

AGENTS OF CHANGE Eleven Torontonians who are building a better city

This is the fifth part in a series exploring how 11 groups and individuals plan to make Toronto a better place through the Centre for Social Innovation's Agents of Change program. Each is being set up for a year with tools, ranging from work space to contacts, aimed at turning ideas into reality.

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Chad Craig, left, and Lucas Medina. CONTRIBUTED

Filling a diversity gap in foster care

Lucas Medina and Chad Craig are looking to change the lives of foster children who fall along what Medina calls the rainbow spectrum.

The couple's venture — Five/Fourteen — is a foster placement agency focused on providing a safe space for youth who identify under any part of the LGBTQ2A acronym.

Medina himself grew

up a crown ward. From age eight to 17, he lived in the same evangelical foster home, uncomfortable to come out. When he was 16, his foster mother discovered he was gay and left him a note deeming him a "boarder." He left soon after.

Because of the way children are placed in the foster-care system — as boys or girls — there is no system in place to help a child transition if, for example, a boy at

eight self-identifies as a girl.

When foster agencies think of an 11-year-old saying they're gay, Medina said, they think of gay sex instead of focusing on the fact that the child is declaring an identity they understand.

The vision for the agency has two parts. It brings kids on the rainbow spectrum into Toronto to be placed with families who have ties to the gay community. It also functions as a transitional spot for young people aging out of the foster-care system.

The company's name comes from May 14, which has been dubbed Children and Youth In Care Day for Ontario.

System limitations

"There seems to be a strange lack of being able to separate the concept of sexual orientation and sexual activity."

Lucas Medina, co-founder Five/Fourteen

A collaborative approach to shaping their city

Liz Rykert and Caitlin Colson believe city-building is for everyone.

To facilitate their philosophy, the two network developers created Shape My City, a free social network that helps passionate Torontonians develop their causes.

The platform connects and encourages individuals, groups and organizations with similar causes. Users range from grassroots activists concerned about the Gardiner to neighbourhood advocates calling for cleaner parks.

The pair met when Colson began a mentorship with Rykert, who had discovered there was no place online to connect groups working toward similar goals.

"It comes down to how people connect with each other," Rykert said. "How you help people collaborate and work more effectively together."

Unlike networks like LinkedIn, Shape My City (which launched last September), is a place to "get work done" beyond networking. The pair designed tools to make the site a practical place, rather than a "vague, nebulous network."

"It's about helping

people who have an idea actually bring it to life," Rykert said.

Users post ideas, projects and events. They form groups that can be seen by anyone. Groups are connected through a "virtual block" that helps users sort through content. Users can join or follow a project: Join, meaning they intend to take an active part in the group, and follow, to simply keep an eye on its pulse.

They can develop meetups, and organize projects according to 16 categories, including architecture and design, business, education and transportation.

The site has polling

Participation

235

Users connecting with each other on Shape My City.

tools, and ways to post for event volunteers. It has a radar that sorts content and alerts users to new causes they might be interested in.

"You don't have to be a politician. You don't need to be an architect. You can be a curious neighbour who wants to try something," said Colson. "That's really important to us, that people can see themselves as city shapers."



Liz Rykert, left, and Caitlin Colson. CONTRIBUTED



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