

THE ASHOKA YOUNG CHANGEMAKER MAGAZINE:

CHANGEMAKING IS THE NEW COOL!



Welcome Note



It is with great honour and excitement that we unveil the inaugural edition of the Ashoka Young Changemakers Magazine in Nigeria. This publication marks a significant milestone in our shared journey to recognize and amplify the voices of young changemakers who are boldly shaping the future of our nation, Nigeria.

The Ashoka Young Changemakers (AYC) program is a carefully selected network of young people 20 years of age and below, who have found their power to create change for the good of all and are ready to take on their next big role as co-leaders of Ashoka's global Everyone a Changemaker movement. Each Ashoka Young Changemaker has launched social initiatives, formed peer-led teams, and created solutions for the good of all while activating others to join in. Today, they are stepping up to shape a global conversation in redefining what it means to be a young person growing up in today's world.

Ashoka is the world's largest network of Social Entrepreneurs and Changemakers. Founded in 1981 and headquartered in Arlington, VA, the organization supports 4000+ Ashoka Fellows who are solving systemic problems in 92+ countries. As the world becomes increasingly unequal, Ashoka's work focuses on tearing down

this New Inequality. Ashoka Young Changemakers are at the center of this effort!

Nigeria is home to a growing number of Ashoka Young Changemakers who are proving that leadership is not defined by age but by vision, empathy, and action. Their creativity, resilience, and determination are transforming communities and inspiring others to believe in the power of possibility. This magazine is their platform, a space where their stories, ideas, and innovations can shine and spark new movements of change.

Within these pages, you will meet some of these young changemakers who are tackling challenges head-on, turning obstacles into opportunities, and reminding all of us that change begins when we dare to dream and act. Their journeys are not only inspiring but also a call to action for each of us to step forward, dream big, and contribute to building a Nigeria where every young person feels empowered to become a changemaker.

We invite you to read with curiosity, reflect with openness, and join this growing movement of changemakers. Together, let us celebrate the extraordinary potential of young changemakers and commit ourselves to supporting their efforts in creating a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Welcome to this new chapter.

**Welcome to the Ashoka Young
Changemakers Magazine!**



Meet the *Cool*est Youths in Nigeria

In June 2025, after going through a rigorous process of nominations, different stages of interviews, we finally brought onboard the Ashoka Young Changemakers Program, 9 impactful and inspiring young changemakers.

Let's meet them together!



VARNESSA KAYEN VARLYNGTON,
FOUNDER, EGALITARIANISM FOR EARTH | EMPOWERING
YOUTH THROUGH CREATIVE CLIMATE EDUCATION

Varnessa is a 14-year-old environmental changemaker from Nigeria who began her climate journey after witnessing severe flooding, waste pollution, and deforestation in her community. Motivated to make a difference, she forged her own path by using creativity as a tool for change.

Varnessa authored AMAMA, an eco-fiction book that explores themes of nature and responsibility and produced over 100 animated videos to make climate education engaging and accessible for children.

Through her initiative, Varnessa has led impactful school outreaches, Incubator Lab and spearheaded tree-planting campaigns. She is also an advocate for climate education reform in Nigeria, working to ensure that environmental literacy becomes a priority in schools. Her efforts are aimed at empowering young people to understand and take action on climate issues.

Currently, Varnessa is focused on expanding her work to reach more schools across West Africa while developing a youth-led platform where children can learn about climate change, share their voices, and lead on climate solutions. Her vision is to make climate literacy fun, age-appropriate, and accessible to every child in the region.

COMFORT ALABI,
FOUNDER, ECO CITY VISION | YOUTH-LED SOLUTIONS FOR A
GREENER, HEALTHIER PLANET

Comfort Alabi is an inspiring Nigerian changemaker, environmental educator, and community leader dedicated to advancing sustainability and youth empowerment. She integrates values such as creativity, responsibility, and innovation into her work, leading projects where students transform waste materials like plastic bottles and scrap into reusable goods. As the founder of Eco City Vision, Comfort provides hands-on training and activities that motivate young people to care for their environment by demonstrating practical solutions to pollution.



Her approach has encouraged students to rethink their relationship with waste and develop leadership in environmental protection. Comfort's vision includes expanding her programs to incorporate climate change education and recycling initiatives in more schools, empowering even more students to take meaningful action for a greener future.

Comfort believes that teaching youth to recycle and innovate not only addresses environmental challenges but also creates new opportunities. By equipping young people with essential knowledge and skills, she inspires them to become changemakers in their communities and thrive as leaders of today and tomorrow.



UNIQUE OKEWOYE,
FOUNDER, HEALTH IMPACT FOR YOUTH INITIATIVE |
TRANSFORMING YOUTH HEALTH THROUGH KNOWLEDGE &
CARE

Unique is a Nigerian young changemaker dedicated to improving youth health outcomes by providing education and access to essential care. Through a combination of virtual health talks and targeted community outreach programs, she empowers young people to make informed decisions about their well-being and to challenge harmful health practices. Under her visionary leadership, Health Impact for Youth has expanded its scope to include mental health campaigns, school visits, and online learning initiatives, all designed to equip youth with the knowledge and resources they need to make healthier choices.

As a passionate mental health advocate, Unique's work is anchored in three strategic pillars. The first is advocacy, where she coordinates virtual programs that address pressing mental health issues and work to dispel common myths and misconceptions. The second pillar is awareness; she actively encourages young people to speak openly about their mental health and engages at the policy level to promote the adoption of more effective mental health policies. The third pillar involves outreach, with her team organizing community gatherings that provide support and relief to marginalized groups, ensuring that no young person is left behind.

Currently, Unique is focused on expanding the initiative's ambassador program and strengthening its online presence. Her goal is to broaden Health Impact for Youth's network, reaching even more young people across Nigeria and equipping them with the tools and support they need to lead healthier, more empowered lives.



FEOLAMI AWE-JOSEPH,
FOUNDER, EDUCATIONAL GUIDANCE DEVELOPMENT
INITIATIVE (COLLEGE GUIDE AFRICA) | YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT FOR EMPLOYABILITY AND TRANSFORMING
FUTURES

Feolami is a young changemaker from Nigeria who is empowering young Africans with skills and opportunities for employment, bridging the gap between education and the industry needs of the 21st century. Her experience as an HR intern exposed her to the widespread issue of unemployability among young Nigerian graduates, which inspired her to launch her initiative.

Feolami's initiative leverages social media to create practical spaces where young people can learn and develop essential life, career, and leadership skills, as well as receive guidance to navigate various phases of life beyond the traditional classroom. She organizes workshops, mentors young changemakers, and leads community-driven programs such as the Global Education Summit and skill development cohorts. Through these accessible and youth-friendly opportunities, she empowers others to grow, lead, and make informed decisions about their futures. As a dedicated advocate for youth empowerment, Feolami is committed to helping countless young Africans acquire employable skills, secure jobs, and build successful careers, ultimately contributing to the economic growth and development of the continent.

OLUWAPELUMI OYETADE,
FOUNDER, BLOOM IN STEM | STEM ADVOCACY AND GIRLS'
EMPOWERMENT

Oluwapelumi is a passionate young changemaker from Nigeria dedicated to closing the gender gap in STEM and creating inclusive opportunities for girls to succeed in a technology-driven world. She is committed to challenging societal norms, cultural biases, and systemic barriers that discourage girls from pursuing careers in science and technology. As a young woman in STEM and the only girl in her high school science class to take Further Mathematics, Oluwapelumi understands firsthand the isolation and underrepresentation many girls experience in academic and professional STEM settings. This personal journey inspired her to found Bloom in STEM, an initiative that empowers girls with the knowledge, mentorship, and confidence needed to explore and excel in STEM fields.



Through Bloom in STEM, Oluwapelumi is building a supportive community for girls from low-income and underrepresented backgrounds by offering access to mentorship, hands-on training, accelerator programs, and hackathons. Her work has directly impacted girls in Lagos and beyond, boosting their confidence, inspiring their career ambitions, and helping them realize that they too can innovate and lead in STEM.

**PRECIOUS OMELU,
FOUNDER, FOR MY BOYS INITIATIVE | YOUTH EMPOWERMENT
AND VALUES-BASED LEADERSHIP**

Precious is an inspiring young changemaker from Nigeria committed to transforming the lives of boys by guiding them to discover their purpose, develop strong values, and grow into confident, responsible men. As the founder of the For My Boys Initiative, she addresses the critical lack of mentorship and guidance many boys experience, especially in areas such as integrity, chastity, and self-awareness. Drawing from her own experience as a survivor of sexual harassment, Precious is deeply dedicated to preventing similar trauma by instilling core values in boys from an early age.



She believes that nurturing boys with empathy, purpose, and respect is essential to raising a generation of men who lead, protect, and uplift others with integrity.

Through her initiative, Precious leads impactful programs including Project Discovery, school workshops, community campaigns, and the International Kings Conference. All of these efforts are designed to empower boys through mentorship, open dialogue, and self-discovery. Having reached over 700 boys so far, Precious is laying the foundation for a future where boys grow up with vision, confidence, and the skills to positively influence their communities.



**FAVOUR OSHIOKENOYA,
FOUNDER, OWN A BOOK TODAY INITIATIVE | LITERACY
ADVOCACY AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT**

Favour is a dynamic young changemaker from Nigeria dedicated to closing the literacy and knowledge gap among children and teenagers in underserved communities. As the founder of the Own a Book Today Initiative, she works to provide young people with access to a wide range of reading materials and to foster a culture of personal growth through books. Having grown up with limited access to books herself, Favour deeply understands the challenges many students face in their pursuit of knowledge.

