

WORLDLINK

VOLUME
19

A program of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the
University of San Diego's Kroc School of Peace Studies

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2016



Student delegates discuss the power of youth at WorldLink's 19th Annual Youth Town Meeting.

Photo by Justine Chen

Power of Youth: *To Use or Abuse?*

We know our generation has great influence, but what are the ways in which we use it — for better or for worse?

Written by Leily Rezvani, High Tech High North County

YOUTH LEADERS from different parts of the San Diego-Baja Mexico region explored the significance of this question at WorldLink's 19th Annual Youth Town Meeting. Over 800 high school students gathered at WorldLink's Opening Plenary seeking solutions to some of the world's most pressing issues. They listened to captivating speeches from international leaders and experts addressing young people's positive and negative influences on five areas of focus: social, economic, environmental, policy and technology.

First, Mark Kabban took the stage. He shared his story as a young boy whose family fled Lebanon from the civil war. Kabban felt discouraged to pursue his academic goals while in school since he often felt adrift. He even recounted his childhood lunches, which symbolized a difference between him and his classmates. Kabban encouraged conference delegates to "[not] let limitations bound you because life is not a race." Today, Kabban and his organization Youth and Leaders Living Actively (YALLA SD) prepare refugee and immigrant youth for college through soccer and academic programs.

The second speaker was Dr. Ami Car-

penter, an associate professor at the University of San Diego's Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies and an advisor to the San Diego County Advisory Council on Human and Child Sex Trafficking. Taking a critical look at San Diego's underground economy in sex trafficking, Dr. Carpenter described the influential role that young people have in perpetuating these human rights violations. One of her most recent findings was that "children and young adults are trafficking children

Our generation must collect its power and use its influence to create positive change in our local, national and transnational communities.

and young adults."

She recalled an interview that she had with a former pimp who prostituted girls by using psychological strategies, in other words "selling the dream." The boy admitted to courting girls by claiming that he loved them and would take care of them. After he gained a girl's trust, he would force her into prostitution. Dr. Carpenter explained that specific groups of young people are targeted, including those who have experienced abuse, live in foster care, or are homeless. Pimping is a social identity fueled by money, power,

and disrespect for women. She champions us to "participate in the transformation of our world" by identifying and reaching out to the vulnerable individuals around us.

Following Dr. Carpenter, Evan Wesley lit up the stage with moving words as he opened his talk with a rap about the water crisis in impoverished nations. Every 21 seconds, a child dies from lack of clean water. With this unfortunate reality in mind, seven students from Southern

California went from raising funds on the streets of Hollywood Boulevard to creating an organization, now known as the Thirst Project. Through his work as the director of education for the Thirst Project, Wesley works with young people and local community members in several countries, including Swaziland, El Salvador, Ethiopia and India, to combat the global water crisis.

Wesley explained the importance of collaborating with communities by reciting an African proverb, "If you want to go fast in life, go alone. If you want to go

far in life, go together." The Thirst Project and its worldwide partners lead clean water projects, such as sustainable wells, which have had a positive impact on health and sanitation, employment rates, and the ability for children to receive schooling. This, in turn, aids the nation's economy and addresses a multitude of health concerns. Carrying gallons of water across many miles can cause miscarriages and spinal problems. Contaminated water can lead to fatal diseases or can put a person's health at greater risk if the individual already has a virus infection, such as HIV. He ended his speech by calling us to "understand the consequences of inaction" and to "believe in the power of youth."

Next, Joel Davis took the stage. Davis, who is the founding executive director of Youth to End Sexual Violence, established this organization as a way to amplify the voices of youth survivors, leaders and activists. He expressed the lamentable reality of double standards associated to youth survivors. "They are old enough to be pregnant, but not old enough to be trusted with comprehensive sexuality education. They are old enough to suffer through a sexually transmitted infection,

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About the WorldLink Program

The mission of the WorldLink program is to connect youth to global affairs by creating an environment in which young people may consider global citizenship and responsible local participation.

WorldLink encourages critical thinking and understanding of the dynamics shaping international policies and global economies, as well as local cultures and concerns. A staff of guest student writers from different high schools in San Diego and Baja Mexico contributed to this edition of the WorldLink Newspaper, which details the 19th Annual Youth Town Meeting (YTM) held on January 20, 2016. WorldLink’s Annual YTM allows for discussions with experts, activists and fellow youth leaders from around the world. It calls upon youth to engage in global affairs and add their voices to a civil and responsible atmosphere in which we can build our diverse yet increasingly intertwined communities, with a vision of justice and peace.

WorldLink is a program of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego’s Kroc School of Peace Studies.



Photo by Herman Saldaña Toledano

Letter from the Editor

Written by Olivia Zaller, Coronado High School

My name is Olivia Zaller, and I am the 2016 WorldLink spring intern and editor-in-chief of the 19th edition of the WorldLink Newspaper. At this year’s Youth Town Meeting (YTM), over 800 students from Southern California and Baja Mexico came together to discuss this year’s theme, “Youth’s Influence on the World: For Better or Worse.” As the day unfolded, it was clear that I was in the midst of a network of socially conscious young people who I know will one day fill the roles of global leaders.

Despite differences in language, country of origin, race, and upbringing, everyone who attended this year’s YTM had in common one single goal: to learn how to become changemakers as we listened to the stories of those who have been successful in doing so. All differences aside, 800 young people embarked on a thought-provoking day designed to spark action among the young delegates.

As youth it is easy to forget or dismiss the repercussions of our actions, but it is the understanding of these repercussions that will bring about positive rather than negative social change. Our generation is often underestimated by our elders, but after managing my team of journalists and photographers and watching the student delegates engage with YTM topics, I have become extremely proud of our generation and excited to see what we can and will accomplish in the coming years.

I have come to live by the principle, “the worst thing we can do is nothing.” I wholeheartedly believe that one is never too young to be a change-maker. Although at times we may feel powerless, we must always remember that together anything can be accomplished. Even when potential impact seems minimal, making the difference in the life of one person is much better than doing nothing at all. We are all capable of achieving change so far beyond the scope of our imaginations, making an impact not just in our communities but also on a global scale.

Becoming self-aware of global issues and developing a personal stance is the first step to initiating change on global, social justice issues. From watching the news to hearing an opposing opinion of a friend, there are so many ways to make this possible. This year’s YTM perfectly captured this way of life. I witnessed 800 different individuals come together in order to educate themselves on various global issues, such as gun violence, human trafficking, and lack of education, as well as develop plausible solutions for them.

Regardless of whether we try to or not, youth have a significant impact on the world. It is important to note that our influence may not always be

positive. As a substantial segment of society, we do in fact have many destructive behaviors, including wastefulness and overconsumption of natural resources. Nevertheless, learning from our mistakes is the only way to prevent future conflicts and become advocates for positive and progressive social change.

In the face of so much violence in the world, it is easy to become discouraged and brush these serious issues under the rug. However, we must remember that even in the shadow of violence, human strength and perseverance will always prevail. I have confidence that we, as a united generation, can alter the course of the largest and most threatening social justice issues that humanity has ever experienced. All it takes is for each of us to refocus our priorities and resources, and think realistically about how we can improve difficult situations.

No generation is perfect, and by no means is ours exempt from this statement. Despite our flaws, however, we possess a tremendous power that no person or thing can ever deny us of. How we ultimately choose to use this power is what will determine if our legacy and impact on the world is either positive or negative.

