



# ¿Que Pasa?

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES  
THE YMCAs OF QUÉBEC

2012 REPORT

## Hand in hand in partnership

*Kelsey Pinch and Samuel Dupont-Fafard participated in CIDA's International Youth Internship Program in 2012. It was a 7-month internship with The YMCAs of Québec that included a 5-month placement in Quito with the YMCA/ACJ of Ecuador. Here, Kelsey and Samuel recount some of their experiences while working with the YMCA in Ecuador.*



Samuel & Kelsey with market children

by Kelsey Pinch

***In just five months I was a part of an international project, learned a new language, and enhanced my skills in youth programming, workshop facilitation, community relations, and intercultural communication.***

The time I spent with the ACJ of Ecuador is an experience that will stay with me forever. I remember the day we first arrived and met with the staff at the ACJ of Ecuador. I was feeling dizzy from the altitude and trying to understand everyone's Spanish at the meeting.

At that point in the internship, all I could think of was how we could use our skills to work together on something that was needed at the ACJ of Ecuador. At that moment, I never could have expected the experience that was to come.



## Kelsey Pinch

Since we were in Ecuador from April to September, we were able to work with both the school and summer programs. From April to June, we worked with youth in an afterschool program called *Proniño*. Children who come to the Proniño program are those who work in markets near the ACJ. Proniño is part of a movement that is currently happening for the eradication of child labour. I still remember one of the first days I was working, I asked a little girl who was maybe 9 years old, "Where do you go to school?" and she replied, "Proniño." It was from that moment on I realized the importance of this program and the impact that it could possibly have on the children who attend. And so, with Samuel and I having backgrounds in Leisure Studies, we took on the role of recreation educators during our time at the ACJ of Ecuador.

We developed programming for the afterschool program, led camp activities, and developed a module of recreation for the eradication of child labour. Aside from our daily work, we visited other ACJs located in Ecuador, spent a weekend with the Tsachilas tribe, and spent time immersed in the wonderful Ecuadorian culture.

I have given a lot of thought to this internship program and what it has brought me. The CIDA-funded International Youth Internship Program allows young Canadians to gain experience and develop skills for future careers in development. In just five months I was a part of an international project, learned a new language, and enhanced my skills in youth programming, workshop facilitation, community relations, and intercultural communication. Our boss at the ACJ of Ecuador once mentioned how beneficial it was to have us engaged in a project about child labour. He told us that now we can help educate Canadians on this issue and what is being done here in Ecuador to prevent and eradicate child labour. I couldn't agree more. Without this internship, I never would have been as knowledgeable as I am today on this issue.

What I like about the ACJ/YMCA is that they take a holistic approach to community development. The Proniño program is a great example of this. Samuel and I spent time with the children who worked in the markets, while our colleagues also ran workshops for their mothers. In these workshops they discussed child development and education, took part in art activities, and discussed other topics related to the prevention of child labour. A lot of these mothers have not gone to school so providing them with basic education is another component of these workshops. There are also community psychologists at the ACJ who go to houses and have meetings with the whole family. I can definitely see the benefits of this holistic approach. I think that it is the only way we are going to get those kids out of the markets.



**Child labour will never be normal and should never be normal. Children's childhoods are being stripped away from them left, right, and center. This is evident just about everywhere in Ecuador. There are two boys who go to the ACJ, and a couple weeks ago we sadly found out that their father had passed away. A few days later, we saw them both selling candy on the bus. We assumed that because the family no longer had income from the father, the two boys had to work even harder. They are about 8 and 10 years old. Now that it's September I wonder if they are going to school. This is the everyday life of too many kids in Ecuador.**





## Samuel ...

*A little guy says, "Oh you're the grandfather, you have a lot of whiskers and hair!"*

We started the week with a tour of a public market in Quito Sur. It's a place filled with exotic fruits (exotic to me), vegetables, and objects of all kinds, counterfeit or not (it's legal here). This market is chock-full of people, huge, inexpensive, and is where most of the fruits and vegetables in Quito come from. It is also one of the places where children work to help their parents. The YMCA/ACJ works with this clientele!

We spent most of our days in the ACJ's Proniño program doing activities with a group of youth. Every day there were new children and we never knew who would show up, with groups ranging from four to twenty children! We played games and took part in educational activities with them (i.e. activities on conflict resolution).

The program is part of a project (Proniño) aimed at eradicating child labour. As part of this project, the ACJ is also required to work in the market itself! We went to the Camal market to spend a morning with children whose parents work there. The kids were really happy to play and sing with us. They sang a song that spoke of finding your sister, your father, your mother, your grandfather, and at the end of the song, a little guy says, "Oh you're the grandfather, you have a lot of whiskers and hair!"

On June 12, we celebrated the Day for the Eradication of Child Labour with other organizations in Quito. We had fun! Our new animator insisted that Kelsey present herself at the kiosk dressed up as a rag doll. So we made her a costume, and I had a good laugh.

The children at the ACJ were always curious to see us and were always asking questions. The one that came up most often was "Why are you here?" So I told them that there are also YMCAs in Canada, and there are activities with children there too. A child asked me, "Do the children who go to the YMCA in Canada have to work too?" It is at times like these that I find life very unfair.

