



## Leaders to Leaders Youth Summit

Friday, March 16, 2018

UJA-Federation of NY: 130 East 59th Street

## Keynote Speaker

**Diana Chao**

Founder and Executive Director, *Letters to Strangers*  
Fine Art Photographer, *Moonglass Studios*



This is all true: 1) Diana Chao is a 19-year-old Chinese-American immigrant; 2) She grew up in California and currently studies at Princeton University; 3) She spent a lot of her life confused.

Growing up in an English tongue-tied family, she found herself working at a young age (12-hour labor shifts on weekends > gym membership, hands down). Then the confusion set in. She fell temporarily blind multiple times due to uveitis, yet pursued [photography](#) nonetheless. Her stubbornness about elevating POC stories to the fine art industry led to features by *Vogue Italia*, Adobe and Redbubble. To date, Diana has exhibited to over 75,000 people. She received a publishing deal for fantasy fiction at the age of 13, was recognized by the U.S. Navy for her research on dengue virus when she was 16 years old, and researched for NASA with a feature at the American Astronomical Society conference by the time she was 18 years old. She directed marketing for a business with over 1 million online hits a week while simultaneously throwing herself to the philanthropy world by founding [Letters to Strangers](#) (L2S) in 10th grade. L2S is a youth-run mental health organization that has impacted over 27,000 people on four continents. A Coca-Cola Scholar, Three Dot Dash Global Teen Leader, TEDxTeen speaker and (self-proclaimed) karaoke-fu champion, Diana was honored by President Obama as 2016's sole female Academic U.S. Presidential Scholar from California.

So maybe #3 isn't true. She just took some detours to realize who she really was. A storyteller. A believer in the human connection. Ready to create change—together.

### Case Study Presenter Biographies

#### Seher Khawaja, Legal Momentum



Seher Khawaja is a Gender Justice Fellow at Legal Momentum, The Women’s Legal Defense and Education Fund. Her work focuses on developing strategies to advance gender equality in the workplace and enhance economic security for women, with a focus on assisting low-income and immigrant women.

She previously served as an attorney for the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), where she developed policy on affordable housing, advised on legislative and regulatory reform, and ensured legal compliance, including implementing the Violence Against Women Act. Prior to joining NYCHA, Seher worked with organizations in Burma, Haiti, Iraq, Israel, South Africa, and the United States on a range of human rights issues, including gender-based violence. Before law school, Seher consulted with the United Nations Development Programme and was a Program Associate with the World-Federalist Movement—Institute for Global Policy. She is an active member of the New York City Bar Association’s Human Rights and United Nations Committees, has served as an editor on several academic journals, and has published articles focusing on international human rights. She received her J.D. from Brooklyn Law School, where she was a Sparer Public Interest Fellow. She also has an M.Sc. in International Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a B.A. from the Johns Hopkins University.

#### Ane Mathieson, Legal Momentum,



Ane Mathieson is Legal Momentum’s Rights Now! Policy Fellow. In collaboration with Peer Educators, Ane is developing curricula and materials on educational equity, students’ legal rights, and the impact that domestic violence, sexual assault, and dating violence have on young women’s educational trajectories. The curricula seek to empower young women of color to be their own advocates and to assert their rights to equity.

Ane’s research and activism inspired her to co-found We Fight Back, a boxing empowerment program for women who have survived sexual violence. She is dedicated to improving parental leave policies, closing the gender wage gap, and ending violence against women and girls. Prior to the Fellowship, Ane worked on commercial sexual exploitation policy at The Organization for Prostitution Survivors. As a 2012 Fulbright Fellow, she researched global prostitution policy in Sweden. Ane holds a Master of Social Work with a concentration in Public Policy Practice and Administration from the University of Washington.

#### Emily Mendelson, Global Nomads Group



Empathy is the name of the game for Emily. Passionate and curious about the way people from all different walks of life think, connect, and create, she works to foster cross-cultural dialogue as a Program Coordinator for Global Nomads Group. After studying Creative Writing and Psychology at Ithaca College, she decided to go back to school to get her Masters in Fine Arts in Creative Writing from The New School. She believes that immersing oneself in the story of another is a fantastic way to practice and perfect the skill of compassion, which is so important in our world today. We hold phenomenal power when we craft our own stories and tell our own truths. She’s excited to help amplify the voices of

students through the new Campfire Youth Leader program, which will enable students to help guide their classmates through Global Nomads Group’s Campfire program connecting young people from the US and the Middle East/North Africa. When she’s not at work, you can find Emily working on her novel, trying to convince herself to exercise, or belting out Broadway melodies until the neighbors tell her to give it a rest.