Change is a choice, not a coincidence. Change takes work, and it takes learning from our mistakes. We must each think critically about what we as individuals can do to better ourselves and, in turn, society as a whole. I hope that readers of this newspaper realize how many unique, priceless gifts they can offer the world. Believing not just in yourself but also in those around you is necessary if we are to achieve global progress.



Warm regards,

Olivia Zaller
Coronado High School
2016 Editor-in-Chief
WorldLink Program

WORLDLINK

2016 Staff

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Olivia Zaller, *Coronado High School*

SENIOR COPY EDITOR

Leily Rezvani, *High Tech High North County*

COPY EDITORS

Nanitzia Comparán Cuadras, *CETYS Tijuana*
Isabel Harmet, *Cathedral Catholic High School*
Marthapaola Martínez, *Options Secondary School*
Ana Sofía Rivera, *IMAN*

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Sarah Sanchez, *Academy of Our Lady of Peace*
Imee Patricia Torres Pizarro, *IMAN*

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Marthapaola Martínez, *Options Secondary School*
Angela Natalia Peralta Fragoso, *Federal Lázaro Cárdenas*
Ana Maria Rubio Gamboa, *Academy of Our Lady of Peace*

JOURNALISTS

Liliana Bollinger, *Outside the Lens*
Nanitzia Comparán Cuadras, *CETYS Tijuana*
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Stephannie González Esparza, *Colegio Ibero Tijuana*
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Ana Sofía Rivera, *IMAN*
Durana Saydee, *Kearny International Business School*
Sofía Torres, *Cathedral Catholic High School*
Olivia Zaller, *Coronado High School*
Erika Zepeda, *CETYS Tijuana*

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Andrés Argote Ramos, *IMAN*
Justine Chen, *Outside the Lens*
Renata Del Riego, *High Tech High Chula Vista*
Alejandra Galindo Villezcas, *Colegio Ibero Tijuana*
Luz Hernandez, *Academy of Our Lady of Peace*
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Sarah Sanchez, *Academy of Our Lady of Peace*
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Sofía Vega, *Colegio Ibero Tijuana*

VIDEOGRAPHERS

Adair Calderón Díaz, *Colegio Ibero Tijuana*
Fausto E. Celis Gama, *Colegio Ibero Tijuana*

WORLDLINK CONTACT:

Debbie M. Martínez, Senior Program Officer for
Youth and Peacebuilding
Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice
Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies
University of San Diego
5998 Alcalá Park, San Diego, CA 92110
T 619.260.7568 | E dmartinez@sandiego.edu
W peace.sandiego.edu/worldlink



THIS YEAR'S STUDENT-SELECTED THEME IS

"Youth's Influence on the World: For Better or Worse"

addressing five areas: Social, Economic, Environmental, Policy and Technology

THE 19th ANNUAL YOUTH TOWN MEETING SESSIONS

#ChicagoGirl: Mobilizing the Syrian Revolution

PRESENTER: Ala'a Basatneh, Syrian youth activist
MODERATOR: Cristina De Almeida Amaral, High Tech High Chula Vista

Youth Survivors and Activists Combat Global Sexual Violence

PRESENTER: Joel Davis, executive director, Youth to End Sexual Violence
MODERATOR: Alexandra Martínez, Colegio Ibero Tijuana

Investing in Honduran Youth: Solutions to Poverty

PRESENTER: Katia Gomez, executive director, Educate2Envision International
MODERATORS: Skylar Gering, The Bishop's School, and Rebecca Shields, The Grauer School

Protecting the Rights of Sexual Minorities

PRESENTER: Patrick Tindana, consultant, United Nations Development Program
MODERATORS: Azriel Almera, High Tech High Media Arts, and Aimee Tsuchiya Ramírez, Federal Lázaro Cárdenas

The Malala Movement: Champions for Girls Education

PRESENTERS: Erica Ales, film campaign coordinator, Malala Fund, and Joyce Im, associate for educational outreach, Students Stand #withMalala
MODERATOR: Nadia Mehretab, High Tech High Chula Vista

Peace by Piece: The Critical Role of Youth

PRESENTER: Kara Wong, program officer for strategic peacebuilding, Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice
MODERATOR: Osama Mezgouri, National University Academy

Youth SPEAK UP Against Gun Violence

PRESENTER: Judy Haber, education and outreach chairperson, Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence
MODERATOR: Andrea Cardoze Navarrete, CETYS Tijuana

Thirsty For Change? Youth-led Water Activism

PRESENTER: Evan Wesley, director of education, Thirst Project
MODERATORS: Sonia Adjroud, La Jolla Country Day School, and Emma Rodriguez, Mt. Everest Academy

Transforming Lives in Uganda, One Seat at a Time

PRESENTERS: Grace Michel, assistant director, University of San Diego's Center for Peace and Commerce, and Alex Naugler, USD student, Simple Seat, Better Lives
MODERATOR: Abdulrahman Abdulmawla, National University Academy

Global Engagement: A Local Call to Action

PRESENTER: Bettina Hausman, president and CEO, United Nations Association, San Diego Chapter
MODERATOR: Elias Jinich, Francis Parker School

World Wild Solutions through Community-based Conservation

PRESENTERS: David O'Connor, ecologist and researcher, San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research and Samantha Young, senior research technician, San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research
MODERATOR: Kellie Allen, High Tech High School

Innovation and WIT for Social Change

PRESENTERS: Aly Arrington, Esmeralda Lopez, Gisselle Morales, Karina Olsen and Natasha Tayebi, Whatever it Takes
MODERATOR: Brianda Herrera Nuñez, CETYS Tijuana

One Team, One Dream: New Beginnings for Refugee Youth

PRESENTER: Mark Kabban, founder and executive director, YALLA SD
MODERATOR: Alan Hiraes Ahuatzin, CETYS Tijuana

Battle for Humanity: App-plied Activism

PRESENTER: Jessica Murrey, communications manager, Search for Common Ground
MODERATORS: Crystal Coriano, Academy of Our Lady of Peace, and Faduma Mohamed, Sweetwater High School

Young Filmmakers Reframe Violence

PRESENTERS: Nuvia Ruland, educator, and Eduardo Bimbela, sound engineer, Beyond the Crossfire
MODERATOR: Remy Reya, La Jolla Country Day School

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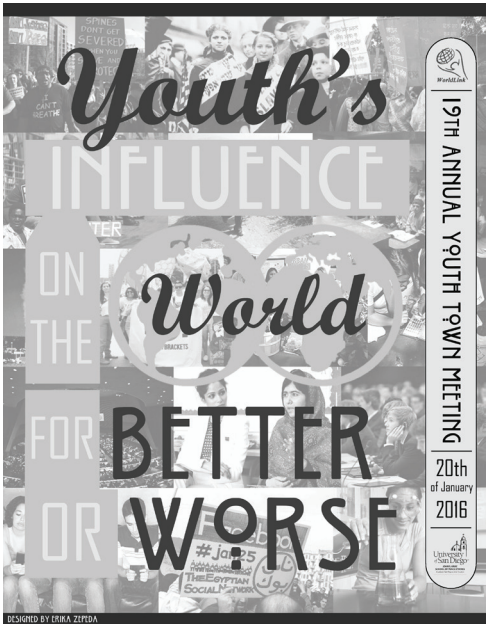
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CONFERENCE SPEAKERS



Erica Ales and **Joyce Im** work on campaigns related to the 2015 documentary, *He Named Me Malala*, which documents the story of Malala Yousafzai of Pakistan, who was targeted by the Taliban and survived a gunshot wound to the head, and is now a leading campaigner for the education of girls worldwide. **Ales** is the film campaign coordinator for the Malala Fund, an organization cofounded by Yousafzai, which aims to enable girls to complete 12 years of free, safe and quality education so that they can achieve their potential and be positive changemakers in their families and communities. **Im** is the associate for the educational outreach team at Students Stand #withMalala, a 12-month social action and advocacy campaign that accompanies the documentary. Students Stand #withMalala aims to engage and motivate millions of people as newfound champions for girls' education globally.



