

YES! Jam Alumni Stories



Greetings Good People,

Since 1990, YES! has organized more than 100 transformational weeklong gatherings for young leaders from 65+ nations. We have come to call these gatherings of 30 change-makers from diverse backgrounds “Jams” because when amazing people come together they can innovate, creating something new and different - just like when musicians come together without a rehearsed piece to perform, they jam!

Evaluative data tells us that YES! alumni have started more than 400 social profit ventures, and that cumulatively, the work of our 432 (and counting) Jam alumni is reaching more than 1.8 million people directly and more than 200 million people indirectly, each year. Attached are eight narratives from our alumni about the impact of YES!, and the YES! community, on their lives and work. But before you get into those I would like to share some of my own reflections.

I have been working at YES! since September of 2002. The summer before I began my employment with YES! I participated in YES!’s 2002 Women’s Jam, a week-long gathering of 30 women from roughly 10 nations who came together to bridge historic divides and build authentic and lasting relationships. I had just completed an internship with the NAACP Southeast Regional Office’s Prison Project. During my time with the NAACP I had the fortune of attending many interesting gatherings, one of which was the State of the Black World Conference. There was an incredible line-up of well-known speakers like Sonia Sanchez and Rev. Jesse Jackson. But out of all of these powerful speakers, I was most moved by Malika Sanders of 21st Century Youth Leadership Movement in Selma, AL. I remember that I went home that night and wrote in my journal about the impact that Malika had on me. As a teenager she had organized her high school to protest against the racist tracking system the school used to set back African American students, putting them on a vocational track as opposed to an academic one. I was totally blown away when I met Malika again at the 2002 Women’s Jam.

At the Women’s Jam I was initially a bit star-struck by Malika. As the week progressed Malika’s power, clarity and leadership continually inspired me, but I also realized that she was a human being. During the week we all shared stories about our hopes, fears, challenges, successes and places where we wanted to see growth in our lives. We did the inner, self-reflective work so that we could better understand how we were relating with each other. We took off our masks and risked sharing from the heart, and built relationships on real ground. We left knowing that we were a part of a global community of women from very different backgrounds who shared a

common vision of a just and sustainable way of life for all, and that we were in it together. And when we returned home we took that hope to the communities that we each worked in and let it ripple out.

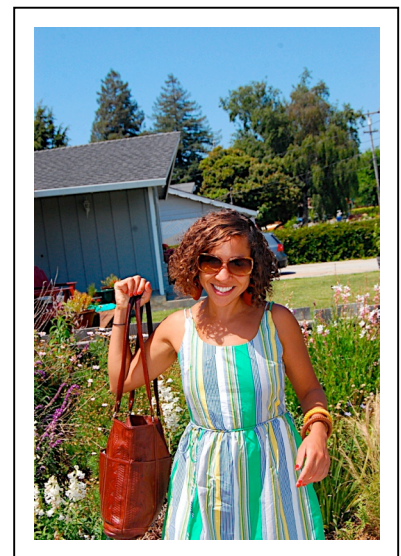
The change-makers we work with at YES! are some of the most inspiring people I have ever met. In their communities they are often under immense pressure, and the week that they are able to take for the Jam allows for self-reflection and healing with peers from various backgrounds. The environment that we co-create at the Jams helps to foster relationships of trust and authenticity that allow for the complexities of who we are to emerge. The benefit of spending time with peers in this manner is that real connections and friendships are born from a solid foundation. With this kind of foundation transformative collaborations are organically birthed, as you will soon read about: friendships, partners, organizations, support networks, funding networks.

Since I met Malika at the Women's Jam I have been to her community in Selma three times. I have marched with Malika at Jubilee in remembrance of Bloody Sunday, the day when Civil Right's Leaders like Dr. King marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge with community members, standing up for the right to vote for blacks. Organizationally, Malika and I have explored programmatic partnerships and are currently serving together as members of the Global Youth Leadership Collaborative. She is not just someone I admire, but is now a friend, a mentor and a partner.

I know that as you read the following stories you will be inspired by these amazing change-makers. I believe that in these stories lies testament to the powerful work that happens at Jams. Just as Jam alumni are impacted by the power of the work of what we create together at Jams and then return to impact their communities with what they have learned and shared, I hope that these stories touch you. You, too, are a part of this global community of change-makers! Enjoy.

Tiffany Brown
YES! Co-Director

Tiffany Brown, 28, Co-Director, has been with YES! for seven years. She has worked with local as well as national anti-racist groups such as the civil rights organization, the NAACP (Southeast Regional office's Prison Project). Tiffany is passionate about bringing people together over food, community, relationships and communication. She has participated and facilitated several conferences with Be Present, which focuses on transformative communication across difference. And she is serving on the Board of Common Fire, working towards the vision of a diverse intentional community that promotes living in alignment with our values. She is a co-founder of the Santa-Cruz based Community Alliances Initiative (CAI), which is a support network for a diverse group of intergenerational changemakers.



*Ko Mauao te maunga,
Ko Tauranga te moana,
Ko Ngati Ranginui te iwi,
Ko Pirirakau te hapu,
Ko Paparua te marae*

Kiritapu Lyndsay Allan



Kiritapu is one of those people that wakes up on any given day in completely different places, interacting with many kinds of faces and traversing through all types of spaces. Peace and justice lie at the core of all that it is that she does. In saying that she admits that it is another matter to fully embody these concepts at the personal level and strives to attain the balance of peace and justice within her own self, family, community and country. Kiritapu is indigenous to Aotearoa, specifically she comes from the peoples of Ngati Ranginui, Ngai Te Rangi, Tuwharetoa and Te Arawa which are tribes from the middle of the North Island. Her work revolves

around educating and inspiring all peoples about learning from our histories so that we can create a sustainable, just and hopeful future.

