



# EMERGING INSIGHTS

08

YOUTH

# Authentic leadership and personal wellbeing

## Global Issues

**Like women, work in the youth development field is enigmatic.** The same issues that affect our young people often affect us all. The environment, migration, economic stability, and health are factors that affect a person no matter their age, but there are challenges today that young people alone struggle to overcome. In many parts of the world, the population pressure of dramatic youth bulges are especially taxing. While social and health indicators for today's young people around the world look better than they did for their parents – more youth are in school than ever before, basic literacy is high, and maternal and child mortality rates are lowering<sup>43</sup> – they still struggle to find jobs in overcrowded markets, to find suitable housing in spontaneous settlements, and to reach milestones like marriage and children that will enable them to graduate into adulthood.

The stories of young people are often paradoxical. They are praised as tomorrow's promise, but incarcerated and legislated as a threat.<sup>44</sup> They represent an opportunity for progress but are lamented as lazy, uninvolved, and entitled. These binaries do more harm than good – there are no easy answers to solve the complex issues that affect a generation with wide interests, needs, and futures. With 1.8 billion people, 25% of the total global population, between 10 and 24, strategizing a better future for young people is of utmost importance.<sup>45</sup>

## The Headlines

### The world has a problem: too many young people

*New York Times* 3/5/16

### Automation threatens jobs. Can education create new ones?

*PBS* 12/4/18

### To Build A Better Future, Yemen's Children Must Be Educated

*Forbes* 12/6/18

### Invest in Africa's youth before migration to Europe doubles, says UN official

*Guardian* 12/5/18

43. UNICEF. (2018). Newborn-care. Retrieved from <https://data.unicef.org/topic/maternal-health/newborn-care/>

44. ACLU. (n.d) America's Addiction to Juvenile Incarceration: State by State. Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/issues/juvenile-justice/youth-incarceration/americas-addiction-juvenile-incarceration-state-state>

45. United Nations Population Fund. (2014). The State of World Population 2014: The Power Of Adolescents, Youth And The Transformation Of The Future. United Nations Publications.



## New Ideas

Our Fellows this year are helping to resolve the youth paradox by recognizing the importance of personalized and local context in facilitating opportunities for young people to lead. In the United Kingdom, a Fellow builds better child protection services, focusing on the overarching factors that create situations of abuse rather than on the individual evaluation without reference to the environment. Three Fellows are focused on restructuring the play environment to provide foundational experiences for holistic development. And several Fellows show us models for engaging young people around the world for authentic leadership. These strategies are at the core of ensuring an “everyone a changemaker” world, where all youth thrive and are trusted to lead.

### Contextualizing a safer future

**Carlene Firmin** is shining a light on adolescent abuse in the United Kingdom with her Contextual Safeguarding Network. The child protection system, as it was designed, is only able to address cases of abuse or violence that happen at home and by family members without recognizing that risk of abuse outside the home rises as young person ages. When extra-familial abuse happens, the current system reverts either to blame family members who are unaware and unable to stop the abuse or to blame individual victims, rather than trying to address the contexts within which abuse can happen. After a decade of researching community and group-based violence, Carlene designed “contextual safeguarding” to help shift the mindsets of policymakers, institutions, practitioners, and the general public about child protection and help them assess and design interventions for specific issues in specific places. For example, Carlene has worked with the Football Association, which works directly with tens of thousands of youth each year. She’s helped them to audit their programs to understand when young people may be vulnerable and design interventions to ensure safety of all young people involved.

### The right to safe and empowering play

**Lauren McNamara** draws on years of research in Canada on the importance of recess as a foundational experience for young people to develop skills in friendship and social interaction. Her research showed that over 50% of students experienced conflict during recess and 60% report being lonely. A variety of factors indicated to her that more could be done to make this critical period of social interaction more positive. The Recess Project trains and deploys research coordinators who help to ensure that play spaces are inclusive, supportive, engaging, and protected from social exclusion and marginalization. The coordinators also put youth in charge as junior recess leaders who support their peers. Coordinators help to create Recess Committees to ensure that play is part of the whole school community. In partnership with Physical Health Education Canada, Lauren is focused on creating national policy shifts based on her learnings.

A lack of space for recreation and play in Brazil’s public schools has not deterred **Diane Sousa** from advocating for the right to play. In fact, she seizes the lack of playing

grounds at school and publicly defined play spaces as an opportunity to teach young Brazilians lessons in civic engagement. She helps communities throughout the region reclaim underused fields, lots, and public squares by using sports as a tool, not only for fun and games, but for citizenship and social change. She created the Sports and Citizenship Incubator at the Instituto Formação to help build adaptable and cost-efficient sports methodologies. With primary schools, she helps teachers reinvent spaces for guided play and in high schools she identifies youth leaders to identify areas and resources in their school and communities to be able to do sports and activities. This has led to a recreation of traditional sports in the Afro-Brazilian community. Diane’s work impacts more than 8,000 children and 2,000 teachers in the northeastern state of Maranhão.