Ala'a Basatneh

is originally from Damascus, Syria and now lives in Chicago. She is the protagonist of the award-winning documentary *#ChicagoGirl*,

which has aired in over 40 countries. The documentary follows her as a 19-year-old university student who helps organize the Syrian revolution from her Chicago bedroom. Through the use of social media, camera phones and digital cameras, Basatneh decided on protest and escape routes and convened small groups of protestors in order to form larger groups. She has gained distinguished honors globally in the political and humanitarianism activism world. Amnesty International named her one of their *10 Human Rights Heroes of 2014*. Basatneh has received a bachelor's degree in political science and Arabic studies from Northeastern Illinois University.



Ami Carpenter

PhD, is an associate professor at the Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego. She recently led the ground

breaking study, "Measuring the Nature and Extent of Gang Involvement in Sex Trafficking in San Diego," one of the largest, most comprehensive human trafficking case studies in the United States to date. Carpenter and her research team identified sex trafficking as San Diego's second largest underground economy after drug trafficking. The study fits with her interests in community resilience to violence, the shifting identities of young people involved in armed groups, and how those groups are linked to illicit markets. Carpenter holds a PhD from George Mason University and teaches courses on conflict prevention and resolution.



Joel Davis

is the founding executive director of Youth to End Sexual Violence, youth ambassador for the U.S. on Sexual Violence in Conflict,

and a Nobel Peace Prize nominee. He serves as co-chair of the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict, the first global collaboration between Nobel Peace Laureates, international organizations, and groups working at regional and community levels in conflict. In 2014 Davis represented the U.S. at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, hosted by the United Kingdom's former Foreign Minister William Hague and UN Special Envoy Angelina Jolie-Pitt. He also works closely with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict to galvanize support for the engagement of youth survivors, leaders and activists. Davis currently attends Columbia University and The Juilliard School of Music.



Katia Gomez

MPH, works with Educate2Envision International, a nonprofit that invests in youth from underserved areas of Honduras to be their own innovators in tackling extreme poverty and playing a leading role in economic development. Gomez is executive director of the organization,

and was awarded an Ashoka social entrepreneurship fellowship in 2015. She has been named one of *10 Heroes for International Day of the Girl* by TakePart.com, *12 Amazing Young Entrepreneurs Doing Good* by Forbes, and *Top 25 Women Under 25 in the World to Watch* by Newsweek.



Judy Haber

is the education and outreach chairperson for the San Diego Chapter of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, an organization working toward cutting the number of U.S. gun deaths in half by 2025. Haber, now retired,

taught in elementary schools for 30 years in New York City and California. Through the Brady Campaign, Haber helps create safer communities for young people through gun violence prevention education, including youth in the problem-solving aspect of reducing gun-violence through the ASK and SPEAK-UP programs. She has also met with legislators to lobby for stronger gun violence prevention laws at the Brady National Summit in Washington, D.C.



Bettina Hausmann

is the president and CEO of the United Nations Association, San Diego Chapter, a program of the UN Foundation that informs,

inspires, and mobilizes the American people to support the principles and vital work of the UN by actively engaging partners and stakeholders at a local level. Hausmann leads annual delegations to the UN and regularly attends high-level plenary meetings and panels, including the annual Commission on the Status of Women, Millennium Development Goals Post-2015 Agenda, and the Human Rights Council. Raised in East Germany, Hausmann's early adulthood was shaped by Cold War Era politics and living life behind the Iron Curtain. These personal experiences resulted in her strong sense of community and the understanding of the impact of collective memory, cultural conflict and peace.

Mark Kabban is the founder and ex-



ecutive director of Youth and Leaders Living Actively (YALLA SD), the only college preparatory program in California that uses soccer and academic programs to motivate refugee and immigrant youth. Kabban's family came to San Diego from Beirut, Lebanon when he was 9 years old. YALLA SD emerged after Kabban worked as a refugee case manager, through which he witnessed refugee youth "idle and alienated." Through YALLA SD, refugee and immigrant youth have access to state-of-the-art technology, project based-learning, therapy, and recreational soccer, which provide necessary support for their transition to the U.S. For his leadership with YALLA SD, Kabban was named one of the *Top Five Best Young World Changers* by DoSomething.org, *Top 10 Unsung Heroes* by TakePart.com, and an *International Hero* by CNN Heroes.



Grace Michel

MA, is assistant director of the University of San Diego's (USD) Center for Peace and Commerce, which prepares the next generation of leaders to develop effective solutions to complex social and environmental problems through innovation and responsible enterprise development. She worked with the U.S. Campaign for Burma and spent time on the Burma-Thailand border as an educator for Karen refugees. In 2013, Michel was one of USD's Social Innovation Challenge award winners for her project, HOMESPUN, which brings together refugees from Burma living in San Diego for weaving circles, where elders pass on their art of traditional weaving to the youth, and participants learn social entrepreneurship skills to sell their woven creations. Michel has also worked as a research intern with the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland.

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Jessica Murrey

is the communications manager at Search for Common Ground, a conflict prevention and resolution nongovernmental organization with

offices in over 35 countries. Search engages local youth as partners to transform conflict into cooperative action, pioneering projects that use comics, theater, sports and other creative means to bring youth together and amplify their voices. Murrey is the creative mind behind Search's global initiative Battle for Humanity, a digital platform for grassroots activism that takes the hero-journeys of youth from virtual to reality, initiating a youth movement to end violent conflict. She has a degree in journalism and minor in international relations from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

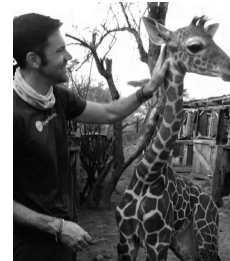


Alix Naugler

is a junior at the University of San Diego (USD), pursuing a degree in international business and a double minor in Spanish and accountancy. Naugler

is part of the Simple Seat, Better Lives team, comprised of four engineering and business students who developed a low-cost and por-

table toilet seat designed for Ugandan landmine victims with disabilities to alleviate the difficulties of using a latrine. Simple Seat, Better Lives was selected as one of the winning projects for the 2015 USD Social Innovation Challenge. Naugler created the project's microfinance implementation system in order to stimulate sustainable economic growth in a targeted rural community.



David O'Connor

MSc, is a community-based conservation ecologist and research coordinator with the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation

Research. He is also a contract senior researcher with *National Geographic* magazine and a course instructor for University of Miami's Project Dragonfly Master's program. In collaboration with local partners, O'Connor uses socio-ecological methods to understand human-wildlife-livestock interactions to inform and develop community-based conservation programs, primarily in developing nations. He is currently leading San Diego Zoo Global's community-based reticulated giraffe conservation program in East Africa. O'Connor also works on combatting the illegal trade in bears and bear parts in Southeast Asia, and assisted on developing remote sensing technology for the critically endangered vaquita in Baja, Mexico.



