



Roman Wolfli, right, and Farrah Elgaweesh are two of the 100 youth meeting virtually with members of Canada's government to discuss steps toward tackling issues affecting youth. (Image credit: Joe Passaretti/CBC, submitted by Roman Wolfli and Farrah Elgaweesh)

# 'Children aren't listened to': Group hopes to bring kids' issues to government

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## From COVID-19 to education, Young Canadians' Parliament is raising concerns to Canada's decision- makers

Farrah Elgaweesh says she feels more stress and responsibility than a 14-year-old should.

Between babysitting her two-year-old sister at home in Edmonton and worrying about how school will work in the fall, she said she's battling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And it's not just her — Farrah says youth across Canada are struggling with issues and anxieties that have come up as a result of the virus.

So she's using a unique new platform just for kids to bring her concerns to the forefront.

Farrah is one of 100 students to participate in the first-ever virtual Young Canadians' Parliament.

Last month, she got together online with kids and teens aged eight to 18 to discuss issues that are important to them.

"As a student, I don't want COVID to [affect] my learning and schooling in the future after this crisis ends," Farrah said.

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The Young Canadians' Parliament is a group that formed in order to bridge the gap between kids and Canada's decision-makers (i.e. Members of Parliament who are elected across Canada and ministers who report directly to the prime minister).

## What is the Canadian Parliament?

You may be wondering what Canada's Parliament even looks like.

Picture this: Members of Parliament (MPs) sit in a big room in Ottawa (a.k.a. the House of Commons chamber) debating and voting on proposed laws.



Members seating of the House of Commons, which is located in the West Block, one of three buildings on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. (Image credit: Benoit Roussel/CBC)

The House of Commons and the Senate (a.k.a. a smaller group of accomplished people, appointed by the prime minister, who also help create new laws) make up Canada's Parliament.

Then there are ministers — politicians who lead certain sections of the government (think: transportation, environment, families and children).

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For Farrah, the Young Canadians' Parliament was an opportunity to discuss issues that kids like her are facing and bring them straight to the top.

She said that includes not only education but depression and loneliness among young people as well as a lack of physical activity throughout COVID-19.

## Kids introduce ideas to Parliament

The group held its first virtual session on June 18, where members brought up potential laws and ideas.

They're set to hold another virtual meeting on Thursday.



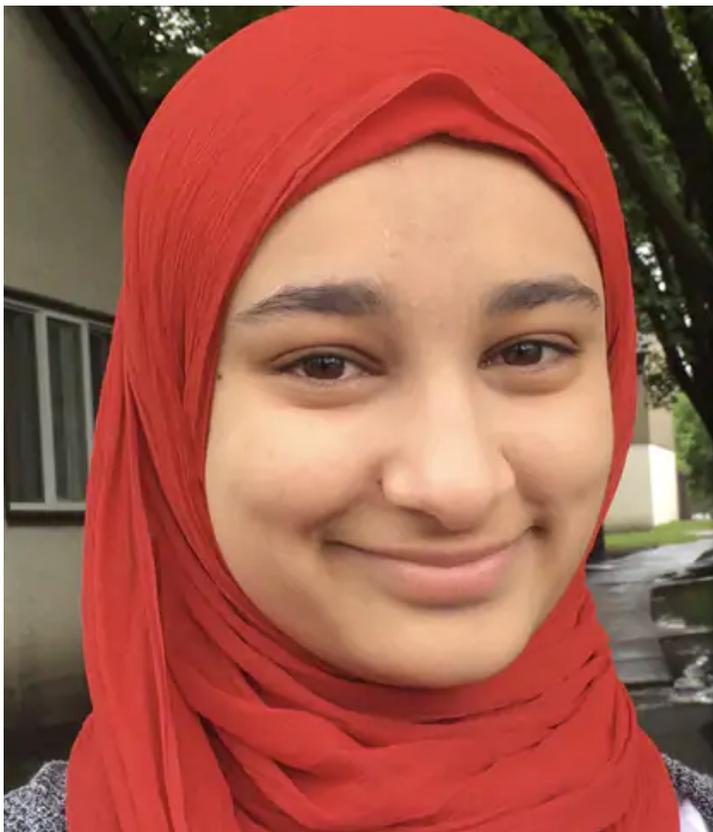
Parliament Hill, which is located in Ottawa, is home to Canada's federal government. (Image credit: alenAMiatlushka/Shutterstock)

Roman Wolfli, 13, from Calgary, said those involved can both learn about the democratic process as well as their rights as children.

"I've always felt that children aren't listened to as much as they should be and that their voices are on a significantly lower level than those of adults," Roman said.

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"Our rights, and standing up for our rights as children, is especially important."



Farrah Elgaweesh, left, and Roman Wolfli say it's empowering that the Canadian government is willing to consider the opinions and voices of youth. (Image credit: Submitted by Farrah Elgaweesh and Roman Wolfli)

Roman says it's important for kids to speak on behalf of other kids, and to shed light on alarming numbers concerning issues like poverty and mental health.

"It was very powerful to hear these statistics from the children themselves ... children who see these issues in their community and feel that action is necessary," he said.

Although there are countless issues that Roman says need to be addressed, the Young Canadians' Parliament is "a step in the right direction."

If you're interested in participating in the virtual sessions, or becoming a member of the group, you can reach out to Children First Canada or the Youth Advisory Council to learn more.

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