



2018-19 SHEELA BASRUR CENTRE

# A Year in Review

## Strengthening public health during times of change

**This has been a year of commemoration, marking the passage of a decade** since the opening of the Sheela Basrur Centre. Many initiatives have taken place to acknowledge this anniversary. Several of these activities paid tribute to Dr. Basrur's accomplishments, while other initiatives focused on enhancing the skills of our current workforce and the next generation of public health experts (read more in the article on page 6).

The skills and attributes of future public health leaders are showcased within this issue. This year's Student Travel Bursary recipient, Hannah Chan, just returned from Kenya after having spent 12 weeks working with local communities on agricultural and nutrition-based initiatives, advancing public health measures and outcomes, while improving food insecurity and health equity (Hannah's interview is on page 3). We also reconnected with 2015 Bursary award alumna, Annie Liang, who is currently working as a health analyst for the World Bank Group's Health, Nutrition, and Population Global Practice, focusing on the East and Southern Africa region. She has built an impressive career taking on roles in international organizations in the health operations and research/analytics sphere, often involved in innovative

health projects that include various partners and levels of government (see the article on page 8). It is this type of multi-sectoral stakeholder communications that will lead to the implementation of vital public health policies and programs, ultimately impacting and benefitting populations.

In reading about the experiences of our award recipients and alumni, we will take their lessons learned from the field and the on-the-job skills they've identified as essential into consideration when we move forward with our program planning for the future. We are also excited to engage the field in this conversation to support the design of programs that prepare the sector for the opportunities that lie ahead as we navigate through a changing landscape, promoting and protecting the health of Ontarians for years to come.



**Sheela Basrur Centre**



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## IN THIS EDITION

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- 3 Student Travel Bursary**  
Local Communities – Global Impacts
  
- 6 10-Year Anniversary**  
Commemorating all things SBC
  
- 8 SBC Alumni**  
Where are they now?  
Catching-up with SBC’s award alumni
  
- 10 Donate to SBC**  
Help support our next public health leaders

### COMING SOON

**Student Travel Bursary**

**Call for Applicants  
January 2020**

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**SBC @ The Ontario Public  
Health Convention (TOPHC)  
March 2020**

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# Local Communities – Global Impacts

## Improving large-scale issues through nutrition and agricultural public health programs

The Student Travel Bursary supports students in pursuing their travel placements abroad, enabling a deeper understanding of public health from an international perspective. Through this experience, students witness how public health programs work in diverse communities while enhancing their leadership skills.



Hannah Chan in Eldoret, Kenya.

**Hannah Chan** is a first year Master of Public Health (MPH) Nutrition and Dietetics student at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. This summer she completed a 12-week placement at Moi University in Eldoret, Kenya studying the impacts of colonialism on indigenous knowledge and practices related to food, nutrition, and agriculture.

We interviewed Hannah once she returned from her placement, as she recollected highlights from her travels to Africa and experiences working with local communities on agricultural and nutrition initiatives.

### **SBC:** What was the focus of your placement in Kenya?

**Hannah Chan:** I was in Kenya from June to the beginning of September completing a global health placement as part of the Collaborative Specialization in Global Health with my MPH Nutrition and Dietetics program. The focus of my placement in Kenya was to create an educational cookbook on the traditional and indigenous foods and crops found among the Kalenjin community in western Kenya. The goal of my placement was to identify indigenous and traditional crops that have the potential to improve food security, reduce micronutrient deficiencies, enhance smallholder farmer adaptation to climate-related changes and protect the traditional knowledge related to food and nutrition that is integral to the country's cultural framework. With the assistance of translators who were fluent in both Kiswahili and the local dialects, I conducted key informant interviews in Eldoret and in various surrounding communities and homesteads to identify traditional or indigenous crops, how to grow them, and provide recipes for cooking and storage.



Above: Dishwashing stand in Mosoriot.



Left: Pot of ugali made from maize flour.



