

2013 Youth Report



**ENGAGED
PREPARED
EMPOWERED**



YOUTH HEALTH CORPS
CUERPO DE SALUD DE JÓVENES

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Foreword

Standing Apart

When I first began working with homeless and addicted dropouts on the streets of New York over 50 years ago, I naively believed that if I could just get them to open up and trust me, I could help them back into school and on their way toward a promising future. I had no idea how deeply entrenched and complex their problems were, and that it would take more than my youthful optimism and a few phone calls to turn things around.

My colleagues and I quickly learned that our social service systems were impersonal, fragmented, riddled with gaps and redundancies, and perhaps worst of all, not accountable. So we decided to take matters into our own hands. We set up “street academies” in Harlem and the Lower East Side – small, storefront schools that also served as hubs for positive relationships, counseling, health care, job training, college preparation, and whatever else the young people needed to have a shot at a decent life. Out of these experiences, we eventually founded Communities In Schools, now in its 36th year.

Children International is a kindred organization, working in the poorest urban neighborhoods and rural villages around the world, going where others do not go. CI’s approach of providing services through a community center creates a development anchor in areas that desperately need services. The centers are hubs for volunteer education, comprehensive service delivery and leadership training for youth; they also serve as libraries and family resource centers.

CI helps tackle the toughest problems facing these communities as well, including crime, human trafficking, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS and other health issues. Their prevention initiatives, Youth Health Corps, child protection protocols, education and job-training programs, and Youth Councils are models of hope, effectiveness and results. Moreover, CI emphasizes a strong link between sponsor and child. It is more than just providing money to support a young person for health, education and other services. It is about building a long-term, positive relationship, akin to mentoring, in which the youth knows someone is committed to his or her welfare and success.

In this report, you will meet a handful of young people whose stories are typical of the some 350,000 children and youth who benefit from CI in over 11 countries. As a result of CI’s youth programs, many of these young people are valued because of their integrity, sense of responsibility and leadership skills. Most importantly, they remind us that we who are blessed with so many advantages have greater responsibilities to the world community, because every child has promise and these are all our children.

Bill Milliken has been one of the foremost pioneers in the movement to help troubled students graduate and succeed in life. In 1977, he and others developed a model organization now known as Communities In Schools (CIS). CIS currently serves 1.25 million students and their families through 2,400 school sites across the U.S. Bill has advised U.S. presidents of both parties and has received numerous awards, including the Champion for Children Award from the American Association of School Administrators. His most recent book, “From the Rearview Mirror” (Hay House, 2012), is a highly personal memoir of his own troubled youth and his spiritual journey over 50 years in youth advocacy, community organizing and education reform.

Introduction

Rescuing the Next Generation

Over 165,000 youth received direct benefits from Children International in 2012.

Chile	7,897
Colombia	23,572
Dominican Republic	14,675
Ecuador	26,498
Guatemala	17,648
Honduras	9,825
India	13,531
Mexico	5,151
Philippines	39,633
United States	1,299
Zambia	5,469

There are 1.7 billion young people ages 10 to 24 in the world, the largest generation in history.¹ Given their numbers and the gap they will fill from an aging population, today's youth are an invaluable resource. However, the majority live in developing countries – many in extreme poverty – where they routinely confront threats to their personal safety and progress. Without intervention, those youth will experience a poorer quality of life and shorter life expectancy. They will remain trapped in the intergenerational cycle of poverty and suffer continued economic and political marginalization, which often leads to increased instability.

“Failure to address adversity at this time leads to lifelong deficiencies and compromises future youth in development opportunities,” USAID reports. “... Investment in youth programs and services can reduce conditions that limit the potential for a demographic dividend, including for example, high rates of youth unemployment, school dropout, early pregnancy, HIV/AIDS infection, and poor nutrition.”² That investment will help “amplify and sustain important health and social gains from childhood interventions,” the group adds.

Children International launched a youth program in 1999 to carry out those timely interventions and build upon the foundation of basic medical, educational and material support youth receive from sponsors and donors during childhood and early adolescence. Since then, a set of targeted programs has evolved to teach youth the skills they need to stay safe and



healthy, complete school and job training, find gainful employment and become self-reliant, contributing members of society.

The programs not only fill a void in impoverished communities by offering young people education and training opportunities that are rare or inaccessible, they also promote the following program elements based on best practices and USAID's youth development policy:³

1. They **support** the basic needs of youth in an encouraging environment led by caring mentors and adults who value their participation.
2. They **protect** youth from threats to their personal safety through health initiatives, advocacy efforts and safe spaces.
3. They **prepare** young people to become productive members of society by providing education and skills and by helping them transition into work.
4. They **engage** young people in dialogue and activities to improve their personal development and conditions in their communities.

Youth who actively participate in CI's programs say they are empowered to overcome adversities they otherwise would have been ill-equipped to confront. According to their personal testimonies and results from Children International's annual exit survey for graduating youth, active participants report that they are healthier, better educated, more optimistic, and more likely to give back to their communities than their disengaged peers.

There is much more to the story, though. The report that follows provides an analysis of the dangers and dilemmas youth face and details how CI's youth programs are preparing young people to make positive choices in their lives and communities so they can break the cycle of poverty.

About This Report

Every year Children International asks youth who are graduating from the program to complete an exit survey. The survey measures their frequency of participation, level of education, personal and job skills, and attitudinal changes. Youth are also asked to rate the quality of CI's core programs and benefits. The results are measured and analyzed according to the youths' level of participation to help CI assess the value and benefit of its programs so it can identify ways to increase participation.

In 2012, 11,853 graduating youth completed the survey. The survey responses, combined with testimonials from structured interviews and expert research, provide a valuable resource for understanding a growing, at-risk population that will undoubtedly influence the course of international progress and development.

Children International's Youth Programs

Social and Financial Education

Teaches young people their rights, responsibilities, and how to save, plan and budget their resources.

Sports for Development

Involves youth in organized sports leagues for lessons in teamwork, conflict resolution and perseverance.

Health Awareness Training

Prepares youth to become peer educators on topics such as substance abuse, reproductive health and preventable diseases.

Leadership Development

Includes workshops that teach life skills like communication, decision making and problem solving.

Youth Councils

Engages participants who elect representatives to promote their interests and implement community-improvement projects.

Continuing Education

Awards scholarships to youth so they can complete high school, go to college or learn a trade.

Job Training

Matches youth with trade schools and formal work experience so they can gain job skills that are in demand in their communities.

Gangs and Violence: Growing Up in Hostile Territory

41%

of all annual homicides
worldwide occur among
people 10 – 29 years old.

“Realizing the Demographic Opportunity,”
Youth in Development, USAID Policy

“Sadly, we have become insensitive to seeing corpses in the street.”

That’s how a young man named Selvin summed up the harsh reality of growing up in a gang-afflicted community called Satélite, in Guatemala. “Even the name gives you an idea of how isolated it is,” he said. “It is located in the municipality of Mixco – supposedly next to the city, but not ... there are still many trees, dirt roads and, regrettably, a little dangerous.”

Communities like Selvin’s are known as “red zones,” a term once used to describe war-ravaged areas, because they are controlled by powerful gangs so dangerous even the police refuse to confront them. Many started as informal settlements, or *asentamientos*, that attract large populations of rural migrants and poor families in search of work and free or cheap housing. They may lack basic infrastructure such as roads, clean water and sanitation,



and access to social services. Their relative isolation makes them ideal territory for gangs.