The summer holidays began and the day camp was well underway with some 175 children aged 4 to 12! The children were happy and we were busy!

I abandoned the idea of organizing the entire operation. There were 50 volunteers who led games, there was an animation team - which did not animate but did other projects- a chief coordinator, a youth coordinator, a handyman who had a monopoly on some key local spaces and, aside from all these people, there we were, the two Canadians! So the solution was simple: abandon the concept of following a schedule! We ran our recreational activities according to the groups that came out to join us in the hot July sun!

In addition, Kelsey and I provided training to volunteers and facilitators on the role of the animator and the pedagogy of play.

The other day there was a lady who enrolled her child in the ACJ program. In the questionnaire, they asked her to state her weekly wage. She wrote down \$70 per week. The cost of living is definitely cheaper in Ecuador, but one must eat, dress, have a place to live, and get around as well. Imagine that when working in the market, one does not even earn the minimum wage of \$300 per month, probably has bad working conditions, a family to support, and earns only what one sells. So when the merchandise is stolen, there isn't much left. Sometimes life is just not fair.

*by Samuel Dupont-Fafard*



**A baby participant in the Day for the Eradication of Child Labour**



**Doing activities with the market children**



# The YMCA International Youth Engagement Summit



***"To be sharing with people from another country has been very rewarding, but this experience is definitely different because we see the social realities of another country. It's amazing how by talking about social and political problems we discovered that we have many things in common. I've noticed that around the world there are similar stories, because not only did we share with people from Canada, but Mexico, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Haiti as well."***

***- Gabriela Eloiza Gaytán Santos, YMCA of Guatemala***

The first YMCA International Youth Engagement Summit was held this summer, from August 30 to September 3, at YMCA Camp Kanawana. The conference attracted about 80 youth and volunteers from Québec and partner YMCAs in Haiti, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua.

The goal of the Summit was to develop the leadership skills of youth aged 16 to 25, and help them become agents of change within their communities. During the five days, participants took part in workshops and discussions on selected topics, and participated in cooperative games and outdoor activities.

Cathy Wong, Development Officer for The YMCAs of Québec's youth sector and Summit organizer, said that the project was a natural next step to a leadership training weekend held the year before. A number of young Montréalers who participated in that training - **Christine Hoang, Karine Robitaille, Dina Mansour, Frédéric Rivest-Roy, Ando Herizo Andrianady** and **Charlotte Smoley** - decided to get involved and worked with Cathy in all stages of the Summit. "It was a great experience to

be part of the implementation of this forum with other people my age and YMCA staff," said Ms. Hoang.

The following guest speakers inspired reflection and discussion, and led activities: **Annie Robert**, Coordinator for Awareness of Trafficking in Persons (TP) for the RCMP; **Fimba Tankoano**, Development Officer at Access Volunteer and an elected official at the Youth Forum on the island of Montréal; **Franck Sylvestre**, storyteller and artist; **Genevieve Wood**, a medical student involved in youth engagement and civic participation; **Héctor L. Bermudez Restrepo**, lecturer at HEC Montréal; **Isabelle Morin**, a NDP member of the House of Commons; **Kathleen King**, a community worker at The YMCA Residence; **Marc Garneau**, MP in the House of Commons; **Dr. Mohamed Benkhalifa**, international representative in New York and Geneva within the United Nations; **Olga Navarro-Flores**, PhD in Business Administration with a specialization in Partnerships and International Cooperation; **Emmanuel Ricardo Lamour-Blaise**, Communications Officer for the



*"What I want to achieve - and this is what I tell people here and in Ecuador - is a strengthening of ties between countries. Something that is worth mentioning is that I firmly believe that the only thing separating young people from around the world are flags and physical spaces, which is why my interest is also to achieve a permanent connection between the young people of Ecuador and Québec, as well as between the young people from The YMCAs of Québec's partners (Nicaragua, Haiti, Guatemala) that I had the opportunity to meet in the 2012 Youth Summit."*

*- Ximena Palton, ACJ/YMCA of Ecuador*

Centre for Studies and Cooperation (CECI); **Widia Lariviere**, specializing in inter-ethnic relations; and **Yanick Létourneau**, Director and Producer, currently co-president of DOC Québec.

The goal of the Summit was also to bring together youth from Québec and from our international partnerships to learn, share, and develop their leadership skills, and to apply them in their various communities. Although the main language of the Summit was French, translators helped the Spanish speakers understand and communicate with the other youth and presenters.

The 3 youth from Haiti, Stephanie Pierre, Witny Etienne and Rose-Coralie Norris, had no problem communicating and two of them stayed in Québec an extra 2 weeks to work with their partner YMCA in NDG and to experience Montréal. They had no trouble making friends at the Summit or in Montréal and found leaving an emotional experience.