Motivated by her own experiences, she is determined to break the cycle of ignorance and poverty by making books more accessible and inspiring young people to think critically, dream ambitiously, and invest in their personal development.

Through her initiative, Favour distributes self-help books, biographies, literature, and science texts to students, and has established a vibrant online book club where young readers can share reviews and discuss their learnings. To date, her efforts have reached over 600 students, building a growing community of readers in Ikorodu, Lagos. Favour is also developing a mobile app and website to further expand access to books and enable students to track their reading progress. Her long-term vision includes supporting more than 10,000 underprivileged children, launching a youth-focused TEDx-style platform for social dialogue, and helping student writers publish their work for free. Driven by a strong belief in the transformative power of knowledge, Favour is nurturing a generation of informed, empowered, and intellectually curious young Africans poised to shape a brighter future for themselves and their communities.



**SEYI OGUNDIPE FOUNDER,
AD ASTRA | BRIDGING FUTURES FOR YOUNG LEADERS
THROUGH MENTORSHIP, SKILLS & COMMUNITY**

Seyi is a young changemaker and social innovator from Nigeria who is dedicated to helping teenagers access life-changing opportunities through mentorship, skill-building, and community support. He is deeply committed to closing the opportunity gap and ensuring that young people have the tools and confidence needed to lead and succeed.

Through his platform, Seyi connects young people with mentors, global learning programs, and leadership opportunities that encourage them to dream big and take bold action.

His work centers on equipping teenagers with practical skills, helping them discover their strengths, and empowering them to take charge of their futures.

Recognized as a youth leader, Seyi is known for his unwavering commitment to creating a world where every young person sees themselves as a problem-solver and changemaker. He strives to provide the support young people need to drive meaningful change in their own lives and within their communities.

**EMMANUELLA SULE,
FOUNDER, CIRCLES MENDS INITIATIVE | CHAMPIONING
YOUTH WELLBEING & LEADERSHIP**

Emmanuella is a young changemaker from Nigeria dedicated to championing mental wellbeing among young people. She empowers youth to heal, find their voice, and lead positive change in their communities. Through her mental health initiative, Emmanuella strategically addresses interconnected societal issues such as identity formation, gender-based violence, hygiene awareness, and the empowerment of emerging leaders. She leads projects that create safe spaces for learning, healing, and personal growth.

Emmanuella also amplifies her impact by speaking on podcasts, facilitating trainings, and serving as a youth ambassador, using her platform to inspire and support others. Her work is rooted in empathy, creativity, and a strong belief in the transformative power of young people who feel seen, heard, and empowered.

At the core of her mission is the goal of helping others restore their confidence and become changemakers in their own lives and communities. Emmanuella's efforts are paving the way for a generation of youth who are equipped to shape a better, more inclusive future.



Link to Profiles of all Ashoka Young
Changemakers in Nigeria: [https://
www.ashoka.org/en-ng/ashoka-young-
changemakers-africa](https://www.ashoka.org/en-ng/ashoka-young-changemakers-africa)

SPOTLIGHT ON SELECT ASHOKA YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS



David Onilude (AYC 2022) – Championing Youth Empowerment Through Technology: David Onilude was honored with the prestigious Diana Award in 2024, which recognizes young people who inspire and mobilize others to serve their communities and create long-lasting change. Through his youth-led nonprofit, David has leveraged digital technology to train, mentor, and empower thousands of young people across Africa with tech skills critical for the future of work. His work directly supports SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure).



Favour Effiom (AYC 2024) – A Voice Against Gender-Based Violence and Inequality: Favour Effiom was named one of the 10 winners of the Future Africa Leaders Award 2024 for her tireless work combating gender-based violence, sex trafficking, teenage pregnancy, and unemployment. Through community engagement, advocacy, and skills empowerment programs, she's addressing root causes of inequality and empowering vulnerable girls and women. Her impact spans SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 3 (Good Health and Wellbeing), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).



Amara Nwuneli (AYC 2023) – Leading Climate Action Through Youth Advocacy: At just 18, Amara Nwuneli (AYC 2023) is making global waves in climate activism through her youth-led NGO Preserve Our Roots. In recognition of her work, she was named the Canon Young Champion of the Year at the Global Good Awards 2024 and the Africa Winner of The Earth Prize 2025. Inspired by personal experiences with flooding, Amara led the transformation of a dumpsite in Ikota, Lagos into a community park built with recycled materials, serving both as a safe play space and a climate education hub. Her initiative, which includes a documentary on Africa's climate crisis and plans to build more eco-parks, demonstrates powerful youth-led action toward SDGs 13, 15, and 11, positioning her as a leading voice in grassroots environmental change.

Inside the Life of Young Changemakers

(interviews with newly elected
AYCs)



A portrait of Varnessa Kayen Varlyngton, a young Black woman with her hair styled in a bun of braids. She is wearing a blue t-shirt with the words 'AFRICA' and 'OKA' visible. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

The Gen Alpha Making Climate Action Fun!

Varnessa Kayen Varlyngton

is an environmental young changemaker from Nigeria whose climate journey began after witnessing the flooding, waste pollution, and deforestation affecting her community. Instead of staying silent, she decided to turn her creativity into a tool for action. The author of *AMAMA*, an eco-fiction book that teaches children about nature, courage, and responsibility. Beyond writing, Varnessa has created more than 100 animated climate videos, making climate education fun, colourful, and easy for children to understand.

1. What moment did you first notice the climate problems happening around you?

The moment that made me realize the climate problems were severe beyond the lesson on environmental degradation was when I witnessed the severe heatwaves in Rivers State and how it affected my younger sister. Our learning environments were disrupted, making learning unconditional and finally, the high rate of deforestation and our air that was tainted black due to soot and oil pollution prompted me to take action.

2. What inspired you to choose storytelling as your tool for climate action, and how did AMAMA come to life?

I was inspired to choose storytelling as a tool for climate action because I believe that if children can learn to love from Disney, learn to be superheroes from Marvel, then they could be eco-champions from the stories I create. Stories evoke emotions; they go beyond reports or data but inspire empathy and accountability for one's actions. Telling a story allows people, not just children, to see the bigger implications and reality of their actions beyond what organizations or scientists discuss.

AMAMA came to life when 10-year-old me understood that children treated climate discussions as a read-and-write exam situation. I want them to understand that human activities go beyond the classrooms, affecting our ecosystems each day. Therefore, AMAMA effectively conveys the message of deforestation and the reason to protect life on land, while fostering a sense of cultural recognition.

3. You've created over 100 climate animation videos. What pushes you to keep going and keep creating for kids?

The major reason why I keep creating these stories for kids is because I believe children play a crucial role in safeguarding a sustainable future, but they need the right access to materials that build a sense of environmental stewardship. That includes the stories that shape their mindset and foster behavioral change - the type of animation I create.

4. What has been your favorite moment during your school outreaches or Incubator Lab sessions?

My favorite moment of the Incubator Lab was the project development sessions and roundtable discussions - it was a moment to exercise innovation, creativity, and leadership without being limited or thinking solutions are birthed from those in power. These moments made me engage deeply with them, understand the way they view the world, and their role in the ecosystem. We built on our ideas, pushing limits together, and forming bonds throughout the incubator sessions as diversity was also encouraged. The incubator lab was raw, it was real, and it was powerful!

5. Why is climate education such a big deal to you and what changes do you want to see in Nigerian schools?

Climate education is a big deal because it is a key that teaches children about the natural world, fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship. It prepares them to sustain these solutions in the coming years and prevent the eco-mistakes of the past. I want to see Nigerian schools prioritize climate education by making students aware of their role in the ecosystem, eco-practical that teach kids to be resourceful and finding creative solutions to environmental challenges. I believe that schools should nurture not just academic excellence but also cultivate true earthlings who value and respect nature.

6. Kids love your content. What's the funniest or most surprising reaction you've ever had from a child?

The funniest reaction I got from a child was when a child was trying to confirm whether my animations are the same as the ones on TV because he was somehow confused and wanted to verify before watching them. He thought they were just educational contents not movies like but when he watched them, he immediately became motivated.

7. What's one big misunderstanding people have about young people and climate activism?

For me, a big misunderstanding people have about young people and climate activism is that we are inexperienced or too explorative. Some question the ability of young people, forgetting that we have potential solutions. We look new, too young and may not go the conventional ways, but these traits make our ideas new and powerful.

8. If you could teach every child in West Africa one simple truth about nature, what would it be?

Nature has been kind to you, so why don't you reciprocate that love? Everyone has a role to play in the ecosystem. Just like bees pollinate flowers, we're responsible for protecting the cycle of life. This means preserving our homes, honoring our indigenous heritage, and safeguarding the future - nature is fundamental to our existence.

9. What do you consider your "climate creator" superpower?

My climate creator superpower is my imagination. The fact that I have wild imaginations that have the power to either tell green stories or lead green projects that are innovative and creative built on what I imagined can be considered as my superpower.

