Bio: Yanique Brandford is a physicist and the Founder and Executive Director of **Help A Girl Out (HAGO)**, a Canadian registered charity dedicated to advancing menstrual equity through access to period products, education on menstrual and uterine health, and the empowerment of women and girls.

Her passion for this work is deeply personal. Yanique's experience with period poverty began while growing up in Jamaica and continued after immigrating to Canada as a low-income student. She often shares the story of her mother, a single parent and survivor of domestic abuse, who handcrafted menstrual pads from cardboard, newspaper, and other materials so she could attend school each month. Despite the many challenges they faced, her mother remained determined that Yanique receive an education and have opportunities beyond the poverty they were experiencing.

These experiences, along with those of her siblings and peers, became the driving force behind HAGO's mission to eliminate period poverty and menstrual stigma. Yanique believes that menstruation is not only a physical health issue but also a matter of mental health, dignity, and equity. Shame, isolation, anxiety, and missed opportunities caused by menstrual stigma can have lasting effects on confidence, self-esteem, educational attainment, and overall well-being.

Yanique experienced many of these challenges firsthand. When she began speaking publicly about menstruation, she faced criticism and isolation from some family members, friends, and members of her community, where the topic remained highly taboo. Despite the personal sacrifices, she continued advocating because she knew countless others were experiencing the same struggles in silence. Over time, her willingness to openly share her lived experience helped elevate the conversation nationally and internationally, while encouraging women and girls with similar experiences to seek support and speak without shame.

Although her advocacy began informally at the age of 17, it gained significant momentum after she officially founded Help A Girl Out in 2018. Since then, her leadership has been recognized both in Canada and internationally. She served as a panellist for National Geographic's *Activate: Keeping Kenyan Girls in School* event in Toronto in 2019 and has received numerous honours, including **Global Citizen Canada's Hero Award (2020)**, the **Viola Desmond Award (2020)**, the **Brampton Board of Trade Community Impact Award (2022)**, and the **Toronto Youth Cabinet Advocacy Award (2022)**.

Alongside her humanitarian work, Yanique pursued studies in Biomedical Physics at Toronto Metropolitan University, specializing in cancer therapy research. As the only Black woman in both her undergraduate and graduate cohorts, she conducted research focused on improving medical imaging and tumour detection during proton therapy for cancer treatment. She later built a career in nuclear energy and radiation protection, where she again recognized the significant underrepresentation of women and racialized professionals in STEM. She won notable internal awards at Laurentis Energy Partners and Women in Nuclear Canada for her advocacy and people centred leadership.

Today, Yanique continues to champion both menstrual equity and educational opportunity. Through HAGO, she works to remove barriers to menstrual health while mentoring young

people, particularly girls and underrepresented youth, encouraging them to pursue careers in STEM, leadership, and community service. Her life's work reflects her belief that when people have access to the resources, knowledge, and support they need, they are empowered to reach their full potential.

Awards:

1. Global Citizen Prize: Canada's Hero Award (2020) – Recognized internationally for outstanding leadership in advancing menstrual equity and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
2. 2025 Governor General's Awards in Commemoration of the Persons Case (nominee)
3. Breaking New Ground Award (2026) Women with Passion & Purpose
4. Youth Advocacy Award (2022) Toronto Youth Cabinet
5. Community Impact Award (2023) Brampton Board of Trade
6. Inspirational Award (2025) City of Brampton
7. Viola Desmond Award/Bursary (2021) Toronto Metropolitan University

Significant Achievements

- Founded Help A Girl Out (HAGO) at 16 years old, expanded HAGO from a lived-experience centred grassroots initiative to one of Canada's leading menstrual equity charities.
- Successfully advocated for, secured, and managed over 1.5 million dollars in funding (since 2018) from notable stakeholders including Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE), Ontario Trillium Foundation, Food Banks Canada, Shoppers Foundation for Women's Health, Scotiabank, and numerous corporate partners to support our menstrual equity efforts.
- Became a leading voice in the global menstrual equity movement with outreach spanning 13 countries in the Caribbean and Africa and international recognition from notable sources like Global Citizen, National Geography, GirlBoss, The Italian Rêve, DoSomething.org
- Invited as a key panelist for National Geography and Proctor and Gamble documentary "Keeping Girls in School" in Toronto 2019.
- Led the distribution of over 2 million menstrual and hygiene products to individuals experiencing period poverty across 350+ Canadian communities.
- Established Canada's first large-scale charitable reusable menstrual pad sewing initiative, combining environmental sustainability with menstrual equity, mobilizing 300+ volunteers to sew 10,000+ cloth pads, benefiting 8 countries and diverting approximately 800,000 lbs of menstrual product waste from landfills.
- Led the development of a national menstrual health education curriculum that has reached 20,000+ youth and community members through schools, libraries, shelters, and community organizations.
- Built partnerships with 80+ corporate, government, healthcare, and community organizations to advance menstrual equity across Canada.