The youth from Nicaragua (Olga Massiel Blandon Alvarado, Lea Rizo Oporta, Delbia Maria Suarez Guxman) and Guatemala (Gabriela Eloiza Gaytán Santos, Luis Angel Guillermo Caal, Karen Julissa Muhun Xocoy) and Ximena Palton from the YMCA of Ecuador, all integrated well despite their concerns with language. Although all the youth from the partnerships gained much from the experience they had both at the Summit and with their local partner YMCAs in the city, it was obvious to the youth organizers how much they affected the local youth with their presentations on their home realities and challenges they face daily.

This pilot Summit was deemed such a success that it became obvious that many more should follow. A Summit developed by youth for youth has proven to be a winning recipe for producing a high quality event for young leaders.



**Luis, Ximena, Frédéric, Whitney, Olga, Lea, Delbia, Gabriela and Karen**

*"It is an exchange of experiences beyond compare that has opened our eyes and expanded our world-view. To share our work with our peers, knowing that there are many things we work toward, we can appreciate that despite the history of our country, which has been hard, we have carried out social projects with youth and children and continue this work because our country needs this."*

*- Gabriela Eloiza Gaytán Santos, YMCA of Guatemala*



# Manos a Manos sin Fronteras

“Hands to Hands without Borders” is a good way to describe the feelings of friendship, understanding, and solidarity that sprang up quickly and spontaneously during the recent visit to the West Island YMCA of three youth volunteers from the YMCA/ACJ of Guatemala.

They had spent the afternoon touring the West Island area with YMCA staff, seeing everything from castle-like homes by the water, to the food bank of the Fonds de dépannage in Roxboro. They learned that the food bank serves 900 families per month! Our Guatemalan visitors then realized that poverty is very present in our community too, although it is less visible here than in their country.

Luis Angel Guillermo Caal (age 20), Karen Julissa Muhun Xocoy (19 years), and Gabriela Eloiza Gaytán Santos (24 years) live in three different areas of Guatemala. Luis is a volunteer with the ACJ's Camp Chichoj, near the town of San Cristobal Verapaz, in the majestic mountains of the northern region of Guatemala. Karen lives in Tierra Nueva, a bustling suburb north of Guatemala City, and Gabriela is from the city of Amatitlan, which borders Lake Amatitlan, south of the capital. While each community is unique, all three areas are impacted by poverty and lack of opportunity, by an ongoing culture of violence, and by the dangers that come with the illegal narcotics trade that crosses through Guatemala.

The ACJ Guatemala was established in 1964 and focuses its work on social justice, youth development, and community building. It offers a safe and welcoming place for youth to meet, learn, play, and serve their community. The ACJ trains and involves youth as volunteer leaders 17 to 22 years of age, who then plan, organize, and run community-based programs and activities. In fact, many of the youth leaders “grew up” in the ACJ. The ACJ youth leaders from across the country come together to strengthen their understanding, skills, and commitment to building a culture of peace in a society that still suffers from too much violence.

This year, an invitation to attend The YMCAs of Québec's International Youth Engagement Summit brought Luis, Karen, and Gabriela to Montréal. Now, here they were in De Zone, the West Island YMCA's drop-in centre, surrounded by the crush and noise of a room filled with energetic and dynamic teenagers! But when our Guatemalan guests began to talk about their lives and their YMCA (ACJ), you could hear a pin drop!

The West Island youth were shocked and saddened to learn of the deliberate killings of hundreds of thousands of Indigenous people and of the children whose mothers had been murdered during Guatemala's 36-year civil war. They wanted to know more about the ACJ's special 3-year program to help those children heal, gain self-esteem, and learn how to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. They were impressed that the ACJ gives sessions on Guatemalan history, including the dark period of its

bloody civil war, so that the ACJ's youth volunteers understand the importance of working toward peace. In addition, West Island teens were fascinated that the ACJ of Guatemala uses circus arts - from stilt-walking to fire-throwing - as an integral part of its youth programs!

Soon a real “exchange” began, with the West Island and Guatemalan youth asking about aspects of each other's lives such as school, everyday activities, favourite foods, favourite sports, youth and drugs, and corruption in both countries.

It was sobering to hear that in Guatemala, there are 50,000 students applying every year for only 18,000 university placements. Only 1% of the population goes to university. The West Island students described the red square marches by Québec students demanding lower tuition fees for post-secondary studies here.

Some aspects of everyday life seemed very similar, such as youth hanging out in malls, but they soon realized that the reasons were not the same. Guatemala lacks parks and recreational facilities, so youth hang out wherever they can. When Luis talked about getting up at 5:00 a.m., working until noon, and going to school in the afternoon until the evening, the Montréal youth realized that some aspects of life were very different.

When they compared their YMCAs, the Guatemalan youth noted that theirs is much smaller and there is no gym. The ACJ is known as a youth organization in Guatemala, while the YMCA in Montréal brings together people of all ages. All the youth enjoy sports, and soccer was the declared favourite. Finally, both the YMCA and the ACJ provide exciting and valuable programs for youth at risk, as well as a place and space for young people to become positively involved in their community.

