Policy priorities in support of children and youth take centre stage at Queen’s Park reception hosted by the School of Public Policy & Administration

As part of its outreach and celebration of public service, the School of Public Policy and Administration (SPPA) hosted its annual spring reception on March 27, 2018 at Queen’s Park to bring together policymakers and professionals from the public and not-for-profit sectors with faculty, students and alumni. The focus of this year’s reception was policy priorities in support of children and youth.

“It is well documented that the early years of our lives have a profound and long-lasting impact on all of us. While we may face different challenges, it is important to try to ensure that we all have opportunities and a chance to overcome those challenges.” – Professor Alena Kimakova, Director of the School, noted in her opening remarks. She also explained that the work of Irwin Elman, the first Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth of Ontario, had served as an inspiration for the theme of the event based on the recommendation of a Master of Public Policy, Administration and Law (MPPAL) student who worked in his office and had the opportunity to observe his work first-hand.

Elman, currently serving his second term as the independent Provincial Advocate, spoke to the importance of giving children and youth a voice. He shared a moving account of a young woman who had spent many years in the child welfare system facing abrupt, dramatic changes in her life without any opportunity to shape the decisions made on her behalf. This experience of not having an ability to provide input and maintain control led her to give up on any long-term planning, which became a way of life and thinking. Elman emphasized that while this particular example of not having a voice came from the child welfare system, he had encountered similar experiences and the same sense of disenfranchisement working with youth with disabilities and other challenges. Stakeholder input is an integral part of policy making and service delivery and Elman urged everyone to remember to create channels for children and youth to provide their input.
The Hon. Sophie Kiwala, Member of Provincial Parliament for Kingston and the Islands, and Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Children and Youth Services as well as the Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliations, shared her experiences working with indigenous children in Northern Ontario communities and the Right to Play initiative. Professor Kimakova also highlighted MPP Kiwala’s support for the National Aboriginal Organizations’ call on the federal government for a national public inquiry into missing and murdered Aboriginal women with a private members’ motion, which was passed in 2014.

The remaining two speakers at the event focused on the economic empowerment of youth by supporting successful transition to the workplace. Aretha Constant, Director of Integrity Operations at Employment and Social Development Canada/Service Canada spoke to the federal government’s initiatives in support of youth such as the Federal Student Work Experience Program and the Canada Student Loans Program. Julia Deans, CEO of Futurpreneur Canada, a national non-profit organization dedicated to providing assistance with start-ups, including business skills coaching, financing and mentoring, highlighted the growing role of entrepreneurship in our changing world of work.
Aretha Constant in the centre with MPPAL students Mary Anne Forcadilla (left) and Avesta Naseer (right)

MPPAL alumni Kevin Giddings and Romina Chencheva

Graduate Program Director Dagmar Soennecken in the centre with MPPAL students Jocelyn McCauley (left) and Lisa Druchok (right)

Professor Brenda Spotton Visano with President Emeritus Ian Macdonald
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Overview of the potential of disruptive technologies for public services - Diane Francis

Approaches for leveraging disruptive technologies for public services - Hilary Hartley (Chief Digital Officer, Government of Ontario)

Blockchain for Public Services - Kevin Armstrong (Partner, Deloitte)

Autonomous Vehicles - Ryan Lanyon (Autonomous Vehicles Working Group, City of Toronto)

Artificial Intelligence & Robotics Process Automation - Alida Meghji (Cognitive Advantage Lead, Deloitte)

Location: Deloitte, 8 Adelaide Street West, Toronto

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