10. How has being part of the AYC community shaped your voice and confidence as a climate leader?

Being part of the Ashoka Young Changemakers Community built my confidence as a climate leader, knowing that I have peers, mentors and leaders who are always supporting me and believe that I can change the world. My voice has also been drastically changed - I am able to not just teach about climate change or foster sustainable habits but ensuring that I'm going beyond behavioral to mindset change allowing everyone to understand that they could be Changemakers in their own ways while championing the EACH Movement. I'm using my voice to allow them find their voices instead of just telling them what to do.

Quick-Fire Questions

- One word that describes you - Determined
- A song that puts you in "climate activism" mode - Dear 2045 and Earth by Lil Dicky
- Your favourite thing in nature - I love the wind and scent of grasses, leaves and trees
- A book or movie every child should see - WALL-E
- Dream collaboration - Disney
- Go-to snack while creating climate stories - Spring rolls
- Coolest part of being a changemaker - The fact I can contribute to being the solution to world problems in the littlest ways.
- Your climate mantra in one sentence - Gen Alpha Can Still Make a Change



Where Career Meets Change making

Feolami Awe-Joseph

is a young changemaker from Nigeria who is empowering young Africans with the skills and opportunities they need to thrive in today's world. After working as an HR intern and seeing how many graduates struggled to secure jobs, she decided to bridge the gap between what schools teach and what the 21st-century workplace demands. This experience inspired her to launch her initiative, creating practical learning spaces where young people can build the confidence, skills, and readiness needed for real opportunities.

Joseph

1. What sparked your passion for youth empowerment and preparing young people for the future of work?

Being exposed early and interacting with people who were talented but lacked exposure or proper resources made me realise many talented young people around me lacked information, awareness, or the right guidance. Growing up, I was exposed early to older youths who were gifted but didn't have access to opportunities, exposure, or proper resources. Seeing that gap repeatedly made me want to fix it. I genuinely believe potential should not be wasted simply because the information didn't reach you.

2. Was there a moment during your HR internship that made you say, "I need to create a solution for this"?

Yes. I constantly watched young people come for interviews completely unprepared. Some had strong abilities but didn't know how to present themselves, write a CV, or speak confidently. That was the moment I knew a real solution was needed.

3. What's the coolest or most unexpected impact your work has created so far?

Building a global audience. Connecting with young people across different countries and seeing my work inspire them has been one of the coolest things ever. Watching them build new friendships and collaborations through my platform still surprises me in the best way.

4. What would you say is your changemaking superpower?

Resilience and audacity. I am not afraid to start, restart, or try again.

5. How do you balance learning, leading, mentoring, and being a young person?

Time management. I use my diary, Google Calendar, and simple planning apps to keep my life in order.

6. What's one misconception young people have about building careers today?

Many believe their degree locks them into a single path. They don't realise your degree can lead to many different careers. Another big misconception is waiting too long before exploring career options. You need to start early.

7. What music or artist puts you in your "changemaker mood"?

I love all genres of music, but I love musicals because they usually have so many morals which I think inspire you to be a changemaker. Billie Eilish as an artist also inspires me; I think she is a changemaker in her own right.

8. If your initiative had a movie title, what would it be?

When I Grow Up, I Want to Be.

9. What advice would you give to a young person who feels confused or uncertain about their future?

Do not be afraid to explore. Try new things, meet new people, learn new skills, and step out of your comfort zone. If you cannot physically explore new spaces, use the internet wisely as a tool for growth.

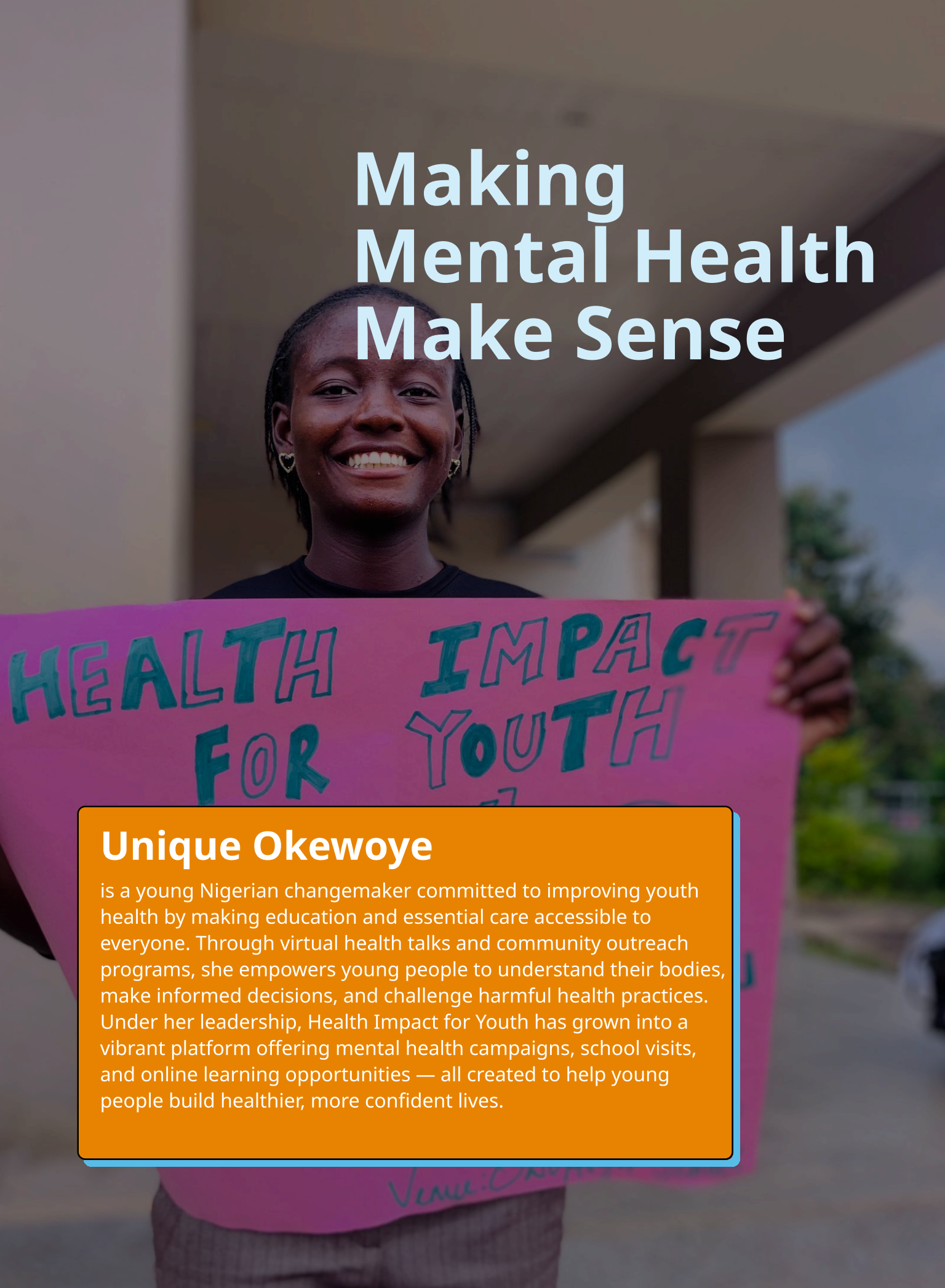
10. How has being an Ashoka Young Changemaker changed you or shaped your journey?

The connections and collaborations have been beautiful. Being surrounded by other AYC's showed me that so many of us simply want to create meaningful change and help our communities. It has strengthened my confidence and expanded my vision.

Quick Fire Questions

- One word that describes you: Go Getter
- Biggest inspiration: Seeing my goals actually get accomplished when I put my mind towards them.
- Coolest part of being a changemaker – Connections & Meeting New People
- Song on repeat- On my Spotify playlist right now, Fame is a Gun (Addison Rae), Rocket Man, I think It's Gonna Be a Long Long Time (Elton John), Getting Older (Billie Eilish)

Making Mental Health Make Sense

A young woman with dark skin and braided hair is smiling broadly. She is holding a large pink sign in front of her. The sign has the words 'HEALTH FOR IMPACT FOR YOUTH' written on it in a stylized, hand-drawn font. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a building and some greenery.

HEALTH FOR IMPACT
FOR YOUTH

Unique Okewoye

is a young Nigerian changemaker committed to improving youth health by making education and essential care accessible to everyone. Through virtual health talks and community outreach programs, she empowers young people to understand their bodies, make informed decisions, and challenge harmful health practices. Under her leadership, Health Impact for Youth has grown into a vibrant platform offering mental health campaigns, school visits, and online learning opportunities — all created to help young people build healthier, more confident lives.

1. What first made you passionate about improving the health and well-being of young people?

My passion started in my third year during psychiatric clinicals. I saw first-hand how misinformation, lack of safe spaces, and inaccessible youth-friendly services affected young people's mental health. Some conditions could have been prevented with the right information or support. That experience stayed with me and sparked a desire to create spaces and programs where young people can thrive.

2. When did you realise that young people needed a safe space to learn about health, mental wellness, and their bodies?

I realised it during my third-year psychiatric clinicals. I saw young people struggle not just because of misinformation, but because there were few spaces where they could ask questions without fear or judgement. Meeting more youths since then has confirmed that when they feel valued and heard, they open up, learn, and grow.

3. Tell us about Health Impact for Youth. What inspired you to start it and what has the journey been like so far?

Health Impact for Youth started from a simple realisation: you don't need everything figured out to make a difference. A conversation with a friend (who later turned out to be one of our first volunteers) convinced me to start with what I had, and our first outreach kicked off the journey. Since then, it's been a rollercoaster, exhausting, chaotic, but incredibly rewarding. Seeing young people's lives improve keeps me going every single day.