Before the evening ended, email addresses had been exchanged, and plans were made to communicate once a month via Skype and to fundraise for a future trip to Guatemala! Handshakes and hugs cemented these new friendships, and there was a definite sense of solidarity and *Manos a Manos sin Fronteras* as the youth bade each other good night and a safe trip home.

by Sheila Laursen



Jennifer, Karen, Gabriela, John, and Luis

# 2012 International Youth Exchange

The International Youth Exchange is a program involving youth aged 14 to 18 from The YMCAs of Québec and Nicaragua. Its objectives include the discovery of a different reality, building relationships with young people from another country, and gaining a better understanding of their own culture.

In 2012, three youth (Carolina Alarcon, 18; Victoria Simmons-Dion, 15; and Yasmine Sentissi, 15) and their group supervisor, Megan Ropeleski from the Westmount YMCA, as well as four youth (Nerling Granados, 18; Eveling Granera, 18; Kevin Hernández, 15; Maite Sobalvarro, 18) and their leader, Marvin Granera from the YMCA/ACJ of Nicaragua, had the chance to live this experience.

From December 27, 2011 to January 9, 2012, the Westmount youth hosted 4 young people from Nicaragua giving them their first experience of a Canadian winter. It was not until the second part of the exchange from July 14 to July 29, 2012, when the Canadian youth went to visit their Nicaraguan friends in their country, that they understood the culture shock their southern friends must have experienced in Montréal. It's a big challenge for all the youth involved in this exchange which has become an annual event since the first one in 2002, when youth from the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve and Westmount YMCAs joined together to make this exchange a local as well as international

experience. Over the 10 years, it has gone through some inevitable changes to now become an annual event with two North-South exchanges per year. Every year, the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve and Westmount YMCAs alternate as the local exchange group.

2012 was the year for Westmount YMCA youth to have this experience of a lifetime, and 2013 will be the year for youth from the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve area.

There is a lot of preparation that goes into these exchanges. For instance, the youth must participate in pre-departure training sessions that include learning about their Nicaraguan partner YMCA, the country itself, its health and safety issues, as well as learning the minimum amount of Spanish to be able to communicate with their Nicaraguan twins. Of course, they also have to prepare for the biggest challenge of all: culture shock. However, the experience for all the youth involved from both countries is always so profound, and it is a project the respective YMCAs have deemed worthy of all the efforts required.

The following are testimonials from the 3 youth from Westmount which highlight the impact this exchange has had on them.

## by Yasmine Sentissi, age 15

Never before had I felt so insecure. I will always remember that night at the Acahualinca YMCA (in Nicaragua): the barbed wire on the wall, or the fact that I didn't close my eyes all night. I clutched Victoria's hand to find comfort while Carolina lit up the room with her flashlight. Every noise, however quiet and insignificant it really was, seemed loud and threatening. I remember going to wake up Megan, like a duckling running to its mother duck, and staying with her to talk and feel reassured until sunrise.

This trip was a unique one for me. When I was younger, if I found myself near a poor area, I avoided looking around because I did not want to see people living in poverty. Today, after spending 15 days living with these people, I have grown up. I feel I have matured: the world has become clearer, more profound with its injustices. However, I also see all the wonderful things and the strength that lies in human relationships. One realizes that we are not so different from each other: we all have dreams and hopes. The only difference is that we have had better luck: nothing else, just luck. When one of the Nicaraguan participants looked me straight in the eye and told me that since the age of 14, she has been working 11 hours a day making pancakes for a total of \$5 per day, my eyes filled with tears and my heart suddenly felt heavy.

For all the reasons I have mentioned as well as the complete state of disorientation in which I found myself, the first week was tough. Absolutely everything was different: houses, roofs, rooms, showers, bathrooms, food, lifestyle, and life in general. What an enriching experience Nicaragua was for me! I never would have thought that in so little time so much could change in me.



Yasmine Sentissi



# 2012 International Youth Exchange

by Victoria Simmons-Dion, age 16

When I left for Nicaragua, I didn't have any idea what to expect. It is only in the plane during landing in Managua that I realized that this trip would change my life. From the very first night I could see how different the reality of the Nicaraguan youth was, but at the same time, how similar.

The first part of the exchange was quite different from the second. I didn't know in what conditions they lived and I thought they had all the things that we take for granted, like hot running water. I didn't realize how much culture shock they experienced when visiting us in Canada until I lived their lifestyle for awhile. Spending nights in a concrete and metal house amplifies all sounds: quiet sounds become loud, with the loudest sounds resonating for hours. The first few nights were tough, but little by little I got used to the sound of firecrackers going off at all hours and the animals communicating with each other. I soon became accustomed to these nightly sounds. Every day was a new adventure and I felt like I was alive for the very first time.

The relationships I have built with the participants are incredible. Even if I am not in contact with them every day, we have shared some wonderful experiences and I will never, ever forget them! The language barrier made it difficult to communicate sometimes, but it is an obstacle I overcame and my Spanish is now much better than it was. I realize how fortunate we are to have lived such an experience: I totally rediscovered myself and I changed so much during those 15 days.

