

In-Depth presents:

YOUTH CHALLENGE INTERNATIONAL

UNB student Mark Bray shares his experience as a Challenger in Guyana during the summer of 1994



No washing machine for this Guyanese Challenger, he must wash his clothes by the mighty river.

challenges, people from around the world and an immersion into a foreign community. The experience can be divided into three parts, fundraising and preparation, project and the return back home into one's own culture. The three stages provide a broad range of experiences and develop a broad range of skills whose value is distinct and beneficial in their own rights.

The second challenge is Project Life where you will be living and working with its community members. Projects range from cataract screening clinics, work with street kids, construction projects and heaps of down time that can be spent teaching kids crazy nursery rhymes, Sesame Street-like learning techniques in schools, challenging and losing to the community in friendly soccer matches or organizing a ridiculously huge bonfire party. After living and working with community members it is easy to make new friends and to learn more about their culture. Project Life is always full of surprises for example, the time the local bull got under the house at night while some of us were sleeping in our hammocks. To my great surprise the third part of the experience was the biggest shock to me, coming back home to our culture. After seeing things from different perspectives one begins to question and stand in amazement at things we take for granted.

Volunteering with YCI provides an amazing foreign experience. It provides a different physical and ideological perspectives of the world whose benefit is revealed more and more over time.

...YCI is extremely rewarding since it exposes the volunteer to many new challenges

Youth Challenge International (YCI) is a Canadian non-profit, non-religious, non-governmental, volunteer organization which is involved in international development projects. The three-month projects take place in Costa Rica, the Solomon Islands and Guyana, South America. These projects are run from a YCI headquarters located in each developing country by an international team of volunteers.

The international team is composed of Canadians, Australians and members of the host nation of the project. The projects on which these volunteers work are community, social and health related. The team works along with the community of the host nations. YCI's role in these developing countries is to create a system through which communities can apply for community

development projects, run feasibility studies, organize funding for projects, purchase materials, organize transportation of materials to project sites and

host nations and also many funding agencies for the important role that they play in international development. The success of the organization is attributed to its volunteers and the

ensure that the project is completed by providing field support. The field support is provided by several groups on different projects throughout the nation. YCI has found that their project selection process is very successful. Their success is recognized by CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) many Canadian sponsors, governments of the

small, grassroots nature of the organization. The personal, low cost nature of the organization has proved to be an effective formula for success.

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PROJECT GUYANA

Project Life

It took us ten days to get to our project site. In order to reach our destination we traveled by army truck, boat, hiked, slept in hammocks, made radio reports to HQ, saw lots of jungle and very few people. After 3 days in the dark, wet jungle the novelty of the whole experience had worn off. Our guide had been attempting to convince us that we would be at our destination "just now," but we were, to say the least, unconvinced. By the fifth day we were sore and some of us had jungle foot, oh well. When we broke out of the jungle we found ourselves on a mountain ridge and suddenly all of pain from the jungle trek was worthwhile and the scenery around us was beautiful.

Like clockwork I awoke to the cry of the mental donkey and the crow of a rooster. I lay there and watched the sun rise beyond my feet that poked from the side of my hammock. The isolated highland Amerindian village of Paramakatoi came alive as the sun shone across the village. I got out of bed and walked upstairs to see if the cooks of the day had started to make

breakfast, on the way up I said "morning" to the passing villagers who were on their way to collect water from the village well. It doesn't take long for the sun to rise into the sky and clouds were already building on the horizon for the morning rain to come. We shuffle around upstairs, drink some coffee and eat breakfast and then head off to the construction site which is located several meters from our house. We have been working on the construction of a new health clinic that will serve the surrounding area. Construction has been far from traditional since we are without power in the village and everything must be done by hand, that includes digging and sifting gravel and sand, cutting planks with a chainsaw and hauling them out of the jungle. The work is hard but always amusing since the locals think that our lack of skills, our clumsiness and our loudness is hilarious. Some of us have spent the morning pulling planks out of the jungle that will serve as rafters of the building. We eat lunch together and hide from the hot sun. Things are moving along much quicker now that the foundation is poured and

the main structure is up. It seems strange that only two months ago we landed in the country, met 60 new people, a new

culture and then traveled to our respective project sites.

- Mark Bray



Preparing a foundation for a community health centre.