

BLACK PEARLS

GALA
2026

ROOTED IN
LEGACY.
RISING IN
EXCELLENCE.

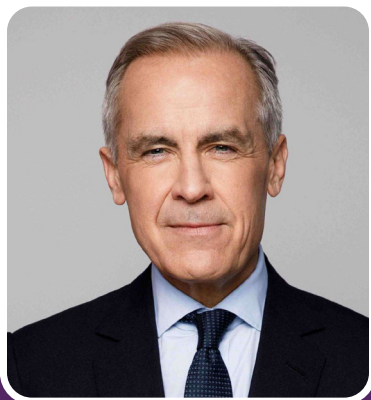
Canada
International
Black Women
Excellence



Celebrating **100 Black Women** to Watch in
Canada 2026



PRIME MINISTER



I would like to convey my warmest greetings to everyone attending the 2026 Black Pearls Gala, hosted by Canada International Black Women Excellence (CIBWE).

Since it was founded, CIBWE has been dedicated to empowering black women and to celebrating the tremendous contributions they make to communities across the nation. I join you in congratulating this year's honourees and in wishing them every success in their future endeavours.

I would also like to thank the organizers for making this event possible. You can take pride in your commitment to fostering diversity and inclusivity.

I wish you all a wonderful evening.

The Right Honourable Mark Carney,
P.C., O.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Ottawa
2026

Black Pearls Gala 2026 Event Program

7:00 pm	Welcome
7:05 pm	Prayer
7:10 pm	Land Acknowledgement & National Anthem
7:15 pm	Opening Remarks
7:20 pm	CIBWE Founder's Speech
7:30 pm	Awards Ceremony pt. 1
7:50 pm	Performance
8:00 pm	Keynote Speaker
8:20 pm	Awards Ceremony pt. 2
8:40 pm	Performance
9:00 pm	Special Feature
9:05 pm	Performance
9:20 pm	Awards Ceremony pt. 3
9:50 pm	Special Feature
10:00 pm	Toast
10:20 pm	Closing & Thank You

LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER

Rooted in Legacy. Rising in Excellence.



Rose Cathy Handy
Founder, Canada International
Black Women Excellence

Dear Black Pearls,
For more than a decade, we have gathered to recognize excellence, celebrate achievement and shine a light on the extraordinary contributions of Black women.

Year after year, I have watched women enter the Black Pearls Gala carrying remarkable stories—stories of courage, sacrifice, leadership, reinvention and triumph. Some arrived already confident in their power. Others discovered that power when they saw themselves reflected in the women around them. Together, we have created more than an event.

We have built a legacy. Today, nearly 1,000 Black Pearls are connected through this platform. Think about the experience, knowledge, influence, relationships, resources and possibilities represented within a network of 1,000 accomplished Black women.

The question is no longer simply, “What have we built?” The question is: What will we do with it?

How can we transform this network into one of the most powerful platforms for the advancement of Black women—from Canada to the world? How many women could we mentor? How many doors could we open? How many businesses could we support? How many young women could we prepare to lead? How many communities could be strengthened if every Black Pearl contributed something?

I started the engine. But now, you hold the key. It is time to put this movement in gear, turn up its power and help drive it forward.

For 11 years, I have called upon our Black Pearls to become more involved—to see CIBWE not simply as an organization that celebrates them, but as a movement that belongs to them. Yet too many of our alumni remain on the sidelines, waiting to see what CIBWE will organize next, instead of asking, “What can I help CIBWE build?”

A few years ago, while travelling in Atlantic Canada, I met one of our alumni. She asked me why CIBWE was not doing anything in her region. I turned the question back to her: “What do you believe we could do here—and why aren’t you helping us create it?” That conversation has stayed with me because it captures the future of CIBWE.

This movement cannot reach every province, every

community or every Black woman through the efforts of one founder or one small team. It will grow when Black Pearls everywhere decide to carry it. It will become powerful when you stop seeing yourselves only as recipients of recognition and begin seeing yourselves as builders of the legacy.

We have now entered a new decade. Let us make this one count. Every Black Pearl can strengthen this network through four forms of contribution:

- Your mind: Bring your knowledge, ideas, expertise and solutions.
- Your soul: Bring your passion, compassion, courage and commitment to lifting another woman.
- Your body: Be present. Volunteer. Mentor. Lead an initiative. Represent the movement in your city, profession or industry.
- Your purse: Invest in the work. Sponsor a woman. Support a program. Purchase from a Black woman’s business. Help us build the financial strength required to sustain and expand this movement.

You do not need to contribute in every way. But every one of us must contribute in some way.

Our roots are deep. They are nourished by the women who came before us, the sacrifices that made our progress possible and the legacy we are responsible for carrying forward. But strong roots are not meant to keep us in one place. They exist so that we can rise—higher, stronger and together.

The next chapter of CIBWE will not be written by me alone. It will be written by the Black Pearls who choose to step forward, take ownership and transform this network into a force that changes lives.

Imagine 1,000 Black women connected by more than a title. Imagine 1,000 women sharing opportunities, opening doors, mentoring the next generation, investing in one another and using their collective influence to create lasting change.

That is the movement I see. That is the legacy within our reach. And that is the excellence we must now rise to build. I started the engine. You hold the key. Black Pearls, are you ready to drive this movement forward?

ABOUT CIBWE

The Next Decade of CIBWE

**ONE BLACK PEARL. ONE CIRCLE.
ONE COMMUNITY AT A TIME.**



CIBWE began with a personal promise.

When my sister, Esther Handy, died at only 38 years old from complications related to HIV/AIDS, I did not want her life's work to disappear with her. Esther was a nurse in Cameroon who cared for HIV-positive pregnant women and helped them deliver their babies with dignity. During this selfless work, she contracted HIV herself. Yet even while facing her own struggles, Esther continued using her modest salary to buy clothing for children and help them attend school.

She did not wait until she was wealthy, powerful or widely recognized to make a difference. She simply used what she had, where she was, to help the people placed before her.

After she died, I made a promise: Her work would not die because she died.

That promise became the foundation upon which CIBWE was built.

For more than a decade, we have recognized and celebrated Black women who are creating change in their professions, businesses, families and communities. We have brought visibility to their excellence and reminded the world—and sometimes the women themselves—of the value of their contributions.

But as we enter this new decade, recognition alone is not enough.

The next chapter of CIBWE must be about transforming recognition into collective action.

Imagine what could happen if every Black Pearl chose one issue, one initiative or one group of women to champion in her community. Imagine local circles led by Black Pearls across Canada and eventually around the world—all connected by our four pillars:

MIND

Expanding knowledge, confidence and opportunity

SOUL

Strengthening identity, belonging and sisterhood

BODY

Protecting our health, energy and well-being

PURSE

Building income, ownership and economic security

You do not have to create a large organization. You do not need an office, a staff or a complicated program. Esther taught us that meaningful change begins when one person decides to use what she already has.



BLACK PEARLS GALA 2026

Guest Speaker

Dr. Jarso Maley Jallah

Minister of Education Republic of Liberia



Dr. Jarso Maley Jallah serves as the Minister of Education for the Republic of Liberia. Appointed by President Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr. and confirmed by the Liberian Senate on February 6, 2024, Dr. Jallah is leading efforts to transform Liberia's education system and enhance the country's standing within the international community. Additionally, Dr. Jallah serves as the chairperson or ex officio member on relevant national advisory boards, including the Board of Commissioners of the National Commission on Higher Education, and she represents Liberia on the Executive Board of UNESCO.

Before assuming her ministerial position, Dr. Jallah held senior academic and administrative roles in the United States. As Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Division of Student Success, and adjunct faculty at Delaware State University, she played a key role in fostering student achievement and academic excellence. Her journey in education began as a coordinator and counselor for the US Department of Education federal TRiO Program—Talent Search at the Community College of Rhode Island, where she supported the educational aspirations of disadvantaged students. She later joined the University of Rhode Island, where she served in academic affairs, as well as an adjunct faculty member, and was appointed to the President's Commission on the Status of Women, leading initiatives to advance gender equity campus-wide.

