

FRI Oct 03

# Hip enough to care: pushing students to vote

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At the forefront of their minds that night was how lame all the 'get out the vote' initiatives were, says Dougherty in a phone interview.

by Brittany Mahaney



## APATHY IS BORING

Ilona Dougherty co-founded Apathy is Boring when she was 23. The organization aims to raise youth voter turnout ( Photo Provided)

At a party in January 2004, Ilona Dougherty, then 23, and two friends were hanging out and talking about the upcoming federal election.

At the forefront of their minds that night was how lame all the 'get out the vote' initiatives were, says Dougherty in a phone interview.

"We decided we could do something better," she says. "We figured we were all artists so we had the creativity factor down. It was just a matter of spreading the word."

This discussion gave birth to Apathy is Boring, a non-partisan organization that encourages active citizenry and voting in 18-35 year olds with the help of art, media and technology.

An overnight success, the organization was able to reach over 500,000 Canadian youth in a mere two months, according to the website.

It doesn't hurt that Dougherty is only 28 and can relate to youth voters.

She has lived in Saskatchewan, the Yukon and Montreal, and Dougherty says she has a good sense of what it's like to be a young person in both urban and rural Canada.

"The thing that's cool about a small town is that you probably know who the mayor is. It's a lot more

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accessible," she says. "However, sometimes there are communities that are remote and politicians don't make the effort to go there."

Regardless of size, studies by Elections Canada have indicated many communities across the nation have poor youth voting rates.

The organization attempts to inform and educate modern Canadian youth, who may not be drawn into current issues faced by political consumers. Dougherty says that one remedy is to expand civic education in high schools.

During her own high school career, Dougherty was actively involved in various committees and projects, even acting as chair of the Canadian Environmental Network Youth Caucus. She says experiencing politics at such a young age made her really think about pursuing activism.

Dougherty's roots may be the foundation of her activist spirit. She says her mother, a psychologist, and her father, a social activist, were very active in their community and instilled those values in her.

Studying dance and policy studies at Concordia University allowed Dougherty to fuse her two passions - art and activism - to apply creative solutions to relevant issues. They use fashion, art and music to get their message across.

Popular artists such as Chris Brown, Chantal Kreviazuk, and Zaki Ibrahim have pumped the crowd at civic duty rock concerts.

Dougherty says the two most inspiring voices she has come across are Raine Maida, former lead singer of Our Lady Peace, and Governor General Micha'le Jean.

"What I respect about both of them is their desire and ability to connect with youth and to inspire those around them to work for change," she says. "They also both have an incredible analysis of the intersection of art and democracy, and how powerful that can be."

Dougherty says youth experience cynicism and are disconnected from politics - they are virtually an untapped generation. They are underrepresented in the House of Commons partly because politicians are not making an effort in areas that matter to youth, such as the environment and job opportunities, she says. This lack of connection correlates with a low voter turnout.

"If you don't vote while you're a teen, it's likely you won't vote when you're older," Dougherty says.

Since the organization's conception, youth voting rates have consistently gone up, she says. Although Dougherty says the organization would not take full responsibility for the increase, she likes to think they are part of the solution.

Because the organization is non-partisan, Dougherty couldn't comment on the current election, though she says she hopes young people will go out and vote.

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