Above: Kitchen in Kaptagat.

Through the connections I made during my placement, I was also able to attend rounds occasionally on the internal medicine unit at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital (MTRH) in Eldoret to witness the delivery and provision of inpatient healthcare services, alongside other American medical and pharmacy students completing rotations at MTRH.

**SBC: What would you say were the biggest nutritional challenges faced by the communities that you worked with?**

**HC:** During my field visits, it was very eye-opening to see the effects of climate-related changes (such as, irregular/unpredictable rainfall and temperatures) and its impact on agricultural productivity and crop yield. For example, maize production is very prevalent in Kenya but it is not a traditional or indigenous crop to the country. Its productivity and yield have been impacted by climate-related changes, having economic implications, especially in rural communities where livelihoods are agriculturally-based. The main staple food in Kenya is ugali, which is a stiff porridge made from ground maize flour mixed with water. In rural communities, ugali is usually eaten by hand with a variety of traditional vegetables which can be found and harvested wild. Meat is less commonly eaten, with the main protein source being

milk. It was really interesting to learn how ugali was traditionally made with a mixture of millet and sorghum, both of which are traditional and indigenous crops in Kenya and more nutrient dense than maize.

**SBC: How will the educational cookbook impact communities in Kenya and improve public health outcomes?**

**HC:** The cookbook is close to being completed and I am finishing the final round of edits. It will be used as an early conversation-starting tool as part of my supervisor's long-term vision to improve food

sovereignty, food security and health equity in the context of sustainable food systems in western Kenya. As part of that process, the cookbook will be used as a knowledge translation product relevant to indigenous communities in Kenya that will help populations struggling to cope with a rapidly changing climate and other land use issues to adapt and better integrate indigenous and traditional food sources into their diets.

**SBC: What aspect of your placement did you find the most challenging?**

**HC:** The aspect of my placement that I found to be the most challenging was navigating differences in language and culture in Kenya. I was very fortunate and grateful to have the incredible support of my supervisors and translators in the field. I gained confidence and competence in designing, piloting and implementing an interview tool that was understandable, meaningful, and culturally-sensitive. I also learned the importance of being flexible, anticipating and trouble-shooting challenges, in addition to considering and reflecting on your position when conducting practice-based research.

Right: Hannah and a community resident.

Below: Interior (top) and exterior (bottom) of a traditional kitchen in Mosoriot.



**SBC: What was your biggest professional and personal take-away from this experience? Has your placement changed your perspective and/or influenced any future career aspirations?**

**HC:** Living in Kenya allowed me to witness many of the social determinants of health in action, including the impacts of difficulties in accessing health services, education and employment. I also experienced challenges in the built environment of cities and rural communities, but at the same time I was able to absorb a culture with an unmatched sense of community, generosity, and resiliency. Throughout the placement, I connected with medical and pharmacy students from various universities in the United States. The conversations we shared were incredibly enriching in broadening my perspective of the perceptions and realities of the provision of healthcare services in different countries.

My experiences in Kenya demonstrated that tackling global issues—whether that’s climate change, or food security, or chronic disease prevention—requires transdisciplinary cooperation and collaboration and targeted interventions in local communities can have global impacts. I will definitely be applying what I have learned about the food, agricultural,

and health care systems in Kenya to my future career as a registered dietitian and public health professional, and this placement has reinforced my career aspirations of continuing to tackle global food, nutrition, and agricultural issues through the lens of sustainable food systems.

**SBC: Would you like to return to Kenya in the future?**

**HC:** Absolutely! My time in Kenya was eye-opening, challenging, enriching, and instrumental in propelling both my professional and personal growth and resiliency in living and working abroad. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to pursue an international placement and I thank the Sheela Basrur Centre for helping to make this possible.