Dr. Jallah's nearly 24-year career in education, public service, and policy development has made her a true champion of education. She previously served as Deputy Director General for Training and Manpower Development at the Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA), where she was instrumental in building national capacity

through education and training. As Country Coordinator for the Anglophone West African Regional Public Sector Management Training Program, she played a key role in fostering public sector leadership and development across the region.

In addition to her ministerial duties, Dr. Jallah was appointed by His Excellency Joseph Nyuma Boakai, President of Liberia, to chair the National Reburial of former Presidents William R. Tolbert Jr. and Samuel K. Doe, as well as the National Healing, Reconciliation, and Unity Program that preceded the reburial. In recognition of her outstanding leadership and service to the nation, Dr. Jallah was conferred the distinguished honor of Dame Grand Band of the Humane Order of African Redemption (DGB-HOAR) by His Excellency, President Joseph Nyuma Boakai, Sr., and Grand Master of the Order of Distinction at the National Investiture Ceremony held on July 24, 2025.

Dr. Jallah holds a Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from Delaware State University and a Master of Arts in Counseling from Rhode Island College. She possesses extensive expertise in administration and management, policy development, project management, psychosocial counseling, budget and finance, and career development. Her career reflects a deep commitment to advancing education, leadership, and national service. She is a 2020 recipient of the American Council on Education-Women's Network Delaware "Rising Star" award for her commitment and contributions to the field of higher education, and a recipient of numerous US higher education institutional leadership and service delivery awards.

BLACK PEARLS GALA 2026

Keynote Speaker

Tia Upshaw



Tia Upshaw is an multi award-winning entrepreneur, business coach, author, keynote speaker, facilitator, and community leader whose work is rooted in entrepreneurship, economic empowerment, and creating opportunities for women to build sustainable businesses and lasting legacies.

A **2023 Black Pearls Award recipient**, Tia returns to the Black Pearls Gala in 2026 as the keynote speaker, representing a full-circle moment that reflects the evening's theme, **"Rooted in Legacy, Rising in Excellence."**

Tia is the Founder and CEO of **Blk Women in Excellence (BWIE) Society**, which she founded in 2020 to support Black and Brown women through entrepreneurship education, mentorship, wellness, and community. Since its inception, BWIE has supported hundreds of women while expanding its programs, partnerships, and impact across Atlantic Canada.

She is also the Founder of **Femme Noir Business Coaching**, where she works with entrepreneurs who are ready to move beyond simply having a business and focus on strategy, revenue, visibility, and sustainable growth.

Tia's leadership and community impact have earned her numerous recognitions & awards, including the **Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission's Dr. Burnley Allan "Rocky" Jones Individual Award**, recognition as a **CBC Black Changemaker**, the **King Charles III Coronation Medal**, and recognition as one of **Atlantic Business Magazine's Top 50 CEOs & 25 Most Powerful women in Atlantic Canada**.

She is also a regular contributor to **CTV Morning Live Atlantic** through Tuesdays with Tia, where she brings conversations about entrepreneurship, leadership, community, and business to audiences across Atlantic Canada.

As an author, motivational speaker, coach, and facilitator, Tia uses both her professional expertise and lived experience to encourage women to think bigger about what is possible for their lives and businesses. Her journey is a reminder that legacy is not only about what we accomplish for ourselves, but also about the doors we open and the opportunities we create for those coming behind us.

From receiving a Black Pearls Award in 2023 to returning to the stage as the 2026 keynote speaker, Tia continues to embody what it means to be **rooted in legacy and rising in excellence**.

HOST & PERFORMERS



Andria M. Thompson – *Red Carpet Host*

Andria M. Thompson is a Certified Image Consultant, educator, red-carpet and podcast host, six-time author, and compiler of the newly released devotional, *A Woman's 30-Day Journey into: Identity, Faith & Purpose*.

Andria's mission is to uplift and empower women and girls to embrace their beauty, resilience, and worth. Her impact extends beyond the stage and into women's health advocacy. As a Stage 4 endometrial cancer survivor and Founder of the Andria Thompson Endo-C Foundation of Hope, she champions women's health, awareness, education, and support with grace and courage.

Her advocacy and influence have earned her numerous honours, including the Woman On Fire – Community Activist Award, recognition as one of Canada's Top 100 Black Women to Watch, and one of the Black Canadian Role Models.

Andria believes that when a woman recognizes her worth, she becomes a catalyst for change. Her life and work are a testament to resilience, purpose, faith, and the power of using one's story to inspire others.



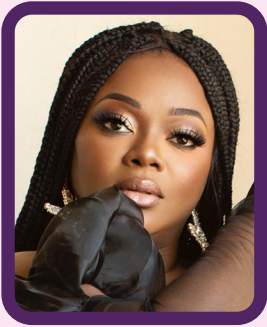
DR. KAY MORRIS

Dr. Kay Morris wears many hats; she is a Best Selling Author of the book "The Price of Greatness", she is a multi-award winning reggae Gospel Hall and Wall of Fame Inductee; she is a Grammy Considered singer/songwriter, Gospel Music Ambassador, Global Humanitarian & Philanthropist, an Ordained Reverend/Grammy U (University) Mentor, Women & Youth Empowerment Conference Speaker, Fashion Designer, President/Founder of the Kay Morris Foundation, Certified Life Coach, Certified Professional Coach, Certified Christian Coach and CEO of Beauty For Ashes Global Coaching Services/Destined To Reign Academy.

Dr. Kay Morris holds a Bachelor of Divinity Degree, an Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree, and an Honorary Doctor of Humanities Degree. She is Jamaican by birth and was raised by two Pentecostal minister parents. She started singing at the tender age of 4; She have received over 50 humanitarian and music awards worldwide.

Her philanthropic work through the Kay Morris Foundation has allowed her to become The Voice of The Voiceless to thousands of Women, Children, and youths across Africa. She has mentored many youths in Africa and around the world.

Her music has allowed her to cross cultural and religious barriers around the world. The Electrifying Kay Morris takes over the stage captivating her audiences, and as she ministers lives are Divinely impacted. She has performed to audiences of over 100,000 people. The Canadian Gospel Legend has twice been featured in the Toronto Star by Journalist Geoff Chapman who states, "Kay Morris brings to mind the commanding voice of Mavis Staple of the staple singers." She has performed at Stellar Awards, Dove Awards, and Grammy Awards sanctioned events in the USA. Kay Morris sang on the short film soundtrack *Sleeping Dogs Lie*. Her music has been featured in many TV sitcoms and Documentaries.



MIS BLANDINE

Singer/songwriter, percussionist Blandine Kaniki, winner of an African Entertainment Award 2015 as best female voice, knows well how to withstand the seasons of change. With the release of his first album “L’Antidote” Congolese Canadian singer Blandine gives herself body and soul on his masterpiece released in November 2019. With a powerful collaboration with the legend of Congolese music Nyboma Kanta and lead guitarist Lokassa Ya Bongo, Blandine made this project a labor of love and a real expression of life.

After having toured the USA with the legendary group Afriza international of the late Tabu Ley, as a replacement for the legendary Mbilia bel, Blandine decides to embark on a solo career. Blandine has established herself as a musical sensation in Toronto where she resides. She released 3 R&B style singles in 2011 titled: Take it Back, Telephone and To the beat, all available on Youtube, Blandine chooses now to take her fans on a musical journey by releasing these 2 new title “Sonne et Mon Bebe” which is a cross between urban music pop and Congolese rumba.

