



## Board of Directors

News

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November 19, 2016

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### Jennifer Graham - President

Jennifer Graham was born with a CHD - congenitally corrected transposition of the great arteries (ccTGA). Jennifer has been a part of CCHA since 2006. She graduated from Carleton University with a B.Sc Hon in Biology and Psychology. During her career she has held various positions including Project Manager, Computer System designer and developer, Process Re-engineering Analyst and National Trainer in the Insurance and Pharmaceutical industries.

While part of the CCHA team, she has helped organize events fundraising and social events as well as, represent CCHA at CCS Congress and various patient education conferences across Canada, the Sick Kids Family Education Days, Sick Kids Transition Nights and ISACHD symposium.

In 2010, Jennifer initiated the partnership between CCHA and the Cardiac Health Foundation of Canada in their annual Walk of Life fundraiser, to raise funds for CCHA programs and cardiac rehabilitation programs across Canada, programs often used by CHD patients. Since then Jennifer has organized CCHA's team each May and to date they have raised almost \$85,000. In 2012 she was invited by the Cardiac Health Foundation to join their Walk of Life's organizing committee. In 2013 she joined CCHA's board of directors.

Personally, Jennifer enjoys travelling around the world, cottaging and spending time with her family and friends.



### **Priyanka Kugamoorthy - Vice President**

Dr. Priyanka Kugamoorthy has been a life-long advocate for CHD as her journey began before she was even born. Her mother was born with Aortic Stenosis which led to her becoming one of the first women in the world to undergo an Aortic Balloon Valvuloplasty while pregnant with Priyanka; leading to her healthy delivery and setting up for the Ross Procedure to be performed 3 years later.

This piqued Priyanka's ambition to obtain her Doctor of Medicine and eventually join the physicians that helped save her mother's life. She currently works in the Heart and Pregnancy Program and the Inherited Arrhythmia Program within the Department of Cardiology at both University Health Network and The Hospital for Sick Children, working with high-risk pregnant women who have heart disease. She has been heavily involved in research and publications with the purpose of innovatively treating various congenital heart disease and arrhythmias in pregnant women as well as bringing community awareness from an academic perspective.

In her spare time, Priyanka enjoys creative writing, international music and submerging herself in nature by hiking with her family and being out on the water.



### **Bengy Mercier - Treasurer**

Bengy is the mother of two kids, a little boy (January 2014) and a little girl (March 2018) born with Tetralogy of Fallot with absent pulmonary valve syndrome.

She has a bachelor's degree in Computer Science, and she is currently working as an IT Analyst. Bengy lives in Montreal and loves spending time and enjoying all the little moments with her husband and children, she likes to travel, to sing and to support people in need.



### **Amanda Fregonas - Secretary**

Amanda was born with CHD. She completed her Bachelor of Science with Honours in Biomedical Science at the University of Guelph in 2021. Amanda's experience with CHD inspired her to pursue a career in medicine. She is currently attending medical school at the University of Ottawa as part of the class of 2025.

Amanda grew up as a very active individual, participating in competitive soccer and training as a lifeguard. Recognizing how fortunate she was to have received the care that she did, Amanda became passionate about learning about the social determinants of health and their impact on an individual's life. During her undergraduate education, she was greatly involved in social justice work with the Guelph Chapter of Oxfam Canada, an anti-poverty non-profit organization that advocates for women's rights. Amanda became the President of this student group and led the organization of an academic symposium that addressed disparities in the access and distribution of healthcare. Amanda aims to advocate for individuals with CHD and spread awareness as a member of the CCHA.

In her free time, Amanda enjoys travelling, playing volleyball, going for runs and practicing visual arts.



### **Luxshikka Canthiya**

From a young age, cardiac health has affected Luxshikka and her family. The resilience she built from these experiences and the awe she gained from listening to the stories of those living with congenital heart disease (CHD), inspired her to pursue a career and education in cardiology. She is currently completing her final year of Honors Molecular Biology and Genetics, to explore and understand the intricate interplay between cellular processes and genetics to better understand complicated conditions like CHD.

As a research assistant at the Department of Cardiology, Toronto General Hospital, she worked closely with doctors and researchers to collect patient-reported outcomes and enrich existing databases with new data about this vulnerable patient group. The rewarding experience of working with CHD patients has motivated her to continue to advocate for this community.



### **Rick Harland**

Rick has 30+ years broad experience and an exceptional track record in a variety of executive roles in both the private and non-profit sectors. Rick has developed and implemented strategic plans for numerous organizations which have ensured that management and stakeholders are provided with the knowledge and tools necessary to succeed.

Rick's wife was born with a congenital heart issue which they are dedicated to managing every day.

Rick has an HBSc and MSc in Zoology, as well as an MBA from the Ivey School of Business at Western. He resides with his family, and Henry the dog, in Calgary, Alberta.



### **George Jiri**

George Jiri is fully aware of the impact of congenital heart disease as his son and mother experience it. As a result, he is resolutely battling for transformative change and awareness of CHD.

