
150 Profiles: Ibrahim Musa

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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: Ibrahim Musa

Current role in the sector: Founder and Executive Director of the Cuts For Kids Foundation, Communications Coordinator at Youth Ottawa, Tenant Ambassador at Ottawa Community Housing (OCH) Corporation.

Years working and/or volunteering in the non-profit sector: Eight years.



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

Having volunteered for six years for community and non-profit initiatives, I took the leap of faith and started my own charity to tackle poverty relief and mental health in a way that I knew I could create impact. The Cuts For Kids Foundation is the only charity, globally, that provides free haircut services to youth. This is a blessing in the sense that we are unique and able to shape our own journey, but also a curse in that we have limited options in looking to others for guidance and a proven structure of operations. If there is one thing that I have learned in the past year and a half, is that new organizations eat a lot of dirt in their struggle for stability. It is in these formative years that our team has learned to navigate the non-profit world.

Describe your desk/workspace.

As with many in the non-profit sector, the many hats we wear means that we are constantly—and quite literally—on the run from project to project and meeting to meeting. Anything with a flat surface becomes a desk! However, on my designated 'office days', I am usually sitting in front of my computer screen which is almost hidden by the endless post-it notes stuck onto it, scribbled with 'to-dos' and things to remember. Beside me is my office phone and cell that add to my toolbox of change-making. To my left, right, and back are my colleagues and staff members who are in constant collaboration. And above me is a poster of the Tiananmen Square Tank Man.

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

I have found that there is no one book or journal that can provide complete insight into the

workings of the non-profit sector. However, I have learned the most through reading the living books around me (people in the sector) to help me better understand the ever-changing and challenging environment of the non-profit world. With one eye on various social media feeds and one ear in the political sphere of our sector, the best approach to learning is by doing. With that being said, I tend to spend great amounts of time reading into the legal and governance workings of non-profits to understand how to easily navigate the organizational management of a charities in Canada. Overall, I take every day as an opportunity to learn!

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

In the city of Ottawa alone, we are quickly approaching 1,800 charities, according to the most recent statistics from the Charities Directorate. This is a number that does not include non-profits, or unincorporated groups and grassroots initiatives. Our sector is plagued with organizations operating within their 'silos', often working towards similar goals or doing the same work—but with a serious lack of collaboration with others. The non-profit world is in desperate need of integration and cohesion between the services we offer to the public, and the research and resources that we have cultivated must be shared across the board to improve the overall quality of our work.

Our sector is hardworking and resilient. However, we are too often wrapped up in our own visions to realize the long-term benefits of collaborative approaches. My hope is that the professionals of the sector can begin a dialogue on working relationships between organizations and initiatives, for the benefit of our clients and community members.

Do you know someone we should profile as part of this series? Email us at philanthropistprofiles@gmail.com