4. You run virtual health talks for young people. Which session has been your favourite and why?

Mental health sessions are my favourite because they open up the conversations we often avoid depression, societal pressure, and body image struggles. Seeing young people finally talk about things they've held in for so long will always be a favourite for me. It's always amazing to see them share, learn, and realise they're not alone. Reproductive and sexual health sessions are a close second, there's nothing like seeing curiosity turn into understanding.

5. Mental health is still a tough topic for many young Nigerians. What myths do you wish more young people would stop believing?

Mental health is still a tough topic for many young Nigerians because the moment you mention it, people tense up. Many misunderstand it as automatically meaning 'mental illness,' so eyebrows rise, people say 'abeg don't say that here,' and everyone starts pretending to be fine. I wish young people would stop thinking mental illness is only for certain people or that money protects you. That therapy is only for 'crazy' people,

men shouldn't talk about emotions, or smiling online means everything is fine. Caring for your mental health should be as normal as caring for your physical health "abegg".

6. What does a "safe space" for young people look and feel like to you?

A "safe space" isn't one-size-fits-all, but I've learned a few things that matter everywhere. It's a place where young people can be their real selves, not the "strong" version, not the edited version, and feel heard, valued, and supported. It's where growth comes from care, not pressure, and they can express themselves without bottling things up. Most importantly, it's a space with warmth where every young person knows: "I'm not alone here".

7. Advocacy is one of your strongest pillars. If you could change one mental health policy today, what would it be?

If I could change one mental health policy today, it would be two things: first, make mental health education mandatory in schools, from secondary to university. We teach Biology but not emotional intelligence. We teach Reproductive Health but not depression awareness. A policy that requires mental health literacy in schools would change everything; young people would learn how to understand their minds, manage stress, or spot early signs of struggles. Second, I'd make mental health support accessible in every community, not just hospitals or big cities. Mobile clinics, youth-focused outreach, and local counselling would give young people help when they actually need it. Together, these changes would normalise mental health conversations and make support practical, reachable, and real.

8. Your outreach programs reach marginalized groups. What is the most powerful thing you've learned from working in those communities?

I've learned that nobody is incapable of doing great things; they just need the right access, knowledge, and support. I've seen young people who never saw themselves as changemakers start mapping problems, creating solutions, and training others when given guidance. To be honest, potential is everywhere.

9. What keeps you going on days when the work feels heavy or emotionally draining?

Impact-making is exciting, but it can also be exhausting. On tough days, I think of the children finally going to school, the young girl who learned to understand her cycle, the youth who overcame an inferiority complex to become a public speaker, and those discovering their potential to be changemakers. I draw strength from other changemakers too; we can't do this alone. And hearing students shout "Health Impact for Youth!" before we leave their schools? That's the reminder that every effort is worth it.

10. What's your dream for Health Impact for Youth in the next five years?

On our Instagram page, we've set a bold goal: equipping 1 million young people by 2030. It sounds wild, maybe even unrealistic, but big dreams push you to do big things. In the next five years, my dream for Health Impact for Youth is to have ambassadors in every university across every state in Nigeria and then Africa, fully equipped to lead change. I hope we'll have created online communities that are safe spaces for honest conversations about mental health, where young people feel seen, heard, and supported and strong partnerships with local and global organisations to reach even the most underserved youth.

This month, we're also celebrating one year of Mental Health Mondays in one of our online communities, which houses nearly 900 young people. In five years, I hope to still be running these sessions, reaching more youth, creating safe spaces for dialogue, and empowering them to take charge of their mental health.

Simply put, I want us to be a movement that empowers young people to take charge of their lives and futures, no matter where they come from.

11. How has being an Ashoka Young Changemaker shaped your confidence, voice, or leadership style?

Being an Ashoka Young Changemaker has really boosted my confidence and sense of responsibility. The title reminds me that people trust me to take action, which pushes me to step up and lead. It's taught me that leadership isn't about having all the answers; it's about listening, learning, and empowering others. Celebrating milestones like one year of Mental Health Mondays with nearly 900 young people reminds me that real leadership is about impact, not titles.

Quick-Fire Questions for Unique

- **One word that describes you**

I had to ask my friends and teammates to describe me, but they couldn't settle on a word. I could say persistent, curious, innovative or strategic, but I'd stick with deliberate, I'm very intentional in what I do.

- **A song that instantly lifts your mood**

I have a few, depending on the season, but for now, my favourite that instantly lifts my mood is Running Back to You by Seph Schlueter

- **Go-to self-care ritual**

Journaling, I just started recently and wow, it's not overhyped! Sleeping and chatting with friends also help a lot.

- **A myth about mental health you want gone forever**

That men shouldn't cry. Seriously, why shouldn't humans cry when we have lacrimal glands?

- **Your favourite thing about working with young people**

Young people are creative, innovative, and fun! There's little need for bureaucracy or stiffly following rules, and that's exactly where innovation comes from.

- **A book that changed your thinking**

So many, but The E-Myth Revisited by Michael Gerber really shaped my leadership journey and helped me structure Health Impact for Youth. It made me see leadership in a much broader way.

- **Dream collaboration**

The UN, Nigeria Ministry of Health and Education, Nigeria Ministry for Youth Development, UNESCO.

- **Snack you eat during virtual sessions:**

Popcorn or chi-chin, try the popcorn with groundnuts and thank me later!



Parent's Corner



Parents as Catalysts for Change

Behind every young changemaker is a parent who believed, supported, listened, or simply made space for their child's curiosity to grow. Parents shape the confidence, courage, and compassion that young people carry into the world. In this Parent's Corner, we celebrate the quiet heroes, the changemaker makers, whose love and guidance help raise the next generation of leaders.

Welcome to Raising a Changemaker.



Interview with Mrs Jessie Varlyngton

Mrs. Jessie Varlyngton is the supportive force behind Varnessa's climate journey. Her encouragement and belief in her daughter's creativity show how parents play a powerful role in raising young changemakers. In this conversation, Mrs. Varlyngton shares her perspective on raising a child who is using imagination and action to inspire a greener future.

1. What moments made you most proud watching Varnessa grow into a changemaker?

For me, it was the day Varnessa came home from school and decided to teach about environmental degradation. She'd always loved teaching, but this was different - she was on a mission! She couldn't stop talking about it, and I could see the fire in her eyes to raise awareness about the pollution happening in the Niger Delta. She gained a new sense of identity and as she started watching local and international news, mimicking the UN Secretary General, Sir António Guterres and delegates talking on pressing issues, I knew she was catching the representation bug. And the turning point was her attraction to documentaries about Malala and Greta's stories. I encouraged her every step of the way, but the moment that really got me teary-eyed was when she created an Instagram aimed at building her own organization. She wanted to move beyond just teaching and make a real impact in the Niger Delta. I was so proud of her courage and heart - she wanted to give back to society and not just sit quietly. That was the moment I knew she'd become a true changemaker!

2. Was there ever a time you doubted or worried about how she would balance activism and her education?

There were definitely times I worried about how Varnessa would balance her activism and schoolwork. Especially now that she's entering her final year in high school, I knew it was going to be a challenge. Sometimes there's a new conference, other times there's an urgent impromptu test in school. It was a lot to handle.

But the thing is, over the years, she's really mastered the art of time management. She's learned to prioritize, stay focused, and make the most of her time. Whether it's studying by night and reading by day or taking some breaks, I still get a little anxious sometimes, I'm very pretty confident that she has a good grip with time management and placing priorities.

3. How has her passion for creating change influenced your own outlook on community and leadership?

Honestly, being a part of Varnessa's journey has totally changed my view on community and leadership. She's shown me that changemaking can start with just one person - and that's the beauty of changemaking! It's like a single seed that grows into a whole ecosystem. One person can start a movement, and before you know it, a whole community is rallying behind them which is a similar demonstration of the butterfly effect.

4. What do you think motivates Varnessa the most when it comes to her work with young people and the environment?

I believe what motivates Varnessa the most when it comes to her work is the fact that if we don't involve the younger generations, all efforts made now would be gone in the future - not creating the idea of a sustainable future. This makes her very keen on solving this issue.

5. When you hear the phrase 'Changemaking is the New Cool', how does that describe your daughter?

When I hear the phrase 'Changemaking is the New Cool,' I think of my daughter Varnessa. She's redefining changemaking, whether it's through literature or technology. She's not just about numbers and data; she's showing the world that changemaking can be cool, fun, and accessible to everyone. She sees changemaking from a different lens and looks at it like influencing - a space for creativity and creating impact. She lets people know that changemaking is the New Cool.

6. How did you nurture an environment for her changemaking skills to thrive?


I gave Varnessa the freedom to express herself, supported her ideas, and encouraged her to keep pushing forward. I offered guidance and feedback when she needed it, and helped her find opportunities to grow and learn. That's how I supported her changemaking journey - by being there for her and helping her shine!



Interview with

Dr Akhere

Marian Akran

A portrait of Dr. Akhere Marian Akran, a woman with long, dark, curly hair, wearing a black top with a red rose pattern. The background is orange with large, stylized yellow flower graphics. A white text box with a black border is overlaid on the bottom right of the portrait.