Nuvia Ruland and Eduardo Bimbela

helped produce the documentary *Beyond the Crossfire*, an investigative film led by 45 Chula Vista high school students tackling the broader questions of violence and its root causes. *Beyond the Crossfire* explores the U.S. mental health system, entertainment industry, criminal justice system and usage of video games as possible factors. **Ruland** is a teacher at High Tech High Chula Vista, who uses the classroom as a laboratory to combine science, art, and culture in a multidisciplinary curriculum that explores the challenges her students face. During his junior and senior year at High Tech High Chula Vista, **Bimbela** served as sound engineer for *Beyond the Crossfire*, playing a pivotal role in the making of the documentary. Throughout this two-year project, Bimbela discovered his passion for education, which he plans to pursue in college.



Patrick Tindana

JD, is a consultant with the HIV, Health and Development Group in the Bureau for Policy and Programme Support at the United

Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He has eight years of experience in promoting the rights of cultural, ethnic, gender and sexual minorities. At UNDP Tindana supports work on drug policy, gender, LGBTI and key populations. Most recently, he was an LGBT & SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) project intern for the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; a legal intern with Immigration Equality, where he assisted LGBT and HIV-positive immigrants in their pursuit of asylum in the U.S.; and a coordinator for

diversity initiatives at a New York law firm. Tindana, originally from Ghana, holds a JD from the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law in New York.



Evan Wesley is the director of education for the Thirst Project, the world’s leading youth organization working for safe, clean water for the more than

663 million people around the world who do not have access to it. The Thirst Project works with local community members in Swaziland, India, Uganda, Ethiopia, El Salvador, Kenya and Colombia to implement clean water projects, including hand pump freshwater wells, bio sand water filters, and rainwater catchment systems. As a keynote and workshop presenter, Wesley has reached over 100,000 students in 35 states and 4 countries about the impact clean water has on education, economic development, food security and health and sanitation.

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Power of Youth: To Use or Abuse?

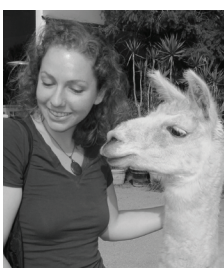
but not old enough to exercise the autonomy required to receive treatment for it. They are old enough to be raped, but not old enough to be believed,” he told the silent, captivated audience.

It quickly became evident why Davis is motivated to do the difficult work he does on a daily basis. He shared the story of a 14-year-old girl he once met in Iraq. Instead of going to school each day, as we do, this young girl takes refuge in a tent because she was raped by ISIS. She covers her face to mask the shame she has for herself because in her culture victims are considered shameful. She mourns the death of her brother, who committed suicide since he could not bear the shame



Kara Wong, MA, is a program officer for strategic peacebuilding at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, where she helps to design, man-

age and implement the institute’s international field projects. Specializing in peace education and experiential learning, Wong has contributed to the design and implementation of community-based education projects on four continents. Prior to joining the institute she spent seven years in Myanmar, where she cofounded a community-based education center that empowers young leaders from marginalized areas of the country with confidence, knowledge and skills to transform and resolve conflict within their own communities. Wong holds an MA in development studies from the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands, and a BA in international justice and human rights from the University of Western Ontario.



Samantha Young, MSc, is a senior research technician in the Conservation Education Division of the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation

Research. Currently, Young works in Latin America; in the upper Gulf of California, Mexico where a porpoise known as the vaquita is on the verge of extinction due to accidental catch; and in the Dry Forest of Peru where a unique population of Andean bears is threatened by human expansion. She works with local organizations to lessen human impact on ecosystems while considering the livelihoods of the communities. This includes research into human interaction with the environment to inform initiatives like environmental education and teacher training, sustainable livelihoods, improved cooking methods and incorporating locals into conservation research and leadership.



Whatever It Takes (WIT) is the only college-credit, social entrepreneur and leadership course in the country that equips teenagers with the tools to design, launch, manage and measure a social enterprise. Along with WIT assistant and cofacilitator **Karina Olsen**, WIT teens, **Aly Arrington** from Francis Parker School, **Esmeralda Lopez** from The Preuss School UCSD, **Gisselle Morales** from San Diego High School International Studies, and **Natasha Tayebi** from The Bishop’s School discuss the social enterprise programs WIT teens have launched on the prevention of bullying, awareness of street harassment, and capturing people’s stories through art.

of his sister’s rape. Joel Davis is bringing many youth survivors and leaders together to end sexual violence through his organization, as well as through his role as the Youth Ambassador for the United States on Sexual Violence in Conflict and co-chair of the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict.

Lastly, speaker Ala’a Basatneh addressed conference delegates and encouraged us to share with our own communities the lessons, ideas and solutions exchanged throughout the Youth Town Meeting. Basatneh is originally from Syria and is the protagonist of the award-winning documentary *#ChicagoGirl*. She was inspired to dedicate her life to activism after learning about a group of 9 and 10 year-olds who were detained, tortured and murdered by the Syrian govern-

ment for writing on their school walls the phrase, “We want to topple the Syrian regime.”

In that moment, at the age of 19, Basatneh reevaluated her afternoon plans to go to the mall with her friends. She decided, “I had to do something about the kids who were being tortured. I looked around the room and all I saw was my laptop, and I thought that this was the window to the world.” Basatneh explained that we too can have that level of influence in our world today. Delegates were asked to raise their hands if they owned a cell phone. Almost every hand was raised. She described the phone as a “double-edged sword” that either has the capability of being used for the good or for the bad. Ala’a Basatneh inspired conference delegates to use their voice and technology in a thoughtful way in order

to make a positive impact on the planet.

The Youth Town Meeting opened with a call for action. Our generation must collect its power and use its influence to create positive change in our local, national and transnational communities. One student from Hoover High School defined an activist as someone who aspires to change the world with the help of a community. As cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” The world has never seen a youth population as large as it is today, so embrace every opportunity because, as youth, we hold the key to the future.

To watch the Opening Plenary, visit www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern. ■

The Alliance for Peacebuilding published this article in its Spring 2016 edition of The Peacebuilding Post.

Global Engagement: Youth's Call to Action

Written by Olivia Zaller, Coronado High School, and Leily Rezvani, High Tech High North County

“**YOUTH’S WAY** of approaching the world cannot be limited to merely consuming it, but rather directing our passion to understanding it with depth and by taking concrete actions to improve it,” said high school sophomore Elias Jinich, a research intern for WorldLink ~ Connecting Youth to Global Affairs.

WorldLink is a program of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice (IPJ), at the University of San Diego’s Kroc School of Peace Studies, that has impacted more than 15,000 high school students over the course of 19 years. It brings together young people from Southern California and Baja Mexico from all socioeconomic levels with experts, academics and practitioners of peacebuilding and human rights.

Through year-round practical experiences — including leadership trainings, service projects, research and media internships, and opportunities to serve as citizen journalists — WorldLink channels youth’s influence toward civic leadership and problem-solving and counters apathy and illiteracy in international affairs. Since its establishment in 1997, the program has expanded its network to youth across the globe who are working toward achieving long-lasting change in our world today.

Given the challenges we face in the world today, a negative discourse surrounding the role of youth has developed. Young people are more often than not considered to be a part of the problem rather than the solution. How-

ever, in December 2015, the United Nations Security Council elected to reverse that narrative through the passage of Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security.

One month later, WorldLink hosted its capstone event, the annual Youth Town Meeting at the IPJ, which convened over 800 youth leaders from both sides of the U.S. and Mexico border, demonstrating the importance of listening to youth voices. Youth leaders gathered with local and international experts in peacebuilding, education, human rights, and business — including Joel Davis, 20-year-old founding executive director of Youth to End Sexual Violence; Erica Ales and Joyce Im, coordinators for the Malala Fund and

Students Stand #withMalala campaign; and Ala’a Basatneh, protagonist of the award-winning documentary *#ChicagoGirl*, who helped organize the Syrian revolution from her Chicago bedroom at the age of 19.

