

Educate, Advocate, Support: Ensuring equity through access

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What do we fight for globally? What is the want, the passion that fuels people to rise and act for their freedom, independence, or quality of life? During my work with Sangat Youth, a local Sikh organization, we experienced this fight, not firsthand, but second hand. As we experienced the Farmer's Protest in India and saw the protest spread across the predominantly Punjabi Sikh diaspora, we saw a real need in Canada for accurate and updated information about global protests. This is where my journey started with Sangat Youth, in working on getting the correct information out to the Punjabi diaspora in the Western world. Other board members worked to create a centralized list of resources that people could direct donations of food, water and money to support the farmers occupying Delhi. In contrast, others attended rallies in support and covered the events via our social media. My interest in International learning stemmed from the international community to which I belong, mobilizing to support our loved ones who were fighting to keep the existence of small, local farming in India and not in the hands of large multinational corporations.

Why did the Farmer's protest affect me so? While my parents were born in Punjab, I was not, so what ties do I have to the land and farmers' rights in Punjab? The reasons for becoming involved in an international protest can vary from person to person. I know that other young people of Punjabi descent still have gone back to visit Punjab at least once, and their parents are still landowners or homeowners in Punjab while being citizens of Canada. Before I decided to pursue

my certificate, the only activism I would get involved in would be reposting social justice posts on my Instagram and engaging in casual discussions with my friends. However, this changed when our classes moved to virtual art at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I found myself having much more time, and it was also when major social justice movements such as the Farmer's protest and Black Lives Matter resurged after the death of George Floyd. So what does a teen do at home and see so much pain, hurt, trauma and activism rising up? I found any way I could to be involved, which began with applying to be on the board of Sangat youth. I had no knowledge of board governance, how youth groups worked or what exactly they did, but I knew that they were active in Sikh youth activism.

The board welcomed me with open arms and allowed me to float between positions before getting involved more heavily and tying an area of knowledge with my board title. I saw significant gaps in what support our community had in comparison to other equity-seeking groups, such as the black or Muslim community. While the end was there in our community, the organization and presence of someone who could be involved were not. Once I brought this up to the board, and once I went through the CIL orientation and engaged in the module that specifically talked about the tendency for communities to work in silos, I had more knowledge about the collaborations and relationship building that goes into creating a robust international community, one that is not only strong as a collective but firm in their respective communities as well. The board decided that I would be best in the area of Outreach and Advocacy; I sprang into action and began to reach out to other BIPOC organizations that specifically had strong youth branches, such as Islamic Family and Social Services, the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, and the City of Edmonton Youth Council.

This outreach sparked my interest in the area of social justice and specifically the area of hate and racism. I was introduced to the Alberta Hate Crimes Committee and their work supporting communities affected by hate crimes and hate incidents while also working to improve law enforcement responses to hate. This introduction came in handy when the Sikh community became the target of a series of hate crimes throughout the summer of 2021. While the gurdwara committee members could file a police report, it was not followed up with until they brought it to my attention, and I brought it to the head of the police's Hate Crimes and Violent Terrorism Unit. My volunteer work that was stimulated by my registering for the CIL catapulted me into a position where I was fielding calls from the media, concerned community members, government officials and the police while trying to ensure that the community members did not feel any fear or uncertainty in the situation. It also helped me craft media statements and releases in multiple languages, including French, which I took as part of my CIL requirements.

For the whole four months that this issue was a part of my every day, the same thought would run through my mind; "There has to be a better way to do this". You have to understand I was utterly exhausted and burnt out. I would hear about the latest hate crime directed at a community member every day. I would field calls, repeat the series of events repeatedly, and have to prove that our community was impacted and that we needed support. The burden placed on communities impacted by hate is too significant, too much and unnecessary. After all, we had said and done. I became a passionate advocate with the Alberta HAtE Crimes Commission to the Edmonton Police Service to ensure that my experience and the experiences of other communities would never happen again. I participated in the creation of new hate crimes and hate incidents

training module for officers, became a contact for EPS officers if they had any questions about the Sikh community and worked tirelessly with the Sikh community to educate them about what hate crimes and incidents are and what to do if you are targeted.

Throughout this process, I realized I had worked myself and Sangat youth into a silo again. We were so focused on our community again that we did not see other communities impacted. This spurred us to do an internal review of what we can do to ensure that we remain open to collaborations, relationship building and focusing more on connecting the international Sikh diaspora to the youth in Edmonton that we remained so connected to. Much of the work I do now with Sangat Youth focuses on establishing contacts with as many communities in Edmonton as possible, advocating various levels of government about issues that affect our community and many racialized communities in the city. Our next step is to work towards more reconciliation efforts with the Indigenous community and ensure that we remove colonialist processes and structures in our work.

I am hopeful that the eradication of hate in our city and province is possible. The farmers successfully repealed the three laws; if our elders can do it, what can their youth do?