Dr. Akhere Marian Akran is the mother of Ayomide Akran, founder of the Pink Diva Organisation and a Cohort 1 Ashoka Young Changemaker. As Ayomide's biggest supporter, she has been instrumental in nurturing her daughter's confidence, compassion, and commitment to empowering girls. In this conversation, Dr. Akran shares her reflections on raising a young changemaker and the role parents play in shaping young leaders.

1. When did you first realise Ayomide had a strong sense of leadership and empathy?

I knew quite early. Ayomide was that child who would stop at nothing to help others, she never let her tender size deter her. She started pretty young as a volunteer for my foundation. At just four years old, she would proudly wear the foundation's bib, climb on a stool, and hand out relief items during our community outreaches. She'd coordinate the children and sometimes even the adults. She called herself my "PA" back then and would draw up event line-ups for the year, complete with her own notes and reminders. As she grew older, that sense of responsibility only deepened. In primary school, she was always the helper – the friend who'd share her lunch, comfort a classmate in tears, or step in when someone suddenly started their period. But the defining moment came on her very first day at Queen's College. I couldn't find her in class when I arrived to pick her up. A fellow parent smiled and said, "Ah, I saw your daughter, she was leading about ten girls to get cleaning materials to tidy up the classroom. She's been coordinating everyone since morning." I just smiled. That was so Ayomide leading, caring, serving, all rolled into one. She ended that term as class captain despite being a Day Student. She's always been kind, empathetic, and intentional, a natural leader through and through.

2. What went through your mind when she started Pink Diva Organisation? Did you think it would grow this much?

Honestly, I thought it was a noble childhood idea that might take time to mature. But Ayomide's conviction was far beyond her years. It started with her wanting to write a letter to her principal to start a club that would support students with special needs. Then she began taking sanitary pads to school to help her classmates. By age eleven, she had formed the Pink Diva Organisation and hosted her first outreach. I remember watching her sew her first batch of reusable pads, documenting every step like a professional. She treated it like a project presentation methodically, passionate, and purposefully. Then that aha moment where she thought of and initiated collecting plastic bottles to be exchanged for pads (pads for bottles drive) to support more teen girls in underserved communities and girls with disabilities. Today, seeing Pink Diva impact over three thousand girls fills me with awe. She's constantly supporting teenage girls to not only access menstrual hygiene products but also to lead change themselves. She delegates, she trains, she empowers which is true changemaking in motion. It's humbling to see how something that began as a simple mother-daughter conversation has blossomed into a movement that restores dignity, hope and empowers.

3. How have you seen her work with Pink Diva impact other girls and even your family?

Pink Diva has truly amplified the rhythm of our home. Even her brother now talks about periods with confidence which, to me, should be the norm with all boys. Our conversations revolve around purpose, dignity, and impact. I've seen girls who once whispered about their challenges now

speak boldly and lead projects of their own. Ayomide has created a safe space (online platform) where over a hundred teenage girls who are members can share their vulnerabilities, collaborate, and design sustainable solutions. That ripple effect is powerful. As a family, we've learned to live intentionally to give, teach, and support more consciously. Ayomide's journey has made us realise that advocacy truly begins at home, and that change often wears a familiar face.

4. What qualities about Ayomide inspire you the most as her mother?

Her consistency. Ayomide has this beautiful kind of stubbornness, the kind that refuses to give up when something matters to her. She's driven by compassion, not applause. Even when it's inconvenient, she shows up. What inspires me most is how she combines empathy with discipline, kindness with structure. She's confident, courageous, and unafraid to lead in any room even among older teens. She competes fairly, wins gracefully, and leads from the heart. She's result-oriented, creative, and genuinely caring and supportive. I often tease that I'm the real humanitarian but honestly, Ayomide is taking over. *Chuckles.* Watching her evolve reminds me that purpose can indeed be inherited in spirit, even if not by design.

5. If you could tell other parents one thing about supporting a daughter with big dreams, what would it be?

Be present and listen more than you instruct. Let them dream, even when their dreams seem too big or uncertain. As parents, our role is not to design the path but to prepare the soil where their ideas can take root. Support doesn't always mean agreeing with everything, it means believing in their "why" even when the "how" isn't clear yet. Every great woman once needed someone to simply say, "Go ahead, I believe in you." It's not about you, it's about them. Guide with wisdom, correct with love, and allow them to grow through experience. That's how confidence is born.

6. How did you nurture an environment for her changemaking skills to thrive?

Our home has always been a place of conversation, curiosity, and compassion. We don't just discuss what's wrong with the world, we take it a step further by asking, "So what can we do about it?" Or "what would you do differently if you had the opportunity". It was very important to rid the children's minds of just criticizing, to being problem solvers themselves. From a young age, Ayomide was part of my community projects not as a spectator, but as an active participant. I gave her room to try, to lead, and even to fail safely. Changemaking thrives where children feel trusted, heard, and free to experiment. She learned by watching me carry out humanitarian work and gradually began taking initiative herself. It was a form of indirect, project-based learning/ hands-on, experiential, and deeply values-driven. By letting her lead my projects early, she developed the consciousness that being a change agent isn't an event; it's a lifestyle that could blossom if properly nurtured or wither if abandoned. She chose to nurture, and this has blossomed to where she is now. Quite euphoric!



Lifestyle & Culture Section

The Lifestyle & Culture section is where we explore the everyday world of young changemakers, their style, their influences, their passions, and the little things that shape who they are. Here, we celebrate the cool side of changemaking, from music and fashion to daily routines and creative expression. This is the culture of a generation changing the world in their own way.

The Changemaker Vibe Check



Every changemaker has a vibe — the music that fuels their energy, the culture that inspires their creativity, and the influences that shape how they show up in the world. In this segment, Ashoka Young Changemakers share the songs that put them in their changemaking groove and the pop culture inspirations that spark their ideas and identity. These stories come together to form the official Changemaking Playlist on Spotify, a soundtrack powered by the voices, passions, and personalities of young people redefining what cool looks like.

Let's Dive In!



Name: Victor Eyo

Location: Cross River State, Nigeria

Song title + Artist: "Fight Remix" by Odd Felix and Woke Vanquish

Why it represents changemaking:

Every changemaker knows that the journey isn't easy. "Fight" isn't about violence — it's about resilience, faith, and the refusal to give up. It echoes the spirit of everyone or dreamer who says, "I may be down, but I'm not done."

That's the essence of changemaking — believing that light can rise even in dark places.

Pop Culture inspiration:

I'm inspired by fashion brands like Seamfit, who dare to differ by blending African heritage with modern edge. Their work proves that creativity can be a form of protest, a way to challenge the ordinary and express identity with pride. Seamfit's fearless approach reminds me that impact begins when we stop trying to fit in and start designing our own lane in art, culture, and life.



Name: Amara Nwuneli

Location: Lagos, Nigeria

Song title + Artist: Power by Kanye West

Why it represents changemaking:

All of Kanye's songs have different rhythms that have entranced the world, my personal favourite though is Power ... it's my anthem. It reminds me that courage is about confidence, responsibility, and channeling your voice into something that lifts others. The energy of "Power" makes me want to move, create, and lead with intention. It's the soundtrack to every bold step I take toward change.

Pop Culture inspiration:

One pop culture moment that really inspires me is when groups of young creators' remake movie trailers or music videos with limited equipment — just phones, recycled props, and pure imagination. I used to do that when I was younger, gathering my friends to recreate scenes and tell stories with whatever we had. It showed me the power of resilience and creativity: instead of fancy (and expensive) tools, all you need is a vision to make something meaningful. That DIY spirit reflects changemaking to me, because real impact often starts small, raw, and real. It's about using what's in your hands to shift perspectives and tell stories that matter.

Name: Abeedah Alabi

Location: Lagos, Nigeria

Song Title + Artist: Hold My Hand – Maher Zain

Why it represents changemaking:

This song gets me every time! The lyrics make me really think about how we keep going when there's so much pain around us. But beyond the sadness, it's also a reminder that we're deeply connected. What, with the same blue sky and the same round earth?? Maybe it's my extra love for nature, but it always pulls me back to look around a bit more keenly, to build more empathy, and to remember that changemaking starts from that shared care for one another. It makes me want to protect that connection and help others see it too.

Pop culture inspiration:

Social media.

I recently discovered Salem King and subscribed to his LinkedIn newsletter. One of his pieces titled "Write it down!" really flowed with me. He said, and I quote, "Always write down your ideas... because there will be seasons of creative drought, and those ideas you've written will become a bank you can always pull from." Most of the current projects I'm working on as a changemaker didn't start recently. They've been around for months. Years even. I wrote them down and had them documented over the years. An idea would begin small and appear ordinary until you nurture it. Every movement, innovation, or community project started from a simple thought someone chose to write down. The act of documenting our ideas is how we honour possibility. It is how we make sure that when inspiration comes, it finds a home.

Name: Unique Okewoye

Location: Niger, Nigeria

Song Title + Artist: "Rise Up" – Andra Day

Why it represents changemaking:

Because every act of change starts with rising, rising for others, for growth, and for hope. It reminds me that small actions can spark big impact.

Pop culture inspiration:

Black Panther (2018) — beyond the action, it represents empowerment, innovation, and a reimagined future where culture meets courage. It mirrors how changemaking starts when young people believe their ideas can rebuild communities.

Name: Feolami Awe-Joseph

Location: Lagos, Nigeria

Song Title +

Artist: Superheroes The Script

Why it represents changemaking:

This song has always been a sort of anthem for me since I was little; it represents changemaking because it talks about the power of resilience and working hard despite tough circumstances. Another song is This is Me by Keala Settle from the Greatest Showman soundtrack. This song represents changemaking to because it talks about being unapologetically yourself while being resilient for what you believe in.