Meanwhile she was recording music projects with Toumani Diabate during his stay in abidjan and with Serge Ibaka in Canada for his ART project. From her training in Jazz music at York University in Toronto and classical singing techniques in Lomé Togo, she is also an artist who cares about humanitarian causes because in 2019 she is a volunteer at the Serge Ibaka foundation with the Toronto Raptors basketball players to help raise tuition funds for young people in Congo and Toronto. She speaks of women’s rights in her lyrics and is inspired by the story of the women of the world. Her 2nd album is scheduled to be released late 2022.



Taiwo Adegunwa

D’s Riff and Roll was established in January 2024. D’s Riff and Roll is a premier entertainment brand registered under the laws of the Government of Canada and Ontario. Built on a passion for global sounds and high-energy performances, the brand bridges cultural gaps through the universal language of music.

The celebrated face of D’s Riff and Roll is Taiwo Adegunwa, an extraordinary vocalist recognized for her incredible vocal milestones and artistic versatility. Commandingly performing a repertoire of over 96 songs, Taiwo seamlessly traverses the musical landscapes of Africa, Europe, and America. Her powerful live performances breathe new life into classics from iconic global legends, including Miriam Makeba, Whitney Houston, and Asa. At D’s Riff and Roll, we don’t just play music—we create unforgettable auditory journeys.



Djolei Justine Gougoua

Originally from the Ivory Coast and living in Canada since 1994, Djolēi Justine Gougoua is a recognized figure in the arts and entertainment industry. She’s toured the country extensively over two decades and has earned several awards along the way including Canada’s Top 100 Black Women to Watch of 2022.

She founded CanAfric Théâtre in 2008 to promote African and Canadian culture and to develop a better understanding between people despite their cultural differences and founded several arts events in Ontario: North World Culture Fusion Fest, FemArts; a celebration of a creative women, North Bay International Drum & and Dance Festival, EdVenture Camp; promoting children’s creativity through arts, Under the African Baobab Tree; a celebration of Black History Month to name a few.



CANADA'S TOP 100 BLACK WOMEN TO WATCH 2026



Business & Entrepreneurship | Calgary, Alberta

ADAORA UZOMA

Founder & Lead Educational Consultant |
Realtor | Entrepreneur

I am an entrepreneur, educator, and founder committed to creating opportunities through education, innovation, and community-focused businesses. My entrepreneurial journey began with a desire to solve real problems and help people navigate important life decisions with greater confidence.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

ADESOLA OLOTU

Event Planner And Coordinator | The Blossom Events Centre Inc. & Cherryblossom Events Planning And Decorations Inc.

My entrepreneurial journey began over 16 years ago in the United Kingdom when I founded CherryBlossom Event Planning and Decoration. What started as a passion for creating beautiful and memorable experiences quickly grew into a business dedicated to helping individuals, families, and organizations celebrate life's most important milestones.



Promising Youth | Toronto, Ontario

ADEWUNMI AJIKE

Senior AI Product Manager at Telus & Co-founder at WomEconomics | WomEconomics www.womeconomics.org

In 2023 at 22 years old, while at Bell Canada, I led the full end-to-end planning and execution of Black History Month programming for the Black Professionals at Bell Network under the theme Black Excellence and Empowering Youth. The network was only three years old, and we were still emerging from COVID, when in-person connection had lost momentum.



Promising Youth | Toronto, Ontario

AISHA BOUBACAR

Student, Entrepreneur, Author, Speaker | Books By Aisha B Inc.

In April 2026, I conceptualized and successfully executed Pilates & Read, a sold-out, 20-seat wellness event for young women of colour in the GTA. It was funded through a competitive \$3000 grant I secured for my social enterprise, Books By Aisha B Inc., from the Weston Frontlines Centre.



Promising Youth | Durham, Ontario

ALEXANDRA INNOCENT

CEO/Founder | Vision Outreach

Vision Outreach began from a simple belief: every child deserves to feel seen, supported, and included. As Co-Founder, I have led the development of culturally responsive autism programs, respite services, creative workshops, and family events that provide both practical support and a sense of belonging.



Professional | Oakville, Ontario

ANGELA SALMON

Vice-President, HR Risk Governance & Controls | Royal Bank of Canada

One of my most significant professional achievements has been my leadership in advancing protections for senior and vulnerable individuals within the financial services industry. While serving as Head of Compliance for one of RBC's wealth management entities, I regularly advised frontline advisors on complex client escalations involving older adults.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Business & Entrepreneurship | Markham, Ontario

ANNMARIE ETUK

CEO/Registered Psychotherapist | Supply the Change Psychotherapy Services

One of the most significant achievements in my career has been combining clinical mental health expertise with community education to create accessible, culturally responsive programming for underserved populations. Recognizing that many individuals face barriers to traditional mental health services, I developed and facilitated workshops, psychoeducational presentations, and group-based programs that translate evidence-based therapeutic approaches into practical tools people can use in their everyday lives.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Toronto, Ontario

BRENDA FOREMAN

Pan-African Cultural Strategist, Creative Director, Author, International Speaker | African Fashion Week Toronto (AFWT), BStyld Image Consulting

My professional journey spans more than 25 years across entrepreneurship, fashion, cultural advocacy, diplomacy, research, and Pan-African engagement. Through BStyld by Brenda Foreman and as a Founding Partner and Creative Director of African Fashion Week Toronto, I have used fashion and image as vehicles for confidence, cultural identity, economic opportunity, and representation.



Sports | Regina, Saskatchewan

CAROL LAFAYETTE-BOYD

Retired Social Worker | on the Board of 4 non-profit organizations

My most significant experience as an athlete was when I attended my first International track meet in Europe. I attended, being rated second in the world in the sprints and fourth in the world in Long Jump.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Oshawa (Durham), Ontario

ASHLEY PERRYMAN

Curator of Custom Desserts | Sweet Pieces Bakery

One of my most significant achievements has been transforming Sweet Pieces Bakery from a personal passion into a licensed and growing business. While working full-time as a law clerk, I built the brand, developed a focused product line, completed the required food-safety and municipal licensing processes, secured a local retail partnership, and began participating in community markets.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Toronto, Ontario

CAROL DOUSE

Founder & Director | Oldowan Co.

I am an award-winning designer, cultural strategist, leadership facilitator, and founder of Oldowan Co., a multidisciplinary creative strategy and cultural infrastructure studio dedicated to helping people and organizations build sustainable systems for growth, trust, and community impact. For more than thirteen years, I have worked across nonprofit, manufacturing, creative, and public sectors, bridging leadership, design, communications, and organizational culture.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Calgary, Alberta

CHINOMSO NNADI

Founder & Executive Director | Femme Alliance Network

As Founder and Executive Director of Femme Alliance Network (FAN), we built a comprehensive empowerment ecosystem for immigrant and racialized professional women. Since 2024, FAN has served over 1,000 women through mentorship cohorts, career readiness programming, entrepreneurship support, and mental wellness initiatives — all volunteer-driven and largely self-funded.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Business & Entrepreneurship | Regina, Saskatchewan

CHIOMA OKONKWO

Registered Nurse | Fad Fit Lifestyle

My journey as a registered nurse has been shaped by firsthand experiences of seeing individuals struggle with preventable health conditions, often due to limited access to accurate information about fitness and nutrition. Over time, I noticed a recurring pattern: many patients were not fully aware of how lifestyle choices could play a significant role in preventing chronic illnesses.



Professional | Winnipeg, Manitoba

CRYSTAL CORNISH MCGINNIE

Head of Human Resources, Canada | JBS Foods Canada

I started at JBS Foods Canada as an Ascend Leadership Trainee, moved into an Employee and Labour Relations Supervisor role, and from there into HR Manager, where I stayed for three and a half years. I then went onto Amazon as the HR Manager for one of their largest facilities, and after two years I earned a double promotion straight to Senior Regional HR Manager.



