

Canada World Youth

A Guide for Parents

**6 week Youth
Leaders in Action
program**

March 2013



**Canada
World
Youth**



**Jeunesse
Canada
Monde**

Welcome Parents and Guardians of Youth Volunteers on Canada World Youth programs!

What an exciting time for you and your youth volunteer! You may be experiencing emotions ranging from nervousness, happiness, excitement and perhaps some apprehension. What parent or guardian would not have these emotions at some point at the thought of their child going to another part of Canada and another part of the world?

In consideration of this, we encourage you to read through the Canada World Youth Parents' Guide in order to better understand how to support your youth volunteer as he or she embarks on the adventure of a lifetime.

This document is divided into 5 parts:

- 1) What is Canada World Youth?
- 2) Health and Safety of Youth Volunteers
- 3) Before the program
- 4) During the program
- 5) Returning home

1. WHAT IS CANADA WORLD YOUTH?

Founded in 1971, Canada World Youth (CWY) is a world leader in developing international educational programs for young people **aged 15 to 29**. CWY programs are designed to help youth experience the world for themselves, learn about other cultures and diverse Canadian communities while developing leadership and communication skills. Mainly focused on health and environment, the educational experience instils a long-lasting sense of global social responsibility.

A unique and innovative model

Non-formal education: The CWY program advocates learning by doing, a model in which young volunteers learn by being actively engaged and volunteering in communities in Canada and in another country.

A bilateral exchange program: CWY is one of the few organizations in the world that offers a two-part program, with one phase in Canada and the second in another country. This is one of the most original aspects of the CWY model because it provides a perspective on how people live in both countries and fosters true dialogue between partners in the global South and in the North.

2. HEALTH AND SAFETY OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERS

The health and safety of our youth volunteers and staff are Canada World Youth's number one priority. All CWY projects are supervised by highly qualified professionals who provide volunteers with a safe, unique, and enriching experience.

Health

Canada World Youth is dedicated to ensuring that all youth volunteers' health is given the highest priority.

Canada World Youth has a team of health care professionals that monitors illnesses during the program and advises us in our actions to promote health during the program.

In addition:

- Each Canadian volunteer is provided with travel health insurance for their overseas experience.
- Each team is equipped with a comprehensive medical kit that project supervisors have been trained to use.

The CWY program can be a stressful experience and our staff will have an easier time supporting all volunteers if they can plan for this in advance. If your child has a particular medical condition, allergies or would need special support systems, it is very important that he or she discloses this information in the medical evaluation form.

Your child is being vaccinated: Your child should be visiting his/her MyFile Account to see what vaccinations are recommended and required for the program. Canada World Youth covers the cost of the overseas health insurance, but the cost of vaccination is not covered by the program.

We ask that each volunteer visit a travel clinic prior to their Canada World Youth program, where a travel health nurse can give up-to-date advice for staying healthy while away from home.

How can you support your child?

- Ensure that your child does not forget any important medical information when filling out the medical form.
- Encourage your child to receive all vaccinations before heading away from home.
- Assist your child with transportation to and from the health clinic. Some travel health clinics are located far from home, especially if you live in a rural area.
- Assist your child in paying for the vaccinations. Some vaccinations can be quite costly but are very necessary. Another option is to assist your child in requesting for funding support from your local band council and/or community associations.

Safety

CWY acts on the advice of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Canada and follows country situations closely through our exchange partners and Canadian Embassies.

Travel advisories are closely monitored and taken into account at all times during the program's development and duration.

In the unlikely event that a country's situation becomes unsafe for our youth volunteers, Canada World Youth will implement procedures to ensure the safety of all volunteers. Such measures may include, but are not limited to: repatriation of youth volunteers, delay of the beginning of the program, selection of a new partner country, and cancellation of the overseas phase.

To ensure the health, safety and security of the volunteers, the volunteers themselves must maintain a high degree of integrity as to not compromise their security throughout the program.