**We congratulate Hannah on the important contributions she is making to public health and the creation of important knowledge products. This unique placement experience provided Hannah with an opportunity to advance public health measures and outcomes, greatly impacting developing communities, while improving food security, nutrition and health equity.**

# Commemorating all things SBC



Peter Donnelly, Public Health Ontario President and Chief Executive Officer, at the TOPHC 2019 podium paying tribute to former Chief Medical Officer of Health, the late Dr. Sheela Basrur (on-screen). Photo credit: Desmond Blackman.

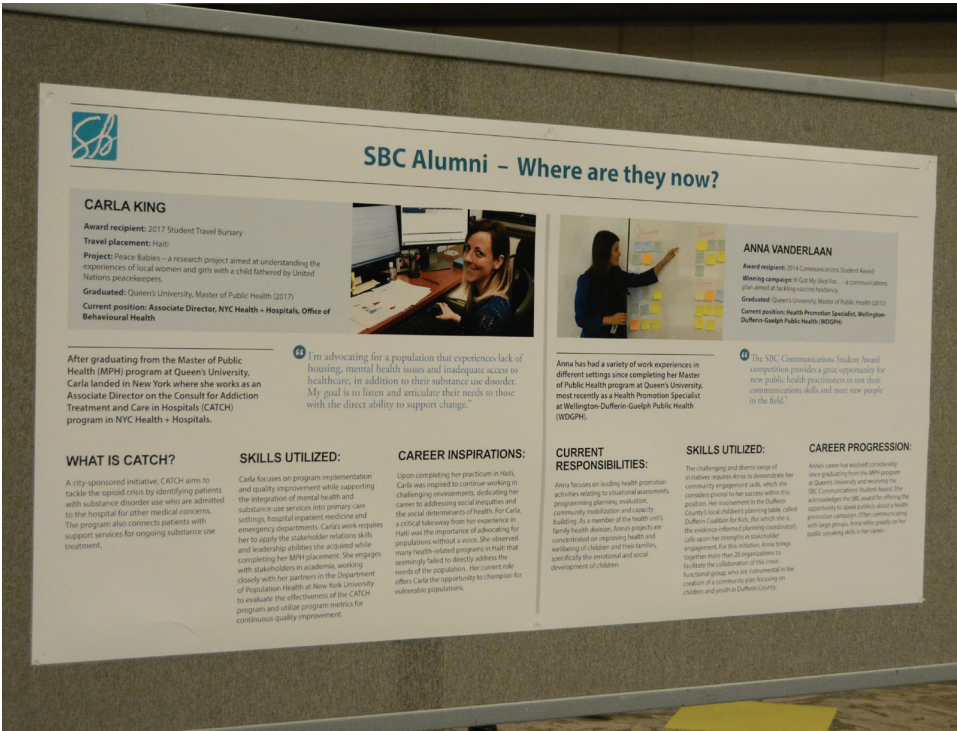
**T**his year marks the tenth anniversary of the opening of the Sheela Basrur Centre. To honour this milestone, SBC offered several commemorative initiatives at The Ontario Public Health Convention (TOPHC). To honour Dr. Basrur's legacy, these initiatives were reflective of the Centre's vision and areas that she was passionate about, while turning our attention towards the next generation of public health professionals.

Opening the conference was a tribute video highlighting Dr. Basrur's many contributions to public health. The video touched upon Dr. Basrur's career accomplishments and paid homage to an outstanding public health leader, providing inspiration to the younger generations of aspiring public health leaders. Visit the [SBC website](#) to watch the video.

The accomplishments of our SBC alumni were captured in poster format and showcased at TOPHC. The 2018 Student Travel Bursary recipient, Leah Shipton, featured highlights from her placement at the World Health Organization last

summer. Leah's placement focused on initiatives centred on public health policy, human rights and global governance. Her interactive poster also featured an audio component, sharing tips for students to help them prepare for their public health placements.