In 2004, the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa (colonially referred to as New Zealand) underwent the largest single land confiscation in living memory. The Government in one piece of legislation, ‘The Seabed and Foreshore Act, 2004’, placed the entire coastlines of our islands into the hands of the Government extinguishing any native title or customary rights of Maori to the coastal lands and extinguishing Maori rights to determine ownership and control through the New Zealand court system.

I had been active in opposing this piece of legislation along with many of my peers. At the beginning of 2004, I was working for the Prime Minister’s office – by the end of the year I was hanging off lamp posts with 40,000 other people outside that same office in protest against racist legislation.

It was a year of heartache for Maori, but with all sad things, so too was it a time for us to come together as a peoples and sing, dance and celebrate ourselves for being resisters to a system that has and continues to fail not just us but many other peoples as well.

It was right towards the end of this intense year that I heard about a program called the World Jam. My best friend and mentor, Teanau Tuiono, had been to the program in 2001. Like many of us who had been working actively on the campaign, I was starting to feel a sense of being burnt out. So on a plane I went, to Senegal, West Africa.

The World Jam in Senegal remains a pivotal point in the landscape of my journey. I rocked up to that Jam, excited because I was in a far away land but hesitant because I was out of my comfort zone, sharing space with people whose movements I knew very little about. During that week it was like a part of me emerged from my own ashes, a piece of my sunlight, where I could see a bunch of folks who cared about their peoples, their families, the world in which we lived, trying

to make a change. Somewhere, somehow, I was surrounded by people who wanted to do right in the world, regardless of what the cost was and remains to be.

That Jam was almost five years ago now. Since then, my fellows and I have founded an organization that works with indigenous peoples to uplift our consciousness about what is happening here on our own backyard and too, how that has impacted and is impacting upon our brothers and sisters around the world. The World Jam was an opportunity for me to open up my eyes to a whole world of struggle, survival, color, sounds, peoples that are moving. Down home, we wanted to create something that could give us that flavor locally.

Our organization, Conscious Collaborations, has partnered with many of our friends and organizations that we have met through relationships formed through World Jams.

In 2006, I was fortunate to go and spend three months interning for an organization, called the 'Black Mesa Water Coalition' that was co-founded by Enei Begaye and Wahleah Johns (amongst others), both of whom are Jam alumni and friends I met through the 2006 Santa Fe World Jam.

For three months, sponsored by 'Seeds for Justice', I had the opportunity to work with a group of young natives in Flagstaff, which is a border town to the Navajo reservation in Arizona.

In a house full of Jam Alumni (Cathy Rexford, co-director of Alaska Native Movement, Enei Begaye, co-director of Black Mesa Water Coalition, Wahleah Johns, co-director of Black Mesa Water Coalition, and Evon Peter, co-founder of Native Movement), we were all young natives from very different corners of the world, who had committed our lives to our peoples, that got to jam for a few months on ways to organize and uplift the masses' consciousness.

In this time, we built mud brick houses, rallied against multi-national corporations that wished to desecrate on sacred mountains and others that wanted to mine precious natural resources, and organized youth camps on the reservation. This was also the time when I laid the foundations for our organization in Aotearoa.

The relationship between the south-west region and Aotearoa has been critical and continues to grow throughout the years. Conscious Collaborations hosts a number of young people from the south-west region who are committed to making change for their people in a variety of ways.

Following my return home soon after, we hosted a Jam-like gathering in Aotearoa, called 'Nice 'n' Native', which was fiscally support by YES!, the Wild Rose Fund and Seeds for Justice Fund. Each of these donor relationships had been forged through our relationship with YES! and enabled us to bring 30 indigenous peoples from the four corners of the earth together at a Motakotako Marae (an indigenous community house) in the Waikato region here at home.

Jam alumni partners from APIYN (Asia Pacific Indigenous Youth Network) participated in the event, which has subsequently led to formalized relationship of indigenous young peoples here in the South Pacific region.

This event allowed for solid relationships to continue to grow, which have again manifested themselves in so many ways – from music gigs and collaborations to front line action when the State, in 2008, terrorized indigenous communities inciting Terrorism Acts which impede on basic civil rights and compromise the rules of justice. Seventeen indigenous and environmental activists were incarcerated and held for up to a month, while several thousand people responded

by hitting the streets, writing submission to the United Nations (which ultimately lead to a damning report of New Zealand Government officials) and a drawn out legal campaign for all charges to be dropped against those that were arrested.

Throughout our lives as activists, change makers, people who seek justice in hidden corners - our lives are made up of the beauty of creating with our peers, igniting light in the hearts of each other – and too, our lives are committed to being there on the front line when injustice is perpetuated in front of our eyes. The World Jams and the relationships formed throughout these Jams have continued to foster a sense of light within me, have allowed me to find peers who too are on a learning journey about how to stay true to ourselves and our hearts. These peers have been an enormous part of my growth in my activism and in matters of the heart. I am forever indebted to the work of this organization that seeks to join people and foster relationships of the heart.

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Laura Loescher

Laura Loescher is the Executive Director of Aepoch Fund (www.aepoch.org), a foundation supporting artists, healers, activists and movements that are linking ecological, cultural, economic, and social transformation to create the conditions for all people and the planet to thrive. Laura was co-founder and former director of Changemakers. She is also a leadership coach and philanthropic/investment advisor to individuals who are devoting their lives and resources to inner and outer transformation.