Volunteers must be aware of the choices they make during the program and ensure that these are made with their own security, and the security of others in mind.

How can you support your child?

- Talk with your child about the risks and challenges of travelling abroad.
- Review with your child the information provided by Canada World Youth, prior to their departure.

Volunteer Responsibilities

In order to ensure that the CWY program remains a safe and positive experience for everyone, CWY has policies on youth volunteer responsibilities. These guidelines are meant to provide direction to volunteers and are grouped into three broad categories as follows:

1. Respect for the Law: Volunteers should be aware and respect the laws in Canada and the exchange country.
2. Health, safety and security: Volunteers' actions should seek to preserve and promote the health, safety and security of themselves and others
3. Positive and responsible participation: Volunteers should contribute to a positive program for everyone in a manner that will allow others to participate in the years to come.

In addition to these broad guidelines, four clear restrictions have been established for the duration of the program. These restrictions are part of CWY's risk management and insurance policies.

Therefore, for the duration of their program, youth volunteers must refrain from:

- Hitchhiking
- Driving motorized vehicles
- Leaving the exchange country
- Leaving the community of their exchange without the authorization of a project supervisor.

Project Supervisors ensure that these responsibilities are understood and respected by youth volunteers throughout the exchange. Failure to adhere to the responsibilities will be grounds for disciplinary action established by Canada World Youth. Serious lack in judgment or repeated violations of volunteer responsibilities can lead to dismissal from the program, in which case the volunteer will be responsible for reimbursing Canada World Youth the cost of their air ticket home.

How can you support your child?

- **Discuss with your child his or her responsibilities while on the program.**
- **If your child questions the pertinence of some restrictions and responsibilities, encourage him or her to contact his or her Project Supervisor to get more context information on the country of the exchange and the rationale for such rules.**

3. BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Getting ready

Your child has been selected to participate in a Canada World Youth educational program. Once they have accepted their offer they will have access to our online “myfile” page which outlines the program details. Information includes:

- Review of their program
- Their main responsibilities as volunteers and young adults on an exchange program
- Information on how to do a successful fundraising campaign
- Medical requirements
- Insurance
- The documents they need to bring with them
- Transportation and baggage
- Pocket money

Many of the issues a youth volunteer is confronted with during his or her program could be prevented if the youth volunteer had been well-prepared for the experience. Reading this guide is a critical step to ensure a good pre-departure preparation.

How can you support your child?

- Encourage your child to read all the necessary information we send them and to become more familiar with all aspects of the Canada World Youth experience.

Program Costs and Fundraising

Most CWY programs are heavily subsidized and the cost of placing 1 volunteer through a program ranges from \$5,000 for a 6 week program to \$16,000 for a 6 month program. CWY pays for and organizes domestic transport from a youth’s home community as well as international transport, food and lodging during the program, international medical insurance and program costs during the program.

Fundraising contributions give youth volunteers an opportunity to begin developing their communication and leadership skills. As well, the small contributions made by volunteers ensures that we can continue to offer programming to future youth.

Preparing for the adventure

Packing for the program is a critical aspect of the preparation. It is important to consider the weight and size of baggage; and to carefully assess the youth volunteer’s needs with regard to: climate, activities and regional norms (e.g.: Is there electricity readily available? What types of outlet are common? Does it rain a lot? Is the temperature generally warm or cold? etc.)

How can you support your child?

- Encourage your child to look up climate information for each location they will visit for that time of year.
- Encourage your child to communicate with past volunteers when possible and with the Project Supervisor prior to the start of the program, to discuss what is really useful to bring and to ask questions.
- Encourage your child to go for a walk with his or her bags to see if it is a comfortable weight.
- Encourage your child to question the items pack for functionality, usefulness and necessity during the program.
- Assist your child in weighing his or her baggage to ensure that they will not go over the weight limits of their various flights throughout the program. Note that there are sometimes discrepancies in weight restrictions between domestic and international airlines.
- Assist in researching country information with your child.