Arts & Media | Edmonton, Alberta

CHISOMEJE OKOEDION

Artist | Somejemusic

I collaborated with the Edmonton Public Library "Sing it Edmonton – Songs from the neighborhood" project to produce children's music, by songwriting and Vocal composition to create an encouraging and anthemic song for young audiences. Also, through the African Music Academy of Alberta, I currently teach children singing and drumming, helping preserve cultural traditions while inspiring confidence, discipline, and creativity in the next generation.



Promising Youth | Halifax, Nova Scotia

CRYSTAL WITTER

Articled Clerk/ Student at Law | McInnes Cooper

I came to Canada from Jamaica at 19 years old with less than \$500 in my pocket, no parental support, and a dream that was bigger than my circumstances. From the moment I arrived, I knew that if I wanted a different life, I had to build it myself. A defining milestone in my career has been building a multidisciplinary path that bridges entrepreneurship, emerging technology, and law.



Professional | Ontario

CLEVETTE COOMBS

Human-First AI & Sales Strategist for Women in Business | Clevette Coombs Consulting

I am defined by results, reinvention, and a commitment to expanding access for women in business. Entrusted with a \$1 million sales target, she delivered \$7 million—an achievement that reflects both precision and mastery.



Professional | Ontario

DAHABO AHMED OMER

Chief Executive Officer, | BlackNorth Initiative

Over the past year alone, Dahabo has led the launch of Pledge 2.0, established the Vanguard Scholars program, expanded the Homeownership Bridge Program through transformative partnerships, strengthened organizational governance, and continued positioning BlackNorth as Canada's leading corporate accountability organization focused on Black economic advancement. Dahabo enters 2026 at a defining stage of her leadership.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Business & Entrepreneurship | Vancouver/Surrey, British Columbia

DAMI AJANAKU

Founder and Lead Makeup Artist | Feyisara Beauty Inc.

One of my most significant career milestones has been growing Feyisara Beauty from a passion led service into an established business with a physical studio. Opening my own space allowed me to create a professional and welcoming environment where clients, particularly Black women, could feel seen, understood, and confidently cared for.



Arts & Media | Toronto, Ontario

DESARAE DEE

Artist-Educator | DESARAE DEE MUSIC GROUP INC.

One of the most significant achievements of my career has been building an internationally recognized independent music career without a record label or management team. Since launching my artist brand in 2014, I have developed a global audience through my music, educational content, and community-focused initiatives.



Arts & Media | Halifax, Nova Scotia

DAMINI AWOYIGA

Poet, Filmmaker and journalist | Founder of Damini Creatives; freelance journalist at CBC; University of King's College.

One of my most significant professional milestones was directing, producing, and writing HYPHENATED through the Being Black in Canada program in partnership with Netflix and the Fabienne Colas Foundation. The short film explores themes of identity, belonging, and navigating multiple cultures, using storytelling to spark meaningful conversations about the experiences of Black Canadians.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Mississauga, Ontario

DESIREE KING

Founder/ Real Estate Broker of Record | King's Downsizing & Estate Services Brokerage Inc. & King's Golden Years Concierge Services

One of my most significant professional achievements has been founding King's Downsizing & Estate Services, a boutique Real Estate brokerage dedicated exclusively to helping older adults and their families navigate later-life transitions. Drawing on more than a decade in Real Estate and over 20 years in technology, I recognized that seniors needed far more than traditional real estate services.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

DEJU AKANJI

Wellness Consultant | Engage Wellness

My journey as a wellness consultant is deeply personal, born from the heartbreaking loss of both parents to preventable health conditions, including my mom when I was just seven years old. Determined to reclaim my health and live an abundant life, I channelled my grief into purpose.



Arts & Media | Ottawa, Ontario

DIANA OFFICIAL

Strategic Consultant & Executive Director | Out Loud Creative

One of the community initiatives I am most proud of leading is Black Out Loud, an incubator I founded to create intentional spaces where Black creatives could feel seen, and well rounded. Through this initiative, I organized multidisciplinary events that brought together hundreds of community members while amplifying emerging Black talent often overlooked by mainstream institutions.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Professional | St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador

DIDAN ASHANTA WEDDERBURN

Migrant Integration Specialist | Intercultural Resilience Researcher | Author & Speaker | Founder, Resilient Foreigner

One of my most significant community leadership roles was serving as President of the Jamaican Canadian Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (JCANL), where I led initiatives that strengthened cultural visibility, community cohesion, and cross-community engagement. I coordinated flagship events such as the Launch Gala and the annual Fun Day in the Park, both designed to celebrate Jamaican Emancipence Week, while fostering intercultural understanding and cultural pride within Newfoundland and Labrador's Jamaican diaspora.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Toronto, Ontario

DR. SHERI ADEKOLA

Professor | Founder, OLDF | Founder, Africanada Imports and Simply Harvest

Throughout my career, I have been driven by a vision of creating lasting social and economic impact. In 2006, I founded the Ontario Learning Development Foundation, which has grown into a charitable organization serving hundreds of children, youth, newcomers, and families each year through educational and workforce development initiatives.



Professional | Calgary, Alberta

DR. YVONNE KANGONG

Medical Doctor | Breakers Health, Technocrat Health

My commitment to lifelong learning and patient-centered care has driven me to continually expand my expertise. In addition to becoming a Diplomate of the American Board of Obesity Medicine and a Fellow of the College of Family Physicians of Canada, I successfully completed the Menopause Society Certified Practitioner (MSCP) examination in 2025.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Brampton, Ontario

DR. OMO OGBAMOLA

Founder/CEO | Tripplemos Food Processing Company

One of my most significant professional achievements has been founding and growing Tripplemos Food Processing Company, a Canadian-based food manufacturing business producing authentic African spices and hibiscus tea under CFIA-approved standards. What began as a small entrepreneurial venture has evolved into a scalable business with products sold through Amazon, Walmart, Temu, eBay, FAIRE, and retail stores across Canada.



Professional | Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

DR. SOMTOCHUKWU IBEZI

Family Physician/ Board Chair/Vice-President | Erindale Health Centre / Black Professionals and Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan/ Black Physicians of Canada

Since becoming co-owner of my family medicine clinic in Saskatoon in 2019 – two years after relocating to Canada – I've built a practice grounded in community-based, culturally responsive care, while also stepping into national leadership roles that extend my impact beyond my own patient panel. As Vice-President of Black Physicians of Canada, I help lead an organization that in 2024 received funding through the Novartis Health Equity Initiative to build Canada's first public-facing, culturally sensitive database of Black physicians



Promising Youth | Mississauga, Ontario

DREAM TUIT-BARNES

3rd-Year Medical Student | Queen's University

At 22, I am an incoming third-year medical student at Queen's University. My journey into medicine began through the Queen's University Accelerated Route to Medical School (QuARMS), a program that allows 10 students to enter medical school directly from high school after completing two years of an undergraduate degree.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

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Business & Entrepreneurship | Winnipeg, Manitoba

ENIOLA ADEPOJU

CEO | EnnysHair

One of my most significant professional achievements has been growing EnnysHair from a one-woman operation in a basement in 2018 into an international beauty business with locations in Canada and Nigeria. Since opening our Nigeria location in 2023 and expanding our Canadian operations, the company has grown to employ more than 20 team members, with plans underway for a third location.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Oshawa, Ontario

ERICA LONDON

Owner and Children's Author | Colour Their World

My journey began after the loss of my uncle in 2019, when I struggled to find grief-related children's books featuring diverse characters for my own children. My partnership with Billy Bishop Airport is by far my greatest achievement. It's a testament to perseverance and determination.



Arts & Media | Toronto, Ontario

FAITH-ANN ALLISON

Comedian, and Content Creator

I believe laughter is one of the most powerful ways to bring people together. As a standup comedian, content creator, event host, and youth leader, I have built my career around creating moments where people from different backgrounds can see themselves in the same story.