Youth are instrumental in achieving long-lasting change and should no longer be ostracized. It should be a worldwide priority to work closely with young people on global peacebuilding initiatives. Through youth’s inclusion in this process, we will enter into a far more hopeful chapter of cultivating peace and justice.

To read UN Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security, visit <http://bit.ly/1XYSmX7>. ■

Young Filmmakers Look Beyond the Crossfire

A group of 45 high school students explore the root causes of violence.

Written by Nicole Martindale, Torrey Pines High School

“**WHY IS THERE SO MUCH VIOLENCE IN AMERICA?**” asked Eduardo Bimbela. “And how can we reduce it?” Bimbela is a recent graduate from High Tech High Chula Vista (HTHCV), who served as a sound engineer for the documentary *Beyond the Crossfire*. At WorldLink’s 19th Annual Youth Town Meeting, Bimbela was joined by Nuvia Ruland, a HTHCV teacher and one of the lead instructors behind the film.

Beyond the Crossfire is an investigative documentary produced by 45 HTHCV students, made specifically to address the broader questions of violence in America and its root causes. According to the film, there are causal linkages between violence and the following variables: compromised brain health, lack of mentors, lack of opportunities for youth in their communities, and recidivism of youth in

the juvenile justice system. HTHCV students decided to produce this investigative film because their school’s student body was directly affected by gun violence.

In 2011, HTHCV student Sean Fuchs and his younger brother Kyle were killed by their father in a murder-suicide case. In the wake of the tragic event, the HTHCV student body decided to make a mural to honor their

fellow classmate. Students were deeply touched by what they had created and felt more connected to one another.

Mere weeks later, there was another incident of gun violence in Chicago, Illinois. Having recently experienced a similar tragedy, students of HTHCV were personally bothered by the very little acknowledgement given to the Chicago school shooting. Some of the

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Taking the Leap

Transforming futures, one refugee and immigrant youth at a time.



YALLA SD's college-bound students.

Photo courtesy of YALLA SD

Written by Liliana Bollinger, Outside the Lens

MARK KABBAN introduced himself to an audience of 800 students and brought the first of many smiles to the crowd, as he straightened his orange tie and began to speak as if the audience were an old friend. “If anyone is thinking that I look familiar, the answer is yes. I am the guy from the Disney Channel commercial,” he joked. Through various media outlets, Mark Kabban and his organization Youth and Leaders Living Actively (YALLA SD) have received national recognition for their impact on more than 1,200 refugee and immigrant youth since 2010.

Kabban is the founder and executive

director of YALLA SD, which in Arabic means “let’s go!” YALLA SD would not have been possible without Kabban’s realization that he needed to take action in order to address the limited resources available for refugee youth in San Diego, which has become one of the country’s largest resettlement cities for refugees. The experiences of these young people resonated with Kabban. During Lebanon’s civil war, his family left their home country and immigrated to the United States, where Kabban was born. After the war was over, he and his family returned to Lebanon for a few years and then de-

cided to move to San Diego when Kabban was at the age of 9.

When he returned to the United States, Kabban experienced bullying. “I was different,” Kabban confesses. “I would open my lunch box to find wrapped grape leaves and hummus when the other kids had peanut butter and jelly. During the first week of school, I arrived in short shorts and a long shirt. I didn’t know better!” He experienced alienation and limited support, which ultimately led to the creation of YALLA SD.

The organization began as a way to help ease the transition for young refugees and eliminate the feeling of exclusion. Kabban recalls that he was able to make friends as a child through sports. He continued his engagement through collegiate sports and witnessed the impact of athletic scholarships. Thus, he decided to incorporate athletics into YALLA SD, specifically soccer since it is a sport that transcends many borders. “It’s about the kids,” he says. “A lot of them have been through terrible trauma. We have orphans and students coming from war-ridden areas, but they still find a love for the game.”

Through its soccer programs, YALLA SD builds camaraderie, connection, and community among youth who have come from all over the world. This youth-led organization is made available to young people with limited means. “We’re accessible,” Kabban says. “The median in-

come for our students’ families is around \$15,600. We don’t want our soccer program to cost a ridiculous amount because we want students from all backgrounds to be able to play.”

YALLA SD also prepares refugee and immigrant youth academically. Students have access to modern technology and are able to learn at their own pace. Since the organization started, the students’ literacy has improved 70 percent. Out of the 22 high school seniors in the class of 2015, 21 were accepted into four-year universities, and 13 of those students were accepted into science, technology, engineering and mathematics departments.

Conference delegates asked Kabban how young people could play a role in helping in areas of need. He shared a story of a time he was in the Mediterranean and came across a group of kids cliff diving from 50 feet in the air. “I chickened out,” he says. “But that’s because I’m an adult now and it’s harder for me to take risks. That’s the coolest thing about being young. Nothing can stop you!” Kabban continued, “You need to give yourself the freedom to fall, the freedom to fail. Let your successes invigorate you, and be patient for your passion. If you find a need and fill it, you’ll always be successful in this world.”

To learn more about YALLA SD or to get involved, visit www.yallasd.org or email info@yallasd.com. ■

Youth Survivors and Activists Combat Global Sexual Violence

Amplifying the voices of youth to bring an end to sexual violence.

Written by Jiayong Li, Torrey Pines High School

AT ONLY 20 YEARS OLD, Joel Davis is the founding executive director of Youth to End Sexual Violence, co-chair of the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict, Youth Ambassador for the United States on Sexual Violence in Conflict, and a Nobel Peace Prize nominee. At WorldLink’s 19th Annual Youth Town Meeting (YTM), Davis offered a poignant and personal glimpse into the lives of youth who are living in conflict areas around the world and the struggles they face on a daily basis.

His organization Youth to End Sexual Violence operates in 11 countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cambodia, Colombia, India and Sudan, to name a few. Davis explained that sexual violence against women has become prominent, particularly in areas of conflict, and has become generational, meaning the cycle of violence continues to the next generation.

Davis attended the 2014 Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, hosted in London by William Hague and Angelina Jolie-Pitt, as a representative of the United States delegation. However, upon arrival he realized that the other attendees were mostly of an older demographic. Young people were not involved in the conversation. “That is not okay,” Davis stated. “Young people have their own voice and they know better than everyone, since they are the ones going through that kind of trauma, exactly what’s happening and they may know exactly what needs to change for [sexual violence] to be stopped.”

The lack of youth representation at

the global summit led Davis to establish Youth to End Sexual Violence, a youth centric international organization that involves young people in what is stereotypically a subject for “mature audiences.” All of the staff members are under the age of 30, and many are survivors of sexual violence and have founded their own nongovernmental organizations in their countries. For instance, the orga-

nization’s ambassador from Somalia co-established the country’s first rape crisis center, demonstrating the importance of young people having the opportunity to express the biggest needs in their communities and implement solutions on how to best address these needs.

Allowing the space for discussion or offering to listen to someone’s story can also be a form of support. Three months prior to the YTM, Davis was in New York meeting with young refugees fleeing Syria, when he met Ahmed (the young man’s name has been changed to

protect his privacy). Ahmed’s story be-

gan with unidentified soldiers entering his home in Syria, killing his parents, and selling his sister into sex slavery. After fruitlessly searching for his lost sister, he decided to go to Turkey via smuggling due to increased violence in his hometown.