4. DURING THE PROGRAM

Youth Leaders in Action (6 weeks): A Rough Outline

This is a brief chronological outline of what a volunteer can expect during both phases of the CWY Youth Leaders in Action Program. Projects begin in Canada with one week of orientation and then the team heads to the exchange country together:

- Volunteer arrival in airport
- Program orientation
- Flight overseas
- Volunteers begin host family stay
- Community orientation
- Volunteer work projects begin
- Mid project reflection
- Continue on volunteer work projects
- Complete volunteer work projects
- Debriefing
- Pre-departure
- Flight home

- After Program:
 - Re-entry camp in Canada
 - Return home

Potential for culture shock

'Culture shock' is used to describe the emotional rollercoaster that someone experiences when finding themselves in a new community within Canada or overseas. It is normal for the volunteers to experience some form of culture shock during their program. The symptoms of culture shock vary but can include:

- a feeling of sadness and loneliness
- an over concern about ones health
- headaches, pains, and allergies
- insomnia or sleeping too much
- feelings of anger, depression, vulnerability
- idealizing ones own culture
- trying too hard to adapt by becoming obsessed with the new culture
- the smallest problems seem overwhelming
- feeling shy or insecure
- become obsessed with cleanliness
- overwhelming sense of homesickness
- feeling lost or confused
- questioning one's decision to join the program

Since part of the experience involves living as a group, there is a good chance that the group itself will go through a form of culture shock during their adaptation process. This process can usually be divided in four phases.

Phase 1 The honey moon: everything is great, people are excited, have energy and love everything and everyone in the program.

Phase 2 The storm: suddenly the honeymoon is over and reality sets in. At this point most volunteers are experiencing some of the symptoms of culture shock, at varying degrees. There are some things that annoy them about the program its rules and some behaviours and personality traits that they may not like about their host family, counterpart, work placement or project supervisors etc.

Phase 3 Normalizing: Once volunteers begin to accept and adapt to their new situation and environments they enter the third phase. They have adapted and sought solutions to their challenges. They now understand what the expectations are and are starting to meet those expectations.

Phase 4 Performance: At this stage, they are starting to feel comfortable with their surroundings and the group and individuals begin performing. They find new energy and new projects. They reach for new heights within the experience and put all of their energy into making the most of this amazing opportunity!

Each group and individual in the group may hit these stages at different points and some may not ever reach the performing stage. It is the Project Supervisors' role to help youth navigate through these stages. They provide the group with the necessary resources to find solutions to their issues and define their personal and group objectives for the time they will spend on the program. Projects Supervisors can also act as a friendly ear when a youth volunteer is home-sick.

How can you support your child?

- If your child is suffering from culture shock, discuss the issues openly and let him or her know that what they are experiencing is normal and part of the educational experience.
- Invite your child to discuss his or her feelings with the Project Supervisor.
- Encourage your child to be perseverant; the best part of the program is still to come for them.

Communicating with your child

Each family has a unique experience when it comes to staying in touch. What is certain is that the frequency and types of communications you have with your child will vary throughout the program due to both access and circumstances. Here are some of the most common situations encountered by CWY families.

Your child never calls or emails: Your child will be very busy throughout the program. There are many activities that all of the volunteers are involved in and are organizing. Each volunteer is responsible for building and maintaining positive and healthy relationships with their host family, work place partners, counterpart, other volunteers and other community members. During this time the volunteers must immerse themselves into a new culture and put in 100% of their energy, effort and focus. Given the nature of the program, it is reasonable to expect only periodic emails and phone calls while still being reassured of a young volunteer's well being.

While less frequent contact with your daughter or son may be challenging, it also means that your child is probably getting the most out of his or her experience. Also, many host families overseas may not have landlines and there may only be internet and phone cafes in the community, therefore your child may not be able to contact home on a regular basis. This is something that the volunteers must adapt to during their stay in the community.

