

Harvard Kennedy School Alumni Named Young Global Leaders

MARI MEGIAS, HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL ALUMNI RELATIONS

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What do a former professional football coach, a stem cell research advocate, and a political activist have in common?

All three are MPP 2004 alumni of Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) and all three were chosen by the [World Economic Forum](#) to join its Young Global Leaders (YGL) program in 2014.

Each year, the YGL program selects approximately 200 global leaders under the age of 40 for six-year terms. During their tenure as YGLs, individuals work together on some of humanity's most difficult problems. More than 30 HKS alumni have been chosen as YGLs since the program's inception in 2004. Here are the stories of the latest honorees.

Daron Roberts MPP 2004 came to HKS after graduating from the University of Texas and serving as a staffer for Senator Joseph Lieberman and Lieutenant Governor Bill Ratliff. A football standout and president of his class at UT, Roberts planned a career in politics. But during his time at Harvard Law School—he received his JD in 2007—Roberts volunteered to coach at a youth football camp. Roberts was hooked, and spent the next few years in various roles with several National Football League teams. Now, Roberts is a lecturer at the University of Texas, where he teaches the course “Leadership Strategies in Sports.” He also serves as a motivational speaker. In addition, he leads [4th and 1](#), an organization he founded to, as he puts it, “use football as a way to get young men interested in academic achievement and developing life skills.” Roberts credits HKS for helping him reformulate his notion of public service. “I leaned on my experience at the Kennedy School when starting my nonprofit,” Roberts says. “I started to rethink how I fit into my surrounding community, and saw my role less as an elected official and more as a social entrepreneur. And that transformation started at the Kennedy School.”

4th and 1 is a free football camp for high school students from underrepresented groups. Held each summer in Mount Pleasant, Texas; East Lansing, Michigan; and Jacksonville, Florida, it is the only football camp in North America to balance sports training with SAT/ACT preparation and diagnostics, professional development, creative workshops, and life skills classes. It will serve approximately 120 student-athletes in 2014

and thus far has reached more than 400 student-athletes.

Brooke Ellison MPP 2004 was hit by a car when she was walking home from school on her first day of seventh grade. The accident paralyzed her from the neck down and left her dependent on a ventilator; it also left her determined to pursue a cure. Ellison received her joint degree from the departments of psychology and biology in cognitive neuroscience (mind, brain, and behavior) at Harvard College—she was the first quadriplegic person to graduate from the University—then decided to pursue an MPP at HKS.

“At the Kennedy School, I got my sense of voice and purpose,” Ellison says. “I had read an article about the limitations being placed on stem cell research in the U.S. and I became very upset. I’d never talked about it publicly, and I was forced to talk about my disability in ways I wasn’t ready to. HKS forced me to think critically about other points of view.”

After graduating, Ellison ran for the New York state senate. “I used stem cell research in my platform. It wasn’t being talked about in broad social terms and I thought that New York needed to be looking at this. The election didn’t go in my favor, but I brought the issue to the public consciousness.”

Ellison also produced a documentary (Hope Deferred) about the research and the lives it might benefit. “I wanted to turn the question from one of science and morals to, ‘How can we improve the state of humanity?’” she says.

Ellison received her PhD in sociology with a focus on political sociology and the sociology of science from SUNY-Stony Brook and now serves as director of education and ethics at SUNY-Stony Brook’s Stem Cell Research Center, where she also is co-director of the PhD program in behavioral and community health.

Alison Loat MPP 2004 co-founded [Samara](#), a nonprofit organization whose programs help strengthen democracy and promote public service and public leadership in her native Canada. Samara refers to the winged “helicopter” seeds that fall from maple trees—the national emblem of Canada and a nod to the idea that from small seeds big things can grow.

“I was lucky to have grown up in a relatively prosperous country, but saw opportunities for improvement,” Loat says. “I was very concerned with growing disengagement of Canadians from politics and government.”

One of Samara's first projects was to conduct exit interviews of Members of Parliament—something that, to Loat's knowledge, has never been done before in a lawmaking body. The bestselling book that emerged, *Tragedy in the Commons: Former Members of Parliament Speak Out About Canada's Failing Democracy*, has provoked much discussion and national soul searching.

"We can be doing better as Western democracies," says Loat. "You see a decline in efficacy and trust in democracy in the same countries that told others to be like them. The book takes a critical look in our own backyard."

One of the things that surprised Loat the most was the criticism former members of parliament levied against their own political parties. "This opened a discussion about the role of the modern political party. How open are they? How are decisions being made? If the parties aren't serving members, they're probably not serving the public either."

These are just three of the Kennedy School alumni who are making a difference in their corner of the world. All three cite the influence HKS had in shaping their thinking and their approach to public problems.