Ahmed left Syria with nothing but the clothes on his back and a cell phone,

countless youth around the world who are left with limited options of where to seek help and how to change their situation. Davis said, “[Ahmed’s story] was something that really touched me, and I carry that story with me to this day.” He explained to conference delegates that even though this topic is extremely “emotionally demanding,” it is one that can no longer be kept in the dark.

Despite these difficulties, however, Davis emphasized the strength and resilience of everyday people bringing a glimmer of hope in an otherwise bleak environment. “Every day in this field I see the worst that humanity has to offer, but I also see the best. I see the strength that people possess, and it is this exact strength that makes it all worth it,” stated Davis.

Empathizing with his youth audience, he explained that despite not being able to make substantial changes or have a large impact on an international issue like the Syrian refugee crisis, we can spread the word and make those around us more aware and better educated about our current global situation. Thus, the message of the conference materialized. Global conflicts can sometimes seem too difficult to discuss. However, human strength and perseverance arise from global conflict, which are some of the most inspiring aspects of humanity.

To watch Joel Davis’ session, visit www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern. To learn more about Youth to End Sexual Violence, visit www.youth2esv.org, and the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict, visit www.stoprapeinconflict.org. ■



WorldLink YTM delegates strive to end sexual violence.

Photo by Veronica Martínez

which he hoped to use to contact his partner whom he had a secret relationship with. Lying in the bed of a flatbed truck for three days, not even daring to get out to go to the bathroom or eat, Ahmed finally reached a refugee camp in Turkey. However, after being identified as gay in the refugee camp, he was robbed of his phone, severely beaten, and almost left for dead until the United Nations Refugee Agency provided support.

This reality is not exclusive to Ahmed; it is instead the reality for

Understanding Gun Violence

Three ways we can reduce gun violence on a national scale.

Written by Sofia Torres, Cathedral Catholic High School

“LOOK AT THE FACES OF THESE PEOPLE. Do you recognize any of them?” As the curious student delegates gazed upon the images, they began to recognize each one of the notable figures. Pictured were Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and John Lennon, to name a few. “Does anyone know what these politicians, presidents, and musicians all have in common?” The students thought hard until an inspired few figured it out. They all faced gun violence.

The presenter then turned to the next slide, which showed images of 26 smiling faces of children and six adults. Looking around the room, delegates did not seem to experience the same level of recognition. After a few silent moments, the presenter said, “These are the 26 children and six teachers killed in the Sandy Hook school shooting in 2012.” Student delegates were shocked and horrified, feeling disappointed that they had not recognized the faces.

This was the opening to the seminar “Youth SPEAK UP Against Gun Violence” at the 2016 Annual Youth Town Meeting conference at the University of San Diego. The presenter was Judy Haber, the Education/Outreach Chairperson for the San Diego Chapter of the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence. A retired school teacher, Haber discovered that her great calling in life was to be an advocate for gun violence prevention education. She was greatly affected by gun violence earlier in her life by the deaths of both John Lennon and Robert Kennedy, so much so that she named her son after them.

During the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan in 1981, White House Press Secretary James Brady was caught in the crossfire and was shot. The extent of his injuries were devastating, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down and mentally impaired for the rest of his life. This event was so overwhelming for President Reagan that he was determined to pass “The Brady Bill,” which enforced detailed background checks on all people who were interested in purchasing a handgun.

This bill also inspired a select few men and women to begin an organization called the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, with the goal of teaching

both adults and youth the current state of gun violence in the United States as well as the importance of reducing gun-related deaths. In the United States, there are 90 guns for every 100 people according to the Brady Campaign. The organization also found that on average there are nine children killed at the hand of a gun each day and over 30,000 people shot each year. Gun violence is the second leading cause of death in the United States after car accidents. However, most recently, research led by the Violence Policy Center has concluded that certain states have had the number of gun deaths exceed the number of deaths by car accidents. The ultimate goal of the Brady Campaign is to cut gun-related deaths in half by 2025.

At this point in the session, a blank map of the United States appeared on the screen. The map began to fill up with small red dots to all four corners of the country, which appeared to spread like a disease. “See all those red dots up there?” said Haber. “Each one represents the location of a school that has experienced a shooting from 2013 to 2015.” By this point, there were a total of 161 schools on the map, which included universities, high schools, middle schools, elementary schools and even preschools. The most frightening part was that 52 of those school shootings occurred in 2015 alone. This accounted for more shootings than any other year on record. It was shocking to realize that there are ill-minded people out in the world who would be so cruel as to attempt to kill children who had not even learned their ABC’s.

It leads one to think, how in the world does a grown adult or a young teenager

get ahold of a gun so easily while they are not in a sane state of mind, and how do we help put an end to this? The answers to these two questions are incredibly complex. However, Haber offered three key steps that would help make an impact on reducing gun violence: change the laws, change the industry and change the culture.

As daunting as it may seem to influence gun laws or the gun industry, change can begin to take form by petitioning to Congress to pass a bill that would require background checks through all purchasing avenues, not just sales made at gun stores. This would encompass background checks both online and at gun shows, where there are currently no background check requirements. A few weeks before the 2016 Youth Town Meeting, President Obama took executive action on gun control. According to the Office of the Press Secretary of the White House, this involves creating a more effective background check system, dedicating funds to hiring more personnel to help enforce these laws, increasing access to mental health care services, and developing smart gun technology to improve gun safety.

In an effort to educate children and parents across the nation on the dangers of gun violence, the Brady Campaign has created a series of short videos. One video highlights the fact that 90 percent of guns used in crimes are from the five percent of “bad apple” gun dealers who do not enforce strict background checks on people purchasing a firearm. Therefore, individuals who are mentally unstable or have a pre-existing criminal background can easily buy a firearm from one of the “bad apple” gun dealers. For instance, one of the guns used in the recent attacks in Paris was purchased through an online arms dealer in Florida. Reducing gun violence by changing current gun laws

and the gun industry should be an urgent priority.

We also need to ask ourselves how we, as youth, can directly address the problem of gun violence in our day-to-day lives. The first step we can take is to influence youth’s perception of guns by reducing the casual attitude with which most young people approach the use of firearms today. We can lead informal and formal conversations regarding the unrealistic portrayal of guns in video games, music videos, television programs and films. As a society, we are introducing a skewed depiction of gun violence to children much too early in their lives. Adolescents are growing up shooting virtual people, zombies, and animals. Therefore, there is a disconnect for many young people when they come face to face with a real tragedy such as the Sandy Hook school shooting, not fully appreciating the devastation it causes those who are directly or indirectly affected.

In addition, parents can play an influential role in helping change culture. Adults need to become more aware of the types of games or programs their kids have access to, since it can make a significant difference in the way young people grow up and in the way they approach life. Another issue parents can address is the danger of having an unlocked or loaded firearm in a house with children and adolescents. The Brady Campaign also emphasizes that it becomes 22 times more likely that a gun will be used to injure or kill another human being with the risk of a loaded and unlocked gun at home. Eighty percent of unintentional firearm deaths occur in the home. Being curious is a part of childhood. Parents need to understand this and keep their guns unloaded and locked in a secure place.

Haber’s session on gun violence was thought-provoking and critical to our world today. Her call to action introduced a multitude of resources youth can use to become advocates in helping combat gun violence. Giving young people a voice on gun violence in their homes, schools and local communities allows them to be engaged and influential changemakers. To learn more about the Brady Campaign, visit www.bradycampaign.org.



Moderator Andy Cardoze Navarrete helped Haber discuss youth-led initiatives reducing gun violence.