I attended my first week-long YES! event in the Summer of 2002. It was a facilitation training held in a Jam-like setting. What a gift that experience was in my life at that time, as the young co-founder of Changemakers, a national foundation working to change the culture and practice of philanthropy. It was there that Ocean Robbins, YES!’s Founder/Director, and I began a conversation about collaborating to host a “philanthropy jam” for young people involved in the field. This idea later evolved into the first Leveraging Privilege for Social Change Jam (LPSC) in the spring of 2003. I had the great privilege of co-facilitating or being on the leadership team for the first four of the LPSC Jams. After my Jam involvement, I served on YES!’s board and also worked closely with the staff on developing and growing the organization.

The connections I formed in the container of safety and trust of the Jams have been some of the most profoundly influential relationships of my adult life. This is true for me both personally and professionally, in lasting friendships and strong collaborative work relationships. In addition, my ongoing relationship with YES! as an organization and alumni community has shaped and clarified my purpose, broadened my sense of what is possible, and given me courage to build bridges across the difficult divides of race and class, as well as philosophy and strategy for change.

I am currently the Executive Director of a small foundation that supports artists, healers, activists and movements that are linking ecological, cultural, economic, and social transformation to create the conditions for all people and the planet to thrive. The YES! community is part of my

organization's developmental story. Soon after starting the foundation, one of my colleagues and I attended an LPSC Jam together. The deepening of our relationship and the network of people we met at the Jam has been impactful on our organization. We take an informal, relationship-based approach to our work. We are conscious of the power dynamic inherent in the philanthropic relationship between grant giver and grant seeker. What I explored at the Jams around privilege, race and class has been very influential in how I maintain relationships with colleagues and grantees. I try to offer an authentic, respectful, kind, flexible way of relating to people.

Another takeaway from the Jams has been the growth in my capacity to have awkward or difficult conversations, and to speak directly to challenging dynamics as they arise. Having the experience of being fully received and accepted has enabled me to show up with that courage and presence outside of the Jam setting. The experience of developing really deep loving connections with people in a short amount of time has raised the bar for me on what's possible in relating to people across historical divides. An 18-month training with Be Present, which I joined as a result of being exposed to the work at the Jam, also helped deepen this capacity.

My experience at the Jams and in the YES! community has also shaped my belief that in order to create truly healthy systems, transformation must take place on the individual, community, and societal levels. It is a fundamentally organic and integrated process. Change on one level is valuable but incomplete. Without change on all levels, we lack the ability to truly transform the world. This understanding is central to how we decide what to fund and support.

My involvement with YES! as an organization, outside of the Jam context, has influenced all my work. YES! has taken on the difficult but rewarding task of operating in alignment with a set of principles that aren't particularly conventional in the nonprofit world. From a shared leadership structure, to consensus decision-making, to a commitment to openly and honestly working through challenges as they arise, YES! has experimented with and modeled for me the possibility of doing things differently. I've learned how to establish the minimal amount of conventional structure to keep things workable for everyone, but then to be very experimental within that. This learning is integrated into all aspects of how my organization is structured, how we do our planning, what we choose to fund and how we make decisions.

The network of friends and colleagues that I met through the Jams is a core part of my social change community. I have consistent ongoing connection with at least 25 Jam alumni, and periodic communication through work or play with at least that many more. Our foundation has supported at least ten organizations founded by or run by Jam alumni, and we have made individual awards to several others.

Knowing that there is a substantial global YES! community just an email away, and that in a moment's notice I could tap into the wisdom and support of hundreds of people around the world, is an incredibly valuable resource. Seeing how members of this community show up for each other is so inspiring. When times get dark we need that sense of community, friendship, and kinship to keep us buoyed and hopeful. This helps us stay standing in the place of possibility rather than shrinking in despair.

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Josh Thome



Josh Thome is co-founder of Direct Current Media and co-creator of the TV series 4REAL. His work to educate and activate people on environmental and social causes has reached millions through live events, TV, radio, film and the Internet. His first film, CONNECT, hosted by Michael Stipe of R.E.M., aired worldwide as MTV's 1997 Earth Day Special.

In 1992, Josh presented at the United Nations on youth, the environment and education, and was contracted by the Clinton Administration to help appropriate millions of dollars in environmental youth grants. He is a recipient of the Sierra Club Presidents Award and was featured in the book "The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations".

Recently Josh was awarded as an Emerging Explorer for National Geographic.

My experience with Jams is from the inside out. In 1996, I was working with YES! and helped organize the first Jam. Later, in 2000 I was invited back as a participant, in 2001 I visited the Jam community day and in 2003 I was invited to the India World Jam to make a video. Every time, the Jam played a pivotal role in my life.

I grew up in the remote and beautiful Kootenay mountains of British Columbia, Canada. My parents were part of the back to the land movement in the early 70's and they instilled in me a social conscience, a hard work ethic and a love for nature.

It was this connection with nature that activated me in my senior year of high school, when I became aware of the magnitude of the destruction of the environment and the blind politics of greed that were fueling it. Some friends and I decided to start an environmental club and we began networking with other clubs in BC. We all worked together in organizing a conference in Vancouver that 600 students attended. Within a year it grew to become an Environmental Youth Alliance with over 60,000 students across the country.

This experience taught me the basic movement building formula of educational and entertaining outreach followed up with networking and organizing. It was at this point that I was invited to California to join YES! and help create a national tour to educate, inspire and empower young people to make a difference. The follow up of the tour evolved from workshops in schools, to weekend workshops in communities, to regional and national week-long camps, and finally to the international Jams.

As we organized the first Jam, I was doing media outreach for YES! and I was frustrated with how our message was put into some lame box about how cute it was that young people cared about the Earth. Our message was a lot deeper and more urgent than that and it didn't take me long to realize that the only way we were going to convey it properly was to make our own media. So at the first Jam I interviewed everyone and over the course of the next year I got

enough footage donated to put together my first video called CONNECT. MTV picked it up and broadcast it in 80 countries as their 1997 Earth Day special. This obviously got me inspired to do more media production but it also got me thinking about how to leverage the emerging internet as a means to follow up this kind of mass media outreach.