Pop culture inspiration:

Social media is one of the biggest tools for activism globally. I love how all over the world, social media is being used by young people as a way to practice changemaking and make a difference in their communities. Businesses, movements and lives have been transformed through the use of social media so that's definitely one thing that inspires changemaking for me.

Name: Pelumi Oyetade

Location: Lagos, Nigeria

Song Title + Artist: I Was Here by Beyoncé

Why it represents changemaking:

The song reminds me that true impact is about leaving something meaningful behind, influencing lives, building opportunities, and creating ripples of change that last beyond you. It inspires me to live with purpose and use every opportunity to make a difference in my community.

Pop culture inspiration:

Beyoncé's dedication to using her platform for empowerment and global good reflects how creativity and influence can drive social change. It's a reminder that leadership and service can be powerful forms of art.

Name: Varnessa Kayen Varlyngton

Location: Rivers State, Nigeria

Song Title + Artist: "We Are Here" by Alicia Keys

Why it represents changemaking:

This song serves as a powerful reminder that successful change requires peace and equity, highlighting the interconnectedness of every individual on the planet and the crucial role we play in addressing major global challenges, such as disputes, crises, and poor communication. The powerful beat evokes strong emotions, particularly empathy, inspiring collective action.

Pop culture inspiration:

The animated film IWAJU is inspiring. It celebrates indigenous culture and tackles issues like identity, inequality, and unruly acts in a futuristic world. By exploring Africa's growth through technology and development, IWAJU aimed at promoting a just world. It connects local roots and identity while advancing technology for the betterment of all.

Name: Favour Oshiokenoya

Location: Lagos, Nigeria

Song Title+Artist: We are here by Alicia Keys

Why it represents changemaking:

Changemaking starts with Love, giving people hope and strength and "we are here" advocate for change seemingly talking about how the main purpose of we being on earth is to be our brother's keeper. "We are here" advocate for collective work where it all starts with ourselves.

Pop culture Inspiration:

Music, because it feeds the heart.

**SCAN THE CODE
TO LISTEN:**



[Code.Changemaking Playlist](#)

Creative Zone

Welcome to the Creative Zone, where AYC's let their imagination lead the way. This is a space filled with poetry, art, and bold slogans created by young changemakers who see the world differently and dare to express it. Here, creativity becomes a tool for hope, impact, and storytelling. Dive in and feel the spark.



You are the world
Me needs you
Not one or two but a lot of you
To heed on into the valley
At first, we're fear stricken
Our legs quivering but it won't stop
moving
time is ticking
So, we push past the fear
We strap our swords tight for
they determine our purpose
Not swords made of mere iron but with
words that shake mountains
That makes visible the invisible chains that
hold our mind, body, and soul in place.
Don't drop down thy swords
and don't mute your voice
For Change starts with fighting your fear
and helping others fight
For a gasp of air, for a chance at hope, for
a ray of light, for a chance to know and
see

Keep fighting for a new Change

- ***Favour Oshiokenoya.***

I am no longer a lady in distress
Calling for help
Voice drowns in the echoes of thousands
This time I stand tall, my spirit strong
This time I take the rein on the horse, not
for war but for change.
For a glance at the other wall
Not for myself alone but for all

No standing by waiting for a saviour but
taking chances and leading many
We are small, but we are strong
Bounded by adversary
But this time we not only walk but we work
for change

- ***Favour Oshiokenoya.***

Slogans:

Don't be inspired only, take action
A life changed per day, makes up 365 lives
Change births purpose
Your life is interlinked with a thousand,
help the thousand
Change starts with, "I can"
A smile can make it worth the change
Life is never balance, just try to stable it for
more to join you

You are part of a whole
Me complete you
You complete me
Me, you, far, crash
You, me, join, grow
We go, yes, we go to the valley
Afraid? Yes
We stop? No
Risk? Yes
We fall? Yes
We rise? Yes
We fight, each day for change
We are strong, we are powerful because of
Change
Change not for us, but for others
We break invisible chain
Fight for me, fight for you

- ***Favour Oshiokenoya.***



10 Cool Skills for the Future:

What AYCers are mastering

Tell me you're an AYCer without telling me you're an AYCer. I've been a part of the Ashoka Young Changemakers (AYC) community since the second cohort in Nigeria.

And it's been one of those journeys that stretch your mind and heart in equal measure.

Over time, I've engaged with AYCers across every cohort since the beginning and even sat in on youth opinion interviews for a few candidates from Brazil (which was its own mini masterclass in global changemaking energy).

Through these experiences, I noted patterns not just in what we do, but how we do it.

It's in the way we think, the way we build, and the subtle skills we sharpen without even realizing it.

So, here's my reflection, the A to J of the ten cool skills we across the world are mastering.

A for Audacity: The Skill of Courageous Action If there's one skill every AYC shares, it's audacity. The ability to act before the path is clear. To take a leap when most people are still gathering courage to walk. It's that learned boldness to raise our hands, start our ideas, or speak truth to systems not because it's easy, but because it's necessary. Audacity is a skill. And every AYC I know is practicing it daily.

B for Building Community: The Skill of Collective Growth You can't do changemaking in isolation. Nuh huh. And we understand this better than anyone. We're mastering the art of building communities that breathe, inclusive spaces where others feel seen, safe, and needed. It's not networking. It's belonging building. A skill that can turn passion projects into ecosystems.

C for Creative Storytelling: The Skill of Storytelling for Change. We know that stories shape worlds. So, we are learning to just tell stories that can design narratives that move hearts and policies. Storytelling is how we make impact personal.

D for Design Thinking: The Skill of Human Centered Problem Solving If empathy had a practical twin, it would be design thinking. We are constantly prototyping, iterating, and redesigning, not just solutions but systems. We're mastering how to ask the right questions, test assumptions, and build with people, not for them. AYC's innovate with the soul.

E for Emotional Intelligence: The Skill of Leading with Awareness If anyone told you changemaking is a walk in the park, they forgot to mention the hills. And mountains. Because changemaking is emotionally intense. But what's cool about this is how we're learning to lead awareness, reading rooms, managing burnout, and holding space for others. We practice emotional intelligence and learn to balance heart and logic so that change remains human, not mechanical.

F for Foresight: The Skill of Systems and Future Thinking I've held conversations with fellow AYC's where they share projects they're working on, and the link they make between the present and the future is just so huge. We think in loops, not lines. We see patterns, consequences, and connections, the bigger picture behind every small act. It's always there. We're learning to design not just for impact today but for sustainability tomorrow. Foresight is our way of saying, 'I'm not just fixing this, I'm redesigning how it works.'

G for Grit: The Skill of Resilient Persistence Every AYC has a 'this almost failed' story. The project that didn't scale. The idea that got rejected. The fund that didn't come through. But we keep showing up. Because grit for us is not about being unbreakable, but about being bendable yet unshaken. We always bounce back. Like a ball.

H for Human Empathy in Action: The Skill of Understanding and Responding Empathy is a personality trait for AYC's. We don't just feel for people, we feel with them. It's empathy that leads us into classrooms, climate fields, or policy spaces to build things that make sense for actual people. Empathy in action is a skill that keeps our work rooted in humanity.

I for Innovation and Digital Adaptability: The Skill of Evolving with Change We adapt fast. Like a-new-tool-dropped-yesterday-and-we're-already-using-it-for-social-impact kind of fast. We're fluent in change, learning to blend creativity with technology to stay relevant and resourceful.

J for Journey of Lifelong Learning: The Skill of Continuous Growth If there's a unifying thread among all of us, it's curiosity. We read. We ask. We experiment. We unlearn and start again. We treat learning like oxygen, something you don't stop doing just because the spotlight moves on. Because for us, the journey never ends, it just evolves.

Being part of the Ashoka Young Changemakers community has shown me that the future won't be led by titles or talent alone, but by skills of heart, mind, and courage. Will you build with us?

By Abeedah Alabi



Leading Change Through Innovation and Community Action

In today's world, leadership isn't just about giving direction; it's about creating opportunities for others to grow. As a young changemaker, I've learned that leadership and project coordination go hand in hand with innovation and community education.

Working on sustainability and education has shown me the strength that comes from working together. Organizing projects to educate students on recycling, changemaking, and innovation has taught me how to turn ideas into action. Leadership to me is about listening, adapting, and enabling others to give their own strengths.

