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## 150 Profiles: Ali McConnell

By Ali McConnell

*As we mark the 150th anniversary of confederation, The Philanthropist is profiling Canadians from across the non-profit sector and putting a face to 150 individuals who work or volunteer in Canada's social sector.*

**Name:** Ali McConnell

**Current role in the sector:** Project Director, Northern Youth Leadership, a Project on Tides Canada's Shared Platform and Managing Director, Empowering Kids in Uganda Society

**Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector:** 7+ years.



### **What was your first job in the sector or a defining moment?**

After completing my Masters Degree, I was a Social Worker with Gulu Support the Children Organisation (GUSCO) in Uganda. GUSCO is a Ugandan non-profit that runs a reception centre for children formerly abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army. I assisted with psychosocial support, family tracing, family reintegration, and livelihood skills development. From there I went on to found

Empowering Kids in Uganda (EKU), a registered Canadian charity that supports children born into the Lord's Resistance Army, who returned to Uganda without their parents.

I am very grateful to have had this experience early in my career because it had a profound impact on how I approach youth work. At GUSCO we spent 10 hours a day with the kids and our contact wasn't confined to 1 hour counselling sessions. This focus on connection and informal interaction led to deeper and more trusting relationships, and provided youth with the opportunity to open-up, share their stories, and ask for the support they needed. Since leaving GUSCO, I have prioritized working for organizations where youth work is done in similar informal settings like over a game of pool, or while paddling a canoe.

**Describe your desk/workspace.**

My work space is decorated with art cards, pictures drawn by youth, and little souvenirs I've picked up in my travels that make me smile. I try to keep my desk clean and organized, but when I am in the midst of program development it is normally covered in paper and resources.

**What are you reading or following that has expanded your understanding of the non-profit sector?**

I am pursuing a Certificate in Non-Profit Management from Simon Fraser University and have a lot of reading related to that. I am currently doing a class on financial management, so I am reading a lot about accounting and bookkeeping.

**What do you think our sector needs to be thinking about?**

One of my focuses is ensuring that programming is relevant to and respectful of the people I am working with, and that it honours and incorporates their wisdom and knowledge.

*Do you know someone we should profile as part of this series? Email us at [philanthropistprofiles@gmail.com](mailto:philanthropistprofiles@gmail.com)*