



Hurst Legacy Award 2023: Anum Khan

The Hurst Legacy Award was founded in 2019 to honour the incredible work of our founder, Jim “Hurst” Hayhurst. While he passed away in early 2020, his legacy lives on in the Trails Alumni who are benefiting from his creation of Trails over 30 years ago. The Hurst Legacy Award is presented annually to a Trails Alumni who consistently lives the Trails mission. This award proves that we all have the capacity and the responsibility to give back, regardless of our age, background, or abilities.

Anum Khan

Group: Blazing Hotz, Years: 2004 - 2009

Trails has taught me so much about what I value, and in turn, what I can contribute back to the community.



The value of connection and consistency was front and centre when hiring new facilitators and creating staff teams. The value of authenticity, where, for the first time, I can be who I want to be and, in my role of mentor with the AIM program, can encourage our alumni to do the same. The value of safety, where I can be a queer woman and be fully accepted for who I am, and in turn, provide a haven for our participants and staff. And the value of having “Roots and Wings,” where I have a strong foundation and the skills and resources to soar, and can foster this courage for a new generation of youth.

Returning to Trails meant a return to my inner child —my laughter and joy came back...

I was a positive, extroverted and joy-filled child—a young girl who loved connecting with new people and exploring new things. Born in Canada, I was the middle child in a conventional Pakistani Muslim family, and was given opportunities to try new things and be active, while also being expected to learn the traditional roles of homemaker and caretaker. As I got older, I wrestled with my identity and where I fit into my family and culture.

Around the age of 12, I had two experiences that changed my life. The first was a negative incident that shattered my confidence and caused my energy to shift as I became insecure and introverted. The second was when Trails came to my elementary school for a presentation about the Four Seasons, Four Years, For Life program. I ran home that day and begged my dad to sign me up. I was in.

Trails became my escape. At a time when I no longer felt safe in other spaces, I received love and understanding from my staff and peers, even when my behaviour didn’t warrant that response. Despite pushing boundaries and defying the rules at times, I always felt secure and was held accountable for my actions. I was encouraged to reflect on who I wanted to be in the world.

One of my most special memories of Trails helped me identify one of my core values: connection. My staff facilitator came to my school’s band performance. Though I had a minor role playing the trombone in the back row—I felt so cared for and so special in that moment that I stood up to play my part. My once-shattered confidence was being re-established; I felt like I truly mattered.

The lessons I learned during my five years as a Trails participant seemed minor in the moment, but on reflection, I now see that I learned so much about communication, conflict resolution, goal setting and one of Trails’ Key Factors to Success: Roots and Wings.

In 2011, I started university but ultimately left my program when I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and fibromyalgia. I was extremely mentally and physically unwell and, once again, turned to Trails where I worked for a season as a program facilitator. The Trails “For Life” program for alumni didn’t exist at that time, and I had little or no contact with anyone from the program after going to work elsewhere. I spent much of the next 10 years trying to make sense of my world—my childhood trauma, my health, and my identity. At times, I felt trapped in my life and job and was close to rockbottom in 2021 when my younger brother intervened. Together, we used lessons learned at Trails and set goals—baby steps that helped me to make my way back to myself. Ultimately, one of these goals led me back to Trails.

In summer 2021, I reached out to Trails after seeing an alumni email which led me to be hired to join the Year 3 Eternal Wildfire group in Algonquin Park as a facilitator. Sitting in a canoe, talking to a participant, I realized that I was where I needed to be.

For the first time in 10 years, I felt safe, calm, and at peace. That fall, I continued to work with the same group and volunteered at Trails in the newly created role of Community and Recruitment Coordinator. By January 2022, I had joined the full-time team, where I now work as a Program Director. Coming back to Trails has been the best decision of my life.