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**Association canadienne pour les Nations Unies**

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**YOUTH4WATER UNVEILING OF MURAL PRESENTATION**

**INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the unveiling of our mural, "It Starts with a Drop". My name is Pia-Marie Johnson and this is Shire Brandi, and we are members of a youth group called Youth4Water (Y4W).

Before we share our story with you, we'll first provide you with brief background on who we are and the process behind this mural.

Y4W is an environmental youth group that raises awareness on issues concerning water. Issues such as; global scarcity of water, conserving water in our homes, tackling the lack of water education and confronting the myth of Canada's abundance of fresh water.

We are a youth advisory group for an umbrella project called The Ripple Effect: it was developed by The United Nations Association in Canada, working in partnership with Toronto Community Housing and The Institute of Havergal College. We have been working together since November 2007.

We've generated our skills through workshops, presentations, field trips, guest speakers, and community events. For example, in February 2008 we visited Walkerton, Ontario. This experience allowed us to realize that as Canadians we are not exempt from tragedies like Walkerton and that similar situations like this happen all across Canada.

We have had the privilege to present to various youth groups across the GTA. Presently we are analyzing the results of the first Youth Perceptions Survey on Toronto's Water which we conducted in late 2008.

One of our proudest accomplishments would have to be our participation in Expo Zaragoza 2008 in Spain. The Expo is a groundbreaking international gathering of many water organizations, government representatives, NGOs, business leaders and water experts. Here we were asked to present and sit on a panel during the special week of Water and Education, where we spoke about Canadian water issues and the role we play as a youth group. We also screened the world premiere of our documentary; Water is a Matter of Survival.



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After having met Nicholas Schulz at one of the RiverSides/Lost Rivers water walks, we were approached by the CTC Source Protection Committee to build a relationship with them. Their resources and funding enabled us to create our first mural.

**ARTIST STATEMENT**

Y4W has been working to debunk the myth that Canada's water supplies are renewable and ever lasting. We feel young people and Toronto citizens need to reconnect with where our water comes from, and learn how to protect it. Our identities as a people have been detached from the role water plays in our lives. We need to learn about our water sources and what we are doing to them. Our mural is a snapshot of Toronto's view of Lake Ontario, along with the water droplet, which is meant to dwarf us. Water is this important, yet we forget the origin and necessity of even one drop.

Nature's water tables follow their own water boundaries and these watersheds transcend the boundaries of communities in and around Toronto. Our Lake Ontario is someone else's Lake Ontario. Imagine pouring chemical cleaners down our drains and toilets. Where do they go? They are entering our source of drinking water. They are also entering the source of other people's drinking water. Our actions, very much like a ripple effect, are not held as secrets in the water. The water speaks the truth and it carries the abuses we do to it across its journey throughout all the watersheds that make up Toronto and its surrounding communities.

Our mural's purpose is to reignite our ownership of our water sources. We hope we inspire others who lost trust in: our tap water, our lake, our water – to reconsider our responsibility for its maintenance and our health.

Our health and prosperity as a city is defined by our proximity to Lake Ontario. Our mural is celebrating the source of our water and encouraging everyone to ensure that sustainable management of our water sources is part of our local culture.

**PROCESS & MEDIUM**

The mural was created by eleven youth, two artists named Patrick Thompson and Jennifer Rudski and support from Youth4Water's Communications & Project Officer Dagna Pielaszkiwicz. The mural took two weekends and approximately 20 hours to create.



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We started with four panels, totalling 10 by 20 feet of canvas. We used acrylic paint mixed with water to create a look of fluidity and lightness.

The canvas's supporting structure is made of aluminum water pipes. It was constructed by local architect Steven Hendersen. Rather than painting this on a wall, we painted it on canvas so that our mural could become portable reaching the people we visit and exhibits beyond our own travels.

Working on a collaborative piece involved flexibility and trust. The artists instructed us to move around the mural as we painted the waves, so that our own strokes were soon covered by someone else's. We strengthened our relationships with another, having to work together, believe in ourselves, and have faith that our inexperienced hands could produce something beautiful to look at. This was a first for many of us and thus a challenge – one we have met with the guidance of the artists involved.

The drain is the elephant of our mural; it overtly reminds us that *everything* seeps into our water. The bottles demonstrate our unwillingness to trust completely in our local drinking water. Shipped in from miles away, ironically they often end up in the very body of water we are supposed to drink from. I have walked on our beaches and seen plastic and garbage left behind or washed ashore.

Toronto's water is not dirty. It is among some of the best sources of drinking water in the world. Toronto's water and the watersheds that feed it are the backbone of our city.

### **CONCLUSION**

A lot of our work as a youth group has been centered on global water issues. Today during the weekend of International World Water Day, we mark a new beginning of a deeper relationship with our local water issues.

We recognize that contributing to the global discourse around the global water crisis, includes grassroots work and a deep understanding of *our* water.

A big thanks to the CTC Source Protection Committee and UNA-Canada for supporting us.