

YOUTH ON THE MOVE

Exchange programs between Canada and Europe are a hot ticket for young people.

As a teenager growing up in Great Village, Nova Scotia, Bryson Johnson sketched out a “mental map” of his life’s ambitions: get to a Toronto Maple Leafs home game, travel a little in North America and enter politics.

But in 2000, Johnson’s plans took an unexpected turn, when, at 26, he signed up for a year-long Canada-Sweden youth exchange program. Four years later, with a ringside view of the historic European Union enlargement, he teaches at an elementary school in Stockholm.

Johnson marvels at how the experience of living and working across the Atlantic has opened his eyes to the world—and deepened his appreciation of Canada.

“I would love to go back and talk to the guy that I was at 17, and let him know there is so much out there to see,” he says. “It’s an exciting time to be in Europe.”

Indeed, Europe is a well-kept secret that Canada wants to share with 18- to 35-year-olds.

Exchanging Facts

Canada and Europe are eager to expand contacts among youth, using bilateral agreements and improved choices to facilitate opportunities for young people to travel, work and live abroad.

Canada currently supports youth exchange programs with eight EU member countries (with more planned) under four options:

- Working Holiday Program—young people work for a short stint to offset travel expenses;
- Student Work Abroad Program—Canadian university and college students work and travel in a European country;
- Young Workers Exchange Program—young professionals gain experience through overseas training; and
- Co-op Education Program—post-secondary students gain work experience in Europe in their field of study.

“Back in the 1970s, it was a rite of passage to stick a knapsack on your back for a couple of months and go over to Europe,” says Abbie Dann, Director of European Business Development and Connectivity Initiatives at Foreign Affairs Canada (FAC). However, costs have more recently dimmed the youthful dream of a summer in Europe, she adds. “In terms of the development of future leaders and enlightened citizens, it is just not a good thing... We need to be a country that’s out there seeing the world.”

That’s why the approximately 270 international youth exchange programs offered by governments and non-profit groups across Canada are suddenly a hot ticket.

In 2003, through some 55 programs offered by FAC, more than 16,000 Canadian and European youth between 18 and 30 years of age signed up to work and travel in each other’s countries. There are plans to further expand the programs in the next year



Lights of London: Out there seeing the world.

to 18,000 youth through new arrangements with France, Ireland, Norway and more countries expected to join.

Many of the programs are designed to be accessible and affordable. For example, 120 students from Canada and Europe take part every year in a simulation of the European Parliament, with students acting as “members” to debate a topic. Students pay only the cost of getting there.

Hugo Sierra, a Master’s student in international business at Montreal’s École des Hautes Études Commerciales, says the \$1,500 he spent to attend debates in Barcelona and Krakow paid back unexpected dividends.

“You have to go away and be confronted with situations that require you to develop an appreciation for the cultural and political life,” says Sierra, who had to work across time zones and language barriers to help organize parliamentary debates. “When you appreciate what you have in common with other countries, you discover it is more important than the differences,” he adds.

The people-to-people contacts, further enhanced by ease of communication via the Internet, offer a new form of diplomacy for Canada, Dann says. “The more young citizens



Alison Clement’s internship with the Canadian Red Cross on landmine issues taught her about international issues and left her with “marketable skills that will last a lifetime.”



photo: courtesy of Tania von Schellwitz and Tim Blokland

Link to the current issue of *Canada World View* on-line at www.dfaic-maeci.gc.ca/canada-magazine/menu-en.asp for new features for youth and to search the International Events Calendar for up-to-the-minute events.

Rite of passage: Travel opens young eyes “to the possibilities out there.”

can see the world, the more they can think internationally and act locally.”

That’s just what happened to Alison Clement of Russell, Manitoba, when she joined the Youth International Internship Program in 1998. She worked with the Canadian Red Cross in Winnipeg on landmine issues, travelling to the Balkans and visiting schools in North America to promote knowledge of Canada’s role in negotiating the 1997 ban on anti-personnel mines. The experience changed students’ perceptions—and hers as well.

“International issues were not at the forefront” when she began her 10-month internship, Clement says. “It opened my eyes up to the possibilities out there.” Now 29, she says the position also helped her hone her

abilities in fundraising, recruitment and public speaking. “These are marketable skills that will last a lifetime,” says Clement, who now works with Canadian Heritage in Ottawa.

As for Bryson Johnson, who did finally get to a Maple Leafs game, his “mental map” still includes returning home—and a career in politics, with a newfound appreciation for Canada’s links with the EU. “It’s important to have strong ties with the United States,” he says, “but it’s a good time for Canada to be involved in Europe.”

For more information about youth exchange programs offered by Foreign Affairs Canada, visit www.youthonthemove.gc.ca.

For global international youth programs, go to www.canada123go.ca.

In Brief: The New EU Countries

CYPRUS Capital: Nicosia
Total Area: 9,250 km² Population: 854,800
Cyprus and Canada: Canada was a major contributor to the United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus from 1964 to 1993.

CZECH REPUBLIC Capital: Prague
Total Area: 78,866 km² Population: 10.2 million
Czech Republic and Canada: Canada accepted almost 12,000 former refugees who fled after the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.

ESTONIA Capital: Tallinn
Total Area: 45,226 km² Population: 1.4 million
Estonia and Canada: The second-largest Estonian diaspora in the world is in Canada, with 22,000 people.

HUNGARY Capital: Budapest
Total Area: 93,030 km² Population: 10 million
Hungary and Canada: Hungary has been the largest recipient of Canadian investment in central Europe since 1990, amounting to \$1 billion. Two-way trade in 2003 was \$293 million.

LATVIA Capital: Riga
Total Area: 64,589 km² Population: 2.4 million
Latvia and Canada: The President of Latvia, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, is a former Canadian who lived in Canada for 44 years after fleeing her homeland during the Second World War.

LITHUANIA Capital: Vilnius
Total Area: 65,200 km² Population: 3.5 million
Lithuania and Canada: Canadian investment in

Canada world view. --