



European Citizenship Awards

Youth to Youth Initiative

Description of the nominee:

Karolina is a 26 years social designer, innovator, change maker, community developer from a small town called Alytus, Lithuania.

She is passionate about social campaigns which look into collective consciousness, sustainability and mindfulness.

For the last 5 years she is volunteering for various initiatives that inspires youth towards growth and has been the reason for many to gain opportunities too.

- European Students Forum where she Coordinating the local branches of the organization in Northern Europe and Co-founded the EuroArab project which aimed to connect European and Arab Youth for a better future (2012-2014) by organizing training courses, cultural exchanges and meetings in both Europe and Arab world.

- ASEF Green Action under Asia-Europe Foundation was a social campaign in both Europe and Asia which aimed to raise awareness on the harmful effects of plastic on the environment.

- European Peace Summit under World Peace Initiative Foundation. It was the first such type of a Summit in Europe in 2016. It aimed to provide a unique opportunity for youth organizations from Europe to connect with each other, to learn how to be mindful and conscious at professional and personal levels, to discover their inner potential, talents and capabilities from a different perspective, and to progress and act together for a better and more peaceful future.

- Good morning Vilnius! A campaign which aim is to make people smile and remind them that being individuals we are still living in a society and we have to take care of each other and be more emphatic towards each other. Even Karolina is not working anymore in "Voluntary Center" which belongs to the Municipality of Vilnius, this year the campaign will be held the 4th time.

The biggest achievement of Karolina is International Youth to Youth Initiative where she is the co-founder and President. It was started in 2015 and aims to inspire and empower youth worldwide through actions and projects implementation on local, regional and international levels.

Her achievements are impressive even because of the fact that she born and was brought up in a not so rich family in Lithuania, with her father who was an alcoholic and mother, who was sick due to

depression, Karolina always craved for love in her life. When her parents could not take care of her anymore, her grandparents decided to grow her up.

From then, she always wanted to be the reason to spread love to everybody around her; she knew the value of it. Her focus is to empower people and especially young women, to spread a lot of love and peace to everyone, because she wants to live in a loving and peaceful world.

Her grandmother always taught her that education is the biggest asset of life that could never be stolen. Hence, she was made to do her masters from Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary. Her stay at Hungary changed her way of life. Karolina was unable to communicate with people, since she did not know English, which was the language spoken by most of them at the university, since they were all from various cities and countries and hence, English was the language used for conversations. But, this moment of not being able to connect with others, did not shatter her, rather inspired her to learn the language. With all the passion to learn, she was able to converse in English in a month's time. This was the first achievement of her life. The incident might seem silly, but this phase of one month taught her that nothing is impossible to achieve in this world!

Meanwhile, she began to attend various events where she could learn from people who have walked the path to success. Karolina realized she wanted to create opportunities for more people and that was when she decided to start something on her own. Along with people whom she got connected at a few events, she started Youth to Youth Initiative. "Our first team formed had people from 9 different countries. By then, I had learned that, when people with common passion join hands, they could create revolution and is the same with us. We started with Youth to Youth Summit, a platform where people could come together, discuss on things what matters to them and raise voices without any agenda. We had many people who were active and got more involved in various projects." is the small history behind the founding of Youth to Youth Summit.

During one of her travels, she wanted to learn more about Buddhism, when she met a friend who helped her understand the value of practicing meditation. Slowly, it helped her control her emotions. She recalls how the practice became the reason for a huge change in her life, "From my childhood, having faced a lot of problems in the family, the incidents had made me a person who was short tempered. I was hurt again and again, at that early age of 7. As I grew up, the behaviour of not being able to control my emotions continued. When I travelled and learned about meditation, it helped me a lot. It made me to forgive people and forget all the negative incidents. Meditation increased the positivity in me and I have continued to practice." Karolina is also a Peace Coach and Meditation Trainer at Peace Revolution.

She has also been invited as a speaker to various events. She reminisces the first time she was invited to address a crowd, "There were 900 people I had to address, when I was invited as a speaker for the first time. I was shivering then. Now when I speak, I feel proud that I am able to express the voices of many youngsters of my age.