In 1999, I dove back into grassroots organizing as the WTO meeting in Seattle was approaching. This was an incredibly unique opportunity to address almost every environmental and social justice issue being perpetrated by multi-national corporate globalization. This was a rare opportunity to shine a light on the lawless gold-rush pillaging of the worlds resources and peoples without any regulation or concern beyond profit.

I continued campaigning hard until the IMF/World Bank rallies the next spring. At that point, I was feeling fairly burnt out on protesting against things and the 2000 Jam was just the medicine I needed. It renewed my inspiration, stoked my passion and set me in a new direction focused on solutions. Some of the people I met at that Jam are some of my closest friends and colleagues still today.

The Jam participants are people that demonstrate incredible courage, creativity, intelligence and grace in finding solutions to some of the most pressing issues of our time. I was compelled once again to get these vital and hopeful stories out to the world. These are the real heroes of our time and yet they don't get anywhere near the resources and attention they deserve. I started working on an idea called The Butterfly Effect that would take celebrity guests to highlight the inspiring work of Jammers. Like the chaos theory of the same name, the Butterfly Effect would show how a small action in one place could have a big impact globally.

The Butterfly Effect evolved into 4REAL a couple years later when I started working with my childhood friend, Sol Guy. While developing 4REAL we filmed a music video in Kenya for the artist K'naan, and along the way we met Salim Mohamed. Salim was the link that made us welcomed in the rough and tough neighborhoods of Nairobi where we filmed. He was also a simply great and fun guy to be around and he immediately became a good friend. After a couple days of working together Salim showed us where he lived and worked in Kibera, the largest slum in East Africa. Here, Salim ran a community development sports program for over four thousand young people and helped run a medical clinic too. From our time in Kenya with Salim we ended up with a pilot episode of 4REAL. I also told Salim about the Jams and later implored YES! to invite him to a Jam. As predicted, he's been a vibrant part of the Jam community ever since.

From Kenya, we went straight to the 2003 India Jam. Interviewing the participants was an inspiring opportunity to further develop 4REAL.

Three years later, we finally landed a broadcast deal for eight episodes of 4REAL and over the next year of production the dream to highlight the amazing work of Jammers came true. We started by taking actor Joaquin Phoenix into the Amazon to feature Chief Tashka and Laura Yawanawa, who have brought the Yawanawa community back from the brink of ethnocide. I met them at the 2000 Jam and they have been some of my closest friends since. We also took actress Cameron Diaz to meet Puma Singona in the Andean Mountains of Peru. Puma is bridging a generation gap in ancient Quetchua culture. Again, Puma and I met at the 2000 Jam and have been friends ever since. In 2001 I met Kimmie Weeks at the Jam community day and we were able to take music sensation M.I.A. to Liberia and check out his amazing work there in helping the children of Liberia come out of war.

4REAL has now been broadcast around the world on CTV, MTV, National Geographic Channels and The CW. It's been followed up on many levels at 4REAL.com and half of the profits from the shows go the leaders. It's been an amazing journey and one that's been intimately connected with the Jams. With the recent global economic meltdown, our broadcast partner had to pull the funding for season two of 4REAL, just as we were getting started. Once again I am in a transition but even writing about the Jams is reminding me of the energy and blessings they have provided me and it's already inspiring new vision just as the Jams always have.

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Zahra Ebrahim



Zahra is the Founder and CEO of the architecture and design think tank, archiTEXT. Born in Kenya, raised in West Vancouver, and educated at McGill University in Montreal, Zahra is currently the Innovator in Residence at Canada's National Design Museum, the Design Exchange. Ebrahim brings together diverse groups to tackle the intersections of architecture with social change, the environment, politics, economics, equality, health, and pop culture. Currently curating What Has Architecture Done for You Lately? - a conceptual art exhibit using the museum as the laboratory to research an architectural vocabulary that represents the global population - she is also authoring the accompanying publication, as well as hosting a global charrette series exploring the question. As the youngest professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design (OCAD

University), she teaches in the Think Tank Program, getting the next generation of designers asking complex questions of themselves and the world around them. In her spare time, Ebrahim volunteers as the Co-Chair of Outreach for Couchiching Institute of Public Affairs and as the Chair of Events for Architecture for Humanity (Toronto Chapter). She also sits on the Canadian Commission for UNESCO Youth Advisory Group and contributes regularly to OnSite Review. Zahra was recently recognized as one of the Global Knowledge Partnership's Top 100 Young Global Social Entrepreneurs.

I attended the 2008 Leveraging Privilege for Social Change Jam on the premise of defining this notion that no one is allowed to speak about – the notorious “P” word - and understanding more clearly, my own context of privilege and how it relates to others. The year 2008 – only halfway through at that point – had been an immense year of change (in every way) for me, and I was already in the process of trying to distill that change into something that made sense, something coherent. I was personally evaluating my notions of trust, of communication, of giving, of loving. It was around the same time I attended the Jam, that the work I had dedicated my energy to for the prior two years also underwent a significant shift. Shortly after graduating from university – and eyeing a career that somehow married architecture and social change – I founded an architectural think tank – a vehicle to get those working outside of design and architecture engaged in creating the policy frameworks, and discussions, that result in the construction of our built environment in creative, exciting, and unconventional ways.

