



## **iCAN Make A Difference**

Meet Vivian Tsang

Age: 23

Chapter: KidsCan Vancouver, Canada

Joined iCAN: 2014

Future Plans: MD graduating in 2021 University of British Columbia, MPH either the Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health or the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Favorite iCAN Moment: Playing a key role in creating the network from the beginning stages and seeing youth thrive! I loved being able to empower them through research and advocacy throughout the last 5 years.

I've been asked to share a little about my journey from high school and how I came to be a part of this incredible journey as part of the iCAN family. To bring it back to my teenage years, my own journey in medicine began under the quiet hum of fluorescent hospital lights. I remember well the blue gown that draped over my small body as a pediatric research study participant at the British Columbia Children's Hospital, the tertiary hospital for our province. This experience, though daunting for any 15-year-old, catalyzed a transformation in my timid soft-spoken self. However, as a research participant, it was also through this encounter that I had my first brush with research and academia. I realized the lack of upstream involvement of youth in defining research outcomes and priorities.

This catalyzed my involvement in KidsCan at BC Children's Hospital- the first pediatric advisory group in Canada focused on research. I have played a leadership role in KidsCan over the past seven years and have expanded KidsCan nationally, successfully connecting eight pediatric tertiary care hospitals in a novel pan-Canadian network - an instrumental resource for early-practice clinicians or those from low-resource communities wishing to acquire research funding.

My academic path in university lead me through many twists and turns – a switch of majors, multiple changes in classes, and the ultimate decision to pursue medicine. I started off my undergraduate degree in pharmacology – studying the effects of medications on the human body. However, after much introspection, I realized I didn't enjoy working solely in the laboratory and sought out a major that would align closer to my interests outside of classes. This landed me in a public health and therapeutics degree – integrating my previous foundation of knowledge from my pharmacology classes with relevant applications in global health. This decision also allowed me to bolster my skillset in conducting research especially with vulnerable demographics. This somewhat convoluted path through university has helped me become more critical of who I am and the solutions I hope to be a part of in the world.

There are so many issues to care about which, I understand, can often be paralyzing. However, I like to remind young people that no matter what they choose to do, it is important to select a field where they are part of a purpose bigger than themselves and can find heroes to look up to. For myself, it was Dr. Anne Junker, the pediatrician lead for the initial KidsCan program who left a huge impact on me and implicitly inspired my desire to go into medicine. As a supporter of children and youth, Anne mentored me throughout the past eight years and journeyed alongside my many life transitions – from high school

to university and into medical school. It is both humbling and inspiring to walk in the path of the giants who came before me and to understand that the path to making a difference necessitates a team of supporters, mentors, cheerleaders, family, and friends.

Aside from pediatrics research, the narrative of my life revolves around reshaping healthcare access for the world's poorest communities. Often using unconventional methodology, I have challenged myself to approach systemic issues from new angles. In 2012 I spearheaded my own non-profit organization, recognizing the lack of access youth in poverty have to higher education. Now supported by the Clinton Foundation, our flagship program, HOPE for Success has supported over 3000 at-risk youth in novel one-on-one longitudinal mentorship programs in high schools across BC. In medical school, I investigated non-contact respiratory monitoring to mitigate opioid overdose deaths with the BC Centre for Disease Control and partnered with the Canadian Broadcasting Channel to create guidelines for appropriate media portrayal of supervised injection sites and people who use drugs. This has given me the opportunity to speak on topics from educational reform to stigmatization and the opioid overdose, to over 40,000 youth across Canada through TEDx and WE Day.

My commitment to the most vulnerable demographics in Canada inspired me to apply similar lessons internationally. Last summer, I applied an innovative educational curriculum on a twelve-year occupational health project serving healthcare workers in Zimbabwe and South Africa to lower rates of HIV/tuberculosis infection - conditions rooted in oppression as a result of apartheid history. In the following months, I had the privilege of being challenged to address these harsh realities again as the first intern selected by the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases at the World Health Organization (WHO).

Along with the privilege of being a physician comes responsibility to understand nuances that accompany suffering and pain, to advocate for those who stare up at the same fluorescent lights that glared at me so many years ago. I hope to dedicate my life to freeing populations restrained by flawed healthcare systems and empowering individuals at the fringes of society.