### Case Study Presenter Biographies

#### Meg Sullivan, JCC Harlem



Meg Sullivan is the Director of Programs & Community Engagement at JCC Harlem: An Initiative of the Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan in collaboration with UJA-Federation of NY, which opened its doors in January 2017. Meg previously worked as the Program Director for Jewish Journeys: An Initiative of the

Marlene Meyerson JCC Manhattan. Meg is also the Founder and Director of Project Harmony Israel (PHI), an English immersion camp for Arab and Jewish youth developed in partnership with the Hand in Hand: Center for Jewish and Arab Education in Israel. Meg holds a Bachelors degree from the University of Chicago where she wrote her thesis on restorative justice in deeply divided societies, and a Master of Science from Columbia University in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, where her capstone focused on transboundary water management mechanisms in the Jordan River. She is a lifelong New Yorker.

#### Sadaf Omar, New York City Mayor's Center for Faith and Community Partnerships



Sadaf Omar is a Community Coordinator at the New York City Mayor's Center for Faith and Community Partnerships housed under the Community Affairs

Unit. Prior to joining the Mayor's Office, Sadaf served as the Deputy Director of Scheduling for the Honorable Melissa Mark-Viverito. In addition to her community organizing role, she serves on the Board of Muslim Writers Collective (MWC), a grassroots national initiative dedicated to reclaiming the Muslim narrative through storytelling. Muslim Writers Collective has been featured in *Vice*, *The Guardian*, *Buzzfeed*, *The Daily Beast*, and many more media publications. MWC has active chapters in seven cities across the country, and has been credited with providing "a space for young Muslims to honor their humanity" by *Vice*. She is a current fellow with the JCRC-NY "We are All New York" Fellowship, which is a 10-month leadership development program dedicated to advancing the next generation of New York City's diverse leaders and helping them become change agents to strengthen our city. Sadaf serves on the Young Professionals Board of Breakthrough New York, a non-profit organization that transforms the lives of talented kids from low-income backgrounds by providing educational support from middle school through college and into careers. Sadaf is a community organizer, storyteller and event planner who aims to create unity among extremely diverse and complex communities throughout New York City. She hopes to infuse the culture of inclusion everywhere she goes. Sadaf immigrated to New York City from Calcutta, India at the age of three with her parents. She is multi-lingual and enjoys traveling all over the world. Sadaf began her journey in politics and community relations as a youth leader and advocate when she joined the second cohort of CACF's Asian American Student Advocacy Project (ASAP). Since then, she has remained actively involved with CACF. She truly believes that "change begins with me".

#### Yvonne Shortt, Rego Park Green Alliance

##### Studio

Often I feel like a super hero fighting for a better community. I am sometimes wounded. I sometimes feel like I don't belong but I fight on! I fight against people who drink and run into houses with their car. I fight against

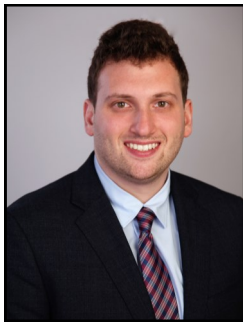


city and private owners who leave their spaces on the edge of death. I fight behaviors that say it's okay to throw garbage on the floor. I fight oppressors who think it's okay to abuse those who are smaller, poorer, younger, or whatever let's them get away with their horrific acts. I fight not with my hands but using art, design, education, and technology. And, like most super heroes I have a team that helps me.

Yvonne Shortt is the Executive Director of social practice non profit RPGA Studio. The studio uses creativity, design, art, technology, education - to address community issues. Some projects include: collaboratively designing and building a tiny house with women to grow carpentry/leadership/network skills, 3D design and printing citywide challenge/education residencies to build creativity and collaboration in youth, a sculpture garden to revitalize 2500 feet of public space, Bench Mensch Sculptures to remind men that women must be honored, and more.

### Skill-Building Facilitator Biographies

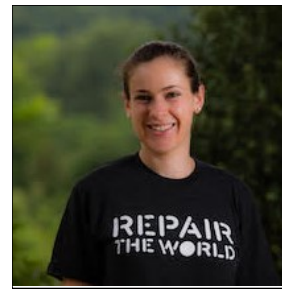
#### David Blechman, Simon Wiesenthal Center



David Blechman currently serves as the Development Associate for the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Eastern Regional Office. In this position, he oversees the coordination of fundraising efforts to support the center's mission, while additionally facilitating

educational tolerance programs, and supporting the Simon Wiesenthal Center's communal advocacy efforts in combating hate and prejudice. Previously, David has worked in a variety of other roles, most notably teaching for three year in a high school in Nanjing China. In this position, he played an active role in developing the program to become one of the top international programs in the province. During this time, David also developed a strong fluency in Mandarin, and a passion for cross-cultural learning and communication. David currently resides in Brooklyn, and enjoys food-focused exploration of New York's diverse neighborhoods.

#### Miriam Lipschutz, Repair the World



Miriam graduated from the University of Vermont with a degree in Animal Science. She is currently a food justice fellow in

Brooklyn at Repair the World, a Jewish non-profit committed to making service a defining element of American Jewish life. She volunteers regularly at the Bed-Stuy Campaign Against Hunger and co-runs Brooklyn Farm Crew. Fun-fact, she had a summer internship at a cheese factory!