Arturo Castellanos, Children International’s service area supervisor in Asentamientos Humanos, Honduras, outside San Pedro Sula, has witnessed a surge in gang activity since he began working in the area in 1996. He said gangs scare off businesses and social services and leave residents with few opportunities for personal development – youth especially. “They are constantly threatened if they are not involved in the gangs ... some have been killed,” Arturo stated, adding that, in order to escape the violence, young people have opted to return to the rural areas their parents initially fled in search of a better life. That perpetuates the cycle of poverty, he pointed out. “Asentamientos Humanos, despite a large population, can’t excel to the degree it should because of the high level of insecurity and crime.”

Creating safe spaces for personal growth

Research in the field of youth development suggests that youth who feel disconnected from their community or who feel excluded from social activities are more susceptible to gangs and other types of criminal activity. “Violence, high school dropout rates and the challenges of school-to-work transition can create conditions for youth to be recruited into criminal networks, armed groups, youth gangs, and trafficking, all of which contribute to sustained violence, extremism and insurgencies,” USAID notes.⁴

Children International helps shield youth from gangs and violence in several ways, first by providing them with safe, secure access to community centers. Youth participants are encouraged to visit the centers to use libraries and computers, help tutor younger children, attend training and skills-building exercises, and seek counseling and guidance from the staff. Many centers feature separate Youth Resource Centers, where participants engage in personal development activities and plan community-outreach projects.

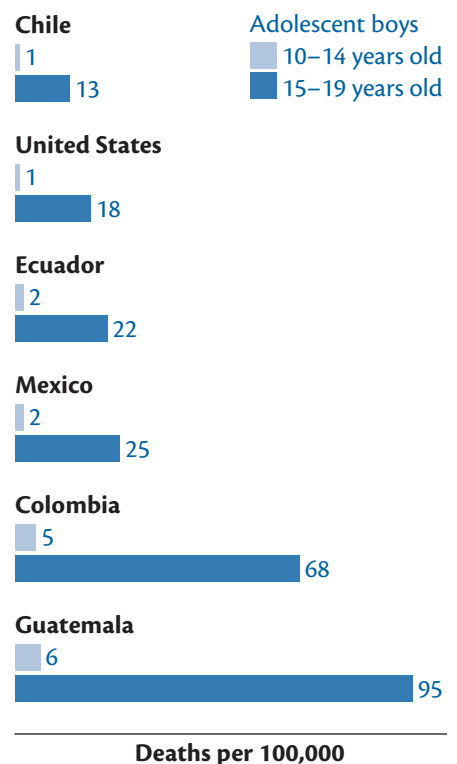
“Since I have a scholarship, I spend a lot of time here in the community center, which helps me associate with good people and be active in positive things,” Selvin shared. Interacting with other healthy-minded young people, as well as staff and instructors, has helped him stay focused and avoid the influence of gangs.

Staying safe through sports

More than 1 million young people die each year from violence, fatal injuries, traffic accidents, and other related causes.⁵ CI’s sports for development program, by contrast, protects youth from those hazards by offering a safe alternative to the streets. Schools, businesses and civic groups partner with Children International by sponsoring leagues and



Homicide rates rise dramatically as adolescent boys get older.



UNICEF 2012 Progress for Children Report, PAHO/WHO, Mortality Information System, 2006-2009, reanalysed by UNICEF



Participants in leadership training increased their knowledge of leadership by 15%, from 63% to 78%, in 2012.

2012 Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Survey for Leadership Training

lending resources, such as sports fields and other facilities. The community-wide partnerships create unity in distressed areas and build stronger social networks among the residents.

During the program, youth participants exercise and compete in athletic events like basketball, baseball, soccer and kickball under the leadership of parents, relatives and other community members who serve as volunteer coaches. The coaches teach participants how to practice a healthy lifestyle, personal responsibility, teamwork, conflict resolution and more. In the process, the youth set personal goals. Some strive to meet physical fitness goals or increase their self-esteem; others aim to raise their grades in school and improve their attendance rates.

Among the 11,185 youth who participated in the sports program in 2012, 77 percent claimed that they had achieved the personal goals they were asked to set at the beginning of the year. And 78 percent reported that they learned how to express their feelings and opinions in a positive manner, listen to others, and weigh the consequences of their actions.

Where leaders are made

Youth in disadvantaged communities cross paths with gang members on a regular basis, so it is imperative that they possess skills to avoid or defuse dangerous encounters. Children International's leadership training program is helping them do that.

"Many successful anti-gang programs have developed as a result of community-driven efforts to respond to particular problems which are

then supported by capacity-building programs for leaders from those communities,” indicate studies by the Congressional Research Service. “Although these types of programs may benefit from financial contributions from local and/or national governments, they may also need non-financial support, including ‘training, information sharing, leadership, or simply the provision of a dedicated space for programming or meetings.’”⁶

Children International community centers offer safe venues where youth can meet to discuss their challenges while developing leadership skills. Participants carry out exercises in communication, decision making, critical thinking, problem solving and conflict resolution. Each participant gets the chance to plan and teach core skills to their peers. They also use their newly acquired abilities during community-service projects such as clean-up campaigns, literacy events, and child rights and child labor rallies. The projects improve living conditions and promote safer environments while setting a positive example to combat the negative influence of gangs.

Empowering young people to become leaders in their communities is reversing negative perceptions and establishing a more positive outlook for generations to come. “By strengthening their social and leadership skills, youth participation not only reduces passivity and apathy among youth but also promotes a positive view of young people in the wider adult community,” USAID acknowledges.



78%
of participants say that CI's sports leagues have taught them how to:

- express their feelings and opinions in a positive manner
- listen to others
- weigh the consequences of their actions.

2012 CI Sports for Development Survey

Partners Against Crime

Honduras is a nation wracked with violence. The small Central American country of 8.5 million has the highest per capita murder rate in the world due to the presence of ruthless, deeply entrenched international gangs like Mara Salvatrucha 13 and Calle 18.

Children International is partnering with Counterpart International and a network of “civil society” organizations in a USAID-sponsored program called IMPACTOS (Promoting Citizen Participation, Transparency and Social Participation) to help prevent rampant violence and create safer, more stable neighborhoods for children and youth. CI hosts training and informational workshops about violence prevention at its community centers in four areas where kids are actively recruited into gangs.

It's a critical age, says Manuel Fernando Moncada Vivas, an IMPACTOS project officer who helps lead awareness

efforts. “The communities are characterized by poverty,” he explains. “Abandoned by all of the local authorities ... the people who live here have few opportunities to get ahead.” Without intervention, vulnerable youth see no other option but to join a gang.

The IMPACTOS program encourages local youth to join community revitalization committees instead. “Many of the youth in these committees belong to Children International. They have contributed a lot, and that has been invaluable to us,” Manuel says. “Children International has a wide range of programs, and each of them contributes in one way or another to community development,” he adds. “We are creating conditions so violence does not increase, because it is clear that without these programs, we are going to see a darker future.”

Substance Abuse: The Silent Struggle

Julieth would have done anything to escape her painful memories. She was 4 years old when she was raped by her uncle, and the brutal act haunted her every day of her life.

Ashamed and angry, Julieth turned to drugs – the cheapest, most accessible form of relief in her poor barrio in Barranquilla, Colombia. She started sniffing glue when she was 11, in a desperate attempt to forget the past. “When I used ‘Boxer,’ I felt secure about what I wanted in my life ... I felt powerful,” she confided.

