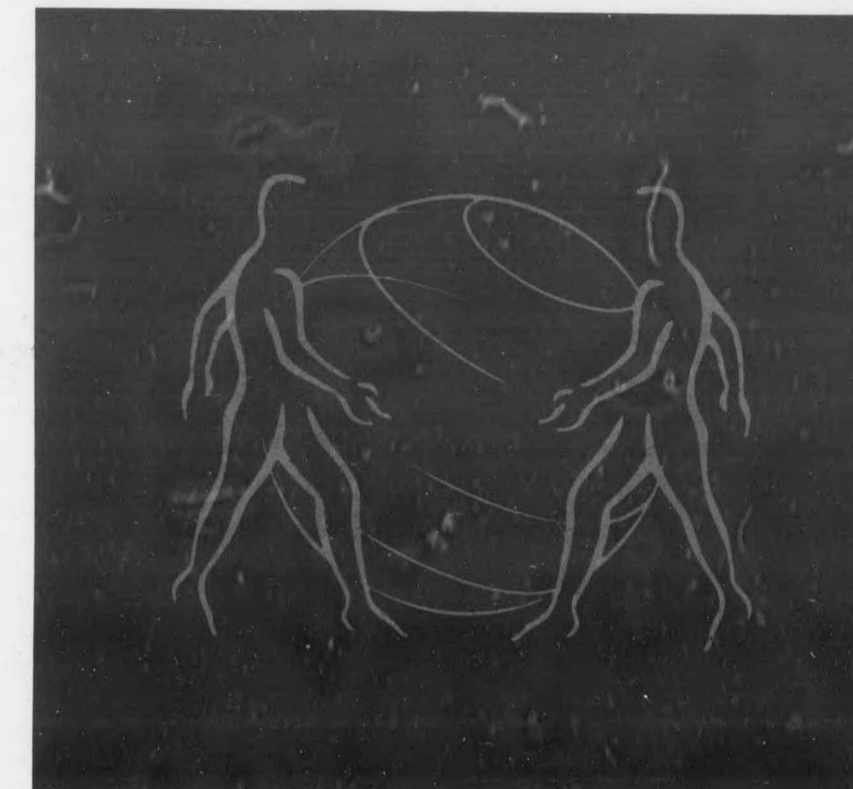
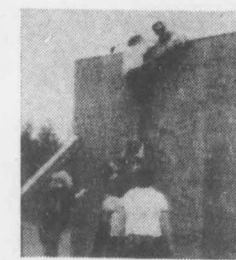
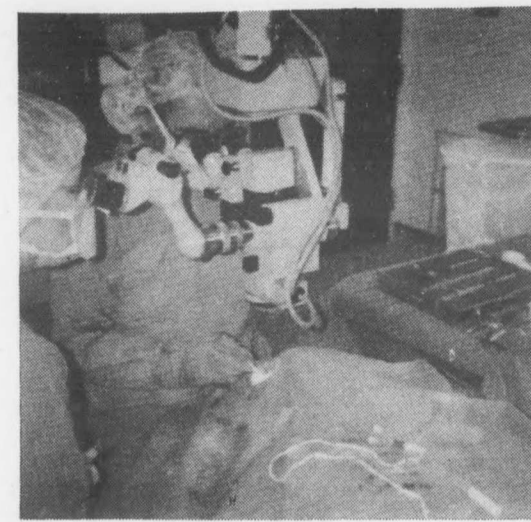


# Youth Challenge International



by Marieka Arnold

## What is Youth Challenge International?

Youth Challenge International is a non-profit organization run mostly by volunteers. YCI is a youth and international development programme that promotes youth to become actively involved in responsible projects in Canada and abroad. This development occurs for youth through a wide range of skills acquired during the participant's involvement in YCI's whole programme, called the four challenges. Youth Challenge seeks to provide opportunities for selected participants, aged 18-25, to live and work with peers from different nations during a three month international development project. Youth Challenge is devoted to the principles of community service, scientific and medical projects, fostering personal growth with this commitment. Projects are undertaken in remote or developing regions, in close cooperation with local communities and organizations.

### History

The roots of Youth Challenge date back to 1978 when Prince Charles launched a 2-year, round the world series of youth expeditions to commemorate the 4th anniversary of Sir Francis Drake's navigation of the globe. The themes of Operation Drake (OD) were science, service and adventure, very similar to that of Operation Raleigh (OR), which would take place from 1984-1988. OR involved nearly 4000 participants from over forty nations, and was a prelude to the Canadian based organization. Participants, volunteers, sponsors and developing communities which hosted OD and OR projects took the initiative to foster a new pro-

gram called "Youth Challenge International". In 1989 the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) awarded YCI a grant to undertake Project Guyana 1 (1990). 1990 also saw the success of a privately funded Canada-Soviet project named Arctic Quest. Further CIDA sponsorship for subsequent projects in Guyana and Costa Rica has helped to sustain our efforts.