Professional | Edmonton, Alberta

FREDA UWA

National Executive Director / Lead Consultant
| Independent Living Canada / Leadership
Integrated Strategies Inc.

As the first Black National Executive Director in Independent Living Canada's 40-year history, one of my most significant achievements has been leading the organization through a period of growth, renewal, and national impact. Entrusted by a Board of Directors and supported by a network of 23 Independent Living Centres across Canada, I have worked to strengthen relationships, expand partnerships, advance disability-led advocacy, and increase the organization's visibility and influence.



Arts & Media | Toronto, Ontario

HALLE TURNER

Account Coordinator, Fashion Stylist | APEX
PR, Freelance

Over the years, I've had the chance to work on unique projects in the costume design/styling fields as well as public relations. Some of these achievements include tailoring for Tems when she was in Toronto, assisting fashion designer Zoba Martin with sewing pieces for Drake's Nokia music video, and being the assistant costume designer for Treemonisha which was the first black opera of its kind in Canada.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Halifax, Nova Scotia

HALLIMAH MUFUTAU

MD/CEO | HallyCraft Cakes and Events

As the Founder and CEO of HallyCraft Cakes & Events Ltd., I have consistently used entrepreneurship, food, and culture as tools for community development and inclusion. Through my businesses, I have supported multicultural festivals, cultural celebrations, youth initiatives, charitable events, newcomer programs, and community fundraisers across Nova Scotia.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Promising Youth | Toronto, Ontario

HANNAH PERMAUL FLORES

MSc Geography Student | University of Toronto

As a senior research assistant with the WHO Collaborating Centre for Governance, Accountability and Transparency in the Pharmaceutical Sector, I led a study analyzing medicine donation policies across donor countries, pharmaceutical companies, NGOs, and recipient nations worldwide. The result was a first-author publication in *Globalization and Health* (2023): "Medicine Donations: A Review of Policies and Practices", at the age of 20.



Promising Youth | Montreal, Quebec

HARANTXA JEAN

PhD student | Columbia University, UNICEF Canada | Youth Advocate

As a delegate with the McGill Youth Advisory Delegation (MYAD), one of the few university-led NGOs in the world, I co-authored recommendations on global gender equality and presented them at the United Nations. As Culture Editor of *Le Débit*, McGill University's only francophone newspaper, my leadership, writing, and reach in cultural reporting were recognized at *Le Devoir*'s 2025 Student Press Ceremony.



Arts & Media | Vancouver, British Columbia

IVANNA SAMUEL

Poet and Filmmaker

Being able to co-host WORDSMITH poetry events over the course of the past two years, we have welcomed over 150 people at our events and have highlighted over 10 local non-profits through our event. I am so proud of the work that is being done to bring community together through poetry.



Professional | Toronto, Ontario

JAHMOIA SMITH

Manager of Community Partnerships / Program Coordinator/Professor | ACCES Employment / George Brown College

My journey is shaped by resilience, community, and a deep belief in the power of opportunity. As a Black woman of Jamaican heritage and an immigrant to Canada, I understand what it means to navigate systems, rebuild, advocate, and create belonging in spaces that were not always designed with people like me in mind.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Brampton, Ontario

JANICE BLONDIN

Hairstylist, Foundation Founder | Just J Beauty Salon & Supplies Ltd.

My story began in Jamaica, where I learned the value of hard work, resilience, and determination. Along my journey, someone believed in me and extended a hand when I needed an opportunity. That act of kindness changed the direction of my life and taught me that one opportunity can create a lifetime of possibilities. As I built my career and established Just J Beauty Salon & Supplies Ltd., I made a commitment to pay that opportunity forward.



Professional | Toronto, Ontario

JESSICA GREGORY

Owner | Runway Coaching & Placement

One of the most significant achievements of my career has been transforming runway coaching into a vehicle for confidence, personal growth, and professional success. Over the past 25 years, I have developed a signature coaching philosophy, "Be. Feel. Walk Confident.", which goes beyond teaching runway techniques to help individuals cultivate presence, self-belief, and authenticity.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Arts & Media | Ottawa, Ontario

JESSIE SIMMONS

Multidisciplinary Artist, Community Builder & Event Curator | Jessie Simmons Music

I am a Haitian Canadian multidisciplinary artist, entrepreneur, and community builder from Ottawa who is passionate about creating spaces where people feel seen, celebrated, and connected. While music has always been at the centre of my journey, my purpose has evolved into something much bigger: using creativity as a tool to build community and inspire others to embrace their identities unapologetically.



Arts & Media | Halifax, Nova Scotia

JHAMIELA SMITH

Multidisciplinary Professional – Recording Artist, Performer, Songwriter, Arts Educator

Reggae Roots is a community music and cultural education initiative I created and lead to introduce young people to reggae music as a tool for storytelling, identity, and self-expression. I co-designed and facilitate this program, which is delivered through six workshop modules focused on the cultural roots and history of reggae music, while encouraging young people to share and develop their own stories."



Promising Youth | Sudbury, Ontario

JOANNA ADEFIOYE

Undergrad University of Waterloo | Afro Women and Youth Foundation

One of my most significant achievements has been leading a community initiative dedicated to improving access to culturally responsive support and opportunities for underserved women and youth. Recognizing gaps in services, I developed innovative programs that combine mentorship, leadership development, education, and mental health support to empower individuals to reach their full potential.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Brampton, Ontario

JULIA BEBIEM

Event Planner | Grandieu Inc

My journey in event management began as the Event Coordinator at the South African High Commission in Lagos, where I served for five years. During that time, I planned and executed diplomatic, cultural, and business events from concept to completion, including coordinating bilateral trade missions between Nigeria and South Africa.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Edmonton, Alberta

JULISA RILEY

Owner & Operator | Skinjuvenate Aesthetics Inc.

One community initiative I led was organizing a skincare education and wellness outreach initiative through Skinjuvenate Aesthetics. The goal was to make professional skincare education more accessible by providing free skin health consultations, educational resources, and personalized treatment guidance to individuals who may not have otherwise sought professional care.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Toronto, Ontario

KAELA JOHNSON

Founder and Influencer Marketing Strategist | TIVE Marketing & Consulting Inc.

A significant career milestone was leaving a stable corporate job after experiencing burnout and launching TIVE Marketing and Consulting Inc., an influencer marketing and consulting business rooted in freedom, creativity, innovation, collaboration, and impact. In under three years, I have scaled TIVE into a six-figure business, leading and supporting influencer marketing campaigns for global brands and agencies connected to Disney, adidas, Sephora, Mattel, Haleon, Sport Chek, Sobeys, and more.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Professional | Toronto, Ontario

KAJAÉA ROBERTSON

Program Manager | R.I.S.E Edutainment - Arts and Community Services

A community initiative I led and contributed to is the MasterPeace Project supported by R.I.S.E Edutainment and City Of Toronto. MasterPeace is an art based program serving youth aged 8–20 across five Toronto schools and 2 Toronto Community Housing communities, using music and creative expression to build confidence, leadership, and community connections.



Professional | Ashcroft, British Columbia

KANDI-LEE CROOKS-SMITH

K-12 School Principal | Desert Sands Community School and Harambee Alliance for Health, Wellness, and Aging Society

I am a Jamaican-Canadian educator whose practice is rooted in culture, creativity, and lifelong learning. Since beginning my teaching career in 1998 and serving as a principal and education consultant, I have used the arts and community engagement to design meaningful learning experiences.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Ajax, Ontario

KEILISSA BRIDGETT

Creator and Owner | Laced Legacies

One of my proudest achievements personally has been building Laced Legacies from the ground up and becoming a published children's author. As a female sneaker enthusiast in a male dominated space, I saw an opportunity to combine my two passions, sneaker culture and education in a way that I haven't seen anyone do before.