Before long Julieth was using cocaine and marijuana, which she got for free from friends or for the same price as a snack. “I got to the point of getting high day and night, every day. I had breakfast with it, I used it at noon when I was home alone, and I used drugs until the evening.”

She tried to stop, but her addiction was too strong. She dropped out of school and started to lose weight. “Once I was home alone, and I was using



drugs in the bathroom,” Julieth recounted. “I looked up to the heavens and saw the clouds like a whirlwind, and I felt a voice tell me: ‘Make a deal with the devil!’”

After threatening to hurt herself and others, she was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Only 15 years old, Julieth had hit rock bottom.

Once she left the hospital, there were two things that finally turned her life around, she said: her faith in God and the knowledge she gained from Children International’s Youth Health Corps. Now Julieth convinces other youth to avoid the dangers of drugs – some of the same young people she once enticed to start using. “Now I sing a praise that says, ‘From now on, my life will not be the same at all.’”

A global problem, right around the corner

Julieth’s early drug abuse is by no means unique. Youth in many underdeveloped communities struggle with substance abuse issues that can lead to devastating health consequences. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that youth who start drinking before they are 15 are five times more likely to become alcohol-dependent than adults who begin at 21. Those young people are more likely to engage in risky sexual behavior, perform poorly in school, and face a higher risk of suicide and homicide.⁷

Easy access to drugs and alcohol is a common reason for abuse. Impoverished areas typically lack sufficient police services to effectively control drug traffic and restrict the sale of alcohol to minors. “It’s as easy as going to a bakery, because it’s just around the corner,” explained Wladimir, a CI youth leader in Quito, Ecuador. He said that young people all know where to buy *cucos*, or cocaine-based cigarettes, from dealers known as *brujos*, or “warlocks.”

In Jalisco, Mexico, the State Ministry of Health reported that 80 percent of youth ages 12 to 19 have tried drugs, alcohol or cigarettes. Meanwhile, Chile ranked the highest among Latin American countries in the number of youth who have used marijuana, tobacco and cocaine-based inhalants. Forty-two percent of all youth indicated that they tried marijuana before age 15, according to a study by the Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission.⁸

According to Nkole Nayame, a mental health counselor and a CI Youth Health Corps facilitator, 60 percent of youth in the poor communities outside Lusaka, Zambia, struggle with addiction because alcohol and marijuana are openly sold on the streets. Those who don’t have money to buy intoxicants resort to making their own. “Jenkem,” an inhalant made from fermented human waste is the third most used substance by street children in Lusaka.⁹ “With glue, I just hear voices in my head. But with Jenkem, I see visions,” a 16-year-old orphan in Lusaka admitted during an

“... Some **70%**
of premature deaths among
adults can be linked to
harmful behaviors, such as
smoking and alcohol abuse,
which are initiated during
adolescence.”

“Realizing the Demographic Opportunity,”
Youth in Development, USAID Policy – Youth





Positive Results Through Peer Education

2,383 peer educators reported reductions in substance use between the beginning and end of CI training:

Tobacco	10.6%	➡	5.3%
Alcohol	5.8%	➡	3.0%
Drugs/Other	2.2%	➡	0.9%

2012 Youth Health Corps Survey

interview with BBC News. “I see my mother who is dead, and I forget my problems in my life.”¹⁰

Peer pressure as a force for good

Youth typically begin smoking, drinking and using drugs as a result of peer pressure, an influence most often associated with negative behavior. But peer pressure can also be leveraged for positive outcomes, as groups like UNICEF note: “Peer educators can communicate and understand in a way that the best-intentioned adults can’t, and can serve as role models for change.”¹¹

Children International recruits youth to participate in peer-to-peer education in all its youth programs. In 2012, 2,383 peer educators shared what they had learned with 183,692 youth in underserved communities across the world. That amounted to 20,000 more peer contacts than 2011.

Peer education has been an especially effective tool at fighting substance abuse among youth. Young people 12 and up are encouraged to join CI’s Youth Health Corps (YHC) and undergo peer-education training by adult facilitators and youth co-facilitators. Training sessions that address substance abuse focus on the following lessons:

- 1) how to identify the three most common drugs in their communities,
- 2) at least two negative health effects of tobacco, alcohol and substance abuse,
- 3) reasons why their peers are compelled to use substances, and
- 4) how to refuse substances and negotiate their way out of compromising situations.

The peer educators share what they learn with other youth during

classroom and community presentations and peer interaction. Their overall progress is measured through anonymous surveys the youth complete before and after each year of participation.

Julieth, the rehabilitated youth addict in Barranquilla, Colombia, was one of many peer educators last year. “I joined YHC at the beginning of 2012,” she shared. “The talks helped me see life in another way, to have a life project, to set the goal of creating a new story for my life.”

Like Youth Health Corps groups elsewhere, Julieth and her fellow peer educators organized informational sessions two or three times each month to discuss the dangers of substance abuse and conducted one-to-one conversations with children and youth in their communities. “The youth look for me for advice, and I visit them at their houses,” Julieth explained. “I feel rejoiced trying to correct the error that I made in the past ... now I want to rescue all the young women who are addicts today.”

Other youth programs are effectively reducing substance abuse as well. CI’s sports for development program keeps young people off the streets and focused on healthy behavior. Coaches share messages about the dangers of drugs, alcohol and tobacco while teaching youth to practice self-discipline. Similarly, CI’s leadership training program reinforces character development by helping youth hone decision-making and problem-solving abilities. These are skills youth participants put to use during community-service projects and campaigns.

Youth participants in Jalisco, Mexico, hosted a circus arts festival to teach their peers juggling, theater and dance while advocating against drug and alcohol abuse. In Kolkata, India, CI youth took to the streets to protest smoking and substance abuse. And youth in Valparaíso, Chile, visited a drug rehabilitation center to speak with recovering addicts. Elizabeth Muñoz, an occupational therapist at the center, said several of the patients told her that they wished they had the same training and opportunities as the CI youth so they could have avoided drugs. “The interaction between users and the youth was fantastic ... an unforgettable experience for both,” she added.

Unfortunately, the prevalence of addictive substances in impoverished communities does occasionally lead to cases of abuse among youth participants. Those who request counseling or treatment are referred to professional clinics and specialists for follow-up care. In Lusaka, Zambia, for instance, Nkole Nayame, the Youth Health Corps facilitator, says an average of 20 to 30 youth are referred to counseling each month, with an average of 120 youth rehabilitated from drug-related addictions each year.

Children International’s agencies also work with community groups, churches and police to promote prevention and rehabilitation. As a result, young people who struggle with abuse and addiction know they aren’t alone and know where to turn when they need help.

“I have learned that drugs can shatter your dreams; they can close your life up and lock you up into poverty.”

– George, a CI youth participant in Zambia



HIV/AIDS: Hard Truths and Helpful Outcomes

50%
of all new HIV infections
occur in people under 25.

95%
of all new infections occur in
less developed countries.

Advocates for Youth. Youth and the Global
HIV/AIDS Pandemic

Despite advances in research and treatment, HIV remains a pervasive epidemic characterized by stigma and fear throughout much of the developing world. There are more than 2 million adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 with HIV, and most are unaware of their positive status according to UNICEF's 2012 Progress for Children report. The majority of HIV-positive youth are girls.¹² More than 1 million live in Sub-Saharan Africa, in countries like Zambia, where 14-year-old Prisca lives.