I designed a way of creatively engaging people first – to explore their personal intersections – and then translating that into tangible outcomes. But let’s take a step back.... a think tank for “architectural activism?” Architecture as a social issue? Imagine the challenges of such an enigmatic life choice - and finding a way to make it something that is organic, yet stable and reputable while still maintaining its organic nature. It was a month prior to the Jam that I was invited by the Design Exchange – The National Design Museum in Canada – to launch a program called “Innovator in Residence”, a program designed to provide social entrepreneurs access to institutional structures and resources in order to produce new innovation and ideas, transcending institutional inaccessibility. So as I was undergoing this personal re-evaluation, I was still in shock that finally – finally – I was being provided with a soapbox, a platform to speak to the issues and mobilize the ideas that, until that point, had been in dire need of an influx of resources to fulfill their potential.

Then I arrived in West Virginia. My “A-type” self had not yet been checked at the door, and I sat in the circle with a group of strangers, being asked to *listen* and not anticipate or plan my answer to the circulating question: How are you privileged? I found for myself – being an extroverted, verbose girl who is extremely comfortable speaking in group situations – moved, challenged and surprised by the honesty of these strangers. Lost for words, with sweaty palms and a racing heart, I realized that the currency of this space was honesty, laughter, tears, thoughtfulness, and mindfulness and it petrified me and excited me all at once.

Over the course of the week, I stood on an observation deck watching the way I had – to date – walked in the world. I revisited and started to understand more clearly some of the values instilled by my parents, I addressed fears and insecurities aloud, was challenged to just “be” and not always “please” – and through this, felt a lightness of spirit that only comes with shedding of your outer self, and being raw – in every sense of the word. In exploring this, realizing trust is not a black and white concept – but rather – a gray one, realizing that other young change makers from around the world were experiencing these same transformations and exploring these same issues and challenges personally, as well as in their work.

As the final days neared and our pre-Jam selves were resurfacing, revealing more and more about our lives by giving quick soundbytes about our work so as to build on the relationships established over the week – Julian Caspari got up to speak. It turns out that we had been living somewhat parallel lives, having attended the same University in Montreal (at the same time) and now working in social change in Toronto, and living in the same neighborhood. He mentioned his desire to organize a project with kids, food, permaculture, and a space. Having entertained a similar desire to work with kids, food, and architecture, Julian and I sat down and brainstormed an idea – which has now resulted in a capital project we are doing in a priority neighborhood in Toronto – bringing together kids, architects, permaculture education organizations, and chefs to empower kids using architecture and urban agriculture. Through this we’ve not only inspired each other to challenge the boundaries of our work in new and interesting ways, but also have built upon a friendship in a dynamic and rounded way.

As I am sure many before me have said, the Jam is a transformative experience. It forces you to question, to challenge, to learn, to ignite your curiosity, to listen, to speak, and to just *be*.

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Marcus Anthony Briggs-Cloud

Makvs Vholocet owis. Cvrket emvliketv hotvlkvket os momen cv poca tate emvliketv fuswvket owemvts. Cvrket em etvlwvt mekosuket os. Kvnfvsken vtijet os momen mekosvpkv-cuko ariyet os. Vm etvlwvt Tvlvhase Wvkokiye tvsekiyvt owis.

Marcus Briggs-Cloud is a Miccosukee person of the Great Maskoke Nation and is a son of the Wind Clan people and grandson of the Bird Clan people. Over the last two years he taught Maskoke language in the Anthropology Department at the University of Oklahoma and

actively worked to promote the resurgence of traditional Indigenous ideology and lifeways among his people. Marcus is passionate about the youth he worked with for two and half years in at Norman High School in Oklahoma as a counselor to pave a road that leads to the restoration of pride in being Indigenous among the generations yet to come. Marcus is a National Steering Committee Member of the United Methodist Student Movement, an elected member to the Board of Directors for the National Tekakwitha Conference, a steering committee member of the American Indian Boarding School Healing Project, and an Oxfam International Youth Action Partner; He is a member of the U.S. Ecumenical Association of third World Theologians, a Board Member of Cultural Survival- an NGO that seeks to promote and defend the rights of Indigenous Peoples' globally, as well as 1 of 6 plaintiffs on the case Blackhorse vs. Profootball to terminate the Washington Football Team Mascot. He recently completed the making of a musical album "Pum Vculyke Vrakkuecetv" (To honor Our Elders), where he adapts traditional Maskoke hymns to contemporary genres of worship with piano, violin, djembe and the complimentary voice of Maskoke/Euchee singer Anna Rangel-Clough. Marcus is currently a graduate student at Harvard Divinity School.

It seems like just last night I was up late hustling to complete my application for the 2008 World Jam. I was altogether shocked when I received a phone call from Tiffany Brown letting me know that the spots from my region had all been filled, but after reviewing my application they agreed to accept me to participate in the World Jam. Nearing my departure to Cusco, Peru to attend the event, I was being asked by numerous persons what it is that I was going to be doing in Peru. I wasn't really sure how to answer them. I just told them "I'm going to attend a World Jam!" With a plethora of puzzled facial expressions, they naturally replied "What is a World Jam?" I told them, "I don't really know, but I'll tell you when I get back." Little did I foresee, that even upon my return home I still would be unable to adequately articulate the immensely powerful transforming experience I encountered at the World Jam.

I come from an Indigenous community whose members are victims of generational cycles of oppression initiated by centuries of physical and spiritual displacement. My people find today, thriving impositions manifested in the lives of our children, parents and even grandmas and grandpas- including the lowest academic retention rate, and the highest rate of suicide, domestic violence, alcoholism, and drug abuse over any other ethnic group in what is now commonly known as the United States of America. Prior to my World Jam experience, I served for two and a half years as a high school counselor for Indigenous youth who are severely troubled by these

phenomena, and confusingly search to restore balance within themselves and their families. Additionally, as the youngest speaker of my Indigenous language (as a result of 200 years of governmental kidnapping and placement of children in boarding schools where they were beaten when they spoke their language, thus they either forgot it or chose not to teach their children for the sake of protecting them from the same potential harm), I taught Maskoke at the University of Oklahoma as a life long commitment to maintain the key component to conducting our ceremonies, the backbone of our spirituality- the gateway to affirm our integrity and dignity.