After nearly four years, YCI has developed into a multi-country programme with partners in Australia, Guyana and Costa Rica and soon in the Solomon Islands.

### YCI's Four Challenges

Throughout their three month participation in an international development project, Challengers actively engage in a series of unique and demanding educational experiences. For most, it is the first opportunity to work with youth from other countries. They participate in worthwhile community projects, undertake valuable medical assignments and assist scientific research. This field participation represents only one aspect of Challenger involvement with YCI. All participants are expected to commit fully to YCI's *four challenges* as outlined.

Full participation in the *four challenges* requires personal commitment. Participants acquire personal perspectives and new appreciations for the significance of international development, for their homeland, for themselves and for others.

### First Challenge - Selection

"Challengers" are chosen well in advance of their international projects. An application review process invites candidates to a regional, two day Selection Weekend (SW). During the SW the

rigours, trials and tribulations of a three month project are simulated in outdoor conditions. Candidates' abilities to analyze problems and implement solutions in a cooperative, common sense manner are evaluated along with group skills.

### Second Challenge - Preparation

Selected Challengers play a crucial role throughout the preparation phase of each project related skills, assisting in the procurement of necessary project equipment and fund raising. Canadian Challengers are required to personally fund raise \$3300 within their community.

### Third Challenge - International Field Project

Challengers are involved in exciting and worthwhile development projects in health, education and scientific research. They assist with immunisations, health surveys, renovations of schools, shelters or community buildings, and conduct scientific research on environmental, anthropological or social issues. They live within an international group, work beside local residents, and learn the value of teamwork.

### Fourth Challenge-Follow Up

Challengers return to their home communities with a great sense of personal accomplishment, lifelong friendships and valuable work skills. Their new found confidence and self-awareness readies them for their final challenge: to transform their personal experiences into positive civic and social action in their home communities.

**N**ever, in my wildest dreams, could I have imagined that embarking on an exchange program would involve such a deep commitment and the consumption of time that it has... WOW!... Reflections from a fund-raiser...

Let me start with my initial connection to the work exchange program Youth Challenge International. It all began with a harmless, and in retrospect I might add, effortlessly written application. Having passed the initial selection process I next found myself alongside some 40-odd, shivering, invigorated Atlantic province youth forging into the freezing waters of the Bay of Fundy. It was mid-April 1993, and I was one of the many youth vying for a place as a challenger, or participant. This was our selection weekend, or more justly termed, Survival Weekend! This 3 day period was the turning point for my ideas about the program... It was an awesome experience and really spurred me on to seriously consider Youth Challenge.

Here I am now, in the midst of my Second Challenge; the first being the selection process. This stage is testing in terms of one's commitment and ability to approach the public. I am driven mostly by what awaits me in the months to come. My determination to improve awareness about the program to local youth between the ages of 18-25 also keeps me ticking. Youth Challenge started in Canada in 1989, and given its re-

cent conception, it seems to operate primarily in Central Canada. My goal is to make the exchange program more accessible to New Brunswickers.

During the second challenge I have been involved with the fundraising of \$3300.00...no small amount! Forty percent of the costs for the three month period are funded by CIDA, the Canadian International Development Agency. Some of my fundraising schemes have included presentations, raffles, T-shirt sales, Earth First retailing...and the list goes on.

The third challenge draws nearer and I continue to wait with

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anticipation. My "voyage of discovery" will begin on November 30, 1993 with a five day orientation in Toronto. On December 25 a group of 62 challengers will fly to the San Jose airport in Costa Rica, Central America. We will be involved in two separate work projects during our three month stay. These will include community service, scientific and medical projects. The possibilities range from eye cataract removal surgeries to sea turtle surveys.

Our Costa Rican homes will

most likely be situated in a community building or in a large group tent. Each different project will consist of 14 challengers: 7 Canadian and the other half from international countries. That alone should prove to be an amazing experience. Not to mention the potential connections that can be established with the host community. We will not be traveling to Costa Rica as tourists but as concerned individuals for the welfare of the people and their country.

Upon our return we will be involved with 100 hours of volunteer community service and will spend time making presentations and the like to local groups. This stage is the fourth and final challenge.

What awaits is an amazing opportunity! I have the good fortune to be participating in this educational and mind-expanding experience... *The Experience of a Lifetime!* Amongst other concerns, I look forward to seeing what I can bring home in return to my province and country.

Anyone with questions, comments etc: can contact me:

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