"I discovered that there was something wrong with me when my mother insisted that I take medication every day," Prisca confided. "She later told me that I was living with HIV ... that really broke my heart."

Although Prisca received antiretroviral medications (ARVs) when she tested positive at a government clinic in Lusaka, she was frightened and confused. She had not been sexually active, she had not used intravenous drugs, and her mother had tested negative. As far as Prisca knew, she could have contracted the virus through the air or from shaking hands with someone. In order to manage the illness, Prisca first needed accurate information.

"Comprehensive, correct knowledge is fundamental to the uptake of HIV services and behaviour change," UNICEF points out, adding that girls have a harder time obtaining information and services because they are more vulnerable to early marriage and encounter restricted access to condoms, testing and social services. HIV is still a taboo subject in many impoverished communities with high prevalence rates too. "Approximately 40 percent of new HIV infections are among young people ages 15-24," USAID reports, "yet only 40 percent of young men and 38 percent of young women have comprehensive knowledge about HIV transmission."¹³

Knowingly safe and secure

Although CI's clinics do not provide direct treatment for HIV, they do diagnose symptoms and refer children and youth to partner clinics that offer services. Sven Mugamya, CI's health coordinator in Zambia, said CI clinics see an average of two or three new cases of HIV-positive children and youth each month. The agency refers those boys and girls to the AIDS Health Care Foundation in Lusaka, which provides free lab screenings and ARVs. The agency also covers transportation costs for families to visit the Foundation

and provides HIV-positive children and youth with supplemental nutrition to boost their immune systems.

Children and youth are more likely to seek medical care – a decision that is critical to controlling a potentially deadly, heavily stigmatized illness – because they have regular access to CI’s medical clinics and referrals to other providers. A past survey of CI’s health programs found that participating youth were twice as likely as their non-participating peers to get an annual checkup, while nearly 25 percent as many receive medications when they are ill.¹⁴

CI’s Youth Health Corps helps supplement the medical care youth receive throughout their tenure in the program. Participants in YHC

93%
of YHC participants know
how to prevent HIV and
identify misconceptions
about the disease.

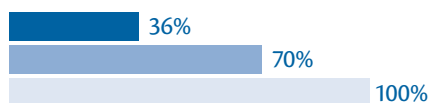
2012 Children International Youth Survey





Youth dramatically improve their knowledge of HIV through CI health trainings.

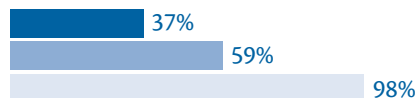
■ UNAIDS 2012 Result
■ Before YHC Training
■ After YHC Training



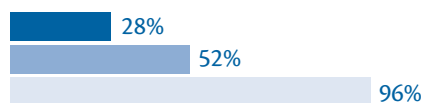
Zambia



Philippines



Dominican Republic



India

2012 Youth Health Corps Survey

undergo training on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases so they can share accurate information with their peers and prevent or curb the spread of infection. They dramatically improve their knowledge in the process.

According to the 2012 Youth Health Corps Survey, **only 47 percent of youth participants could identify two ways of preventing the sexual transmission of HIV at the start of training. The same group could only identify two misconceptions about HIV. By the end of the year, 93 percent could do so.** That increase far exceeds the national averages for awareness among youth as measured by the United Nations in their 2012 UNAIDS Global Report, as evidenced in key countries featured in the chart on the left.

During training, peer educators learn the ABCs of avoiding HIV: Abstinence, Be faithful to your partner (or reduce the number of partners you have) and Condoms. **Over 90 percent of peer educators now say that they will use condoms when they have sex, compared to the 62 percent who said they would at the start of training.** The youth can obtain condoms at CI's medical clinics and are encouraged to ask questions of the clinics' staff.

Being able to talk openly about HIV with a group of trusted peers is beneficial to youth, especially young women who are often labeled as promiscuous, UNICEF indicates.¹⁵

"It's not easy to openly come out as HIV positive ..." Prisca admitted. "At first I withdrew from people, but now I mingle with everybody," she said about her participation in the Youth Health Corps and other activities. "I want to become an accountant."

Now that she is equipped with accurate knowledge about her condition and has a group of supportive peers to encourage her, she has a greater chance of achieving her goals.

Early Pregnancy: Poverty's Life Sentence

“You’re pregnant” is a phrase no teenage girl wants to hear. And yet, as many as 16 million young women between the ages of 15 to 19 give birth each year – births that are often fraught with complications according to UNICEF.¹⁶ In fact, pregnancy is the leading cause of death among women ages 15 and 19 worldwide.¹⁷ “The vast majority of these deaths take place within marriage, making the fight against early marriage and the promotion of youth sexual and reproductive health critical.”¹⁸

Pamela Sandu, a CI nurse and counselor in Lusaka, Zambia, suggests that many youth 13 and over in her area are sexually active. “We have witnessed an increase in the number of girls getting pregnant at a tender age,” she said. “Although the numbers are not alarming, we still consider

Teen mothers are **7** times more likely to be poor than older mothers in Latin America.

“The Impact of Early Pregnancy and Childbearing on Adolescent Mothers and Their Children,” Advocates for Youth.



Percentage of adolescents 15–19 years old who had sex before age 15, by region and by gender

Latin America and the Caribbean*



West and Central Africa



Sub-Saharan Africa



Eastern and Southern Africa



South Asia



*Data available for girls only.
UNICEF 2012 Progress for Children

early pregnancies a threat to the goal of having these children break free from poverty.”

Janet, a 16-year-old mother in the community where Pamela works, is learning that lesson the hard way as she attempts to raise her 6-month-old son, Nulu, with only the support of her grandmother. As soon as her boyfriend learned she was pregnant, the relationship ended.

“He abandoned me, and I have never seen him from that time,” Janet confided. “It was dramatic and traumatizing for me,” she said about being pregnant and alone at such an early age. “Life is difficult for me and my child...I regret so much. I am no longer the same.”

Learning from experience

Participants of CI’s Youth Health Corps try to reach girls like Janet before their lives irreversibly change. Peer educators and other participants first attend a series of pregnancy and parenting workshops to learn about fertility, the consequences of early and unplanned pregnancies, common myths about sex and pregnancy, as well as abstinence and the proper use of contraceptives. That knowledge is then passed on through the presentations and peer contacts the YHC participants make in their communities.



“My observation is that the active participants in health training are more careful and responsible about their sexual lifestyle,” Pamela indicated. “There are vivid signs of behavioral change.”

That is particularly evident among YHC participants in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador who use simulated babies and a pregnancy simulator as part of their training. The computerized dolls are designed to behave like actual infants, crying at regular intervals when they would normally need to be changed, fed, burped or soothed. Some models are even programmed with symptoms that emulate shaken baby syndrome or fetal-alcohol syndrome.

Each youth participant is assigned to care for a baby for a two-week stint, although some give up after just a couple days, explained YHC facilitator Juan Tomás Peralta of the Dominican Republic. Juan’s group was the first to use the simulated babies during a program they call “Baby, Think It Over.” They came up with the idea as a way to address the growing problem of early pregnancy in the D.R., which is considered to have one of the highest adolescent pregnancy rates in Latin America and the Caribbean. The youth also use a pregnancy simulator, a vest filled with water, to recreate the physical challenges of carrying around a baby.

