



Summer 2012, Newsletter

## International Programs, YMCA Canada East

This issue of the International Bulletin highlights the work of a number of successful local programs in the Atlantic Provinces.

### Cumberland County YMCA - Amherst, Nova Scotia

In the summer of 2003, Mac Hawco of the Childcare Department at the Cumberland YMCA had the opportunity to take part in an eight week work placement with the YMCAs in the Dominican Republic and Cuba. He described it as a life changing experience. "During this time, I realized the important work that the YMCA does in different countries, and that it's not only about childcare, health and wellness. It was the experience of this trip that made me realize that people for the most part do not know the work the YMCA does around the world, and I was going to use my experience to help educate people around my YMCA."

When he returned to the YMCA of Cumberland he realized that people "don't want the long version of your experience so I decided to educate the children that I was with about different activities that children from different parts of the world take part in. The afterschool children, who are between the ages of 5 and 12, are very interested. They love to hear stories about different places and events."

Every year, Mac takes time to talk with the kids about the international work of the Y. "We look through pictures from different trips that I have been on, and we play games from other countries. Being a staff member of the YMCA has given me the opportunity to talk to people in different place settings. We have events like Survivor Night where children stay the night at the YMCA, and we divide them into two teams which compete in various games and events. During these games we always have a food challenge where we eat foods from different places around the world. Even though one team usually wins more challenges, everyone always has fun, and they get to learn something new about another place in the world."

Peace Week activities are always of interest to both children and Y members. "Our childcare department always takes time to do display boards of children's art work along with displays of several different international trips that our YMCA staffers went on. During Peace Week it's hard to walk down the hall of our building without stopping to talk to a member about international activities and the Peace Award." Mac points out that the opportunities he has had with the YMCA over the last ten years have made him "more aware of the work that is being done around the world and how a little YMCA in Cumberland County can help with these exciting international endeavors."



*Children taking part in the Cumberland Survivor Night activity.*

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International



## Exploits Valley YMCA - Grand Falls-Windsor, Newfoundland

The International Committee of the Exploits Valley YMCA is a group of staff and volunteers who have an interest in promoting the idea that their YMCA is part of a larger international organization which shows concern for the well being of others around the world.

Their role is twofold: 1) raising awareness of International Development issues within the YMCA as well as the larger community, and 2) fund raising to support their commitment to the Honduras partnership.

The committee meets on average four times a year for no longer than an hour at a time so that the meetings are easy to attend and the agenda is manageable. The goals set are modest but attainable. It was agreed in the beginning to divide the year into quarters and hold at least one event in each quarter. They agreed that they would try to incorporate activities as much as possible in the existing programs offered at the Y.

For example to celebrate the International Day of Families the Y holds a Healthy Kids Day in which the International Committee has always had a presence. During Environment Week, the Child Care facilities incorporate activities which highlight Honduras. In the Youth Center during International Days, the young people will make a meal that is typical of one made in Honduras. This does not require a lot of extra effort and is easy to incorporate with a little planning.

As for fund raising, the committee sticks to a couple of core activities that have now become annual events. They hold a Used Book Sale (all books for a loonie!) which gives them an opportunity to explain where the proceeds are going and hand out bookmarks that contain information about the Honduras Partnership. Their other activity is a Cold Plate Sale which provides another opportunity to talk about why the money is being raised. In particular this event is supported by the larger community and reaches a larger audience.

The committee attributes its “modest success” to a number of factors: the idea that they stick to a manageable workload, the support of the CEO and senior staff, and a good relationship with local media. Events are always well covered and publicized throughout the community.

Committee chair, Debbie Armstrong notes, “We could do more. We need to get some new committee members. We need a stronger connection to the board and of course we could be more visible throughout the organization and the community.” For now, however, they remain focused on the goals identified in their work plan and hope to continue to grow the work of the International Development Committee.

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**Exploits Valley YMCA's  
annual book sale.**

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## YMCA of Fredericton - Fredericton, New Brunswick

There has been an International Committee at the Fredericton YMCA continuously since the years following the Second World War, when its primary activity was welcoming newcomers to Canada.