Professional | Waterloo Region, Ontario

KELLY DE FOGAIN

Founder and Executive Director | Afropolitan Canada

For the past eight years, I have served as Founder and Executive Director of Afropolitan Canada, a nonprofit dedicated to creating equitable opportunities for Black, newcomer, and racialized communities through recreation, leadership, employment, and cultural programming. One initiative I am especially proud of is our Water Safety program.



Arts & Media | Brampton, Ontario

KENDAL BLAKE

Graphic Designer & Illustrator | Kendal Blake

In 2015, I hosted an art show titled The Foundation. I was able to bring a community of Brampton creatives together during a time when there weren't many creative outlets in the city. Through organizing The Foundation, I gained valuable experience and saw firsthand the impact that creating space for artists can have.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Ajax, Ontario

KENESHA HAUGHTON

Owner/Founder | KidzGlow Essentials by NCG & NCGDesign

One of the most significant achievements of my career has been successfully building leadership and influence across both the corporate and entrepreneurial sectors. For more than 22 years, I have built a career in banking, progressing into a Senior Business Analyst. Alongside my corporate career, I founded KidzGlow Essentials, Canada's first affirmation-themed organic skincare brand for children, and authored the Shine Bright children's book series, a gratitude journal, and From Nap Time to Launch Time, a guide for mothers pursuing entrepreneurship.



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Business & Entrepreneurship | Halifax, Nova Scotia

KIMAYA ELLIS-VERVIN

CEO | Picnic Fantasies

I am the founder and creative director of Picnic Fantasies Curated Experiences, a business born during my maternity leave from a simple desire to create a luxury gender reveal that reflected the experience I envisioned. While searching for inspiration, I realized something was missing.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Halifax, Nova Scotia

KYLA DERRY

Founder | Intimately U

One of my proudest professional milestones was being invited to speak at International Women's Day 2026, under the theme "Give to Gain." As a survivor-founded entrepreneur, I shared how Intimately U's Buy One, Heal One model embodies that exact principle, every paying member's contribution directly funds access for survivors who otherwise couldn't afford support, creating a business where giving and gaining aren't separate but built into the same transaction.



Professional | Edmonton, Alberta

LATOYA REID

CEO/Clinical Director | ReiDefine Wellness and ReiSpace

I did not choose this work. It chose me. I arrived in Canada in 2015 from Montego Bay, Jamaica, as an international student, a mother, and a woman who had already spent years on the ground doing community work before she had the credentials to prove it. In Jamaica, I led youth advocacy projects, participated in humanitarian missions to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, and received the Sir Howard Cooke Award for Citizenship. Service was never something I decided to do. It was something I was made of.



Professional | Toronto, Ontario

LAURA WILSON-LEWIS

Entertainment and IP Counsel | Alphonse Latham LLP

With an undergraduate degree in Physics and a master's degree in Medical Biophysics, I applied to law school with the clear intention of becoming an intellectual property (IP) lawyer. In 2019, after three years of exploring various interests, I revisited my goal and found an interest in copyright law.



Promising Youth | Edmonton, Alberta

MABEL ADESOPO

Chief Operations Officer | Skillcity Institute

One of my most significant professional achievements has been helping build and scale Skillcity Institute as Chief Operating Officer and Revenue Lead. Skillcity Institute is a Canadian nonprofit organization based in Edmonton that focuses on empowering youth through education, skills development, mentorship, workforce readiness, entrepreneurship, and STEM programming.



Promising Youth | Calgary, Alberta

MABINTOU OUATTARA

Project Manager, Facilities Integrity | TC Energy

I am an engineering professional, nonprofit founder, and community leader passionate about creating opportunities for young people, particularly women and underrepresented communities. Originally from Côte d'Ivoire, I immigrated to Canada as a teenager and experienced firsthand the challenges of navigating a new culture, language, and educational system.



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Professional | Montreal, Quebec

MAGALIE BOUTIN

Director, Communications, Public and Cultural Relations (NFB) + General Director and Founder | National Film Board of Canada and Frequence

Frequence, a nonprofit organization I founded in 2023, is dedicated to showcasing and empowering Quebec's Black Youth. My work has mobilized organizations and companies to give bursaries, offer mentorship and internships to young Black talents aged between 12 and 21 years old.



Business & Entrepreneurship | St Catharine's, Ontario

MARIAM YUSUFF

Human Resource Professional | Mimi's Bonnets

One of my proudest professional milestones has been growing Mimi's Bonnets from a small idea into an award-winning Canadian business serving thousands of customers. In 2025, Mimi's Bonnets received the Canadian Choice Award in the Hair Care Products category, recognizing our commitment to quality, customer satisfaction, and community impact.



Arts & Media | Gatineau, Quebec

MARIE-FRANCE KOHOUE

Senior Financial Analyst, Federal Public Service | Founder, Sip & Read

Through Sip & Read, I have created a community where literature becomes a vehicle for lifelong learning and social inclusion. Over the past few years, the initiative has brought together more than 300 participants across Ottawa, Gatineau, Montreal through literary gatherings, panel discussions, and community events.



Sports | Ontario

MARY ADARKWA

Athlete, Registered Health and Exercise Practitioner

I grew up in Ghana and moved to Canada at the age of ten, where sport quickly became more than just an activity—it became a space for belonging, discipline, and opportunity. My journey into strength and conditioning and sport performance has been shaped by both lived experience and professional exposure across community, collegiate, and professional sport environments.



Professional | Calgary, Alberta

MAY-MAY SOLOMON

Field Marketing Manager, Western Canada | Circle K

I've led over 23 community events across Western Canada. From building local partnerships in Edmonton and Grand Prairie to activating communities in Calgary and Vancouver, these initiatives strengthened Circle K's presence where it matters most.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Ontario

MELISSA VERNON

Medical Tattoo Artist and Educator | Skyn Illusion

My journey has been shaped by resilience, passion, and a desire to help others recognize their own beauty and potential. I have always been passionate about creating positive change, and my work in stretch mark and scar camouflage was born from seeing a need for more confidence, understanding, and support for individuals who carry visible reminders of their personal journeys.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Business & Entrepreneurship | Winnipeg, Manitoba

MOTUNRAYO BOLANLE AJAYI

Nurse Practitioner | Venus Home and Health Solutions

When I graduated from nursing school in 2018, I made a decision that has shaped my career: I would go where the healthcare gap was largest. This prompted me to accept a Registered Nurse position in Gladstone, Manitoba, a community of fewer than 800 people, working in their long-term care facility.



Business & Entrepreneurship | London, Ontario

MOYOSORE SADIQ-SONEYE

Lawyer | Mo's Law Office & Naija Lawyer In Canada

If there is one thing that has shaped my journey, it is the belief that our struggles can become someone else's roadmap. I am a lawyer called to the Bars of Nigeria, Ontario (Canada), and New York (USA), but my path to where I am today was not always straightforward.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Toronto, Ontario

NALWANGA W. MUSISI

Founder, Clinical Supervisor & Reg. Psychotherapist | Karibu Mental Health Network

My journey has been shaped by my experiences navigating multiple cultures, communities, and systems, and by witnessing how easily people can become disconnected from the support networks that sustain wellbeing. Throughout my career, I have been guided by a simple but powerful belief: people heal, grow, and thrive when they feel seen, valued, and meaningfully connected to community.



Promising Youth | Brampton, Ontario

NAOMI MCDONALD

Student | University of North Carolina

After participating in Havergal College's Next Surgeon Program, where I met cardiologists and spoke to cardiac surgeons learning suturing, watching undergraduate students practice valve bypasses and learning about technology used for the heart such as a mitral valve clip, I was hooked on surgery. I want to have as wide of an impact as I can, saving others.



Professional | Ottawa, Ontario

NASREEN NURADIN

Job Search Facilitator | World Skills

My journey has been shaped by a deep commitment to bridging systems, people, and opportunity. I am a Doctor of Pharmacy by training, but my professional path has evolved into community-focused work at the intersection of healthcare, newcomer integration, and inclusive workforce development in Canada.