Impact achieved:

Y2Y Initiative is unique in its structure, atmosphere and execution. Everything starts with the International Youth to Youth Summit which is an annual thematic event. Each year it presents six challenging for youth topics and facilitates panel discussions, networking, cultural activities and workshops that aim to inspire participants to cooperate on production of joint projects.

International Youth to Youth Summit in the last 2 years brought together nearly 200 young leaders from 50 countries from the world from Lithuania to Zimbabwe, from Australia to Canada. It invited more than 30 recognized speakers from the Bush administration to Ambassadors and Academia, from Anticorruption activists to investigative journalists. It partnered with 37 different organizations, companies, governmental institutions. Each year the summit receives from 600 to 1200 applications from up to 110 countries which is slowly growing and becoming one of the most appreciated youth summits in the world among youth. (<http://y2yinitiative.org/index.php/what-we-do/y2ysummit>)

Yet the best part is that Y2Y Activities start with the Summit and participants keep on being engaged in the Initiative throughout the year. During the Summit participants are able to submit their projects to the Action Hub and each year 6 projects are selected and automatically receive a year-long unlimited support for development and implementation under the Youth to Youth Action Hub. which is an innovative online system for the development and successful implementation of socially beneficial ideas, concepts, start-ups, projects and initiatives created by youth and for youth.

The Y2Y Action Hub is designed as a synthesis of highly responsive, community-driven social network and an interactive, flexible online incubator. The main idea behind it is to maximize the impact of youth-led initiatives by providing around-the-clock support in project management and development, communication and research, technology and innovation, funding and campaigning, marketing and PR, multimedia and design.

In 2015 6 projects were implemented in the Action Hub from Ukraine, USA, Russia, The Netherlands, Singapore, Cross-border project IAMU. One of the projects won European Youth Press Award for best journalism on media freedom, while others were presented during UN meetings in New York, Paris, Milan, EuroArab Youth Forum in Strasbourg and many other events. In the end of May Y2Y Action Hub will start a new mentorship cycle for the upcoming year and work on 6 more projects.

Apart from the involvement in Action Hub, Y2Y Initiative is organizing Brunches all over the year and in 2015- May 2016 had 9 brunches in USA (1) , Lithuania (4), Poland (1), Portugal (1), France (1), Belgium (1).

Last but not least Y2Y is developing and/or getting involved in Side projects and events either as Main organizer or partner. For instance, Y2Y Initiative was partner at European Peace Summit and is a partner for Peace Revolution Summit; Has co-developed training on Peacebuilding which will take place in July in Latvia and is starting a training course in Armenia this August "Extremism, no thanks" which aims to empower youth workers and youth leaders with skills, knowledge and attitudes to play an active role towards an intercultural society.

Finally Y2Y have Ambassadors which are selected from the number of the most engaged young leaders, demonstrating commitment to speaking out about global challenges, affecting youth. As Ambassadors, they represent Youth to Youth Initiative and help to raise awareness about its youth-focused projects to a wider audience. They lobby decision makers, work with the media to raise the profile of the organization, and represent its mission at international and local events.

What makes the initiative innovative?

It is impressive to see how Karolina has managed to gather a team of now 11 people working online and purely on voluntary basis, including Karolina from 7 countries. The passion Karolina and her team has

make dreams come true, and turn impossible into possible taking into consideration that all these achievements were reached in 1,5 years only.

The mechanism of the whole initiative is innovative and sustainable allowing people to get involved in different activities and/or stages. Thus allowing participation of various individuals and organizations.

While the annual thematic International Summits create a starting point, provide food for thought and overall create an environment that encourages creativity and dialogue that allow to plant seeds for partnerships and produce joint projects, the Action Hub provides the tools and resources for projects implementation, capacity building and further grow of the positive impact of youth-led initiatives.

To make sure that the projects are developed in a sustainable way and use their full potential, Y2Y established an additional monitoring body - Ambassadors, who are selected from amongst engaged young leaders.

Contribution to European values:

Respect for human dignity

Environmental sustainability

Equality

Respect of Human Rights. A lot in tolerance, non-discrimination, solidarity, women empowerment

Democracy

Freedom

Website or promotional materials:

<http://y2yinitiative.org/>

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