Upon my return from Nicaragua, I experienced culture shock. The return to what I call "my life" was very hard. All the little things that I took for granted suddenly seemed like great advantages my life offered me. By chance I was born into a family that lived in Canada. You might say I am lucky, and I would have to agree, but we can't forget the beauty in life that is found everywhere. In Canada, there really isn't a sense of community and people are often unhappy. In Nicaragua, the community is very important and wonderful: without it, they would have next to nothing, and yet, I never heard one person complain about his or her living situation. I think that if all youth could experience a similar adventure, the world would finally change. We need to build a world for future generations that is fair, equitable, and harmonious.



Front Row (left to right): Marvin Granera, Megan Ropeleski, Kevin Hernandez  
Back Row (left to right): Yasmine Sentissi, Nerling Reyes, Victoria Simmons-Dion,  
Maite Sobalvarro, Carolina Alarcon, Eveling Granera

Victoria Simmons-Dion



# 2012 International Youth Exchange

by Carolina Alarcon, age 18

When I decided to participate in this program I wasn't exactly sure what I was getting into. To be honest, I didn't know much about the program. However, I did know that it was a cultural exchange and not a vacation, even though people assumed it was a vacation because I was going to Central America. In the end, I was very happy I participated in the YMCA's International Exchange program.

When I met the Canadian group I was super excited because the girls were great and we were eager to begin this adventure together! Over the next few months we became closer and closer, and I'm so happy we did because without Yasmine, Victoria, and Megan, I don't think I would have been able to survive the hard times. Of course, I'm also glad I got to share the great times with them as well.

When the Nicaraguan group came to Canada it was loads of fun. We got to share our stories and learn about a different culture. Seeing just how different our cultures were was an eye-opening experience! Not only did I make friends with the Nicaraguans, I made friends with the girls from Montréal too!

## **Nicaragua: where to begin?**

Going to Nicaragua was a whole other adventure and a completely unexpected experience! Everything about Nicaragua was beautiful, such as the culture and the people who were so friendly and humble. It was so nice to see our new friends in their own environment because they felt more at ease and we could really feel how proud they were to show us their culture and their lives.

I would recommend this program to everyone as it was such an amazing experience. It wasn't just the country or the people that were incredible, it was also the cultural experience and how much it changed me. I knew going to Nicaragua wasn't going to be a vacation, and I don't mean that in a bad way. Living there and witnessing everything - the good and the bad - was part of the experience. There were some moments when I just felt like giving up and going home. It was hard. My first week there I had a swollen foot and I couldn't participate or enjoy much because I simply couldn't walk from point A to point B. Being injured and away from home in a foreign country would be hard on anyone. Then again, there were also moments when I just felt so alive and happy to be there! For example, never in my life had I ever been on a motorcycle. The first time I got on one was in Nicaragua. This was because I couldn't walk anywhere and motorcycles were my means of transportation. By the second

week, when I was able to walk, I actually rode a motorcycle by myself and it was the coolest experience I've ever had! I also got to visit an active volcano. How many of your friends can say they've done that?

Finally, if I had the choice of doing it all over again, I would do it in a heartbeat. Thanks to this trip I was able to experience many things that have helped me grow and have given me a new perspective on life. Living an experience such as this has helped make clear the things that are truly important. It isn't about having new gadgets or following the latest trends. It's about the bonds and friendships you form, and the things you learn from one another. Although we may be miles apart, I've never felt as close to a group of people as I have after this experience. Though many people hope to go back one day, I am making it my goal to return in 3 years and visit all my friends who are there!



Carolina Alarcon

## Nicaragua

### Youth and community say no to violence against women

This project, which began in 2009 and is supported by The YMCAs of Québec through a Québec government international initiative, aims to reduce violence against women through innovative strategies for prevention, and strengthen non-governmental organizations. The YMCA/ACJ of Nicaragua works in close partnership with the mayor, the police, women's groups, and youth in Santa Lucia, a rural area of Nicaragua. The goal is to develop a community network that can raise awareness on violence against women, help victims cope, and report cases of violence to the authorities. Youth leaders from the ACJ are trained to raise awareness on these issues within the community.

The work of the ACJ focuses on providing leadership training for youth with an emphasis on young women. They are trained and acquire skills to become advocates in hygiene and health, become active citizens and leaders in their community, and positive role models to address issues of gender equality.

Specific training on the prevention of violence against women is being provided to youth, as well as adult men and women in Santa Lucia. The training focuses on raising awareness on violence against woman and its effect on individuals, family, and the community, and on prevention and reporting. These sessions have been conducted in community centres and schools. Methods of conflict resolution and building a culture of peace are introduced as a way of changing a culture of violence against women. This has resulted in less indifference to this issue within the culture. Including men and boys in the programs is a strong component to changing patterns in the treatment of girls and women within the society. Also, involving government, local organizations, and civil society will help ensure the efforts being made will continue, and will encourage men's behaviours to change in their relationships with women.

Due to the success and need of such a project, the ACJ is currently seeking funding to continue this work in Santa Lucia.

## Guatemala

### YMCA/ACJ of Guatemala lends support

On Saturday, November 17, young volunteers from the YMCA were animating and supervising the children who accompanied their parents for the presentation of the book *Porque queríamos salir de tanta pobreza* ("Because we wanted to get out of such poverty"). This activity was held at INTECAP in Santa Lucía Cotzumalguapa and attracted more than 170 people, including 25 children who were participating in the activities prepared by YMCA volunteers.