Arts & Media | Toronto, Ontario

NATALIE PREDDIE

Freelance Travel Writer + TV Host | Freelance

I am a travel journalist, television host, producer, and storyteller based in Toronto, and everything I do is rooted in one belief: stories shape how we understand ourselves and each other. As a mixed-race Black woman and the daughter of Jamaican immigrants, I have always been fascinated by identity, belonging, and legacy.



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Business & Entrepreneurship | Burlington, Ontario

NICKEISHA LEWIS-MORRISON

Principal Designer & Owner | NOLA Designs Inc

My journey into retail design began with a passion for understanding how physical spaces influence the way people experience brands. After earning a Bachelor's Degree in Interior Design from Toronto Metropolitan University and working as a designer with both retail design firms and large Canadian retailers, I gained firsthand experience designing environments that support business objectives while creating meaningful customer experiences.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Toronto, Ontario

NNEKA EZURIKE

Pharmacist, Franchise-Owner/Co-Founder
| Shoppers Drug Mart/Black Pharmacy
Professionals of Canada

Beyond operating 4 Shoppers Drug Mart locations, my organizational impact extends beyond the Shoppers Drug Mart network. I'm involved in various women-focused initiatives to help keep the needle moving in the right direction when it comes to empowering and developing leadership potential among women.



Arts & Media | Ottawa, Ontario

OLUNOSEN LOUISA IBHAZE

Senior Policy Advisor, Author, Equity Strategist
and Founder | The Ottawa Black Book Club;
Simple Esan Girl Rising Initiative

"In 2018, I founded the Ottawa Black Book Club to create a welcoming and safe space where Black literature, global stories, and underrepresented voices could be read, discussed, and celebrated. As founder and lead curator, I built the community, selected books, facilitated discussions, hosted authors, and developed cultural programming."



Promising Youth | Calgary, Alberta

OMOYEME ANNETTE OMOYOMA

Clinical Undergraduate Researcher |
University of Calgary, Hotchkiss Brain Institute

"As President of the Women in Dental Club University of Calgary, I led an initiative focused on improving oral health accessibility for underserved members of our community. Recognizing that many individuals face barriers to obtaining basic oral hygiene supplies, I organized and coordinated a club-wide effort to assemble and distribute oral hygiene kits containing essential dental care products."



Promising Youth | Winnipeg, Manitoba

OYINDAMOLA ELUWADE

Program and Grants Assistant | Government
of Manitoba

I founded Empty Streets Canada, a youth-lead organization dedicated to raising awareness about human trafficking and educating young people about prevention, safety and advocacy. After recognizing that many students in Canada have limited knowledge of the warning signs and realities of human trafficking, I wanted to create a platform that would make information more accessible and encourage meaningful conversation.



Arts & Media | Toronto, Ontario

PATRICIA LOVE

Dancer, Performer & Teacher | Samba With
Love

As a Canadian-born woman of Jamaican heritage, my journey in samba has been driven by a deep respect for Afro-Brazilian culture and a commitment to honouring the art form's Black roots. What began as a passion for dance evolved into a mission to promote cultural integrity, representation, and education within the samba community.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Arts & Media | Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

PEACE AKINTADE

11th Saskatchewan Poet Laureate |
Saskatchewan Writers Guild

In 2020, during my term as Youth Poet Laureate, I became the program coordinator for Write Out Loud, a Youth Poetry Collective based in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I created yearly programming for poetry workshops, monthly open mics and slams, and paid opportunities for emerging and established poets in Saskatchewan.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Halifax, Nova Scotia

PRINCESS OCTAVIOUS

CEO | P3 Hair & Beauty Supplies Limited

Over the past seven years, I have built P3 Hair & Beauty Supplies Limited into a trusted beauty retail business with two locations in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Through resilience, strategic planning, and a commitment to excellence, I have created employment opportunities while serving a diverse customer base.



Promising Youth | Brampton, Ontario

PRIYA PURAN

Auto Industry Professional, Co-founder |
AutoTrader, Duovida Foundation & Collective

One initiative I am most proud of is co-founding DuoVida, a community organization dedicated to creating spaces where marginalized and international youth feel a sense of belonging while accessing leadership and personal development opportunities.



Promising Youth | Toronto, Ontario

RACHEL ADJEI

Chef/ Educator | The Abibiman Project Inc.

My journey is one of resilience, navigating the culinary industry as a Black, queer, disabled woman living with fibromyalgia. Running my first restaurant kitchen in France at 18 gave me the technical foundation and confidence to lead, but the 2020 pandemic brought clarity: I needed to step outside structures that did not see or value me and instead build something that reflected my community and values.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

RONKE OSATOHANMWEN

Owner | RonBeautyAmazement, Black Professionals and Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan

Through RonBeautyAmazement, I have dedicated myself to restoring confidence and dignity to women experiencing hair loss due to medical conditions, cancer treatments, alopecia, and other life challenges. What started as a beauty business evolved into a platform for empowerment, education, and emotional support.



Professional | Saint John, New Brunswick

RUFINA AJALIE

Human Resources Manager | Crosby Foods Limited

One of the most significant achievements of my career has been using leadership to create opportunities for others. As Human Resources Manager at Crosby Foods Limited, I serve on the leadership team of a company with more than 147 years of history and am currently the only Black leader at that table.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Business & Entrepreneurship | montreal, Quebec

RUTH FRANÇOIS

Event Planner | Signé Ruth François

I was nominated at the Gala SDE Awards for the "Woman Entrepreneurship" Award. I was in the Top 2 nominees and was really close to winning the award. That moment clearly showed me the impact I have within my community and the love and support I received was truly rewarding.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Halifax, Nova Scotia

SADÉ MARSTON

Lead Nail Technician, Hair removal Specialist & Semi-Permanent Makeup Artist | Deydidthat Nails

A defining milestone in my career has been transforming Deydidthat Nails from a passion into a thriving full-time beauty business. As a solo entrepreneur, I have successfully built, operated, and sustained my business independently while continuously reinvesting in its growth.



Arts & Media | Ontario

SHAMEKA BLAKE

Artistic Director/Choreographer | Artists In Motion

Through my company, Artists in Motion, I create spaces where Black dancers can train, grow, and connect with industry professionals as well as create a meaningful relationship with their personal history.



Professional | Ontario

SHARISE SEALY-MCCALLUM

Graduation Coach for Black Students, BA CYC, MSW, RSW | Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board

My commitment to organizational effectiveness and teamwork ensures that the initiatives I create are sustainable and impactful and contributes to systemic change. One of my most impactful programs for Black students across the Region of Peel is the Pathways to Post-Secondary Night.



Professional | Pickering, Ontario

SIMONE GRANT

Teen Psychotherapist, RSSW | Teen Wellness Studio

My journey has been shaped by resilience, faith, and a deep commitment to helping others overcome challenges and reach their full potential. As a Registered Social Service Worker and Psychotherapist, I saw firsthand the growing need for accessible mental health support for young people and decided to create a space where youth could feel safe, understood, and empowered.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Dartmouth, Nova Scotia

STACY DARKU

Registered Counselling Therapist | Esinam Counselling Inc.

Growing up in a Ghanaian household in a small Canadian city, I experienced firsthand the silence surrounding emotional expression, compounded by exposure to domestic violence and alcoholism. These early experiences shaped my understanding of the profound impact unaddressed mental health challenges can have within families and communities.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026

Cibwe



Promising Youth | Toronto, Ontario

SYLARA SOARES-BASSARAGH

Undergraduate Student, Pre-Med | University of Toronto

I founded Imara, a mobile-first digital health companion app for Black Canadian families with children ages 0–8, designed from the ground up on an Africentric, abundance-forward framework. As founder, I shaped the design framework and the core structure now being presented at the Canadian Black Science Network's BE-STEMM Conference.