Photo by Diego Paz y Puente

#ChicagoGirl

The story of Ala’a Basatneh mobilizing the Syrian Revolution.

Written by Elle Necoechea, La Jolla High School

WHEN I THINK OF A STRONG LEADER, the ability to stay calm is not a characteristic that usually comes to my mind, or at least not until I met Ala’a Basatneh. At first impression, Ala’a strikes you as a reserved college student. She speaks softly yet eloquently about the work that she has done, and is extremely modest about who she has met and worked with over the past couple of years.

Ala’a, who is the protagonist of the renowned documentary *#ChicagoGirl*, began her Youth Town Meeting session with a clip from the documentary. Within the first few moments, the audience witnessed the chaos and smoke bellowing through the debris-ridden streets of Syria. However, to many students’ surprise, the film then shows images of Ala’a in her Chicago bedroom explaining that she is running a revolution in Syria via her laptop.

Out of reach from the Syrian regime, Ala’a is able to take more risks and devote her social media efforts towards the revolution. She is passionate about the power of the online world’s ability to create change. With 12,000 Facebook friends and as an administrator of the Syrian Page of Rage, she has an extremely powerful online presence.

While in high school Ala’a worked with Amnesty International, where she absorbed her experiences as a protester leading her to become a passionate changemaker. She believes young people to be lucky because the generations before us were not privileged to have the Internet and social media networking sites.

Millennials are often criticized for being too wrapped up in their phones and computers, yet Ala’a demonstrates that using these tools can actually better the world. During her discussion, she

stressed that “finding your own causes and your own passions” is the key to improving your own well-being and that of the world. “Try to educate not just yourself, but others as well,” said Ala’a.

Despite receiving much criticism and countless death threats, she has not given up on educating those around her and helping Syria move toward a better future. Ala’a explains, “What empowers me is knowing that there are strong, passionate generations upcoming to make change, and I need to help speak up for them.” She not only speaks up for others, but develops personal relationships with them as well. Ala’a keeps a spreadsheet of all the Syrian activists she has come into contact with online so that she can meet them in person after the revolution.

There is a noticeable pain in her eyes when she describes that there are people of all ages in Syria who do not have a voice. The emotional and personal investment displayed is yet another powerful leadership quality of Ala’a Basatneh.

After meeting Ala’a, it dawned on me that a leader does not always need to be loud and personified. Ala’a is unique be-



Ala’a Basatneh explains youth’s influence through technology.

Photo by Lisa Lee

cause she leads with a serene energy that calms everyone in the room. I believe this has contributed to making her such a powerful figure among the chaos. She has the ability to empower those around her. If other youth take initiative as Ala’a has done in discovering his or her passions and strengths, I know that the world will become a more positive place.

To watch Basatneh’s session, visit www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern.

Noticias

La Misión de WorldLink

Traducido por Marthapaola Martínez, Options Secondary School

EL PROGRAMA DE WORLDLINK TIENE COMO MISIÓN conectar a jóvenes con asuntos globales a través de la creación de un ambiente en la cual puedan asumir una ciudadanía global y una participación responsable en sus localidades. WorldLink fomenta el pensamiento crítico y el entendimiento de dinámicas que dan forma a pólizas internacionales y economías globales, así como de la diversidad cultural y las preocupaciones locales.

La Reunión Local de Jóvenes de WorldLink (*Youth Town Meeting*) proporciona la oportunidad de discusiones entre líderes, expertos, activistas y jóvenes provenientes de diversos contextos alrededor del mundo. Invita a la juventud a involucrarse en asuntos globales y a contribuir a una atmósfera civil y responsable en la cual, a través de una visión de justicia y paz, se logren construir comunidades diversas cada vez más entrelazadas.

El Poder de la Juventud: ¿Usarlo o Abusarlo?

LÍDERES JÓVENES de diferentes partes de la región de San Diego-Baja Mexico exploraron el significado de esta pregunta en la 19ava Reunión Local de Jóvenes de WorldLink. Mas de 800 estudiantes de preparatoria se reunieron en la plenaria de apertura de WorldLink buscando soluciones para algunos de los problemas más grandes del mundo. Ellos escucharon fascinantes discursos de líderes y expertos internacionales hablando sobre las influencias positivas y negativas de los jóvenes en cinco áreas: social, económica, ambiental, política y tecnología.

Primero, Mark Kabban se presentó en el escenario. Él compartió su historia de cuando era niño su familia se fugó de Líbano durante la guerra civil. Kabban se sintió desalentado en seguir sus metas académicas en la escuela ya que frecuentemente se sentía perdido. Hasta habló sobre sus almuerzos durante la niñez que distinguía las diferencias entre él y sus compañeros. Kabban animó a los delegados de la conferencia de “[no] dejar que los límites te detengan porque la vida no es una carrera.” Ahora, Kabban y su organización *Youth and Leaders Living Actively* (Jóvenes y Líderes Viviendo Activos) preparan a refugiados e inmigrantes jóvenes para la universidad a través del fútbol y programas académicos.

La segunda oradora fue la Dra. Ami Carpenter, una profesora asociada en la Escuela de Estudios de Paz de Joan B. Kroc en la Universidad de San Diego y una consultante para el Consejo Asesor del Condado de San Diego de Trata Humana y de Niños. Viendo críticamente la economía de trata de personas en San Diego, la Dra. Carpenter describió el rol de influencia que los jóvenes tienen en perpetuar estas violaciones de derechos humanos. Una de sus conclusiones más recientes fue que “niños y jóvenes trafican a otros niños y jóvenes.”

Ella habló sobre una entrevista que tuvo con un ex proxeneta quien prostituía a niñas usando estrategias psicológicas, en otras palabras “vendiendo el sueño.” El niño admitió cortejar a las niñas diciéndoles que las amaba y que las iba cuidar. Después de que obtenía la confianza de la niña, él las forzaba a la prostitución. La Dra. Carpenter explicó que algunos grupos de jóvenes son específicamente elegido como blanco, incluyendo los que han sido abusados, viven en orfanatos, o están sin casa. Proxenetismo es una identidad social alimentado por dinero, poder, y la falta de respeto hacia las



Delegados de La Academia de Nuestra Señora de la Paz. Foto por Sarah Sanchez

mujeres. Ella nos invita a “participar en la transformación de nuestro mundo” identificando y ayudando a los individuos vulnerables que nos rodean.

Después de la Dra. Carpenter, Evan Wesley prendió el escenario con palabras motivadoras cuando empezó su discurso con un rap sobre la crisis de agua en naciones de pobreza. Cada 21 segundos, un niño muere por necesidad de agua limpia. Con esta triste realidad en mente, siete estudiantes del Sur de California fueron de recaudar fondos en las calles de Hollywood Boulevard a crear una organización, ahora conocida como *Thirst Project* (Proyecto de la Sed). A través de su trabajo como director de educación para el Proyecto de la Sed, Wesley trabaja con gente joven y miembros de la comunidad local en varios países, incluyendo Swazilandia, El Salvador, Etiopía y la India, para combatir la crisis de agua mundial.

Wesley explicó la importancia de colaborar con las comunidades recitando un proverbio Africano, “Si quieres ir rápido en la vida, ve solo. Si quieres ir lejos en la vida, ve juntos.” El Proyecto de la Sed y sus socios en todo el mundo conducen proyectos de agua limpia, así como pozos sustentables, que han tenido un impacto positivo en la salud e higiene, las tasas de empleo, y la habilidad para que niños puedan recibir una educación. Esto ayuda a la economía de la nación y aborda muchas preocupaciones de salud. Cargando galones de agua por muchas millas puede causar abortos involuntarios y problemas de columna vertebral. Agua contaminada puede causar enfermedades fatales o puede poner la salud de una persona en un alto riesgo si el individuo ya tiene una infección de virus, así como el VIH. Él terminó su discurso haciendo un llamado a “en-

tender las consecuencias de inacción” y “creer en el poder de la juventud.”