Leading up to my departure for Peru, I found myself in one of the most defeated moments in life, not only personally, but collectively on behalf of my entire community. The realities of socio-economic, spiritual, and cultural depression surrounding me and my people, was overwhelming to say the least, thus cultivating within me feelings of perpetual doubt and lack of perseverance and stripping my heart of any momentum or vision to seek positive change among my people. I made every attempt to gather myself in order to respectfully interact with fellow Jammers, not wanting to interject my pessimism or internal anger with social movements and those thinking they can 'save the world.'

Upon my arrival in Lima, my roommate for the evening was a fellow Jammer from Aotearora who was among the youngest speakers left of Maori but was among the first batch of guinea pigs for a language revitalization movement that produced an entire generation of speakers. I had vaguely heard about this famous project that Maori People were conducting, but to be visiting with an individual right then and there whose mother helped launch these famous immersion programs that proved to be extraordinarily successful, was nothing short of amazing- giving me instant hope in the midst of my brokenness. Perhaps my people too had a chance to revive what was nearly out of sight forever.

The World Jam was held in the Andes, the home of the Quechua People. I was first blown away by the way in which this Indigenous group had maintained their cultural entirety to such a vast degree. Their example of resistance to colonial domination and assimilation, and vision to foster their identity from culturally purist and syncretic perspectives boosted my esteem like nothing I had ever encountered. I thought how incredible it was that I was attending a Jam the year it was held in an Indigenous community. The moment we stepped foot in their sacred lands, where we were given the opportunity to interact with the living elements of the natural environment in the capacity we chose, explicitly affirmed my decision to come to this event more than anything prior to that time. I was remarkably confused in my own community space, unable to connect in healthy ways to the land we inhabit, including our sacred sites; but Puma, a World Jam facilitator and traditional custodian of those Quechua lands, opened a spiritual realm for me to engage in such a way that began restoring my own essence as a Maskoke individual among a new community of individuals I was just encountering for the first time and with whom I would spend the next week.

Relationships were building faster than I was anticipating, and we proceeded with activities and others interactions such as personal life testimonies of our work back home, for which my emotional boundaries were not ready to digest. I have been to numerous programs and workshops designed to be efficacious in a similar manner as the World Jam, but none had ever captured all of me the way that the Jam did- as my breakdown rested in the hands of the facilitators and fellow participants. I found myself to be an emotional basket case, trying to figure out what these folks had done to me. Needless to say, I underwent a serious process of healing in

all realms of my being, recharging me for the struggle I would return to when I left for home. I spent the next several weeks trying to synthesize my experience, but was left with only indescribable memories, everlasting friendships, and an unwavering peace in my heart.

The Jam instilled a new kind of confidence within me, following the powerful healing experiences I had. Thus, I began facilitating conversations with elders in my community, bringing both Christian and Traditional Indigenous practitioners together for dialogue, something unheard of among my people as we are sharply divided by the animosities our differing ideological foundations suggest. Utilizing the techniques I acquired at the Jam, our gatherings have proven to be productive in many ways, including greater elder/youth interactions, religious discourse, and even moving in the direction of personal healing for those whose minds and hearts have long suffered from internal colonial wounds and other abuses.

The World Jam experience is still one that I am unable to adequately articulate, as it has had such a profound impact on my life and remained a pivotal moment in my personal transformation. Nonetheless, I am forever grateful to YES! for taking me to physical and emotional places of which I never could have fathomed the realization or possibility. I wish every individual could have the World Jam experience; give the power YES! has to create such change within persons and communities, perhaps even that is possible. Mvto ce kicis!

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Evon Peter

Evon Peter is the executive director of the Indigenous Leadership Institute and former Chief of the Neetsaii Gwich'in from Arctic Village in northeastern Alaska. He has served as the Co-Chair of the Gwich'in Council International and on the Executive Board of the Alaska Inter-Tribal Council. Evon is a well-recognized advocate of Indigenous Peoples rights, youth, and a balanced world, active as a speaker, strategist, writer, and organizer. His experience includes work within the United Nations and Arctic Council forum representing Indigenous and environmental interests. He dedicates a significant portion of his time to youth leadership development, movement and coalition building, and gathering facilitation. He holds a bachelors degree in Alaska Native studies with a minor in Political Science and is completing a Masters degree in Rural Development from the University of Alaska, Fairbanks.

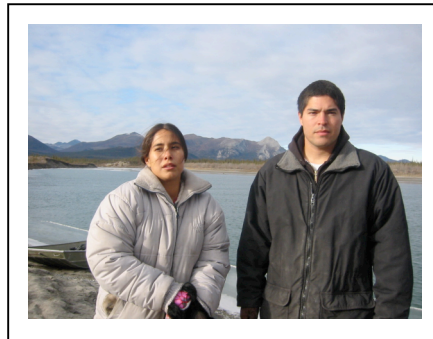
I received the e-mail from Tad Hargrave of YES! as I was sitting in my tribal council office in Arctic Village, Alaska in early 2001. I had been serving as the Chief of the Neetsaii Gwich'in tribe and was twenty-four years old. I responded that I was too busy to take a week of time in California for non-tribal business. My life consisted of nearly seventy hours a week committed to meet the social, cultural, political, and economic needs of my people. Tad persisted to convince me that a phone call might be helpful in explaining what a Jam was and why it might be of benefit to my life and work. He was adequately convincing.