“Before the baby, I thought everything was easy: you’d simply get pregnant, give birth and everything would be easy,” said Yenifer, one of the participants. “After having her, I thought it over ... for me to have a baby, I’d need lots of education.”

For the safety of mother and child

Putting an end to early pregnancies isn’t as simple as pretending to be a parent for two weeks. Many of the youth Children International supports live in areas where the use of contraceptives has been discouraged for cultural or religious reasons, making it more difficult for young women to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

When youth participants become pregnant, CI’s staff doctors customarily provide an initial consultation and health exam before referring the youth to local health centers for prenatal care. They authorize the coverage of initial lab tests, medications and ultrasounds and arrange monthly follow-up visits with the young woman to ensure she is getting the appropriate level of care both before and after her pregnancy. Whenever possible, pregnant teens are also referred to family planning and counseling services that partner with Children International.

Overall, 364 of the 418 pregnant youth who were referred to prenatal care in 2012 completed follow-up visits at CI medical clinics and had successful births. Among those, 96 percent reported that they saw a medical professional for prenatal care at least once.



“My observation is that the active participants in health training are more careful and responsible about their sexual lifestyle. There are vivid signs of behavioral change.”

– Pamela Sandu, Nurse, Zambia



“At least **20%** of the burden of disease in children below the age of 5 is related to poor maternal health and nutrition, as well as quality of care at delivery and during the newborn period,” UNICEF reports.

<http://www.unicef.org/mdg/maternal.html>

In the Philippines, 100 percent of pregnant youth supported by CI attended prenatal care – a 7 percent increase over the Millennium Development Goal standards for that region.¹⁹ The percentage in Latin America, where 95 percent of pregnant teens sought prenatal care, was 1 percent less than the Millennium Development Goal standard.

Although more needs to be done to reduce the frequency of early pregnancy, the training and clinical support that CI youth receive is sparing young mothers and their children from a host of health complications that could ultimately leave them struggling to survive.

Gender Inequality and Early Marriage: Standing Up to Stereotypes

“It’s not my fault that I’m a girl,” 18-year-old Susmita exclaimed about the gender bias she confronts in Kolkata, India. It is a common refrain echoed by girls who struggle to be accepted and valued throughout much of the developing world.

“I would hear people express sympathy to my mother: ‘Oh, you have three daughters? Poor you! How will you ever marry them off?’” Susmita recollected. “Statements like this would make me feel very hurt and angry. It would make my parents worry so much that instead of supervising my studies and other developmental activities, they were always bogged down with the thought of how they would be able to arrange money to get us married.”

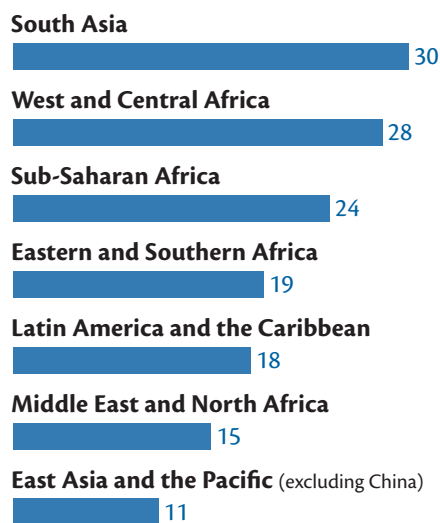
Those feelings of guilt eventually turned to outrage when Susmita encountered prejudicial attitudes at school and elsewhere in her community. “One of the private tutors would use filthy language with the girls if they failed to answer questions, and would abuse them too,” she confessed. “Whereas, if the boys could not answer questions, he did not bother them much.” When Susmita questioned the tutor’s discrimination in class one

Domestic violence is higher among married girls ages 15–19, while complications related to pregnancy and childbirth are the main causes of death among 15- to 19-year-old girls in developing countries.

UNICEF’s “Progress for Children: A report card on adolescence.”



Percentage of adolescent girls 15–19 years old who are currently married or in union, by region



UNICEF 2012 Progress for Children

day, he ridiculed her. “Initially, he was very aggressive, but I stood firm and he soon understood that I would not stand that kind of behavior from him. Soon the other girls supported me, and now even if he mocks us, he dares not use abusive language.”

Susmita attributes her ability to stand up for herself and others to CI’s youth programs, which she says enhanced her communication and leadership skills. As a member of the leadership training program, she replicated what she learned to empower others in her community. “The girls who are attending these sessions are becoming quite adept at addressing any issue of discrimination.” They are no longer afraid to voice their opinion and have learned to value their education, she added.

Changing norms through education

“In many societies, adolescent girls and young women have less opportunity and fewer resources than young men: less food, schooling and medical attention, less access to paid employment and less free time, along with a strong potential to be married off before the age of 15,” USAID has noted. Girls who experience sexual violence are three times as likely to have unplanned pregnancy and are less likely to go to school.²⁰

UNICEF indicates that girls represent as much as 70 percent of all out-of-school youth, despite the fact that for every additional year a girl stays in school past fourth grade, her wages are estimated to rise by 20 percent.²¹ Girls who have seven or more years of schooling typically marry four years later and have fewer children, which can decrease their risk of domestic abuse and complications during pregnancy.*

Unfortunately, too many young girls in developing countries are compelled to drop out of school and enter early marriage before they are prepared to do so. “One in three girls in low- and middle-income countries (excluding China) will probably be married before they are 18. One out of nine will be married before they turn 15,” according to a United Nations Population Fund report. “Most of these girls are poor, less-educated, and living in rural areas.”²²

CI’s youth programs challenge discriminatory gender practices and restrictions by amplifying educational opportunities and giving young women the knowledge and training to avoid early marriage and pregnancy. For instance, a higher percentage of scholarships are awarded to young women on an annual basis to alleviate the financial pressure that compels families to pull their daughters out of school and into early marriage. The scholarships provide up to \$500 per year so applicants can complete their secondary education, get vocational training or pursue a university degree.

Spreading awareness about gender issues is also a component of the Youth Health Corps in several countries, noted Mohammad Arshad, a YHC



facilitator in India. Arshad's group in Kolkata actively focuses on increasing participation among young women to give them stronger representation in their communities. "All youth programs are geared toward equal responsibility between genders and demystifying gender issues," he added. That includes CI's sports for development program, which levels the playing field for girls during co-ed activities, as well as the job-training program, which gives young women access to vocational training they might be barred from otherwise.

CI's efforts to deliberately empower young girls will have long-lasting benefits throughout their communities. Investing in girls can have a multiplying effect, USAID points out, since women normally reinvest 90 percent of their income in their families.²³

Independent voices

Susmita was one of the fortunate beneficiaries who used a CI scholarship to dodge the fate of 47 percent of other young women in India – those who get married before age 18.²⁴ Her family was adamant that she get married after she completed 10th grade; Susmita was adamant about completing high school.

"When I received the scholarship, I was really happy that the financial burden on my parents was lessened to a greater extent," she said. The scholarship, combined with leadership training, gave her the financial

81%

of active participants said they are able to stay more positive about themselves compared to non-participants.

2012 Children International Youth Survey

Of the **2,089** scholarships CI awarded in 2012 for continuing education and vocational training, 1,284 went to young women and 805 to young men.

2012 Children International Annual Report on Program Results



Participants in CI's social and financial training increased their knowledge of their rights and responsibilities by **40%** in 2012.

2012 Aflatoun Survey

leverage and confidence to pursue her goal of becoming a teacher. "The aim of my life is to be self-sufficient," she proudly proclaimed.

