

Regardless of the country they would like to visit, the survey found, the reasons for wanting to travel are often the same. "Many young people say that they have always wanted to see a particular country, find the culture interesting, or want to learn the language." Many choose countries where they have an existing familiarity with the culture and language or have family.

Effecting change

Beyond seeking experience abroad for their own personal growth, many young Canadians are also intent on shaping Canada's role in the world—and the world itself.

While considering the government's new International Policy Statement in May, members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade heard from an entire panel of participants speaking from a youth perspective.

One of those who addressed the committee was David Eaves, a member of Canada25, a non-partisan organization dedicated to engaging Canadians aged 20 to 35 in public policy debate. Each year, Canada25 prepares a report on an issue chosen by its members, basing its recommendations on extensive research and consultation. This year's report is on foreign policy and is entitled *From Middle to Model Power: Recharging Canada's Role in the World*.

"The goal of our report is not to provide the answer to Canada's foreign policy debate," explains Eaves, the lead author of the report. "Our intention is to provide a compelling and challenging vision of Canada's foreign policy that will push the thinking."

Among other things, the organization recommends that international programs for young Canadians be vastly expanded in the belief that international experience is an essential element of any 21st-century education.

"Canada has an enormous advantage because of our immigrant population," Eaves told the parliamentary committee in May. "Many people already speak a second language, are familiar with a second culture and are comfortable with it. It's one of the beauties of Canada. We as a community recognize that when people get together with different perspectives, there is a need to reconcile—there's a need to learn about the other."

YPI participant Kevina Power agrees. She will spend the next six months in Nairobi, Kenya, working on models of engagement for the June 2006 World Urban Forum and related events, including the youth forum. For Power, the UN's millennium goals simply can't be met without the full participation and support of the world's young people.

"Vancouver will be an amazing opportunity to continue to motivate the next generation of planners and world leaders in sustainable development," she says. "It's going to put young people on an equal playing field with all the other interested parties." 🍁



photo: Paul Schemm, Cairo Times

International immersion: Annik Lussier covers a demonstration in Cairo as a staff writer in 2002 for the *Cairo Times*.

Making a difference

Four years ago, Annik Lussier was a young reporter working at the *Cairo Times* through an international job placement sponsored by the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations in Ottawa.

The experience made a big impression. Today Lussier, 29, is the projects coordinator for the council and is seeking a career as a foreign service officer in order to help further Canada's role abroad. "In Cairo," says Lussier, "I saw the kind of work that could be done."

Lussier was among several spirited young Canadians profiled three years ago in a *Canada World View* article (see *Issue 17, Autumn 2002*) on youth programs supported by the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (now Foreign Affairs Canada) who have gone on to bigger challenges after gaining international work experience. Combined with Lussier's training, the six-month internship made possible a posting of nearly two years in Cairo, followed by a seven-month editing stint at the *China Daily* in Beijing.

Now, as a coordinator at the council offering practical advice to interns, "I can really give my personal views on how I lived the program," says Lussier, a self-described social activist who believes that Canada has a special role abroad. "We have such expertise in civil society, in governance. We're helping with capacity building."

In Morden, Manitoba, Darryl Toews, 35, and his wife Meredith Daun, 26, both former interns of the Youth Mine Action Ambassador Program, have deepened their commitment to drawing attention to abandoned landmines throughout the world.

Following their experience in the program (Toews from 1999 to 2000 and Daun from 2000 to 2001), the couple created the Manitoba Campaign to Ban Landmines. "Being youth ambassadors gave us a first-hand look at the landmine issue and [a chance] to be part of the movement to eliminate them," Toews says in an interview from Rwanda, where he is observing efforts to help landmine victims. The youth program, he adds, "provided us with a lot of quality work experience and skills development that have benefited us in our current work."

For his part, Philip Strong, 32, initially thought he was headed for Uganda in 2001 as a youth intern, but wound up in Washington, D.C., instead—and has remained there since his placement with the American Council of the Blind.

Strong, a Newfoundland native who has had a personal involvement in advocacy issues since he lost his sight in 1987, has duties today as an advocacy specialist for the council that include policy work on access and safety for the visually impaired in the area of transportation.

The internship program, Strong recounts, "opened up a whole different realm of opportunities, both employment-wise and in terms of life experience."

Many former interns say they found that the placements made real their aspirations for effecting positive change in the world.

"It demonstrated to us that we can make a difference," says Toews, "and we wanted to stay involved."