Twenty-five years ago, the Committee and International Program Manager, Rick McDaniel, established the YMCA Peace Medallion. One volunteer in particular – Carole Cronkhite – was the first female pewter smith in Canada, and she offered to make the Medallions. She still takes on that role to this day, and the Peace Medallion Ceremony is now celebrated annually by YMCAs across Canada, as well as in the US, Mexico and Haiti. The current International Committee considers it an honour to keep up that legacy – the very first award in its community to celebrate everyday people for their efforts to promote social justice.

In the past, the committee has partnered with the Belize YMCA to implement an eco-tourism program. They raised \$30,000 in response to the drought in the Sahel region of Africa; these funds were matched by the Canadian Government at a rate of three to one, for a total of \$120,000. The committee partnered with the YMCA of the Dominican Republic for over 30 years, providing internship opportunities for youth in Fredericton to experience life in a developing country.

Annually, the Committee organizes Peace Week from start to finish – from soliciting nominations in January to hosting the Award Ceremony in November. It is usually an evening event with up to 200 people in attendance. Music and/or entertainment is chosen by the recipient(s), and cocktails are offered for a Meet & Greet to learn more about the recipients' activities. In 2009, the committee initiated events focusing on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which falls during YMCA World Peace Week. It has held panel discussions on Violence against Women, screened films commemorating the Day, and hosted the Executive Director of the White Ribbon Campaign (to end violence against women) based in Toronto.



*The Fredericton YMCA International Committee*

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The committee also hosted the General Secretary of the YMCA of Haiti and provided an opportunity for him to speak with university students about the post-earthquake situation in late 2010.

Over the last couple of years, the International Committee has carried out many educational and community partnership-building activities as part of our mandate to provide educational opportunities to the Fredericton community on international development issues. These have included providing a workshop to a middle school on dating and gender roles through the Executive Director of the White Ribbon Campaign; delivering ten presentations on Honduras to various target audiences – specifically, on living conditions in Honduras, and on the partnership visit undertaken by the Atlantic Canada YMCAs in 2011; and hosting film screenings on international development (Rick McDaniel's *80/20: A Developing World*, Michele Mitchell's *Haiti: Where Did the Money Go?* and others).

The committee also raises awareness regularly through bake sales: originally intended as fundraisers, the committee began hosting them every holiday season (Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day) using fair trade ingredients only – and using that as an opportunity to inform buyers about fair trade. A fair trade coffee tasting was held in the YMCA lobby, informing participants of the benefits of fairly traded coffee versus conventionally traded coffee.

In addition to public events, the International Committee promotes Cultures Boutique and the Honduran Solidarity Blend of fair trade coffee through the Employment Programs of the YMCA. At each employment workshop, held every two weeks, the Honduran Solidarity Blend is served, and the product and its purpose are introduced to workshop participants. The reaction has generally been that fair trade coffee tastes better too!

The Fredericton YMCA International Committee meets monthly, and members inform each other about learning opportunities with regard to global poverty, human rights and responsibilities, gender equality, environmental responsibility, and so on. They regularly assess their purpose and impact, and they have developed partnerships with the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, the Multicultural Association of Fredericton, the St. Thomas University International Students' Association, the University of New Brunswick's International Development Association, the Canada-Haiti Action Network, the Muriel McQueen Ferguson Foundation, and many more. The committee has been going strong for over 60 years and looks forward to another 60 years of engaging the local community in global concerns.



## Humber Community YMCA, Corner Brook, Newfoundland

The Humber Community YMCA, in keeping with its partnership agreement with the YMCA in Honduras, has an International Committee. Throughout the year, the Committee carries out activities to highlight certain UN Theme Days such as Earth Day and Fair Trade Weeks, while promoting its partnership with Honduras. Its biggest event is Peace Week.

Peace Week is the busiest time of year for the International Committee and the Association. This year was extra special as it was the thirtieth anniversary of the Humber Community YMCA and its tenth annual Peace Week Speak Off.

