WELCOME TO OUR FIRST EDITION OF CWY ALUMNI NEWS

As Canada World Youth Alumni, you are part of a group of individuals whose energy, enthusiasm and teamwork have been making a difference in Canada and around the world since 1971. With the insights and experiences of over 37,000 CWY Alumni, we thought it would be valuable to have a place to reconnect, share stories, and learn more about the lives of your fellow Alumni after CWY – that’s why we’re launching CWY Alumni News.

You are part of a truly global team of individuals who continue to support CWY by actively participating in the development of a just, harmonious and sustainable world. In fact, Mike Power, Director of the Youth Leaders in Action program, describes CWY Alumni as “super volunteers” who have a tremendous impact on their communities that can be seen around the world.

Beyond volunteering countless hours, you have gone on to make a difference in fields too numerous to mention. Many of you are working in the creative arts, with INGOs and non-profits, in education and in government. But these are just a few of the paths our Alumni are traveling. We see you leveraging your interest in cultural exchange and global issues to inform and enrich a wide range of careers.

On these pages, we will promote and celebrate your activities and accomplishments. We will inform you about reunions, projects, life-cycle events and your personal stories. We will also bring you into the picture as we work to transform CWY into an organization ready to meet the challenges that lie ahead, ensuring we continue to meet the needs of today’s youth with specialized programs like the Aboriginal Youth Program you will read about in this first issue.

We will publish CWY Alumni News on a quarterly basis - keep an eye out for the next edition in the spring! Please send us any news that you would like to see featured in upcoming newsletters, as well as any feedback to mdagonas@cwyy-jcm.org. We'd love to hear from you. Don’t forget to update your contact information so that we can continue to connect with you about new initiatives and upcoming events in your area. You can do so by emailing alumni@cwyy-jcm.org or calling 1-800-605-3526 ext: 600. Your continued support means the world to us!

Signed,

Mathieu Dagonas, Head of Philanthropy

Canada World Youth Head Office
2330 Notre-Dame Street West, Suite 300
Montreal, Quebec, H3J 1N4
canadaworldyouth.org
There’s no doubt about it. The Canada World Youth experience has an incredible impact on the lives of our participants. The knowledge and insight our Alumni take home after a project provides them with the tools to create the changes they want to see in the world.

Do you ever wonder where your fellow Alumni are now? In this chapter of CWY Alumni News, we reconnect with past volunteers who have gone on to do incredible things within their communities and around the world.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Gunny just turned 60 and celebrated with her best friend, another CWY Alumni by taking a 24-day cruise through the Mediterranean and returning to their CWY country, the former Yugoslavia. She’s moved across Canada from Kitchener to Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Montreal, back to Winnipeg and finally returned to Vancouver. Her career path led her into journalism and then real estate, which she currently still does for a living. “I thrive in change, marry often, travel even more, love to change my surroundings”.

How did you make the decision to go with CWY?
I saw an article describing the program in our local paper in Kitchener, Ontario and thought it sounded like an opportunity of a lifetime - a chance to leave a small city, meet new people and travel overseas. I applied even though the article was published after the submission deadline thinking “What the heck...maybe I still have a chance.” I wanted to go to Africa, but was chosen to go to Yugoslavia. No regrets, but still want to get to Africa.

What did you learn while on your CWY exchange?
I had led a fairly conservative sheltered life so probably the biggest revelation was that “there’s a big world out there”. Even though I was well aware that there are French Canadians living in Canada one of my biggest culture shocks was meeting them and realizing some don’t speak any English. I had no idea and was also sorely reminded of how lacking my own French speaking ability was in spite of studying it for most of my schooling.

CWY changed my personality considerably. My own mother who has gone on to do incredible things within their communities and around the world.

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GAINED CONFIDENCE AND THE POWER TO BELIEVE. I LEARNED THAT YOU CREATE YOUR OWN OPPORTUNITIES.

What did you learn while on your CWY exchange?
I attribute CWY with my global outlook, my desire for regular interaction and exposure to different cultures and countries — and for pursuing an international career. Thank you CWY!

What surprised you most during your program?
I had been accepted into University but I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. CWY offered me the chance to visit a new part of the world, so it was an easy decision to make.

What skills did you develop during your program?
I developed many skills like education and teaching skills, public speaking, critical thinking, etc. CWY helped me think on the spot. I became a better listener, which is especially important when there is a language barrier because you need to look more at body language and read the context of where that person is from.

Have you kept in touch with some of your fellow participants?
Absolutely! I went back in 1991, for two more years as a volunteer in a special needs school and to further my Spanish learning in the same town I was hosted by CWY. After learning Spanish, I did my undergrad in International Relations in Costa Rica. I maintained my friends since CWY days. Over the years, the group has maintained contact. There is a Facebook group with nearly 75% of the participants who share photos and updates on their lives.

What are your plans/projects for the future?
I am going to finish my Master’s thesis in Educational Foundations at Mount Saint Vincent University, hopefully by early 2015. I will continue to be involved in Aboriginal education, health and community development. I hope that our alliance will reach out to other countries – Latin American Aboriginal tribes for knowledge sharing and strengthen our alliance’s involvement in Canada as well. And I will continue to support CWY!!!

JENNIFER JONES
QUEBEC - BENIN 1999-2000

Home from Berlin with “a firm commitment to community development and inclusive education.” Jennifer completed her degree in International Development and Women’s Studies. She has built on her CWY strengths ever since, teaching refugees community development and working with Room To Grow in Thailand and also volunteering with several projects in Laos, where she has initiated a project with Insulin for Life, providing lifesaving diabetes supplies and education to people in developing countries, and developing educational materials for the Elephant Conservation Centre.

