

Emerging Teen Voice in HIV advocacy named finalist for prestigious Canadian Loran Award

17-year-old Arihant Boli, a Youth-HIV activist from Brampton, ON, stands out among over 5,200 to become a finalist for Canada's prestigious Loran Award

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-- Arihant Boli, a 17-year-old from Brampton, Ontario, has been recognized for his extraordinary work in HIV/AIDS advocacy by being selected as a finalist for the Loran Award. This prestigious scholarship, valued at more than \$100,000, is Canada's main four-year award for undergraduate students. It looks for individuals who have shown character, a spirit of service, and leadership. Boli stood out in a field of over 5,200 candidates, making it to the final group of 90, who will be interviewed for the top prize at the BMO IFL Centre this February 23-25, 2024.



Arihant Boli at NoTimeToWait 2023, Canada's largest Youth-HIV Conference

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Arihant Boli

Arihant's community work through LetsStopAIDS, which he joined at the young age of 13, challenges deep-seated stigmas and taboos, particularly among young people from marginalized and underrepresented communities.

Reflecting on the choice to join LetsStopAIDS at a young age, Arihant admitted, "At the time, it felt like I was rebelling against my family's values. I told my mom about the opportunity to become an HIV advocate, and her exact response was 'you are crazy if you think we are going to

allow you to do this! But I felt driven by the desire to challenge the painful stereotypes I saw, including those affecting my home, my South Asian culture, and my community".

LetsStopAIDS, started in 2004 by Shamin Mohamed Jr, a 15-year-old who saw the misinformed

stances on sexual and reproductive health in his own high school, was a rallying flag for Arihant. Here, he found that it wasn't just about rebelling or being controversial. Instead, it was about opening up discussions, teaching, and learning what it means to turn supposed societal challenges into conversations.

Discussing his strategy, Arihant shared, "My action was to turn our prejudices into engagement, to involve ourselves in bigger dialogues. How can we, as a team, teach and talk about our bigger communities and empower others to transcend from minor interest to massive social drive? That's what we did. That's what makes this group so inspiring."

As Arihant goes to the finalists' interviews, he is excited about the endless opportunities with the Loran Award - from the vast alumni network to the summer experiences and mentorship. Arihant sees the unique similarities between the values of LetsStopAIDS and the Loran Award - their shared people-centric nature. He marvels at "how both organizations are based in a common belief in young people as individuals and future leaders" and how "there is unlimited opportunity to spotlight and grow their stories and experiences."

Learn more about LetsStopAIDS: www.LetsStopAIDS.org

Become a volunteer: <https://www.letsstopaids.org/getinvolved>

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