



# Sowing Seeds of Change: Green Jobs Impacts Urban Forests

**L**ocal Enhancement and Appreciation of Forests (LEAF) is an organization whose mission to grow and sustain the urban forest by providing quality services and programs to communities is strengthened by its commitment to diversity and inclusion. Through their Young Urban Forest Leaders (YUFL) Program, LEAF provides free training and mentorship along with valuable arboriculture, urban forestry, and community engagement experience to Toronto youth from equity-deserving groups, including women, non-binary people, Indigenous peoples, newcomers, 2SLGBTQ+ persons, racialized individuals, and others.

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After completing the YUFL program, Natasha was thrilled to discover LEAF was hiring a Naturalization Assistant for the fall season, a position that was supported by CPRA's Green Jobs Initiative, funded by the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Skills Strategy (YESS) program. "I applied for the role with the hope of being able to continue learning about how to care for the urban forest while working with an incredibly kind and knowledgeable team," shares Natasha.



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The TCHC Planting and Stewardship Program is implemented by LEAF, TCHC and the City of Toronto. It is funded by the City of Toronto through an Urban Forestry Grant and the TD Green Space Grant program from TD Bank Group and the Arbor Day Foundation.

The Young Urban Forest Leaders Program is funded in part by a City of Toronto Urban Forestry Grant and the Canadian Tree Fund.

The fall planting and stewardship events are supported by the Regional Municipality of York, City of Richmond Hill, Township of King, Town of Whitby, City of Oshawa, Ontario Power Generation, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Trees for Life and G&L Group.



*"This opportunity meant the world to me! The role was a fantastic opportunity to begin the work I plan on doing for the rest of my career." says Natasha, Naturalization Assistant*

As the Naturalization Assistant, Natasha played a pivotal role in LEAF's mission to enhance local green spaces and foster a deeper connection between communities and their natural surroundings. In her day-to-day role, she found fulfillment in supporting community planting events by conducting tree-planting demonstrations, engaging participants and volunteers, and cultivating an inclusive and educational experience for all.

Through naturalization monitoring of public planting sites, Natasha greatly increased her knowledge and improved her skills. She became proficient in plant identification and enriched her understanding of urban forest care through workshops with field experts. Natasha's dedication went beyond technical skills as she became a catalyst for meaningful conversations about the value of environmental stewardship within the community. Natasha's impact on local green spaces was substantial. Engaging more than 400 participants in six naturalization events, Natasha contributed to growing the urban forest and left a lasting impression on community members. Her passion for nature and the urban forest became a source of inspiration for those involved in LEAF's programs.

For Brian, Natasha's direct supervisor and the Community Programs Manager at LEAF, her contributions were indispensable. "The support that Natasha provided to our team was incredibly valuable. We simply could not have had such a successful season without her." The impact of Natasha's work extended beyond LEAF; it resonated deeply with the communities they served.

Brian expresses gratitude to CPRA for including the Naturalization Assistant role in the Green Jobs Initiative, emphasizing the essential support it provides to LEAF's program. "This opportunity means a great deal to me, personally, and to LEAF as it allows us to effectively provide high-quality programs and events to communities across the GTA." This fall, Brian and the team planted 1,800 native trees and shrubs on public land. They also supported LEAF's Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) Planting and Stewardship Program, which aims to engage tenants and staff in TCHC communities to improve the local tree canopy, providing tenants with the many benefits that trees offer.

Natasha's role wasn't just about planting trees; it was about sowing the seeds of community engagement, nurturing them with knowledge and passion, and reaping the benefits in the form of a greener, connected, and more vibrant community. In her own words, "This opportunity meant the world to me! The role was a fantastic opportunity to begin the work I plan on doing for the rest of my career."

As Natasha continues her journey toward protecting and restoring nature in urban areas through community engagement, her time as a Naturalization Assistant will undoubtedly serve as a foundation for the positive impact she aspires to make in the future. The success story of Natasha and LEAF exemplifies the meaningful outcomes that are possible through CPRA's Green Jobs Initiative and the dedication of individuals committed to environmental conservation.