Business & Entrepreneurship | London, Ontario

TEMILOLA ALLI

Civil Service | Alova Canada

One initiative I am most proud of is founding ALOVA Canada, a marketplace that helps small businesses and entrepreneurs grow by increasing their visibility and connecting them with customers. As Founder and CEO, I recognized that many businesses struggled to compete online due to limited resources and exposure.



Promising Youth | Lake Loon, Nova Scotia

TIARA MULDER

PhD Candidate in Biology & Research Assistant | Dalhousie University

I created Breaking Conventions in STEMM to address a gap I experienced firsthand: many students, especially Black and equity-deserving trainees, are told what success should look like in academia but are rarely given time to evaluate what success should mean for them.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Toronto, Ontario

TONISHA LEWIS

Salon Owner/Hairstylist | Diva Designs Hair Studio

As a solo entrepreneur and the owner of Diva Designs Hair Studio, I have spent the past 15 years building a business rooted in Black hair care, healthy hair maintenance, and expert sew-in extensions, while creating a safe, welcoming space where clients feel seen, valued, and confident.



Arts & Media | Halifax, Nova Scotia

VANESSA WRIGHT

Broadcast Journalist | CTV NEWS

I grew up in Brampton, ON., but I've lived around the GTA, and even in Dallas, Texas. I come from a family of entrepreneurs who have instilled the value of faithfulness in God and hard work. In January 2026, I served as the emcee for the 2026 African Heritage Month Launch and Proclamation held in Cherry Brook, N.S.



Professional | Calgary, Alberta

VICTORIA ABENA OTENG FRIMPONG

Retention Strategist | Kulin Co

Born and raised in Calgary, my life's trajectory has always been fueled by an innate desire to build and sustain community. This passion naturally guided me into early leadership roles during my university years, where I served concurrently as the President of both the Marketing Society and the African Caribbean Association.



TOP 100 BWTW 2026



Business & Entrepreneurship | Ottawa, Ontario

VIVIAN UFODIKE

Director | La Africana Cuisine

I've built La Africana Cuisine into an award-winning Nigerian restaurant in Ottawa while also expanding its reach through catering, delivery platforms, community events, and brand visibility. Starting and growing a food business in a competitive market required resilience, creativity, financial discipline, and strong leadership.



Business & Entrepreneurship | Ottawa, Ontario

WINNIE IRANGABIYE

Founder/ CEO | Post-Natal Kindness

Post Natal Kindness is a community-driven initiative dedicated to supporting mothers during the postpartum period and inspired by my own experience as a new mother. I created PNK after recognizing the significant gaps in practical, emotional, and social support available to new mothers and families.



Arts & Media | Calgary, Alberta

WUNMI IDOWU

Founder, Black Arts & Culture Council | CEO and Exec Producer, Letura Productions Inc | Woezo Africa

Through Letura Productions Inc., I have developed impactful film and media work that advances representation and storytelling. One of my notable productions, She Leads: Making A Way For Black Artists, was featured on TELUS Optik TV for three years and highlighted the lived experiences, challenges, and achievements of five Black artists in Calgary



WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Ashley Wright

2023 Recipient | Toronto, ON

When I was nominated, I was building The Wright Success and growing my work as an educator and advocate in blockchain, cryptocurrency and financial technology.

Since then, my work has expanded globally across emerging technology, AI, digital assets and the future of finance. I've had the opportunity to educate hundreds of people, build a community supporting thousands of women, and speak and collaborate with organizations and conferences across North America and, more recently, the Caribbean.



Kayla BreeLove

2023 Recipient | Halifax, NS

When I was nominated, I was working as a Clinical Traumatologist, providing trauma therapy and specializing in racialized trauma, adverse childhood experiences and vicarious trauma. Since then, I've expanded BreeLove Wellness, built accessible counselling and experiential learning pathways, supervised the next generation of practitioners, and worked alongside communities and organizations to examine psychological safety, racialized harm, belonging and trauma at a systems level.

THEY NOW? WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



Funmi Odeniyi

2023 Recipient | Halifax, NS

When I was recognized in 2023, I was operating MichNat Fashion from my home, creating custom garments while laying the foundation for a larger fashion business. Since then, I have opened a dedicated atelier in downtown Halifax and repositioned the company as MichNat Couture, a luxury bridal and special event brand focused on precision fit, structural craftsmanship and personal identity. My work has been presented at Fashion Art Toronto, Halifax Fashion Week and the Canada Bridal Show.



Rodale Dwyer

2023 Recipient | Niagara Falls, ON

In 2023, I was building my career as a paralegal and entrepreneur, committed to advocating for others while creating opportunities through my professional work and community involvement. Since receiving this recognition, I have continued to grow both professionally and personally. I have expanded my work as a paralegal and business leader, strengthened my legal practice, and continued supporting individuals and families navigating complex legal and immigration matters.



Rosemarie Bryan

2022 Recipient | Toronto, ON

I have worked as an **Employment Counsellor**, helping Newcomers, Refugees, and others navigate employment opportunities and connect with valuable community resources. I have also continued my work as a Community Worker, organizing and participating in numerous events. Currently I am a Candidate in the upcoming **October 26 election as a Public School Trustee**, where I hope to continue being a strong voice for children, families, parents, and our communities.



Muriel C. Koucoï

2022 Recipient | Quebec, ON

In 2022, I was building SIMKHA Biocosmétiques, a Quebec-made natural skincare brand inspired by my scientific background as a medical biologist and clinical epidemiologist, my Beninese heritage, and a desire to create healthier, more responsible skincare for families. Since then, SIMKHA has grown into a Certified B Corporation and strengthened its position as a Canadian clean beauty brand rooted in science, sustainability and impact.



Nicolette Richardson

2022 Recipient | Surrey, BC

"You have lived so many lives" – my friends say this to me quite often during our conversations and they're probably right, because in the few years since my nomination a few things have happened. I published a poetry collection (The Years I Lived Inside); I contributed to an anthology (The Poetry of Angry Black and Brown People) which is an act of resistance – part proceeds go towards providing aid for Palestinian children. I also left my position as Recruiter – Advisor at UBC and started a boutique consulting firm that works mostly with women-owned/women-led businesses in growth strategy, people solutions, marketing, and social research.



Gillianne Fuller

2023 Recipient | Toronto, ON

When I was nominated, I was building Menopause Matter, a nonprofit founded to close long-standing gaps in menopause education, advocacy, and access to care across Canada. Since then, Menopause Matter has grown into a trilingual mobile app initiative, published white papers presented to Ontario and federal officials, and launched the Free HRT Ontario campaign, which was tabled at Queen's Park.



Hannah Yohannes

2022 Recipient | Toronto, ON

When I was nominated, I was building a career at the intersection of storytelling, community, and the Canadian screen industries. Since then, my journey has expanded significantly as a filmmaker, director, producer, and creative leader. I released the teaser for a critically acclaimed series, Stinkin' Thinkin', while my short film Little Dreams continues its international festival journey, earning recognition and connecting with audiences across Canada and abroad.



Siobhan Perkins

2022 Recipient | Burnaby, BC

In 2022, I was practicing as an Adult Clinical Allergist and Immunologist in British Columbia. I was also a Clinical Instructor with UBC and served as VP of the B.C. Society of Allergy and Clinical Immunology.

I am currently a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Division of Clinical Immunology and Allergy at UBC, where I serve as the Undergraduate Medical Education Lead. I am also a Fellow with the Centre for Health Education Scholarship at UBC and am completing my Master's degree in Health Professions Education at Johns Hopkins University.



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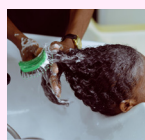
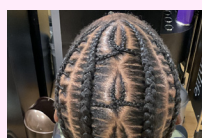
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