### Putting youth in charge for authentic leadership

In Ireland, **Vernon Ringland** has founded an institution, Youth Bank International, which authentically puts young people into leadership. Youth Banks are led by young people between the ages of 14-25 who are organized into grant making groups that channel money into projects that will improve the quality of life of their communities. Youth Banks are not just about youth redistributing resources – they are programs that demonstrate how young people can create positive social change when given the responsibility and enabling environment to do so. Eschewing traditional practices where youth are receivers of services, Youth Banks enable young people to control an entire grant making cycle. Young people recruit members, fundraise locally for money and in-kind donations, review applications, and support groups in implementing their community programs. By having the entire grant making process run by and for young people, the model challenges traditional philanthropic and funding processes and institutions and moves away from tokenistic youth involvement to meaningful and long-term community engagement. Youth Bank International has 26 networks on 4 continents and has led to the funding of over 4,500 small scale projects.

Creating opportunities in leadership and community development in Togo is also the goal of **Kodjo Djissenou**. In 2015, he created a National Volunteer Agency, adopted by the Togolese government, which enabled young people to be paid volunteers while developing critical economic skills. His organization, La Conscience, is now taking the idea one step further to work with local communities to identify young leaders who are committed to the development of their villages. In doing so, youth attend La Conscience’s youth center for leadership training and then use those critical skills obtained to build community development plans with villagers. Since 2013, nearly 4,000 young people from 1,400 of Togo’s 3,600 villages have been engaged in La Conscience’s programs, resulting in 255 villages adopting community development plans. Young people are driving real change in their communities as a result of their participation, overcoming the cultural constraints to attain real opportunities in leadership.



## How to change policies with technology

In India, public policy has historically been framed by institutions and individuals with one-dimensional perspectives on issues of public importance. The citizens who are most affected do not feel they have been represented fairly. **Bharath Palavalli** aims to expand the of policymakers by bringing together technology, social sciences and the arts to shift policies in urban poverty, energy, transportation, disaster management and water. His Policy Lab conducts research and designs methods to help policy makers fully understand the depth and scope of issues needing solutions. They build games and simulations that can help immerse decision makers into the problem. For example, the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) largely borrowed their protocols from sources outside of India, but these did not fit the local realities. Bharath worked with the NDMA to design a simulation that helped show how information actually flowed between agencies during a disaster in real time. This enabled a customized solution that actually works. Field of View's School of Policy works with universities in schools of design and technology to build a talent pool of designers, planners, and policymakers to customize inclusive, scenario tools of the future.

## The Opportunity:

### Lead young

***How can we support Fellows and young changemakers who put young people in charge and give them foundational changemaking skills?***

One third of our 3,500+ Fellows focus on issues relevant and important to young people. One of the biggest insights we have had over the last four decades is that the opportunity to develop changemaking skills early in life play a foundational role in developing systems-changing social entrepreneurs. Moreover, our Fellows around the world have also helped us define a new framework for navigating the 21st century: where every person is practicing empathy, teamwork, new leadership, and changemaking.

A core strategy for Ashoka is now to enable schools, companies, parents, youth organizations, and others to create environments where young people can actively participate and deliver change. We believe a young person who is able to see a problem and innovate a solution will be set on a path for changemaking their whole lives. The old ways of organizing for repetition are fast fading. The future of work is changing and young people must be equipped with the tools to thrive in disruptive change. They cannot continue on an assembly line designed for vocations which are phasing out. We have introduced a suite of initiatives - Young Changemakers, LeadYoung, Peer-to-Peer Allies and Your Kids - aimed at amplifying the work of our Fellows and creating coalitions worldwide to help prepare young people to be active and engaged changemakers.

## About Ashoka

Ashoka believes the most powerful force for change in the world is a new idea in the hands of the right person. With this conviction, we pioneered the field of social entrepreneurship 38 years ago. Ever since, we've bet on the optimists and the adventurous among us who see the world not as it is but as it should be. Year after year, they forge new pathways to get us there, growing unexpected ideas into transformative social progress.

Leading social entrepreneurs are not heroes working in isolation. Their success depends on creating roles for ordinary people — parents, refugees, computer scientists, farmers, and young people — to play an important part in the solution. With each new leading social entrepreneur we nurture, therefore, Ashoka is creating a different kind of future: one where each of us looks inside ourselves and sees a changemaker.



## Methods

### Ashoka's approach to supporting tomorrow's social innovations

After 38 years of electing the world's leading systems changing social entrepreneurs, Ashoka knows how to find new ideas. For this analysis of our 2018 Fellows we tapped into the resources of our Ashoka process to mine the reports, interview notes, reflections, and writings of our teams across the globe who are expert innovation spotters and who have deeply examined the work of potential Fellows. The learnings, patterns, and insights we cull during the rich Fellow selection process provided the baseline data for this report.

## Partner with us

We are always looking for new partners to help us find and support Ashoka Fellows around the world to advance systemic change in new and growing fields. please contact Maria Clara Pinheiro [mpinheiro@ashoka.org](mailto:mpinheiro@ashoka.org) for more information on how you or your organization can help us continue to grow the largest global network of social entrepreneurs.

## Donate to Ashoka's Global Venture Fund

Global Venture Fund is a pool of philanthropic funds dedicated to finding and electing new Ashoka Fellows. The Fund prioritizes supporting the search and selection of social entrepreneurs in emerging or underrepresented areas of innovation, and under-resourced geographies. Please visit [ashoka.org/donate](https://ashoka.org/donate) and indicate Global Venture Fund in your donation.

## Recommend a candidate

Do you know a systems-changing social entrepreneur who could benefit from the financial and network support of the Ashoka Fellowship? Nominate them at [ashoka.org/engage/recommend/fellow](https://ashoka.org/engage/recommend/fellow).



# Everyone a Changemaker



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