The book profiles some of the more than 100 peasant leaders and workers who "disappeared" during the repression in the 80s. The book contains a number of eyewitness accounts of the events that shook Saint Lucia Cotzumalguapa in the 70s and 80s. The story of these men and women is intertwined with the history of the establishment and expansion of the cultivation of sugarcane in the area. One sentence was repeated seven times throughout the presentation: "Sugarcane is as bitter-sweet as our history." The families of the "disappeared" have been working with youth and adults of the southern coast to help restore and dignify their memories.

This is part of the work of the YMCA in Guatemala to help heal the deep wounds that resulted from the years of civil war in their country.





# Haiti

## Reaching more people

The YMCA of Haiti continues to grow and flourish since the first reconstruction efforts began after the devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010. The Huffington Post rated the YMCA of Haiti third in its top 10 list of most efficient organizations in Haiti since the earthquake.

The YMCA of Haiti would be the first to state that none of this would have been possible had it not been for the tremendous support given by YMCAs around the world. Not only did they provide financial support, they also provided support through all the people who gave their time and expertise by going to Haiti, helping at the beginning with emergency relief, then with the reconstruction, strategic planning, governance, various camps for youth and children, as well as arranging for Haitian youth to attend camps and trainings in YMCAs in both the United States and Canada. During this time of transition and growth, the YMCA of Haiti has grown and strengthened. It will need this strong structural foundation in order to survive and continue to meet the needs of the people.

The YMCAs of Québec has continued to support Haiti on its path to establishing its YMCA as a vital part of the communities it serves and as it expands into more locations. At present, the YMCA of Haiti has centres operating in 5 communities, including its main centre in Port-au-Prince, as well as a strong presence in Camp Perrin, Laboule, Kenscoff, and Croix-des Bouquets, with plans to open points of service in 5 more locations: Délugé, Pont-Sondé, St Roc, Mersan, and Cap-Haitien. Some of the new facilities have been built from the shipping containers purchased to transport materials and supplies to the YMCA following the earthquake.

The goals and focus of the YMCA in Haiti remain strong: to lend support to youth and children to receive formal education, to develop as young leaders, to participate in sports activities, and learn about health issues that effect them. This includes tutoring given by young leaders, meals and snacks, and the encouragement to stay the course. The YMCA provides services to those without the means to flourish on their own, which unfortunately encompasses the majority of the Haitian

population. These youth and children are given opportunities they had not dreamed possible and is reward enough for all those who contribute to making this a reality. Under the direction of Gwenael Apollon and a strong, committed Board of Directors, the YMCA has made strong partnerships with international YMCAs, with Haitian municipal and national government sectors, as well as Haitian agencies such as the Special Olympics and the *Association Haïtienne de Tennis de Table* (AHTT). These internal partnerships are vital for the survival and growth of the YMCA in Haiti.

The YMCAs of Québec was pleased to welcome three young volunteers from the YMCA of Haiti this summer: Coralie Norris, Stephanie Pierre, and Whitney Étienne. They participated in the first International Youth Engagement Summit, and also spent time with their partner, the NDG YMCA, to learn about YMCA programs here, meet other youth, and to get a feel of life in Montréal. All three were enthusiastic about having this opportunity and obviously committed to their leadership roles within the YMCA of Haiti. It is through meeting these youth, talking with them about their work with the YMCA, and their dreams and hopes, that one realizes the power of the YMCA to change lives and build communities from the ground up, sometimes literally.





## Our experience at the People's Summit in Rio

by Fanny Hidalgo and Charlotte Smoley

***Charlotte Smoley and Fanny Hidalgo, both employees and volunteers with The YMCAs of Québec, participated in the People's Summit: a gathering of civil society alterglobalists in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. They were part of a delegation of over 70 people organized by The YMCAs of Québec's International Initiatives, UNIAAlter, and Alternatives. Charlotte took part in the monthly pre-departure training sessions held since November 2011 with the Québec delegation. From June 15 to June 23, 2012, Charlotte and Fanny participated in the People's Summit for Social and Environmental Justice. Upon their return from Rio, they wrote of their experiences in this newsletter.***

It was during our first workshop at the People's Summit in Rio de Janeiro that Crystal Lameman spoke to us about the crisis and claims in her native community in Beaver Lake, Alberta. Crystal, a community organizer and daughter of Alphonse Lameman, Chief of the Beaver Lake Cree Band, caught our attention when she spoke:

*"Our community cannot drink the water from our land because it is contaminated by the local mining and petroleum industries. We receive our "potable" water by truck. The federal government sends us this "potable" water with the warning to boil it before drinking it. The water the Beaver Lake community receives is just as contaminated. Our fundamental rights, as well as our ancestral rights, are challenged by our government and this is simply unfair!"*

Suddenly, this reality sinks in and we are struck by these issues of environmental justice, public access to common property, and the commodification of life.

The People's Summit was held concurrently with the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio +20. The main goal of the People's Summit was to gather a diverse group of organizations and members of civil society together to write an official Declaration which would give the people a legitimate voice on the issues being dealt with by the Heads of State at Rio + 20.