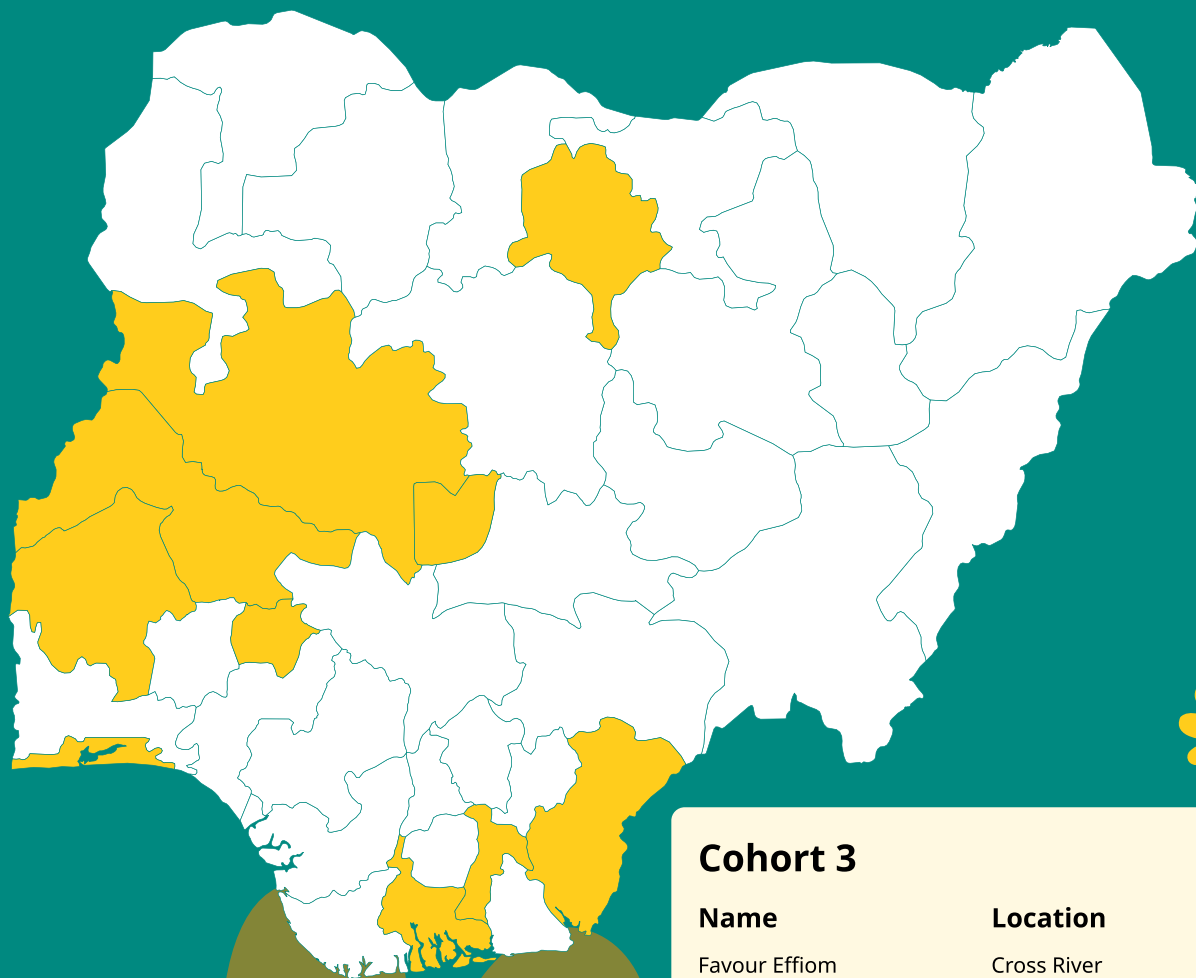
Problem-solving and innovation are also right at the center of what I do. Whether it's creating solutions in collaboration with the community or finding creative approaches to making learning engaging, I've learned that doing things differently creates real change.

As the future unfolds, these skills, leadership, coordination, education for community, and innovation, are preparing a new generation of changemakers ready to tackle global challenges with empathy, creativity, and action.



Impact Section

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Cohort 1

Name	Location
Ayomide Akran	Lagos
Splendour Kalu	Abia
Jonathan Godwin	Abuja/Lagos
Deborah Benjamin	Oyo
David Onilude	Lagos
Godwin Kevin	Cross River

Cohort 2

Name	Location
Abeedah Alabi	Lagos
Amara Nwuneli	Lagos
Muhammad Usman	Kano
Joshua Chiefo-Ejiofobiri	Lagos
Magnus Imam	Lagos
Victor Eyo	Cross River
Ruth Egbedi	Cross River/Lagos

Cohort 3

Name	Location
Favour Effiom	Cross River
Peter Adebowale	Lagos
Dawn Cobham	Cross River
Flourish Alonge	Ekiti
Saviour Iwueze	Lagos
Ashraf Maisikeli Aminu	Kano
Naomi Bamgbose	Lagos
Eunice Omojola	Lagos
Precious Damian	Lagos

Cohort 4

Name	Location
Oluwapelumi Oyetade	Lagos
Precious Omelu	Abuja
Favour Oshiokenoya	Lagos
Comfort Alabi	Lagos
Feolami Awe-Joseph	Lagos
Unique Okewoye	Niger
Emmanuella Sule	Kwara/Lagos
Seyi Ogundipe	Lagos
Varnessa Kayen-Varlynton	Rivers



Letter to the Next Generation

Messages from AYC's to future changemakers : To the next generation of changemakers,

I want you to remember this: impact doesn't wait for perfect conditions. I started my journey in a community that had more limitations than opportunities, but even there, one thing was always available — the decision to try. That decision is your biggest power.

You don't need to have everything figured out. Start where you are, with what you have, and with the people around you. The world won't always understand your vision at first, and that's okay. Many of the things we build as young people don't look "big" in the beginning — but they matter. Consistency will take your small steps further than talent alone ever will.

As you grow, remember that changemaking is not about being celebrated; it's about serving. It's about standing in the gap, creating access, and making sure others can rise because you did.

Your story is valid. Your impact is needed. And your journey, no matter how humble it begins, can change the world.

Keep going. The world is waiting for your contribution.

-David Onilude.



**AYCS AS CO-LEADERS
OF THE EVERYONE A
CHANGEMAKER
MOVEMENT**

Ashoka Young Changemakers (AYCs) are not just participants; they are co-leaders driving the Everyone A Changemaker (EACH) movement. As young social innovators selected by Ashoka for their proven ability to create change, AYCs play a crucial role in building a world where every person is empowered to contribute to the good of all.

Here are the key roles AYCs play as co-leaders of the EACH movement:

1. Role Models of Changemaking: AYCs lead by example. Through their own ventures and initiatives, they demonstrate the power of empathy, teamwork, leadership, and creative problem solving. Their lived experiences inspire other young people to believe in their capacity to lead change in their own communities.

2. Community Builders: AYCs actively cultivate an ecosystem of changemaking by:

- Connecting with peers, educators, and institutions
- Hosting workshops, storytelling sessions, and campaigns
- Supporting youth led changemaking networks and platforms

They create safe and inclusive spaces for other young people to discover their purpose and take action.

3. Changemaker Advocates: As vocal advocates of the EACH vision, AYCs raise awareness about the importance of youth-led changemaking. They:

- Share their stories publicly
- Speak at events, panels, and forums
- Use social media to mobilize and inspire

Their voices help shape a narrative where young people are seen as problem solvers, not problems to be solved.

4. Co-designers of the Movement: AYCs help shape the strategy and evolution of the EACH movement by:

- Giving feedback to Ashoka on youth programs and tools
- Participating in co-creation sessions
- Leading initiatives that experiment with new models of youth engagement

They don't just follow a path, they help create it.

5. Mentors and Multipliers: AYCs play a vital role in identifying and mentoring other young changemakers. Through peer mentoring, knowledge sharing, and storytelling, they help multiply changemaking mindsets and actions among youth.

In summary, AYCs are not just changemakers, they are changemaker makers. Their leadership, courage, and commitment make them essential co-leaders of the Everyone A Changemaker movement, paving the way toward a future where changemaking is the new norm for all.





SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE TO LEAD CHANGE IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

In every corner of the world, young people are stepping up, not someday in the future, but right now. From addressing climate change and mental health to transforming education systems and gender norms, young people are no longer waiting for permission to make a difference. They are doing it. But for this movement to truly take root, the world must support, recognize, and invest in young people as changemakers. That is the heart of Ashoka's mission, and it is why the Ashoka Young Changemakers (AYC) initiative is so vital.

It is important we support young changemakers because:

1. **Young People Are Closest to the Problems:** Youth live the realities of today's social challenges, whether it is bullying in schools, lack of mental health support, or climate inaction. They bring fresh, firsthand perspectives and often spot problems adults overlook.
2. **Youth Leadership Builds a Culture of Agency:** Supporting young changemakers instills a mindset of agency early on. It teaches them that they are not passive recipients of society but active shapers of it. This shift is foundational to creating long-term, systemic change.
3. **Changemaking Skills Are 21st-Century Skills:** Empathy, collaboration, creative problem solving, and leadership, are not only qualities of good citizens but also the most in demand skills for the future of work. Helping young people lead change prepares them for lifelong success and resilience.
4. **One Changemaker Sparks Many More:** Young Changemakers do not just make change, they mobilize others. They inspire and mentor peers, challenge institutions, and co-create supportive ecosystems where changemaking is the norm.

When you read the stories and profiles of Ashoka Young Changemakers, it echoes a powerful truth: when we support youth, we amplify possibility.

How can adults support young changemakers?

Trust and Recognition: Adults need to see young people not as future leaders but as current leaders. As such, they need to be trusted to lead and recognized for their efforts in leading and creating change.

Opportunities to Lead: we must create platforms for youth voice, co-leadership roles in schools, community spaces, and policy forums.

Mentorship and Networks: Wherever possible, we should offer young changemakers our time and talents, connections to industry leaders, access to mentors, peer changemakers, and social innovation ecosystems. These will support them and help them accelerate the impact of the incredible work they are doing.

Resources and Visibility: We can support young changemakers by investing in their futures, donating to help scale their ventures and solutions, offering technical support, tools, and media coverage to scale their impact.