Susmita's peer, 17-year-old Aafia, is also using a form of education to avoid early marriage: social and financial education. "Some time back, my father had taken ill, and then there was pressure on me to get married," she confided. "Because my family was worried that if anything happened to my father, then who would look after us."

Aafia had no idea whom she was supposed to marry – and she didn't want to know. She wanted to finish her studies. The moment she learned about CI's social and financial education program, she signed up. The program teaches youth about their individual rights and civic responsibilities, as well as how to manage money, conserve resources, plan a business, and save for the future.

"As I do not expect any help from my parents for my studies, I felt that I needed this training to plan properly," Aafia shared. "I have already taken the first steps toward financial independence, and with the help of this training, I hope to become even more independent."

During training, Aafia learned how to start her own business making decorative mobiles, which she sells on commission at a store in her urban slum in Kolkata. She is using the proceeds to pay for continuing education at the Institute of Company Secretaries of India. The achievement earned her a spot at the Child and Youth Finance International's Summit in Istanbul, Turkey, where she and a CI youth participant from Quito, Ecuador, named Ivonne were finalists for the group's Youth Champion Award.

"I frequently meet with and interact with girls in my community and tell them about the pitfalls of early marriage and what I have done to avoid it," Aafia affirmed. "If there are more women like me, then I am sure the society will change."

Barriers to Education and Employment

Youth in developing countries face a frustrating dilemma: they must complete school in order to get a job in the formal economy, but graduating with a diploma or degree rarely results in decent job prospects. UNICEF highlights that problem in its 2012 report card on adolescents: “In developing countries, unemployment rates are higher among better educated youth than less educated youth, because there are more of them than there are formal-sector jobs. Youth in developing countries are thus disproportionately affected by unemployment, and, among them, educated youth are doubly affected.”²⁵

It’s understandable, then, why impoverished youth who find it difficult to stay in school due to limited financial resources would opt to drop out

88%

of youth-survey participants passed the previous school year and were promoted to the next level.

2012 Children International Youth Survey





82%

of active participants said they have more schooling and training as a result of Children International.

2012 Children International Youth Survey

rather than add to their families' economic burdens. And yet, education, especially among girls, decreases early pregnancies, reduces mother and infant mortality rates, increases civic engagement and lowers crime.²⁶ Secondary education, in particular, also teaches youth to think critically and “shapes the attitudes, values and aspirations that affect adolescents' ability to function as members of their families, communities and societies,” UNICEF suggests.

While education remains one of the most reliable predictors for personal and social progress, success depends on more than classroom learning, experts say. “Improving education and development for adolescents requires a societal change that bridges across school and non-school settings, communities and businesses, parents and everyone else,” claims a recent report on learning during middle adolescence.²⁷

Children International offers youth an enhanced educational experience by helping them complete school and by teaching them valuable life skills during youth programs, which pair young people with mentors, community leaders and local businesses who reinforce practical knowledge.

Besides the annual school support CI provides to students in primary and secondary school, more than 10,000 scholarships were awarded to secondary-school students who were either out of school or at risk of dropping out. The scholarships help cover expenses such as fees, uniforms, transportation, books and supplies. Additional scholarships for up to two years are awarded to qualified youth who want to pursue vocational training or a college degree. Preference is given to youth who show a dedication to community service, to young women and to marginalized youth, such as those from indigenous tribes who have traditionally faced a cultural bias. Recipients of the scholarships are required to volunteer their time tutoring younger children at CI's community centers. They serve as valuable mentors in that respect.

“Good learning is rooted in a community of practice,” research confirms, “where less experienced learners can work alongside more experienced peers as well as skilled adult mentors, in real roles recognized by that community.”²⁸

Mentoring younger kids, participating in peer education during leadership training, community-service projects and the Youth Health Corps give youth the chance to apply what they learned in their classrooms. The same goes for CI's sports for development program and social and financial education training. Youth work closely with staff and community members who offer guidance and direction.

“I will never forget the trainings I attended as a youth,” said Edmarie Paz, a 2010 CI graduate who now works as a registered nurse. “In fact, when I applied for a call-center job once, I proudly told them about



the agency ... it was where I grew as a person. I have improved. My experiences in the youth program became my root, my foundation. I can apply them even now.”

Bridging the gap between school and work

“It is challenging to find skilled workers here in the area,” Renato Bertillo, an administrator with the Bacacay Technical Training Center near Tabaco, Philippines, acknowledged. “The reason is most families are not really so optimistic about sending their children to a vocational school. They would always prefer universities or colleges. But, of course, poor families cannot afford to send their children to universities. For practical reasons, the best alternative is to send their children to a vocational school.”

Groups like UNICEF and the International Labor Organization (ILO) support that claim. Youth who lack specialized training are more likely to end up working in the informal economy, performing hazardous jobs that leave them permanently trapped in poverty.²⁹ “There are by far more young people around the world stuck in circumstances of working poverty than are without work and looking for work,” the ILO reports.³⁰

For those who are unemployed – some 73 million – the consequences can be devastating. According to research conducted by *The Economist*,

youth unemployment correlates to increased crime and drug abuse, it can lead to a lifetime of lower wages, and it can prompt a host of health risks, such as higher chances of having a heart attack later in life and a heightened risk of suicide.³¹

Children International addresses that problem by providing job training to select youth in the Philippines, Guatemala, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Colombia and Ecuador. Participants are matched with trade schools and training centers that teach skills in areas that have high demand in their communities, such as information technology, automotive repair, consumer electronics, hospitality services, cosmetology and more. During training, the participants learn communication and interviewing skills and other techniques for landing a job, then they are paired with participating



employers so they can acquire formal work experience and start earning a living wage.

“Children International is known in the community to have bright and talented youth,” Renato confirmed. “The quality I admire the most about the youth is that they have a great amount of perseverance. They see the program as a way out of poverty.”

CI’s agency in Tabaco partners with five vocational schools centers and five separate employers who offer on-the-job training. Youth who have been hired as a result of the program earn an average entry-level salary equal to \$210, nearly triple the average \$80 monthly salary many of their families make.

Joan is a recent graduate from Tabaco who now earns three times her family’s income. When her father was hit by a car, she had little choice but to drop out of school and find a job to help compensate for the \$50 in lost income her father earned each month as a tenant farmer. She found a part-time job as an assistant at a local pharmacy and helped farm her father’s small plot of land on the weekends. “But after months of hard work, all my hope seemed to vanish,” she shared. “Even by working too much ... I realized that there was no way that I could improve our lives.”

Not long after that, Joan was encouraged to apply to CI’s job-training program, where she enrolled in computer maintenance training. “Not only did I enjoy more financial support, I also got to attend sessions that tackle life skills. I learned how to deal with life’s problems, how to cope in the work environment, and I also got to develop my personality and confidence,” she said. “The job-training program came into my life when I needed it most.”

Joan now works as an encoder for a distributor of soap and shampoo products. She keeps a computer record of all the products sold by the sales team and audits the warehouse inventory. “This is my first full-time job, and I’m getting \$150 a month,” she added. The modest amount is enough to support her family and help pay for a bigger house and new lot for her family. She was even able to give her mother the capital to start a small vending store at their house to bring in extra income. “What’s exciting is that I’m still so young, and this job is only my first stepping stone to greater success!”