#### Soraya Palmer, Crown Heights Community Mediation Center

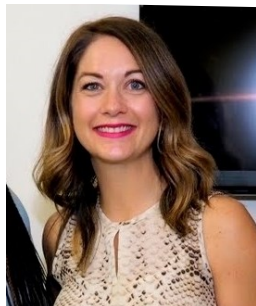


Soraya Palmer is the youth programs specialist for Youth Organizing to Save Our Streets (YO S.O.S.) at the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center. She earned her BA in Africana Studies from Connecticut College and her M.F.A in creative writing from Virginia Tech. Previously she taught Freshman English and Creative Writing at Virginia Tech while spearheading a one on one mentoring program for African American girls. Before this she worked as a student advisor at Harlem Children's Zone. She was born and raised in

Flatbush and can't imagine living anywhere else.

### Skill-Building Facilitator Biographies

#### Laura Jankstrom, Citizens Committee for Children of New York



Laura Jankstrom is responsible for CCC's civic engagement programs, which educate and mobilize New Yorkers around the organization's priorities for children. She coordinates CCC's Community Leadership course, which helps concerned citizens build the capacity to become

champions of change. She also manages YouthAction NYC, a multi-faceted after school program for high school students through which she seeks to inspire a future generation of leaders to stand up for what they believe in and work to make the world a better place. For her work on the YouthAction Program, Laura received the 2014 PaseSetter Award, which honors afterschool educators whose commitment, energy & creativity have had an indelible impact on the

children and youth of New York City. Laura also organizes CCC's adult and youth volunteers to participate in advocacy initiatives, whereby they help to convince legislators to move the needle on issues pertaining to child well-being. In addition, she provides technical assistance and professional development to community-based organizations that wish to incorporate meaningful civic engagement practices into their programs. Prior to joining CCC, Laura was a youth worker and community organizer in New York City's non-profit sector. She attended the Silver School of Social Work at NYU as an undergraduate, during which time she worked as a teacher's assistant and interned at Girls for Gender Equity, where she was involved in advocacy efforts around Title IX, lobbying for gender equity in schools. In 2006, Laura began her full-time career at StreetSquash, an afterschool program for middle and high school students in Harlem. There, she was a guidance counselor and social worker for 50 youth, and worked intimately with students, families, schools, and community stakeholders to ensure academic success and access to needed services. In 2009, Laura completed her Master of Social Work degree at Hunter College, with a concentration in community organizing and public policy. Combining her passion for youth work with her interests in public policy and social change, Laura was thrilled to join Citizens' Committee for Children in 2010. She believes it is her mission to inspire citizens to become more civically engaged and help them to recognize their potential as makers of real and lasting change. Laura is honored and privileged to do the work she loves, with bright and motivated people, in an organization that recognizes and fights for the fundamental rights of all children.

#### Sarah Zapiler (Zaps), Integrate NYC



Zaps is driven by the idea that every person has a wealth of unique gifts to offer. She has been a Dream Director with The Future Project where she supported young people

in putting their dreams and passions into action. Working in schools, Zaps saw first-hand the ways deep structural inequities were getting in the way of amazing young people being the leaders and learners they naturally are. Now with IntegrateNYC she works to build youth leadership for the movement to make school integration and equity a reality.



# Leaders to Leaders Youth Summit

YouthBridge-NY would like to thank all those who made the  
Leaders to Leaders Youth Summit possible:

## Keynote Speaker

Diana Chao

Founder and Executive Director, *Letters to Strangers*  
Fine Art Photographer, *Moonglass Studios*

## Workshop Presenters and Facilitators

David Blechman, Simon Wiesenthal Center

Laura Jankstrom, CCC-NY

Seher Khawaja, Legal Momentum

Miriam Lipschutz, Repair the World

Ane Mathieson, Legal Momentum

Emily Mendelson, Global Nomads Group

Sadaf Omar, NYC Mayor's Center for Faith and Community

Soraya Palmer, Crown Heights Community Mediation Center

Yvonne Shortt, Rego Park Green Alliance Studio

Meg Sullivan, Harlem JCC

Sarah Zapiler, IntegrateNYC

## YouthBridge-NY Board

### Members

William Abramson

Christopher Auguste

Martin Bienenstock

Ivy Cohen

Suzanne R. Davidowitz

Charlotte K. Frank

Marsha Haygood

Brad Korn

Joel Levy

Patricia McGann

Michael S. Miller

Rose Pinero

Mohammad Razvi

Lynn D. Sherman

Elizabeth Velez

Jason Williams

## YouthBridge-NY Staff

Bob Kaplan

*Founding Director*

Karen Lander

*Managing Director*

Rebecca Abrams

*Program Coordinator*

*Thanks to UJA-Federation of NY for generously providing conference space*

*Thanks to Jewish Community Relations Council of NY for staffing the event*

*Thanks to the YouthBridge-NY Fellows and Bridgers in blue shirts for volunteering at the event*



YouthBridge-NY is managed by the Center for Community Leadership at the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York. The JCRC is a proud partner of UJA-Federation of NY.