I arrived into the San Francisco airport later that year and received a warm welcome from the volunteer drivers who had come to escort me to the World Jam gathering site. For seven years leading up to the Jam, I had been immersed in settings that demanded of me to prove my

knowledge and capacity because of my young age. I was open minded but had to live cautious of my actions, words, and decisions. The outcomes of my choices impacted many people beyond myself and this was a pressure I had become accustomed to living with. I had built a barrier of protection that was also denying me to enjoy the full expression of my being and thinking. Of course, I was not aware of all this when I first arrived at the World Jam to witness a short West African woman, a brown skinned Californian, and a European American woman all laughing gleefully together on a small couch. The African woman, named Coumba, looked up and said with an inviting smile, “don’t worry, this will seem normal to you by the end of the week.”

It did become normal to me. The opportunity to sit, share, cry, learn, and bond with a community of young leaders from around the world is one of the most powerful and transformational experiences I have participated in. To discover that we are not alone in our responsibilities as a generation of leaders emerging into a volatile and uncertain future on a global level was reassuring and nurturing. To learn that we are all one family within humanity, working towards the same peace, equitability, and sustainability in our communities and nations. These marked a turning point in my perspective on leadership and the importance of global linkages. My heart had opened to new dimensions.

On my return to the World Jam the following year I met Navajo activist, Enei Begaye, of the Black Mesa Water Coalition. I joked at the beginning of the Jam that, “I am looking for a wife who is a good organizational administrator and willing to move to a small remote tribe in Northern Alaska.” Enei told me a year later at our traditional Navajo wedding ceremony that she had thought, “he’s cute, but good luck finding a wife to move to Alaska.”



We have now been together for seven years and have two daughters, Nanieezh and Cheelil. Together we founded Native Movement, which has grown into a national Indigenous led non-profit organization supporting leadership development and sustainability projects in Alaska and the Southwest United States. Enei continues as a co-Director of the Black Mesa Water Coalition and I am the Director of the Indigenous Leadership Institute, both sponsored through Native Movement.

My relationship with YES! and the World Jams continued to deepen over the years as I emerged into roles as a facilitator and board member. It is without a doubt that my life and work has been substantially influenced through these experiences.

The institutions and programs that I have helped to create are nearly all in some way connected to the vision, insight, friendships, and support I have garnered over these years through YES!.

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Cecilia Iglesias



I live in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I graduated from the Universidad del Salvador with a degree in Environmental Sciences. I initiated and maintain an environmental education project based on ICTs called EcoPibes, which has more than 80,000 users per month in 29 countries all over the Spanish-speaking world. So, I'm the happy coordinator of a wonderful initiative: making my dreams of a better future come true. Today I coordinate an NGO dedicated to environmental education and youth participation.

There we coordinate several projects in collaboration with United Nations agencies and Governments from Latin America.

In 2004 I received the Outstanding Young Persons of Argentina (TOYP) Award, which recognizes young people who excel in their chosen fields, in my case in the area of environmental leadership. In my free time I enjoy spending time with my children, being outdoors, having a drink with my friends, and keeping in touch with other activists all over the world.

I often think of the Jam as a person with a history, a strong personality and a mission in life. In that sense, the Jam and I found each other during a very special moment. I was going through a silent crisis, standing-frozen, looking at two possible futures and not being able to decide which one to take. On one side, I had a promising career as an environmental consultant for the private sector; on the other, I saw a happy, although tough path, as an environmental educator. Lacking support from some of the people I loved the most, I felt very lonely at that time and although I knew I had to make a choice of my own, I needed to discuss my internal dilemmas, fears, and expectations with someone who understood.

By the time I got to Brazil most of my luggage was as invisible as it was heavy: a complicated mix of feelings covered by success and confidence. I remember a very special moment during the Jam: an exercise called The Line of Life. I recall having a big piece of paper in front of me that should somehow become my path from the past and into the future. It felt like that particular exercise was designed for me to listen to my inner self and freely explore my options. I drew and colored my future during a beautiful morning in a warm January. I still don't know if it was an instant inspiration or a result of a long internal dialogue that decided to find an answer there. But I do know that I'm an environmental educator and can't even imagine myself not being one.

I've participated in nearly a hundred gatherings but somehow the Jam stays with me always. As an educator, I find myself reflecting on what were the components of this life-changing experience. What can I learn from the methodology that can be applied into my work? What was the nature of this particular exchange? Was it the people, the place, the method? Was it even planned or did it simply happen? Did it have the same profound impact on everyone or just me?

The group of people who shared the Latin Jam with me was absolutely unique. We were youth coming from different movements and sectors: a girl preventing violence against women; a lawyer eradicating child labour; an artist mobilizing his community through hip hop; a strong soul providing a roof to people living in the streets; academics offering their cosmovisions and knowledge to different causes; a gay activist organizing youth; afro descendents fighting for their identity; environmentalist working with communities all over the region; students shaking

university structures; etc. How could I not be moved? How could I not find inspiration in such passionate leaders?

We were extremely diverse in our fields of work and yet we all had basic things in common: strong commitment; personal struggles; stories of sacrifice; joyful and yet sad spirits; experiences to share and willingness to do so. I found myself surrounded by people who understood! The feeling of freedom was so intense that I opened myself to others, getting guidance and affection in return. In time, some of them had become my brothers and sisters, companions in life and action.

I work in an organization called Asociacion Civil Red Ambiental, managing several environmental initiatives that I'm completely passionate about!! I also work with the United Nations Environment Programme implementing projects with children and youth. At the same time, I lobby for environmental issues and civil society participation at the national, regional and global scale. Finally, due to my experiences in education for sustainable development, I'm often invited to conferences and workshops abroad. Many of my friends from the Jam also work complementing local and international initiatives.