When Language Means Business

In today’s global economy, international companies are increasingly requiring new hires to be proficient in English. Customer service, hospitality, banking and tourism are among the fastest growing industries for which English is a shared language.

Children International has implemented two English as a Second Language (ESL) pilot programs in the Dominican Republic and India to improve employment prospects for youth. In 2012, 180 students in grades 9–11 in the D.R. and 450 in India attended weekly classes for nine months to learn basic reading, writing and conversational skills.

At the beginning of the year, students in Kolkata, India, scored an average of 26 out of 100 points on English comprehension. By the end of training, their score jumped to 77 points.

“I need to learn spoken English because when I go hunt for a job, they will ask me how much I’ve studied,” explains Sahil, a young boy in the Narkeldanga slum of Kolkata.

“It’s one of the most important requirements nowadays in our Indian job market,” confirms Debjani Dasgupta, the ESL coordinator.

“Because if a person is not fluent in English, though having high degrees, they will be left behind.”

Building Safer Communities

In order for impoverished youth to avoid the negative trends that afflict their communities, they must be enfranchised in decision-making processes and empowered to take action. Doing so has been shown to reduce social unrest, crime and violence.

“In fact, engaging young people in creating safe environments – safe schools, safe neighborhoods, safe jobs, safe cities – is already showing positive results,” USAID reports. “Similarly, while accurate accounts of youth voting are lacking, anecdotal experience shows that youth civic and political education and participation supports stabilization and democracy.”³³

Children International’s Youth Councils give young people the chance to advocate for their own best interests and the good of their communities. There are Youth Councils at 16 separate CI field locations around the world, and participants are encouraged to run for democratically elected leadership positions. Elected leaders work to promote community volunteerism, serve as spokespersons for their peers, and collaborate with CI staff to ensure that programs adequately address the needs of youth. **More than 52,000 youth turned out to vote for Youth Council leaders in 2012, nearly 10,000 more than in 2011.**

Following elections, each Youth Council is awarded an annual grant, or “Empowerment Fund,” of up to \$20,000 for the purpose of investing

Below: Chris Economon, a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer, worked with CI youth participants in Tabaco, Philippines, to implement several community projects.



in projects that directly address problems in their communities. Under the supervision of agency staff, council members manage the fund and plan and budget for projects. They first assess needs within their communities by conducting surveys and interviews with residents and public officials before drafting, reviewing and selecting project proposals to implement. Then they enlist the help of volunteers and also seek out support from local partners to improve the quality of the projects. The partnerships range from schools and health clinics to local NGOs, companies and government agencies.

Chris Economon, a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer, worked closely with the Youth Council in Tabaco, Philippines, while on assignment in 2012. He helped the youth organize and implement several empowerment projects. “Working with the youth is the most engaging part of every project. Their commitment to volunteering and making a difference in the lives of peers was exceptional and very contagious. They made me want to do more,” he said. “There are no other youth groups who carry out projects similar to Children International.”

Putting plans into action

The Youth Council in Honduras exemplifies the initiative of youth participants. They wanted to improve school attendance rates among younger children in rural areas, so they set out on a fact-finding mission by hosting public forums with parents and community members in impoverished communities outside San Pedro Sula. That’s when they learned about the squalid conditions at several local schools, a situation that discouraged school attendance.

The council identified three specific projects and got to work. They helped install a concrete floor at an open-air school. The new floor ensured that kids could attend class regardless of the rain and helped reduce the risk of dengue, a mosquito-borne infection that is common in the community. Next, they funded the construction of restrooms at a kindergarten and provided hygiene training for children and teachers who once used an open field as a toilet. Then they built two bus stalls along a busy road that children take to and from school to provide a safe spot that protected children from the traffic, sun and rain.

While youth in Honduras worked to boost school attendance, the Youth Council in Zambia made it their mission to deliver safe water to residents in the dusty Chibolya compound outside Lusaka. “Chibolya sits on rocky terrain and poses a great challenge in the supply of clean water,” explained Samuel Kapandula, the chairperson for the local ward development committee. “In the rain season, the rocks cause a lot of flooding that pushes up diarrheal diseases and other water-borne diseases, especially among children.”



82%
of active youth participants
say the program taught them
how to solve problems in
their community.

2012 Children International Youth Survey

“The youth are pro-active in promoting community development in their community. They are vibrant young leaders who speak out what’s in their mind and put into action what they think should be done.”

- Marivic Remoto,
a parent volunteer in Legazpi, Philippines

CI’s Youth Council proposed a solution: they offered to fund the expansion of Chibolya’s water reticulation system, an underground network of pipes, for the benefit of more than 1,000 residents. The project was unanimously approved by the ward development committee, and youth worked alongside professional pipefitters from the Lusaka Water Trust to install pipes and new water taps. Now women and children no longer have to walk long distances to fetch clean water, a chore that put them at risk of attack and abduction.

“You know, they say ‘water is life,’ and any project that aims at improving the quality of water really is something very important to every community member,” Samuel said, adding that the water taps could drastically decrease cholera in the area, which is spread when families collect contaminated water from shallow wells.

Other Youth Councils are using the Empowerment Fund to rush to the aid of communities when disaster strikes. “Fires and flooding are common occurrences in our communities,” remarked Jerulyn, a youth participant in Quezon City, Philippines. “Homes are lost; lives are put in danger. It’s hard to recover.”

Inspired by CI’s disaster-relief efforts and collaboration with UNICEF to create “child-friendly spaces” at evacuation centers, Quezon City youth designated a portion of their fund to conduct training on disaster management and risk reduction. They formed a volunteer group called the Disaster Brigade to prepare for, and respond to, natural and man-made disasters. Under the guidance of the local fire department, youth volunteers learned how to organize rapid response to emergencies, administer first aid,



A World of Good

Approximately 78,000 youth participated in 104 Empowerment Fund projects in 2012. The projects amounted to an average of \$2,596 per project and benefited more than 90,000 people. Here are some of the projects youth carried out to improve their surroundings:

and also took part in simulations to practice rescuing victims during mock exercises.

The lessons paid off when a fire broke out in a Quezon City neighborhood a month after training and a member of the Disaster Brigade was able to intervene. A youth named Jomel spotted smoke rising from a home and rushed to the scene. He helped the residents form a water-bucket relay to quickly isolate and extinguish the fire.

The heroism and initiative of youth like Jomel highlight the reason why the Philippines National Disaster Risk and Reduction Council has named Children International the Best Civil Society Organization on Humanitarian Assistance for three years.

Going forward, Jerulyn said the Youth Council in Quezon City will focus on risk reduction, hazard mapping and evacuation plans. They will try to educate more residents and work closely with public partners, such as the Department of Public Order and Safety, the Bureau of Fire Protection and barangay (district) officials.

“Ensuring that participants are becoming psychologically empowered through their involvement contributes to sustainability ...” research on community development affirms. “... It is an indication that true community capacity is being created, making it more likely that collective action will be sustainable, even after NGOs and other agencies conclude their involvement in the community.”

By working to build safer, more livable communities, CI’s youth participants are changing attitudes and inspiring action in ways that will benefit generations to come.



75%
of frequent participants believe CI’s programs and services have made their communities safer places to live.