The future belongs to the NOW generation. Ashoka and the AYCs are proving that age is no barrier to leadership. But their success is not just theirs. It is a call to all of us to rethink how we see youth, leadership, and change. Educators can bring changemaking into your classroom. Empower students with voice and choice. Parents can encourage curiosity and support the ideas of their children/wards for community impact. Policymakers can create space for youth to co-lead dialogue and decision-making processes. And we all can listen to, learn from, and believe in young changemakers.

If we want a better world, we must build it together with the youth, not for them.

THE ROLE OF ADULT ALLIES IN EMPOWERING YOUNG CHANGEMAKERS

Empowering young people to become agents of change begins when caring adults genuinely believe in their abilities and invest time and energy in their growth. From offering young people their first changemaking “bicycle ride”, to nurturing them to become changemaker-makers, adult allies are essential in the life journey of young people. A detailed look at how adult allies ignite leadership in youth includes the following elements.

Who Adult Allies Are

These supporters come from many corners of a young person's world:

- Parents who build core values, ethical fibre, emotional intelligence, and provide the safety young people need to explore big ideas.
- Teachers who offer both academic challenges and opportunity to solve real-world problems.
- Mentors who share industry insights, career advice, connections to opportunities, and personal stories of resilience.
- Community leaders who model civic engagement and open doors to local networks.
- Sector changemakers and leading entrepreneurs who commit to raising and nurturing the next generation of local, national and global leaders.

The Impact of Empathy and Commitment

When adult allies show up consistently with empathy and an unwavering commitment, they do more than offer advice or materials to young people. They:

- Transform creative ideas into strategy and concrete action plans that address real community needs.
- Cultivate a sense of ownership, so young people view themselves as empowered contributors rather than passive observers.
- Inspire ongoing civic engagement by demonstrating that positive change is possible when individuals collaborate.

Through dedicated support, resource sharing, and genuine belief in youth potential, adult allies equip the next generation with the skills, networks, and confidence required to lead meaningful social change.

Adult allies shape how young people discover their agency and spark meaningful change. Empowering young people to become agents of change starts with supportive adults who believe in their potential. Adult allies serve as catalysts, offering guidance, resources, and the confidence youth need to step into leadership roles.

When adult allies approach young people with genuine empathy and unwavering commitment, they set the stage for youth-led transformation. They listen attentively, validate each young person's perspective, and offer emotional support without imposing their own agendas. In true partnership, they help outline action plans by guiding young people to define clear goals, establish realistic timelines, assign roles among themselves, and identify the resources they need. For instance, an adult ally might show a 13-year-old environmental advocate how to draft a project proposal, coach them on pitching to local sponsors, and model effective volunteer coordination, while allowing the young leader to take charge of every decision. In this way, empathy and commitment empower youth to turn bold ideas into concrete community impact.

Consistent encouragement combined with targeted support and a genuine belief in youth potential fuels the journey from aspiration to social action. Encouragement can mean celebrating each small victory, reinforcing perseverance when challenges arise, and publicly recognizing a young person's growing expertise. Practical support to young changemakers takes the form of sharing grant opportunities, connecting young people to meeting spaces or specialized mentors, and suggesting useful digital tools that could improve their productivity or amplify their work. By trusting youth to own both the process and the outcome, adult allies build the confidence and skills that sustain a lifelong commitment to civic engagement.

Here are some core strategies, common challenges, and best practices for effectively supporting young people to become changemakers.

Building Trust and Authentic Relationships

Trust is the foundation for any successful partnership between adults and youth.

- Create safe environments where young people feel listened to and respected.
- Practice active listening to understand the young person's motivations, fears, and aspirations.
- Validate their personal experiences and recognize their strengths without judgment.

When a young person senses authentic care, they are more willing to share bold ideas and take calculated risks.

Providing Resources and Skill Development

Access to resources and targeted skill training bridges the gap between vision and execution.

- Organize hands-on workshops on public speaking, project management, and digital advocacy.
- Offer templates, toolkits, or grant-writing advice to help youth mobilize funding and materials.
- Introduce collaborative technologies and platforms that streamline team coordination.

Equipping young changemakers with tools and skills boosts their confidence and accelerates the impact of their work.

Advocacy and Networking

Adult allies have networks and credibility that can open doors for youth initiatives.

- Introduce young leaders to influential stakeholders such as community organizers, nonprofit heads, or local officials.
- Recommend youth-led projects at conferences, school boards, or civic platforms to elevate their visibility.
- Advocate for youth representation on advisory committees, decision-making panels, or grant review boards.

By amplifying youth voices, allies help ensure that young perspectives shape policies and community priorities.

Mentorship and Guidance

When young people ask for mentorship or guidance, adult allies step in to offer sustained support that combines real-world insights with respectful collaboration.

This responsive approach ensures that guidance aligns with the young person's goals and learning style.

- Schedule one-on-one or small group check-ins to review progress, celebrate achievements, and adjust plans together.
- Share personal stories of challenges and resilience to demonstrate that setbacks can become powerful learning moments.
- Provide constructive suggestions for refining strategies, always reinforcing final decisions to rest with the young leaders.
- Offer resources or connections only when requested, ensuring that youth maintain ownership of project direction and implementation.
-

This youth-driven mentorship model cultivates resilience, sharpens strategic thinking, and fosters confident, self-assured leadership del cultivates resilience, sharpens strategic thinking, and fosters confident, self-assured leadership

Fostering Inclusive and Safe Spaces

True allyship prioritizes equity and emotional security for every participant.

- Establish clear community guidelines that prohibit exclusion, tokenism, and discouraging behaviours.
- Design programs that reflect diverse cultural backgrounds, abilities, and life experiences.
- Encourage peer-to-peer support systems to build a sense of collective ownership.

Inclusive spaces empower all youth to contribute fully, not just those already confident or well connected.

Common Challenges and Strategies for Resolution When Working with Young People

Even the most committed allies encounter obstacles. Addressing them proactively maintains momentum.

1. Balancing support with youth autonomy: Allow young people to lead agenda setting and decision making. Provide guidance only when asked.
2. Navigating power imbalances: Rotate leadership roles and co-create norms so that adults and youth share influence equally.

By anticipating these barriers, allies can adapt approaches and maintain respectful, effective partnerships.

Some Best Practices for Effective Allyship When Working with Young People

1. Commit to continuous listening: Prioritize youth priorities over adult agendas in every planning session.
2. Share decision-making power: Involve youth in setting goals, budgets, evaluation metrics, and communications strategies.
3. Cultivate cultural humility: Regularly seek feedback on how adult approaches align with youth cultures and lived realities.
4. Celebrate their progress publicly: Highlight both small milestones and major achievements to sustain morale and community support.
5. Reflect and evolve: Schedule periodic reviews where young people evaluate allyship practices and suggest improvements.

These practices create dynamic partnerships rooted in trust, equity, reciprocal learning, mutual respect, and fostering intergenerational changemaking.

Adult allies serve as the spark and scaffolding that empower young people to discover their strength and lead change efforts. Through trust building, resource sharing, mentorship, advocacy, inclusivity, and strategic problem solving, adults can nurture a generation of confident, capable changemakers. By embracing continuous reflection and genuine collaboration, allies ensure that youth voices drive enduring social impact.



Get Involved

How you can join the movement

To support the Ashoka Young Changemakers (AYC) and the broader youth ecosystem, engagement is built upon the principle of co-leadership and the Everyone A Changemaker (EACH) framework. Involvement is structured to allow diverse stakeholders, from young innovators to institutional partners, to move beyond passive support into active roles that catalyze social transformation across Africa and globally.

For young changemakers who are 20 years of age and below, getting involved begins with the recognition of their existing agency. Aspiring changemakers can enter the ecosystem by applying for the AYC selection here. Beyond the selection process, youth are encouraged to participate in Youth Venture 2.0. This entry point focuses on sharing “Your Dream, Your Team, Your Changed World” and Peer-to-Peer engagement where young leaders collaborate across Jujitsu metros to activate Everyone A Changemaker and drive regional initiatives that address the specific needs of their urban clusters.

For professionals and experts, an important pathway for involvement is through the Young Changemakers Matching Program which matches lived experience to innovative energy. By serving as co-leads, adults provide the structural guidance necessary to scale youth-led ventures while learning from the agility of the young generation. This involvement extends to the sector changemaker engagement process, where industry leaders help integrate AYCs into high-level policy dialogues and professional networks, particularly in fields like digital inclusion and disability advocacy. Experts also play a vital role as scouts, identifying and nominating eligible AYC candidates from underrepresented backgrounds to ensure a diverse and inclusive talent pipeline.

At the organizational level, involvement is centered on resource mobilization and the scaling and sustainability of the Youth Years programs in Ashoka West Africa (AWA). Partners, companies, organizations, and philanthropists can provide strategic funding to support national and regional summits, youth dialogue, capacity-building workshops, and the production of multilingual and multiformat tools and stories that reach and inspire millions of young people. This systemic support is crucial for the Jujitsu metros, where AYCs, co-leaders and their teams-of-teams require investment to become and remain self-sustaining. Partners can further align by integrating the EACH framework into their own organizational culture, thereby fostering a culture where every team member or stakeholder is empowered to lead.

More Info about the AYC Program:

Ashoka Young Changemakers Nigeria Playlist

Information on the Global Ashoka Young Changemakers Program

***Nominate an Ashoka
Young Changemaker!***



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