We also tracked the career paths of some of our former student award recipients. Our 2014 SBC Communications Student Award recipient, Anna Vanderlaan and our 2017 Student Travel Bursary recipient, Carla King, shared details about their recent career accomplishments. Anna is currently at Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health working as a Health Promotion Specialist, leading health promotion activities related to situational assessments, program planning, evaluation, community mobilization and capacity building. Carla is contributing to the Consult for Addiction Treatment and Care (CATCH) program at NYC Health + Hospitals working on program implementation and quality improvement. These posters demonstrated the value and impact of SBC student programs, illustrating how



Left: SBC alumni, Carla King and Anna Vanderlaan, featured in a TOPHC poster. Photo credit: Desmond Blackman.

the Centre's programs help in shaping the career paths of future public health experts.

Dr. Eileen de Villa, Medical Officer of Health for the City of Toronto, gave opening remarks during the SBC full-day workshop, *Measuring and Communicating the Value and Impact of Public Health*. This workshop took place at the conference and offered public health professionals support in quantifying and communicating the importance of public health programs. This was an opportunity for those in the sector to share their experiences and lessons learned, while speakers focused on economic evaluation in a practical context to demonstrate its application to everyday work in public health. Groups also engaged in several communications activities, intended to enhance communications with different stakeholders to convey the importance of public health initiatives. The skills learned were very much aligned with Dr. Basur's unique abilities in expressing the economic value of the work that we do, while defining the significance and reach of public health programs in ways easily understood by different stakeholders.

If these activities are any indication of what may be in store for the Centre, we look forward to future SBC offerings and what may transpire over the next 10 years at the Centre.



Middle/Bottom: SBC workshop at TOPHC 2019. Photo credit: Desmond Blackman.

## Where are they now? Catching-up with SBC's award alumni

We caught up with our award alumna, Annie Liang, to get an update on how her career has progressed since receiving the 2015 Student Travel Bursary and how it inspired her professional path.



Annie Liang (centre) with the Kenya Non-Communicable Diseases Country Pilot project team.

Having held positions at various health organizations since graduating from the University of Toronto, Master of Public Health (MPH) program, Annie presently works as a health analyst for the World Bank Group's Health, Nutrition, and Population Global Practice, with a regional focus in the East and Southern Africa region. She is part of the 2017 World Bank Group Analyst Program cohort, which is a specialized recruitment program for high-achieving young professionals in international development. Only 13 individuals were selected to be part of this prestigious group, out of approximately 14,000 applications during her recruitment year.

In her current role, she splits her time between supporting the World Bank's health operations in-country and on research and analytics that inform the day-to-day work within the health sector.

economic analyses for project impact and participating in client negotiations.

The research component of Annie's job requires her to work closely with task teams on reports and publications that inform different health priorities in various regions in Africa (Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Lesotho, and Namibia) and she often travels between these countries and the United States. Her work encompasses systematic reviews on health interventions, public expenditure reviews in the health sector, coordinating in-country workshops and identifying knowledge-sharing opportunities.

A significant part of her current position involves stakeholder communications. In preparing health projects, she frequently interacts with technical teams at the respective Ministries of Health for the various countries within her portfolio. Annie



Annie Liang and stakeholders attend the social and environmental safeguards assessment for a World Bank project in Kenya.

deploys partners on the ground to co-design health projects, ensures coordination/ synergies between project elements and briefs stakeholders on upcoming projects. She also works with local implementing agencies to design the best communication platforms to disseminate health messages to target beneficiary groups.

Annie's career has taken her in different directions, work settings and countries. Prior to joining the World Bank, she worked at Doctors without Borders/ Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) as an intersectional Telemedicine Services Coordinator. In this role, Annie coordinated the piloting and scale-up of telemedicine technologies to all MSF field sites across 69 countries and the sensitization of telemedicine to all MSF Operational Centers in headquarters. She worked between Toronto, Geneva and Barcelona and interacted closely with the MSF field teams by providing operational support on telemedicine, troubleshooting technology challenges, mapping of technology needs based on field concerns and analyzing/ visualizing field data.