Children International’s 2012 Youth Survey

Colombia

- Environmental cleanup and beautification
- Art, music and theater workshops

Chile

- Scholarships for higher education
- Winter blankets for families in need

Ecuador

- Small business and microenterprise workshops for families
- Disability awareness and prevention training

Guatemala

- First aid and rescue training
- Artisanal trade classes in baking, gardening, crafts and chocolate making

Honduras

- Food assistance for families in need
- Community safety and solidarity campaigns

India

- Health education about thalassemia
- Career orientation workshops

Mexico

- A community-wide youth carnival
- An anti-drug and violence teambuilding retreat

Philippines

- Psychosocial and anti-violence training
- Trash cleanup and recycling efforts

United States

- Neighborhood and park restoration

Zambia

- Community water tap construction

Human Trafficking: Guarding Against the Unknown

Children International has established child protection protocols to prevent issues of trafficking and other forms of abuse:

Records with children's and youths' addresses and health information are kept strictly confidential in accordance with the guidelines of InterAction, an international alliance of humanitarian organizations.

Child protection officers are assigned to every agency to manage cases and train staff and volunteers about child protection laws and how to report cases of abuse and provide support.

When cases are identified, they are referred to partner agencies for the appropriate medical, legal and psychological support.

It was early in the day when a line of children and parents formed outside Children International's Narkeldanga community center in Kolkata, India. They had come to register for CI's sponsorship program. Kids laughed and played while their parents discussed benefits. Then, a shriek.

Heads turned in the direction of a screaming 6-year-old girl who was being carried off by a strange man. The girl's mother and the CI security guard chased and caught the man before he could disappear into the slum's labyrinth of alleys. As the girl's mother soothed her daughter, the security guard detained the man with the help of the other parents until police arrived. The "child lifter" was later prosecuted for attempted kidnapping.

The episode underscored a surprisingly common occurrence: millions of children and youth – many of which are girls – are abducted or voluntarily sold into forced labor, prostitution, slavery and illegal adoption every year.³² Youth in poor communities risk being kidnapped as they walk to and from school or when they are left unattended at home. And families who are desperate to survive are more likely to turn over their children to traffickers who make dubious offers to place the children in decent jobs or wealthier homes.

In 2012, more than 5,700 staff and volunteers were trained to follow Children International's child protection protocols. By extension, those staff and volunteers offer guidance to CI's youth participants, who help fight abuse and exploitation. Youth educate younger children and their peers about their rights and personal safety. Thousands of youth from Ecuador to the Philippines have marched the streets to promote awareness throughout their communities.

CI community centers also offer safe spaces where families can access centralized services from staff they know and trust. That reduces children's and youths' exposure to potential traffickers since they don't have to travel outside their communities for care. And because the majority of CI's centers are monitored by security guards, there is an added element of protection for program participants.

Beyond that, CI's agencies partner with police and other governmental agencies to promote security. Mausam Chatterjee, a sub inspector with the Giahat Police Station in Kolkata, India, explains how local police forces and CI work together to keep kids safe ...

Who is most vulnerable to human trafficking in your area?

Young women and children along borders of our State [West Bengal] and those living in the rural areas are more prone to trafficking as they are often lured into these traps by promises of jobs and financial security or even marriage. Women in the cities are more aware and thus are not easily lured into such traps.

If the police learn that someone is at risk of being trafficked, how do you intervene?

We conduct raids and rescue the person, and then try to rehabilitate the rescued person. If the family is unwilling to take the person back, then she is placed in a welfare home run by the government.

Do CI's child protection protocols provide an added degree of security for children and youth?

It is heartening to see such stringent measures being imposed, especially as you handle a large number of youth. I feel that because of your awareness meetings, the community knows to be more alert about child lifters and molesters.

Do youth programs like those that CI offers help protect young men and women from exploitation?

The kind of trainings and awareness meetings and camps that your program has automatically make young men and women aware of their strengths and vulnerabilities so they are better equipped to deal with their vulnerabilities.

Below: In Guayaquil, Ecuador, more than 200 children and youth marched to promote the safe treatment of children, animals and the environment.





Summary

Focused on Future Participation

The need for international youth programming is stronger than ever. Risks to citizen security in the form of gangs, drugs, disease, environmental hazards and human trafficking, along with discriminatory social and cultural practices, have exacerbated the intergenerational cycle of poverty and made it increasingly difficult for youth in developing countries to achieve healthy, productive lives.

Children International's youth programs offer a strategic solution to those destructive trends. They engage young people in constructive activities, in safe settings with caring peers, mentors and role models. They prepare youth to face the immediate challenges in their communities while also equipping them with the skills, education and training to effectively transition into adulthood and work. Most importantly, they empower youth to participate in their own personal and community development, an approach that has been shown to reverse the negative effects of poverty and create greater well-being and resilience.

Those positive outcomes have had a magnifying effect throughout developing communities as well. **Participation rates have more than doubled since 2010**, rising from 21,658 active participants to nearly 60,000 by the end of 2012. By year's end, participants shared their knowledge about health and personal enrichment with, and carried out community-improvement services for over 300,000 other youth and community members. For those beneficiaries, CI's youth programs have meant the difference between rising above their adverse circumstances and succumbing to them.

"In Children International, we discover, practice and enhance our talents and skills," Mary Ann Tumibay, a former youth participant and preschool teacher in the Philippines, shared after she graduated from the program. "They gave us a good venue to trust our own understanding and to share it with our co-members. It's like finding a family. You will be confident to try, think and socialize because you know they trust you ... CI made me who I am ... they gave me a chance to have a better future."

There are countless success stories like Mary Ann's waiting to be fulfilled. With additional support from partners like you, Children International can expand opportunities to tens of thousands more young people throughout the developing world, giving them the chance to fulfill their potential and fight poverty in their communities. Together, we can ensure they are engaged ... prepared ... and empowered.

"Psychosocial benefits accrue not only to those fortunate enough to avoid trauma and other risk factors, but also to those who become actively engaged in community organizations and other democratic processes. This is particularly true for those who become engaged in certain types of community and organizational settings – namely, those settings that have structures that permit many people to play meaningful roles, those that provide social support, those that provide access to social networks in different organizations, and those that implement community action."³⁴

Active participants report that they are more prepared than their inactive peers to:

73% Be a leader

78% Reach their goals

81% Stay positive

69% Support themselves economically

Children International's 2012 Youth Survey

Parting Words

I first became acquainted with Children International upon my return from Niger, when a fellow returned Peace Corps Volunteer took a position with the organization. Our service as Peace Corps Volunteers gave us the unique perspective of living in communities that received development aid and services. We saw firsthand the types of programs that worked and those that didn't. Regardless of the project, when real needs were being addressed and community members were given the respect and opportunity to affect real change, good things happened.

Since then, I've had the privilege to work with a host of organizations that support the development of youth around the world. The programs that stand out have one thing in common: they take a holistic approach to addressing the individual and structural factors that contribute to a child's vulnerability. These programs then work to reduce barriers to information and opportunity and empower young people with the tools they need to create a healthy, happy and productive future.

Children International does just that. They work with communities to understand their needs and invest in people to develop both trust and ownership. They leverage their resources as an organization to bring the most appropriate solutions. And they provide services that make a real difference in people's lives. Their engagement is inspiring to not only the people they serve but other organizations that seek to do the same.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, we have the responsibility and the opportunity to make the necessary investments in all our futures. If we all give a little to allow CI to continue and grow the meaningful work they do, we will all get much in return.

Karen Byrnes is a former Peace Corps Volunteer who currently works as a Giving Account Specialist with TOMS. She holds an MPP in Health Policy from UCLA and is a Ph.D. candidate in Community Health Sciences.

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