How did you make the decision to go with CWY?
A friend told me about CWY as I was just finishing high school. I had been accepted into University but I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. CWY offered me the chance to visit a new part of the world, so it was an easy decision to make.

What did you learn while on your CWY exchange?
After the program, I started studying International Development. I think my experience with CWY raised more questions about inequality in this world than anyone has answers for, but it’s the asking of the questions, and the search for answers that were the most valuable things I took away.

What surprised you most during the program?
I worked at an under-resourced health clinic in rural West Africa for four months. The things that surprised me the most aren’t things people like reading about, trust me.

What skills did you develop during your program?
CWY instilled in me a quest to understand things from a non-white, non-Western perspective. At the time, I found that frustrating. Sometimes it even felt a bit like being in a cult. And to be honest, I don’t think I was very successful at it. But it stuck with me. The work I do now is based in community development approaches which work alongside local people to achieve local priorities. I work quite differently than many of my colleagues in aid organizations. What we are doing is often quite similar, but how we do it can be worlds apart. I trace back my philosophy of aid to those very confusing days with CWY.

Have you kept in touch with your fellow participants?
We kept in touch for a very long time. But its now been 14 years since we were on the program together, and most of that time I’ve been out of Canada. I have a good idea where many of them are and what they are doing and I know that if I ever needed them, they would be there for me.

What accomplishment are you most proud of?
In 2007, I co-founded a charity for refugee children without parents called Room to Grow Foundation. The work started in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border where I lived and worked for seven years. I was diagnosed with Type 1 Diabetes just a week after I got home from my CWY debriefing and being able to handle my disease and work in conditions where there is no electricity or running water, has been a challenge I am proud to have accomplished. Every year, we are able to support local groups that house, cloth and feed over a thousand children who are looking for safety, peace, an education, and a chance to be children. Every time I see one of those children, I feel proud to be part of a community that helps them grow up stronger and smarter and ready to face the future.

What are your plans for the future?
I will continue to serve on the Board of Directors for Room to Grow Foundation and ensure that our work continues to help children in need. I’m currently based in Laos, but I’m not sure what the future will hold. I have been blessed to be healthy and to have had challenging and interesting work in my life that matters. That’s all I could hope for – for myself, for the future.
With reunions, a leadership tour, and a national symposium, it’s been a rather eventful year for Canada World Youth.

The first of this summer’s reunions took place in Banff, bringing CWY Alumni together to celebrate CWY’s long-standing Canada-India exchange. With Banff Mayor Karen Sorensen as the guest of honour, and many members from India in attendance, the reunion was a great success.

In late August, a reunion of participants from CWY’s Indonesia-British Columbia and Indonesia-Ontario 1984-85 exchanges was held in Bali. Twenty-four CWY Alumni and family members reunited for three days under the sun, exploring new ways to support the village that hosted them decades ago.

The CWY leadership team was also busy this summer, touring Western Canada to reconnect with Alumni from Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories.

That’s how one participant summed up the experience shared by many at the Aboriginal Youth & Confederation, a national symposium for Aboriginal young people, hosted by CWY and the Mi’kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island.

Held June 26-28, in Charlottetown, PEI, the event brought 50 Aboriginal youth from across Canada together to:

• Share information about the contemporary significance of Confederation
• Generate ideas for addressing specific challenges facing Aboriginal young people in Canada

The symposium was presented under three themes: Confederation, Colonization and Reconciliation.

Day one focused on brainstorming sessions aimed at identifying and prioritizing needs and issues.

The groups’ action plans were presented on the third and final day, which concluded with next steps and evaluations, followed by a closing ceremony and group photos.

We’d like to extend a big thank you to all the speakers, Elders, performers and organizers for their hard work in making this event such a success. CWY also commends all the young people who participated – demonstrating great courage in sharing their stories, experiences, insights and opinions.

It is this kind of collaboration and open-mindedness that inspires the work that we do.

Was the Symposium a success?

Our follow-up survey determined that 96% said yes!

Canada World Youth gratefully acknowledges the financial support of its donors, partner organizations, and the Government of Canada, provided through the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD). CWY is a registered charity with the Canada Revenue Agency charitable number 899702488 RR0001 and a charitable tax receipt will be issued for all gifts over $20.
Transformation is what it’s all about at Canada World Youth. Since 1971, CWY has transformed thousands of lives by offering youth from Canada and across the globe truly life-changing experiences. However, it was in 2013-14 that CWY redoubled its efforts towards the road to organizational transformation.

A key goal of this transformation process is to make CWY more self-reliant by diversifying its sources of income. This diversification includes the creation of a Strategic Alliance with Youth Challenge International and a strong focus on Aboriginal programming. In an effort to improve our fundraising initiatives, a new philanthropy department has also been established. This team has been hard at work cultivating a philanthropic culture to support our organization's growth strategy for years to come.

Greater self-reliance also means improving our performance on all fronts and reevaluating our core values and capabilities. At a strategic retreat last fall, CWY management, union, NFSA, and staff representatives collaborated to identify CWY’s true differentiator:

“CWY provides Canadian and international youth who are looking to discover themselves and the world with authentic and eye-opening experiential learning, unparalleled by any other organization.”

At a second strategic retreat in January 2014, CWY board members met to discuss the challenges and opportunities ahead, to identify organizational priorities both short and long-term, and provide alignment within CWY.

Another objective of CWY’s transformation was to examine how to better present ourselves to the world – a crucial part of marketing the CWY identity. The result of this transformation is a fresh, vibrant, and modernized look that brings our true differentiator to life – distinguishing CWY in the marketplace and painting a compelling picture of how our organization will continue to transform youth for years to come.

Signed,

Rita S. Karakas
President and CEO