We decided to join the delegation organized by The YMCAs of Québec, UNIAAlter, and Alternatives, to deepen our knowledge and our engagement within the YMCA.

Participating in this Summit gave us the opportunity to live our first international conference experience overseas. Our objectives were to become well-informed on the issues prior to departure, and to participate fully in order to better share this knowledge and experience upon our return to Québec. Another objective was to defend the rights of youth for a future that respects the social, environmental, and economic principles of sustainable development.



Crystal Lameman

Photo: Charlotte Smoley



We listened to our colleagues and discussed the struggles in achieving a just society. Our colleagues were comprised of youth leaders from the environmental movement in Canada who were in Brazil to defend the interests of future generations, student leaders from Chile and Brazil who chanted slogans like “The silence is over, Brazil will become like Québec,” professors who left their official delegations to give their own personal opinions, women of all ages, leaders of progressive and feminist movements, as well as young African entrepreneurs who encouraged the African community to contribute to the enrichment of a continent that is rapidly being depleted of its natural resources.

For us, this experience was a success on many levels since it allowed us to achieve many of our personal objectives. For instance, it allowed us to go against the mainstream media to talk about the experiences and stories surrounding international conflicts, gain an understanding of the role Canada plays in other countries, travel to a country where we didn’t speak the language, understand the UN process, and voice our opinions on the issues of international cooperation.

We can’t forget the incredible and enriching visit to a *favela* (slum) in Rio de Janeiro. During this outing, we met with some members of Afro-Reggae, a group of young people who have developed youth centres in their neighbourhood. Their ingenuity and resourcefulness was most impressive.

Upon our return, we wanted to build projects of sustainable development and social justice involving young people in our local community.

Ever since the People’s Summit, the participation and political representation of women in democratic proceedings has grown in importance to me (Charlotte). I have joined provincial and national political bodies, and am expressing my opinion on a variety of public policy issues that affect youth. I want to bring together young people and their elected representatives to help them take action. I was also a member of the Organizing Committee of the International Youth Engagement Summit, a summit on youth leadership



The Afro-Reggae Group

Photo: Charlotte Smoley

and engagement organized by The YMCAs of Québec aimed at training young leaders and providing them with the necessary tools.

With my local member of parliament, I organized a round table on youth engagement for International Youth Day (UN, August 12, 2012), which addressed various topics including employability, education, and discrimination. I am also involved in organizing Power Shift 2012, the largest national conference on the issues of renewable energy and sustainable development.

As for me (Fanny), I am continuing my studies in Psychology and Sociology after completing studies in Economics and Political Science. Always eager to share my knowledge, I am putting my energy into offering political and environmental awareness workshops to youth at the Du Parc YMCA. Wanting to use arts and creativity to encourage young people to express themselves on various environmental topics, I helped organize a recycled fashion project through an organization called *Art’hum Jeunesse*. (Fanny has become the Du Parc YMCA’s representative on the International Committee. She remains determined to raise a little more awareness every day about rights, responsibilities, and civic involvement, as well as on Canada’s foreign affairs and the impact of Canadians on foreign soil).

Our journey to the People’s Summit helped us realize that we must indeed “*Be the change you wish to see in the world.*”  
- Mahatma Ghandi



An aerial view of a popular Rio message formed on Flamingo Beach by hundreds of participants.

# 2012 YMCA Peace Medals

On November 22, 2012, The YMCAs of Québec held the 26th edition of the Peace Medals ceremony. This year, Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire, President and Executive Director of Centraide of Greater Montreal, received an honorary peace medal.

In recognition of their efforts to promote and further advance peace, the Brian Bronfman Family Foundation presented a \$1,000 cheque to each laureate.

The 2012 Peace Medals finalists were: Catherine Drouin, Alexandre Vidal, Stephanie Jorg, Jonathan Villata Lumanji and Felicia Marie-Marcelle Desmarais, Laurence Guénette, *Aux trois pivots*, Quebec Native Women, *Fondation Jasmin Roy*, Living Together, Patrice Brodeur, Louise Otis, and Flora Terah. Below are the laureates in their respective categories.

## 2012 honorary peace medalist

### **Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire, President and Executive Director of Centraide of Greater Montreal**

A graduate of *École Polytechnique* in 1963, Michèle Thibodeau-DeGuire was the very first female civil engineer in Québec. After a 20-year career as a structural engineer, she was named Québec's delegate to New England.

In 1991, she took the helm of Centraide of Greater Montreal. She turned to her network of contacts and that of Centraide to successfully rally all of the community stakeholders around the organization's mission: to fight poverty and exclusion.

It is this pooling of ideas and knowledge that ensures the strength and development of this widespread movement of community support and solidarity. Under her leadership, Centraide of Greater Montreal underwent significant transformations which further consolidated its role as a philanthropic and social leader and unifier of people at both the local and national levels.

Thanks to the Centraide campaign, today over half a million vulnerable people receive the assistance and comfort needed to get by.