Therefore, we had the opportunity to see each other again. I've shared vacations with Andre and our families; Santi visits Buenos Aires every once in a while and I go to Montevideo yearly; I went to Amsterdam and Marten invited me to stay with him, just as he stayed with me when he was in Buenos Aires; I had dinner with Leo in Curitiba and a drink with Tytta in Salvador; Osmar came with his camera to Argentina and we talked for hours; Jefferson and Joao visited last year; I invited Karina and Gabi to participate in our workshops. Gabi and I are now working together!!! She has become the national coordinator (Brazil) of the GEO for Youth MERCOSUR, a project that I coordinate regionally aimed at engaging youth in environmental issues.

The Latin Jam taught me that there are many definitions of leadership, none of them universal. So, if I am clear on what I think are the elements of a leader, then I can find one any day, any place. Today, I might discover someone with a great heart, a complex mind and an amazing work, so I have to keep myself open and accessible. It's up to me, and the kind of attitude I carry.

I also learned that it was pointless to try so hard to separate my work from my personal life, because my entire self is in both. I work as I live and I live as I work. I love the people I work with and work with the people I love. I made my peace with the idea of having my own way of balance, disrupted from time to time, but endogenous at least.

Some external changes were unexpected, some were not even welcomed. For example, I cry more often! Most of the time out of joy and admiration! I remember a friend at the Jam saying "Why can't I cry if someone is telling such a sad story? Why are we taught not to cry?" A few days later, he came to me and said "I can't stop crying... No one ever taught me how to stop crying either." I remember him being so surprised and confused by something so natural and yet culturally transformed that I came back determined to teach my children to use the small ways our bodies have to express themselves. Of course this is a tiny change but it is leading me to appreciate expression in the big sense. Amazing, but I believe tolerance grew in me from such a small seed!

So yes... the Jam was a seed planted inside me when my soul was most fertile. I am grateful, but most importantly I feel compelled to care for what was given to me to nourish.



Austin Willacy

austin is a critically acclaimed singer/songwriter who has toured extensively throughout the U.S and Europe as a solo artist and is also a part of The House Jacks, a multi-award winning a cappella rock band. austin is the director of 'Til Dawn, Youth in Arts' award-winning teen a cappella group and has facilitated over 30 youth retreats. austin has also co-facilitated two of YES!'s Leveraging Privilege for Social Change Jams and has been on the board of Rainforest Action Network and the Freight & Salvage for three years and has been an active volunteer for Bread & Roses for 15 years. He donates his musical talent to a wide range of educational, social and environmental organizations.

austin's music has been featured on "Road Rules", and on the soundtrack of two indie documentaries, "Word Wars," and "A Lawyer Walks into a Bar...". He's appeared in Rolling Stone and has performed with icons such as Bonnie Raitt, Ray Charles and James Brown and rising stars like Jem, Vienna Teng, Rachael Yamagata and Amos Lee.

When he's not touring austin uses his prodigious vocal talents for the powers of good. He sang "Killer Queen", "Fat Lip", "Stellar" and "Woman" for Guitar Hero and has contributed dozens of vocals to the award-winning Karaoke Revolution video game series (including Jay-Z, Billy Joel, Boy George, Stevie Wonder, The Bee Gees, Maroon 5, Michael Jackson and more).

I attended the 2005 LPSC Jam because I was looking for a way to more explicitly unite my music and my activism. In 2002, amidst some of the Bush administration's Patriot Act-related incursions into our civil liberties, I discussed with my friends the prospect of putting music on hold so I would be able to fully devote myself to working with other activists who were trying to protect them. My friends unilaterally told me that I should continue to focus on music because when the light starts to fade we turn to the arts for illumination.

I was urged to apply for the Jam by Laura Loescher, a dearly loved, deeply trusted, longstanding friend who is a powerful force in the social change philanthropy sector.

At my first Jam, I befriended Renee' Wilson, an actor I'd recently seen in the Academy Award-winning film "Ray". As it turned out, Renee' is a wonderful singer and a gifted lyricist. She was interested in putting more energy into her music at the same time that I was interested in commingling my music and my activism.

I've been on dozens of retreats and I find that the most meaningful ones are the ones the contents of which I'm able to take with me when I leave the retreat site. It's easy to be mindful and to listen deeply to someone who's triggering you by a babbling brook in a redwood forest; I want to be able to do that in my daily life. Similarly, there is a difference between friendships of convenience and friendships that transcend context and geography. Renee' and I didn't really have time to collaborate at the Jam, but when we went our separate ways afterwards, even though

she was LA-based and I was San Francisco-based, we managed to get together pretty regularly because she was making frequent trips to San Francisco.

Hurricane Katrina hit about a month after the Jam. As an African-American, as a person with strong roots in the South (including New Orleans), as a musician, and as a human being, I was devastated by the way that our government acted (and pointedly did *not* act) in the wake of Katrina. It was even more intense for Renee', who'd grown up there and still had family and friends there. The next time she came over, Renee' mentioned that she'd been asked to contribute a song to a compilation to raise money to ease the suffering of those displaced and those still living in the 9th Ward. I'd just written a song called "they won't cry for you" that represented an aspect of both of our thinking about the deplorable mismanagement of the situation. It was the first time that I'd ever taught one of my songs to someone that I wasn't in a band with but it was effortless because of how deeply we'd connected and how deeply we understood and respected each other after the Jam. I taught it to her and she recorded it about 12 hours later.

Since then I've collaborated with Renee' on several of the songs on her 1st album, *Crepe Covered Sidewalks* and I flew to LA to accompany her and sing with her at her first show in LA. We managed to grow our friendship outside of the bounds of IONS Ranch in Petaluma, CA. We've also managed to expand it to include many fruitful collaborations.

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