



SAMUEL CENTRE
FOR SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS

SOCIAL NETWORKING THROUGH SOCIAL JUSTICE

"I feel like ageism is invisible and that we need to change our attitudes towards ageing and older people so that our rights don't diminish as we age."

- Mentor (she/her), 34, from Australia

Finding common ground and mutual interest in social justice and activism is important in an increasingly interconnected society. Since COVID-19, many young people are experiencing unease around finding a job, securing financial stability, and finding companionship. Conversely, social justice and human rights organizations are lacking new, young, and fresh perspectives at a time when the need for intergenerational and international cooperation has seemingly reached a new apex. Thus, my community engagement initiative, Social Networking Through Social Justice, circumvented issues of physical and emotional isolation by simulating a knowledge exchange meetup in a digital space. With heightened attention to racism, classism, climate change, and health, this exchange offered an intergenerational, multicultural, and transnational space to convene individuals who are passionate about social justice and human rights.

The online exchange provided 3 separate options for participants to serve as a mentor, mentee, or collaborator, wherein participants were paired one-on-one based on their social justice interests. While participants came from diverse geographies, ages, religions, and races, they were united in their commitment to working in their communities and globally on issues of social justice, such as older peoples' rights, Indigenous rights, anti-racism, and climate action. I chose to do my initiative over a digital discussion after realizing that it carried the greatest potential to encourage transnational knowledge-sharing and interactive learning. Participants came from multiple sectors including a gender and diversity specialist for an international NGO (Thailand), a Ministry of Foreign Affairs worker mainstreaming LGBTQ+ rights (Mexico), an Indigenous activist (Canada), and a director of a UN agency (Japan), among many other participants across North America, South America, Europe, Africa, and Asia. With the event taking place from late July to early August, my community engagement initiative created new intergenerational and multi-racial opportunities for community and solidarity building across countries through a common drive for greater social justice.



"I believe the climate crisis is a major social injustice in that it is disproportionately caused by Western countries and yet is most felt in the Global South. I also believe that, in the Western world, the notions that whiteness, maleness, or heterosexuality is synonymous with normal contribute to many systemic inequalities."

- Mentee (he/him), 24, from Scotland



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"My interest in gender equality is informed by experiences in my home country, which have confirmed the need for intersectional and localised feminism."

- Collaborator (she/her), 22, from Korea

Ultimately, 89 people participated, representing 27 countries, from Nepal to Guam to South Africa. After the event took place, I solicited feedback to see how participants learned from the experience, and produced a social justice calendar, reflecting the diverse days throughout the year that carry social significance to participants. Some participants asked for multiple pairings, and disclosed that they would continue to collaborate with their pairing for their organizing. Although there were several challenges in terms of matching people together based on interest and time zones, this event ran with high success. I learned that even when participants do not carry exactly similar politics or ideologies, having consistent, open, and honest dialogue is critically important. Ultimately, this initiative demonstrated that greater exposure to individuals who possess different worldviews and life experiences is important for validating and reshaping our ideas and theories of change to address pressing social justice issues.

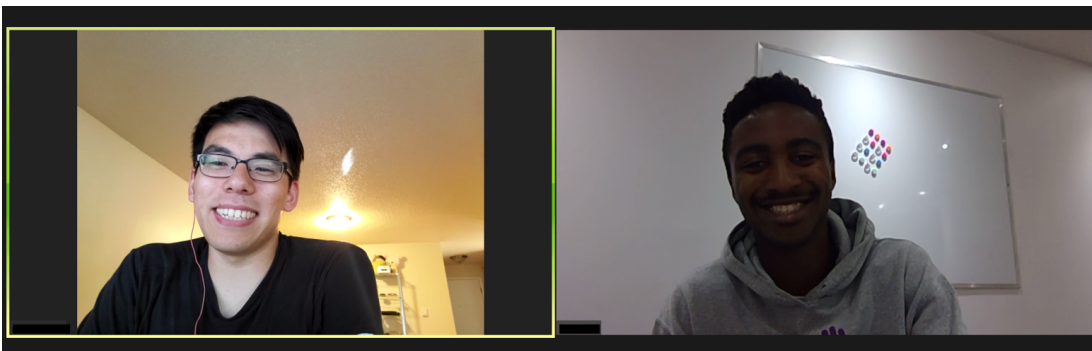


COUNTRIES
REPRESENTED



PARTICIPANTS

However, there were a few pertinent lessons learned from my initiative. First, if I were to coordinate this again, I would remove the 'mentor' and 'mentee' option to flatten power hierarchies between participants. I noticed that how participants perceived their ability to 'mentor' was contingent on cultural conceptions of how knowledge is produced (e.g. knowledge acquired based on professional work experience in anti-racist education versus knowledge acquired through lived experience of racism). I learned that social justice action involves a multi-directional process, where regardless of age, expertise, years of formal work experience, or lived experience, we can, and should be, **learning** from each other. Ultimately, participants disclosed that this virtual exchange opened up new possibilities for transnational learning opportunities and that they will continue their social justice vocation through global collaboration. This was my hope when organizing this event, and I hope to generate more knowledge-sharing opportunities like this in the future.



*A US-Canada
collaborator session
discussing
discrimination and social
injustice in the STEM
industry*

"There are people in developed countries fighting for the same social justice causes as me. That just because someone comes from a prestigious and privileged background, it does not make them entitled. Allies can come from all places."

- Mentee (he/him), 30, from Brazil