Mrs. Thibodeau-DeGuire has received several honorary awards, including *Honoris Causa* doctorates awarded by Montréal's four universities and, most recently, by the University of Ottawa. The Laval Chamber of Commerce and Industry also presented her with the 2012 Gala Dunamis honorary award. She is a Fellow of Engineers Canada, a Knight of the *Ordre national du Québec*, a member of the Canadian Academy of Engineering, a member of the Order of Canada, and was named a Great Montrealer by the Academy of Great Montrealers.



Michèle  
Thibodeau-  
DeGuire

### **International Peace Initiative**

#### **Coup de Coeur award**

#### *Louise Otis*

In this category, the Selection Committee also awarded the Coup de coeur award to Judge Louise Otis. Known as the mother of mediation in Québec, Judge Louise Otis has demonstrated exceptional commitment to peace at the local, national, and international levels. Founder of the International Conference on Mediation for Justice, she was also the driving force behind a wonderful mediation and conflict management project for *Déclic*, an organization that lends support to youth during their social and school reintegration process. Her efforts to foster peaceful relations among youth experiencing difficulties are part of the development of a culture of peace.





## International Peace Initiative

Flora Terah

### Victim of torture takes a stand against violence

Running for parliament in the Kenyan elections, Flora Terah was abducted, tortured, and abused for posing a threat to the country's elite males. Following the elections, she launched a campaign called "Terah against Terror" which aimed to provide alternatives to violence. Forced to flee Kenya, she settled in Canada where she began to teach youth peaceful ways to foster social change. Inspired by her interventions, many Canadian organizations – such as the Stephen Lewis Foundation – have currently launched peace projects in Kenya.



## Youth Peacemaker

Alexandre Vidal

### Opposed to military recruitment

An engaged citizen since the age of 18 on issues pertaining to war and peace, 5 years ago Alexandre Vidal launched a campaign against military recruitment in schools. This campaign, which sparked debates and generated an extensive review of policies outside Canada, resulted in many schools banning this sort of recruitment on their premises. Alexandre is currently a member of the Board of Directors of the *Centre de ressources sur la non-violence* where he is responsible for the war and peace dossier.



## Volunteer Peacemaker

Laurence Guénette

### Defending the rights of Aboriginal and Guatemalan women

An activist involved with the *Accompagnement Québec-Guatemala* project since 1996, in 2012 Laurence Guénette participated in the writing of a report on the discrimination against Aboriginal women in Canada which was presented to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, and also wrote another report on non-violence and student demonstrations. On a different note, she has also been able to use her ability to rally others by mobilizing several people on the front lines to support access to justice and put an end to impunity in Guatemala.

## Local Peace Initiative

Fondation Jasmin Roy

### Fighting bullying in schools

The mission of the *Fondation Jasmin-Roy* is to fight bullying, discrimination, and violence against children in elementary and high schools. This is achieved through various initiatives aimed at promoting better interventions for victims and bullies. The foundation implemented an anti-bullying pilot project in four schools which has already been crowned a success. By providing victims, their loved ones, and public figures with the opportunity to express themselves, it has shown that it is possible to break the silence.





## The Y and human trafficking: a local and international phenomenon

by Dimitrina Raby

We want to break the silence on human trafficking because it is a serious violation of human rights and one of the most important international criminal activities, along with drug trafficking and arms trafficking. All countries are implicated: no continent, no country is immune from it. In fact, it is a little known fact that Montréal is a hub for human trafficking. The victims of this modern form of slavery are mostly women and children being moved from one country to another or within their borders in order to exploit them. They are child soldiers, forced domestic or agricultural labourers, or the sexually exploited. They are deprived of their childhood.

The Human Trafficking Project was initiated in 2011 by The YMCAs of Québec's International Initiatives through funding from the Ministry of International Relations' (MRI) Fund for Public Education and Engagement in International Solidarity (FEEPSI). During this period, the project has carried out several activities: coaching a group of volunteers who have developed workshops for raising awareness, training 16 volunteers capable of leading these workshops, as well as facilitating several workshops and exhibiting informative posters on child trafficking in participating YMCAs.

Aside from these front-line activities, the project has resulted in new partnerships and awareness not expected during the initial project including the creation of a Facebook page called *Traitons la traite* where articles and links of interest have been shared with nearly 500 people since August 2012. One of the partnerships formed was with the YMCA International School which opened several language courses in order to hold awareness workshops. Also, internal relationships were forged with the community program Dialogue which works on the streets of Montréal with a population at risk and often linked to trafficking.

Collaborations went beyond the YMCA with new partners such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which has a person dedicated to raising awareness on human trafficking, and with *Les Affranchie* (Half the Sky), a new movement that has worked with the RCMP to conduct public consultation on trafficking in Québec. The YMCA participated and organized a large event in Montréal with guests, testimonials, and where they shared the results of this survey. Not only was the YMCA present (staff, volunteers, and senior management included), it was also an official partner of the event. Training YMCA youth workers, raising awareness among youth attending the YMCA, and collaboration around an event for the 2013 International Women's Day are all results of these partnerships. We hope that these training and outreach events will allow participants to take effective action in the fight against human trafficking.



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