

Urgyen shares his success story for our Youth SPARK readers– This interview was conducted via email and facebook in March 2012.

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Q1) Would you please introduce yourself to the readers of our Newsletter?

I am Urgyen, a Tibetan Canadian. I was born in Nepal, outside of my country, Tibet. My parents fled Tibet when they were very young because of China's invasion in 1959, and had grown up in refugee camps in India and Nepal. I came to Canada when I was 16. From a very young age, I felt strongly about Tibet, and felt deeply connected to this high mountainous nation that I had only seen on TV. I believe our grandmother and parents played a very strong part in instilling a strong sense of identity and belonging, the fact that we were Tibetan. Naturally, I started getting involved in social awareness work for Tibet and Tibetan community events as I started to find my voice in Canada. I graduated from OCAD University with a degree in Graphic Design, and my thesis was on 'The Evolving Design of Protest'. I currently work as the National Director of Students for a Free Tibet Canada, a grassroots chapter based organization that works in solidarity with the Tibetan people in their struggle for freedom and independence.

Q2) How would you describe your experience being involved in Parkdale Newcomer Youth Program?

I have facilitated workshops in design, tutored high school students in art after school and participated in talks about post-secondary education preparation in 2010.

Q3) Why do you think a newcomer youth should join the Parkdale Newcomer Youth Program?

I think it's a great way to learn about the resources available to Youth in Toronto to help them kick start their education and career paths, and learning about community activities.

Q4) What did you get out of this program that helped you achieve your goals?

I believe in learning from teaching, and with facilitating workshops I was able to greatly improve my teaching and facilitating skills, as well as revising my own design knowledge. I have gone on to do a similar design workshop in a College in India where it received a very positive feedback. The Parkdale Newcomer Youth Program has also helped me sharpen my communication skills with audiences, which is crucial for someone who advocates for human rights and freedom for a people. I was also able to use my experience in the program as a reference for current my current job as Nation Director for SFT Canada. So, I would like to thank Kalsang and Newcomer Youth Program in providing me with the wonderful opportunity to provide support for other newcomer youth.

Q5) What final message would you give to all the newcomer youths or general youth out there?

Talk to your neighbor, be involved, get to know people around you in the community. I think in this day and age, people, especially youth, are getting disconnected from their physical and local communities, and it is one of the downsides of having extensive and instant social networking media like texting, facebook, twitter, etc. It greatly hinders one's ability to engage on a physical level, on a face-to-face level. Everyone has seen people on dinner dates busy on their cellphones or pretending to be busy.

And FINALLY, I would like to add,

“Any opportunity to work with your community is an opportunity to grow as a professional, as a member of society, and as a person. So speak to the person next to you on the subway, don't get weirded out when a stranger makes eye contact with you in public, we are social animals, and instant messaging can really weaken our social muscles.”