



DEDICATION

To All Young People

Imagine what it must be like to be a young person in 2021.

It's been a privilege and an honor to work alongside multicultural youth for the last 20 years. They are my teachers. I've learned so much from them as I imagine walking in their shoes. Young people are precious. They give us hope for the future.

However, it's really tough to be a young person in today's world. It's a time when they are trying to find themselves and their place in the world. But just as they are really ready to explore the world, they find themselves trapped in lockdown, not knowing when they can go out and continue their journey toward adulthood. It's hard to make any plans. They feel confused, frustrated, and lost. Sometimes they can't even imagine a future.

At the beginning of every Summit, I welcome our new youth delegates with a heartfelt apology: "I'm sorry." I am truly sorry that our generation has left them with such a mess. But I also tell them that we will do whatever we can to support them and give them the tools they need to plan for their lives, so that they can help their families, their communities, and our world.

Young people today are searching for ways to build a better world. They want to make a living while rebuilding the planet. While it's estimated that there will be over 10 million new jobs in the green economy, young people aren't being connected with these career pathways. Up until now climate change and sustainability solutions aren't taught in our classrooms. Schools just aren't prepared to guide them as they navigate through this 21st century. From the burdens of testing and standards, and then adapting to the new world of virtual learning during the pandemic, our teachers are stretched very thin. And given the current economy, young people are losing hope that they will be able to find a meaningful career, or even a job with a living wage. Young people of color are the most adversely affected. Our global youth are just simply trying to survive. And they are all doing

whatever they can to alert us to what is really happening in the rest of the world.

Mental health is a very real problem for young people - with few available resources, especially for our multicultural youth. Counseling is expensive - so they are too often prescribed drugs to just numb their pain. And the age of 19 is when young people are at increased risk of having a psychotic break, which can permanently alter the entire course of one's life.

We are losing far too many of them. It is devastating for a family to lose a child. When my 19-year-old brother Chris died in a car accident, it shattered my family. As the youngest of 10 children, Chris was larger than life. His passing left a huge hole in my heart. As part of my own healing journey, I dedicated my first book, and the Institute's work to his memory. His spirit lives on in all the young people we work with.

In 2019, the Institute lost its first youth leader. At 21 years old, Jackie Norborikawa had her whole life ahead of her. She had traveled from her home in Hawaii to Martha's Vineyard to serve as a youth delegate to the Institute's Youth Leadership Summit. She loved New England, and chose to brave the cold winters to attend Champlain College in Vermont. Everyone was shocked at her sudden passing from colon cancer. Our young people remember Jackie as being "full of light, inspiring and spreading love to everyone she met." While in college, Jackie served as a Summit facilitator, working with our new youth delegates. She was always helpful, dependable, honest, and a true leader. "Whenever someone was upset Jackie knew how to talk to them and help them to calm down and see the bigger picture," one delegate remembers. "She was a kind and unapologetic leader who wasn't afraid to share her opinions, and yet listened to others," says another.

Young people have the energy, the desire, the will, the generosity, and the intelligence, creativity and courage to roll up their sleeves and do what has to be done to heal our world. We just have to be willing to help them do it. I'm grateful to all those who have mentored our youth over the years. Our young people need our support now more than ever. Imagine if each one of us reached out to the young people in our lives, in our communities, to lend a hand, open a door, share our gifts and skills!

I'm always touched to see just how much youth leaders care about and want to help younger people. They have a natural inclination to share what they have learned. To try to help them avoid the mistakes they have made. Help them learn how to navigate the system. And talk with them about the big questions -- about what's really important.

Whenever I'm looking for an answer to a problem, I ask the young people, what do they think? And given that the Institute's mission is to empower them, we ask, and then we really listen to them. Today I asked them why this book is important to them, and here is what they told me: "We want to be heard! This book tells the stories of young people who want to be heard. Sometimes we think we need to do big things. But if one person does just one thing, and then others join them, it starts a chain." "To bring hope and light into the world." And "To read these stories inspires people to say 'I can do it too!'"

This book is dedicated to all young people. May we listen to them. May we learn from them. May we amplify their voices. May we shine light on them and their message. May we join with them to build a more just, equitable, and sustainable world.

Marianne Larned

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