

Canadian youth interns abroad

Working for children of the world

Over the last year, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade's Youth International Internship Program joined with several Canadian organizations to offer some 30 young Canadians exceptional opportunities in the field of children's issues.

Through the United Nations Association in Canada (UNAC), Lauren Baswick, Janet Ilott and Jennifer Smith (see right) worked with War Child Canada on a documentary entitled *Musicians in the War Zone*. Says Lauren Baswick, "I really enjoyed it. It helped me strive to be my best, both scholastically and personally." After her internship, Janet Ilott became marketing co-ordinator for Peace Child International in Britain.

Also through UNAC, Ayda Eke worked at UNICEF in New York on child abduction, child soldiers, and children and conflict. Hind Merabet served with the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict; the job involved documenting the War-Affected Children's Virtual Library and compiling a list of research institutions focussing on children and armed conflict.

Human Rights Internet placed Megan McFadden on a project in Guatemala City, helping Casa Alianza organize activities for street children. The University of Saskatchewan's Native Law Centre placed Kjell Anderson and Steven Swan in Washington, D.C., where they participated in the Young Americas Business Trust's Young Indigenous People's Circle at the Organization of American States.

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind placed David Laine with the South African National Centre for the Blind in Pretoria; there he organized a national blind youth movement. In Gabon, CEGEP Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu interns Benoît Caron, Jean-Bernard Gariépy, Danny Bonetti and Martin Charbonneau repaired computers and set up systems and equipment in technical schools. And the Canadian Museums Association placed Julie Oya with the Kids Club Network in London, U.K.; there she redesigned the Web site of the Centre for Curiosity and Imagination, a hands-on project for children. ●

Jennifer Smith finds the key to change

I was fortunate to do an internship at War Child Canada, which promotes awareness and offers support to children and youth affected by war.

To carry out its mandate, War Child Canada has fostered a unique relationship with the music and entertainment industry. Its respect and regard for youth has kept me with the organization since my internship ended.

When I began at War Child Canada, I was hesitant about promoting awareness; I felt I needed to work hands-on to do any real good. I learned that awareness is vital to change when I worked on *Musicians in the War Zone*, a documentary that followed Canadian recording artists into three areas of the globe affected by war. It showed me that awareness is what moves people to get their hands on something.

When the MuchMusic television network aired the documentary for the first time, hundreds of thousands of lives were touched by what they saw. One of those lives was mine. What we do here can really affect others.

Jennifer Jordan and the human aspect of conflict

Through Medical Aid for Palestine, I did my internship with the Palestine Red Crescent Society's Mental Health Department in Bethlehem. There I came face to face with the realities of conflict in the Middle East.

My work involved developing mental health plans, creating community projects and implementing existing programs. However, with the resurgence of tensions in the region in recent months, our focus on general well-being shifted to emergency crisis management. We created and implemented plans for helping people suffering from trauma, anxiety and stress-related disorders—particularly children.

The echo of shelling and gunfire rumbles through the hills, instilling fear in all who hear it. The conflict has infiltrated

every level of society. There are few who have not experienced some form of violence either directly or indirectly.

All too often, conflict is viewed solely in political and military terms, yet it is the people living in the area who are most affected. No one can understand the human aspect of conflict without seeing it first-hand. I am grateful for the opportunity I had to experience this reality and to help people deal with their traumas.

Marie Green and the faces of suffering

During my UNAC-sponsored internship with the Office of the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in New York, I became acutely aware of a terrible modern tragedy: the fact that in the 1990s alone, 2 million children were killed and millions more were seriously injured or permanently disabled, orphaned, or left with grave psychological trauma in more than 30 conflicts around the world.

In the basement of a Manhattan apartment building, I saw faces mostly overlooked by the media. They belonged to children aged 7 to 21—refugees who now were organizing to change the world.

I heard them tell of seeing their relatives massacred in Sierra Leone. I listened to their stories of the refugee camps where they had stayed in Albania. Later, at our office, I watched footage of young people being executed in Sierra Leone; a child barely 6 years old was ordered to shoot at one of the victims. I was silent but a flame ignited inside me.

As my internship drew to a close, I began to realize that the atrocities continued because the public was unfamiliar with the faces of suffering. I decided that after returning to Canada I would launch an organization exposing this cruel reality.

The problem is enormous but I am convinced it can be solved so that every child has a fighting chance to determine how he or she will live.



Ethnic Albanian refugees from Kosovo, including children, struggle for loaves of bread near a refugee camp in Kukes, Albania, May 1999.



Two Vietnamese girls at the Sikhiv refugee camp in Nakorn Ratchasima, northeast of Bangkok, Thailand

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Ministère des Affaires étrangères et du Commerce international

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