Annie Liang (front row, centre right) at a World Bank-convened workshop in Botswana in May 2019.

The SBC Student Travel Bursary award was pivotal in allowing Annie to extend her practicum field experience in East Africa (eight months). Her experience abroad also impacted her on a personal level and influenced her perspective on international development and global inequities. She explains, **“the painful stories my peers had courageously shared with me in Kenya are stories I will carry with me my entire lifetime and continue to provide me a sense of purpose during the most frustrating of times.”**

The experience acquired through her MPH practicum holds special significance to Annie, helping shape her career path. In her current position at the World Bank, she is often approached by students seeking career advice. She advises students to spend at least six months working in the field at the grassroots level to become immersed in the community, witnessing public health programs in action. Annie encourages students to, “listen to the stories of the community members and let your heart be broken”, adding, “you have your entire life ahead of you to work in big international organizations, but you will not always be able to work in the field.”

According to Annie, the skills learned in the field are invaluable in providing context and understanding of the daily realities of the communities served and points out, “unless you have spent significant time in the field, you will not have the lived experiences and street-smarts to navigate the politics in-country.” The time spent in the field provides those just starting their careers with unique insight and knowledge that would not be offered elsewhere, as observed by Annie who notes, **“unless you have worked in the field, you will not be able to properly advocate for your end beneficiaries, which is a skill required in more senior level positions.”**

Youth empowerment is something Annie is deeply passionate about and this year she is leading the World Bank's Youth Summit's social innovation competition. This annual event engages youth globally and focuses on the most pressing international development topics facing younger generations. Annie's team of World Bank staff (under 35 years old) have dedicated their free time and evenings on a voluntary basis to organize this event, which is expected to be attended by over 400 youth from across 117 countries. This year's competition topic is "smarter cities for a resilient future", focusing on pressing global issues to tackle climate change and pollution, in addition to urban inclusion and equity.

**A special thanks to our award alumna, Annie, for her contributions to this article. SBC is pleased to have supported Annie in her career development.**

# Help support our next public health leaders

SBC training programs and awards are geared towards public health professionals and students, with a focus on communications and leadership development.

We are looking for generous supporters like you to contribute to the Centre to help us continue delivering our successful public health professional development programs. Your contribution means professionals and students across Ontario can strengthen their skills to become tomorrow's public health leaders.



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**Ours programs** are essential to the renewal of public health in Ontario. As public health issues continue to make headlines, our work in this sector is vital to the health and well-being of all Ontarians. The knowledge and training acquired through our programs and awards help to build capacity of future public health leaders and strengthen the public health system in Ontario.

Visit our website to learn more about what programs we offer [students](#) and [professionals](#).

## Support SBC by giving to the Sheela Basrur Fund

Contributions made to the [Sheela Basrur Fund](#) support the Centre's programs and activities. Your donation will help provide current and emerging public health professionals access to experts in the media and public health sector, cutting-edge information and knowledge, as well as a wide range of communications resources.

## Donate your public speaking proceeds

Do you have a speaking engagement coming up? Consider donating your proceeds to the Centre through the [Sheela Basrur Fund](#).

**All donations are tax-deductible** and are managed by our partner the [Toronto Foundation](#), a registered, public, non-profit organization that connects philanthropy with community needs and opportunities.

## Be part of the leaders for change

Join our growing network of supporters by becoming an SBC champion. Help spread the word about SBC's programs by:

- promoting the Centre at your next event;
- sharing SBC promotional materials ([email us](#) for details);
- encouraging your colleagues to sign up for our [newsletter](#).

## Interested in supporting SBC?

We would love to hear from you. If you are interested in donating, becoming an SBC champion or have any questions, please contact us at 647-260-7100 or [SBC@oahpp.ca](mailto:SBC@oahpp.ca).

[Donate to the Sheela Basrur Centre](#)