IMPORTANT NOTE: In the exceptional event that an emergency occurs in the field or for your child, Canada World Youth will contact the emergency contact person that the volunteer provided in their application for the program.

How can you support your child?

- Respect the wishes or circumstances of your child. Perhaps you discussed your expectations with your child prior to his or her departure, but be ready for the communication patterns to change. Although it is increasingly easy to stay in touch throughout the program, keep in mind that the specific requirements of the program and the limitations to which your child might be confronted (no electricity, no landlines, no internet access, etc.) may result in less regular communication.
- Discuss your expectations with your child prior to his or her departure, but keep in mind the specific requirements of the program and the limitations to which your child might be confronted (no electricity, no landlines, no internet access, etc.).

Your child is calling or chatting every night! Too much contact with home may prevent the volunteer from fully benefiting from the program. If they are constantly in contact with friends and family from home, chances are they are not spending this time engaging with their teammates or their host families. When communications with home are very frequent, we start to question whether they want to be on the program or if they would prefer to be at home. Constant contact with home can also trigger greater home sickness.

How can you support your child?

- Establish some limits together. Set up a time every week or second week where you can expect a short phone call or email from your child to hear how things are going. This eases your worry and allows your volunteer to focus 100% in the program. Remind your child that in order to get the most out of the program they must focus and spend their time on the program elements.

Every time your child contacts home they express a different emotion: This is normal when on a Canada World Youth program. The volunteers will be challenged in many different ways throughout the program. They will go through cultural and group adaptation processes. There will be many things in the program that the volunteers will have to face and deal with as a result of the eye-opening experience. Each experience will be different and each youth will grow during the program. Volunteers will come into the program expecting to learn about the world -- which they will certainly do -- but they will also learn a great deal about themselves and how their actions affect others in the world. This can be challenging.

IMPORTANT NOTE: In the exceptional event that an emergency occurs in the field or for your child, Canada World Youth will contact the emergency contact person that the volunteer provided in their application for the program.

How can you support your child?

- Listen to your child and know that this is part of the process.
- Encourage your child to seek healthy ways to deal with each situation.
- Encourage your child to speak with their project supervisor and ask for advice.
- Resist the urge to solve the issue; offer advice but encourage them to use their judgment to take the best course of action.

IMPORTANT NOTE: CONFIDENTIALITY LAW

According to the law in Canada, Canada World Youth cannot disclose any information about a youth volunteer without his/her written consent if they are the age of majority in the province or territory of their origin, even if the person requesting the information is a parent or legal guardian.

The age of majority varies depending on the Canadian province or territory of residence.

I miss my child so much... Parents of CWY volunteers often miss their children and find it difficult to reduce their involvement in their children's lives. For many parents, the CWY exchange represents their first experiences as so-called "empty-nesters" and for still some, their first experiences without daily check-ins with their child. The intensity of these feelings makes some parents understandably anxious...and they often seek to become more involved in "helping" the volunteers during the exchange, contacting them frequently, offering advice, etc.

How can you support your child?

- Consider taking a step back during the program; it will enable your child to benefit from the many learning opportunities of the program, helping them to become more and more independent and resilient. If they often seek your advice, encourage them to turn to their project supervisors and to their peers on the program who know the context. Re-assure them that you will always be there for them, but that there are other support networks that can provide the unique kinds of support required on the CWY program.

5. AFTER THE PROGRAM

Returning home

Your child will return home and quite possibly will have new ideas and enthusiasm for many things. He or she may also be very tired.

Your child may also go through a period of 'reverse culture shock'. The symptoms of reverse culture shock are the same as for culture shock (see page 7). This situation is common as youth volunteers have adapted and grown accustomed to being very busy and now must reintegrate back into their old life. For some this may be easier than others.

How can you support your child?

- Listen to stories and share pictures.
- Allow your child to sleep and rest.
- Encourage your child to follow his or her passions.
- Encourage your child to get involved in the community.
- Encourage him or her to stay in touch with members of the group and to connect with other past volunteers through the CWY alumni and friends association.