Professionally, he has been a police officer with the Toronto Police Service over the past two-decades. His commitment to justice, coupled with a drive to effect positive change is his focus upon one of the most crucial facets of law enforcement:- combating Human Trafficking. Throughout this devotion, George has emerged as an advocate for victims of crime, displaying a resolve to provide them with the support and resources necessary for healing and rebuilding their lives.

A graduate of both the University of Guelph-Humber and Seneca College, his academic pursuits have provided him with a solid foundation in understanding law enforcement and victim advocacy. He has a keen understanding of victims' needs while working to ensure their voices are heard and rights upheld.

Beyond his professional endeavors, George is a devoted father to three vibrant children who are engaged in hockey, soccer, while providing everyday parental adventures.



## **Brenaven (Bren) Kugamoorthy**

Brenaven (Bren) Kugamoorthy is a graduate of the University of Toronto (UofT) - St. George Campus, from the Faculty of Kinesiology. He was a full-time international athlete, competing in basketball, and a part-time musician before entering UofT. He is also an advocate for CHD; stemming from his mother having Aortic Stenosis. From a young age, his mother has been advised to be as active as possible, which galvanized Bren into the sport and exercise science and research.

Bren is an active leader. With the UofT community, he has started and led many initiatives through his various positions in governance, coordination, fundraisers, course-related and nationally-related events, and has spoken at many recruitment events on behalf of the university. He is well-versed in policy changes, having represented students to advocate and enhance the curriculum, research, admission/petitions, and has immense knowledge in organizing mass-scale events, having hosted a ½ million-dollar, national university conference. Bren was also able to partake in many undergraduate research projects under the supervision of faculty professors and surgeons at Toronto Western Hospital. He enjoys training athletes at UofT, professional athletes, strength and conditioning coaching, and training Special Olympic athletes.

Outside of the realm of professional sport and academia, Bren participates in sports and exercise himself, loves travelling and being outdoors, frequents concerts and enjoys various realms of art and music.



## **Edythe Tham**

A native of Australia, Dr. Edythe Tham completed her medical training at the University of Adelaide and Pediatrics at the Women & Childrens Hospital and Sydney Childrens Hospital. She moved to North America to pursue a Pediatric Cardiology Fellowship at Stanford Universitys Lucile Packard Childrens Hospital, followed by a Senior Fellowship in Non-Invasive Imaging at Boston Childrens Hospital. She is a staff Cardiologist at the Stollery Childrens Hospital, University of Alberta specializing in cardiac imaging, namely echocardiography and cardiac MRI. Her research interests are in novel imaging techniques to evaluate cardiac function. She is the Director of the Pediatric Cardiology Residency program.

Dr. Tham is also a dedicated volunteer in the field of pediatric cardiology, supporting a number of projects for children, families, and healthcare professionals. She is the founder of the [Virtual Heart Connection](#) (a series of virtual day camps online for children with a Fontan) and organized the first Congenital Heart Family Picnic in July 2022.

Outside of Medicine she is a classical pianist, drummer, baker and ski instructor.



### **Elina Williams**

Elina Williams does not have lived CHD experience, but has spent the majority of her nearly 20 year career walking alongside those who do. With a background in registered nursing, Elina has assumed various roles within the Stollery's Congenital Heart Program ranging from acute and ambulatory care, to research coordination and project management. Elina was one of 8 undergraduate nursing students accepted for a fourth-year practicum in pediatrics. When asked which unit she would like to go to, her response was "You can put me anywhere so long as it's not cardiology." To this day, she does not know if her instructor's choice for peds cardio was intentional or not. Today, Elina leads the [Western Canadian Children's Heart Network \(WCCHN\)](#) as Program Manager, uniting all five tertiary and quaternary pediatric cardiac sites in Western Canada. Often asked "Why pediatric cardiology? That must be so sad", Elina reframes the perspective: "Why *not* pediatric cardiology? There's a strength and resilience in these families here that you'll never find anywhere else."

In her "free time", Elina chases two little boys of her own. She had a near brush with owning and operating her own home-based business called *Balloon Shenanigans*. She chose to stick with her career instead.



### **Nathalie Lacoste-Hofman - Honourary board member**

Nathalie was born in Montreal with a complex congenital heart defect. She was fortunate to have great parents and even more to have grown up in Montreal and in Toronto where, over the years, she received great care.

Nathalie has taught elementary school for the last 30 years and understands the importance of our young people.

Striving for consistent care is near and dear to her heart. When she was young and living in Montreal, her heart was going into failure and the cardiologists were at a loss. Fortunately a few months later her father was transferred to Toronto and Sick Kids was able to help. She was so excited after her Fontan surgery to finally be able to participate in physical education with friends. She says her first 100m sprint in the annual Track and Field school event was the most exhilarating feeling.

Nathalie wants to help ensure that outcomes for people living with CHD are consistent no matter the age or location.

### **Dr. Katie Losano - Honourary board member**

**Karen LeComte - PAB Liaison**

Read why the Board members support CCHA <https://www.cchaforlife.org/news/board-members-show-their-support-ccha>