An evening is set aside to celebrate Peace Week, and it includes food, a “Speak Off” and the awarding of our Peace Medallion. The decorations for the event are created by the association’s afterschool and preschool programs. The children participate in art activities that teach them about peace and create collages and pictures depicting their concept of peace.

At the Association, the committee established a Peace Tree. Each leaf has the sentence “To promote peace, I will \_\_\_\_\_” and members are encouraged to fill in the blank with their pledge to promote peace. By the end of the week, the tree is filled with pledges to be more empathetic, to be a better listener, to be more patient, to be kind to others, etc.

To promote Peace Week and the theme of *What can I do to promote peace?*, a Speak Off is held for Grade 6 students in Corner Brook. Each Grade 6 classroom has students compete and then two students from each school are chosen to compete in the Peace Week Speak Off. Toastmasters International provides the judges for the event. This year Nitara Waghmere from Humber Elementary was the Speak Off winner.

After the Speak Off, the Peace Medallion presentation takes place. Over the years, this medal has gone to the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, Bernice Buckle, Vera Sheppard, Dr. Noel Murphy among others for their hard work towards creating a more peaceful community, province, country and world to live in. In 2011, the Medallion went to Paul Snow, a long-time volunteer who had been president of the Humber Community YMCA when it first opened its doors. He also served two terms on the National Board of Directors of YMCA Canada.

***Nitara Waghmere  
receiving award for  
the 2011 Speak Off  
from Dianne Elliot.***



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## Lunenburg County YMCA, Bridgewater, Nova Scotia

The Lunenburg County YMCA has an interesting event to promote its partnership with the YMCA of Honduras. Since 2010, the association has selected a volunteer to canvas donations and educate community members by participating in a "Water Walk."



In many developing countries, women and girls regularly have to walk long distances to fetch water for family use. The Lunenburg Water Walk demonstrates the difficulty of this task. The participant fills up two canisters with a total of 20 liters of water - equivalent to 44 pounds - then carries the water for twenty kilometers, without wearing shoes!

The simple nature of this event captures the attention of people who take our easy access to clean water in Canada for granted. The originator of the project, Johnathan Gregorash, notes: "The event reminds us how fortunate our culture remains and how little we do in the name of international equity. The YMCA of Lunenburg County addresses this inequality and hosts this event to provide an opportunity for people to act. Through the event, participant observers (those who walk alongside of the barefoot participant) often volunteer themselves to be ambassadors of the YMCA partnership. While the steps are slow and difficult, each connection made through the water walk event is solid and sure of ground; the event and its participants not forgotten."

The YMCA is pleased to have strong supporters for the event every year - and even more thrilled that other volunteers are interested in stepping up to promote a mutually beneficial partnership between YMCAs in two very different nations.

## Saint John YMCA-YWCA, Saint John, New Brunswick

The Saint John Y International Committee is made up of staff and volunteers from the community who are dedicated to growing their partnership with the Honduras YMCA and to spreading awareness and knowledge about the global community.

This committee is proud to be the longest running Standing Committee at the Y. It has been active since the 1970's. Four of its members have been part of this initiative since the beginning and have seen great changes to the Y International movement over the years.

In 2010, the Saint John International Committee added a youth component to its Peace Medal Awards with the inception of the Youth Peace Medal Certificate. Last year's recipient, Hannah Daltrop, was nominated for inspiring Peace abroad and among her school peers through fundraising and awareness events. That year also saw the 1<sup>st</sup> International Craft and Jumble Sale, an awareness and fundraising event.

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In 2011, the committee participated in the first fundraising and awareness event with 10,000 Villages in Saint John. This event was quite successful, attracting twice the customers usual for that time of year.

In 2011, Karin Sundin, Chair of the International Committee, was given the opportunity to take part in the regional visit to Honduras. Karin has since been taking her experience and insights 'on the road' with presentations throughout Saint John.

The Committee has grown over the past few years and looks forward to the future with optimism.



*Karin Sundin in Honduras.*



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*Program undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada  
provided through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).*



Canadian International  
Development Agency

Agence canadienne de  
développement international

*Newsletter designed and formatted by Sandra Romo*

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