Después, Joel Davis tomó el escenario. Davis, quien es el director ejecutivo de *Youth to End Sexual Violence* (La Juventud para Poner Fin a la Violencia Sexual), estableció esta organización como una manera de ampliar las voces de sobrevivientes, líderes y activistas jóvenes. Él expresó la lamentable realidad de tener estándares doble asociados con jóvenes sobrevivientes. “Ellos tienen la edad para estar embarazados, pero no tienen la edad para darles educación sobre la sexualidad. Ellos tienen la edad para sufrir infecciones transmitidas sexualmente, pero no tienen la edad para ejercer la autonomía necesaria para recibir el tratamiento para ellas. Ellos tienen la edad para ser violados, pero no tienen la edad para que les crean,” le dijo a la audiencia silenciosa y cautivada.

Rápidamente se hizo notar por qué Davis tiene la motivación de hacer el difícil trabajo que él hace cada día. Él compartió la historia de una niña de 14 años que conoció en Irak. En vez de ir a la escuela cada día, como nosotros lo hacemos, esta niña toma refugio en una tienda de campaña porque fue violada por miembros de ISIS. Ella se cubre la cara para ocultar la vergüenza que ella tiene hacia ella misma porque en su cultura víctimas de violación son consideradas una vergüenza. Ella está de luto por la muerte de su hermano, quien se suicidó porque no pudo soportar la vergüenza de la violación de su hermana. Joel Davis está trayendo muchos sobrevivientes y líderes jóvenes juntos para terminar la violencia sexual a través de su organización, así como lo hace en su rol de embajador de la juventud de EE.UU. sobre La Violencia Sexual en

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Entendiendo la Violencia Armada

Escrito por Sofia Torres,
Cathedral Catholic High School
Traducido por Renata Del Riego,
High Tech High Chula Vista

“VEAN LOS ROSTROS DE ÉSTAS PERSONAS. ¿Reconocen alguna?” Los intriguados participantes observaban las imágenes, y comenzaron a reconocer cada una de las notables figuras. Imágenes de Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, y John Lennon, entre muchos otros. “¿Alguien sabe qué es lo que estos políticos, presidentes y músicos tienen en común?” Los estudiantes pensaron mucho en la respuesta hasta que alguien la logró descifrar. Todos los personajes fueron víctimas de la violencia con armas.

La presentadora cambió a la siguiente diapositiva, la cual mostraba 26 imágenes de niños sonrientes y seis adultos. Al mirar alrededor del salón, los participantes no reconocieron estas caras tan fácilmente como las anteriores. Después de un par de minutos en silencio, la presentadora anunció, “Estos son los 26 niños y seis maestros que murieron en el tiroteo de la escuela Sandy Hook en el 2012.” Los delegados estaban impactados y aterrados, sintiéndose un poco decepcionados por no haber identificado sus caras.

Así fue como comenzó el seminario “*Youth SPEAK UP Against Gun Violence*” (Jóvenes Hablando en Contra de la Violencia Armada) en la Reunión Local de Jóvenes de WorldLink del 2016 en la Universidad de San Diego. La presentadora fue Judy Haber, coordinadora de educación y difusión de la *Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence* (Campaña Brady para Prevenir la Violencia Armada) en San Diego. Como maestra retirada, Haber descubrió que su llamado en la vida era el ser una defensora de la educación en la prevención de violencia armada. Ella se vio sumamente afectada por la violencia con armas cuando era muy joven cuando murieron John Lennon y Robert Kennedy. Tanto, que nombró a su propio hijo en su honor.

Durante el atentado de asesinato del Presidente Ronald Reagan en 1981, el Secretario de Prensa de la Casa Blanca James Brady fue baleado. Sus lesiones fueron devastadoras, dejándolo paralítico de la cintura para abajo y mentalmente perjudicado por el resto de su vida. Este evento fue tan abrumador para el Presidente Reagan que él se propuso pasar “*The Brady Bill*,” la cual regulaba revisión de antecedentes detallados de cualquier persona que estuviera interesada en comprar una pistola.

Esta ley también inspiró a un grupo de hombres y mujeres a fundar una organización llamada Campaña Brady para Prevenir la Violencia Armada. La finalidad de esta organización es educar a adultos y jóvenes acerca de la situación actual de violencia armada en Estados Unidos, así como de la importancia de reducir muertes a causa de este tipo de violencia. En los Estados Unidos, hay 90 armas por cada 100 personas de acuerdo con la Campaña Brady. La organización también encontró que en promedio hay nueve niños muertos a manos de armas de fuego cada día y más de 30,000 personas por año que les han disparado. La violencia armada es la segunda causa principal de muerte en los Estados Unidos después de los accidentes de carro. Sin embargo, recientemente la investigación dirigida por el Centro de Política de Violencia ha llegado a la conclusión de que en algunos estados

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Noticias

Dando Un Salto

Escrito por Liliana Bollinger, Outside the Lens
Traducido por Angela Peralta Fragoso, Federal Lázaro Cárdenas

MARK KABBAN se presentó a una audiencia de 800 estudiantes y causó las primeras de muchas sonrisas en la multitud. Se arregló su corbata naranja y empezó a hablar como si la audiencia fuese un viejo amigo. “Si alguien está pensando que lusco familiar, la respuesta es que sí. Yo soy el chico del comercial de Disney Channel,” bromeó. A través de diversos medios, Mark Kabban junto con su organización *Youth and Leaders Living Actively* - YALLA SD (Jóvenes y Líderes Viviendo Activos) han recibido reconocimiento nacional por su impacto en la vida de más de 1,200 jóvenes refugiados e inmigrantes desde el 2010.

Kabban es el fundador y director ejecutivo de YALLA SD, que en Árabe significa “vámonos.” YALLA SD surgió porque Kabban se dio cuenta de que necesitaba tomar acción con el fin de abordar los recursos limitados para jóvenes refugiados en San Diego, la cual se ha convertido en una de las ciudades del país más grandes de restablecimiento para los refugiados. Kabban se identificó con las experiencias de estos jóvenes. Durante la guerra civil del Líbano, su familia dejó su país de origen y emigró a los Estados Unidos, donde nació Kabban. Después que la guerra terminó, él y su familia regresaron a Líbano por unos años y luego decidieron mudarse a San Diego cuando Kabban tenía 9 años.

Cuando regresó a los Estados Unidos, Kabban experimentó acoso en la escuela. “Yo era diferente,” confesó Kabban. “Abría mi lonchera y encontraba hojas de uva y hummus mientras que los otros niños tenían crema de cacahuete y mermelada. Durante la primera semana de escuela, yo llegaba en shorts cortos y una camiseta larga. ¡Yo no

sabía!” Pasó por aislamiento y poco apoyo, lo que al final llevó a la creación de YALLA SD.

La organización comenzó como una manera de ayudar a la transición de jóvenes refugiados y eliminar el sentimiento de exclusión. Kabban recuerda que pudo hacer amigos cuando era chico a través de los deportes. Él continuó su participación a través de los deportes universitarios y vivió el impacto de las becas deportivas. Así fue como él decidió incorporar deportes a YALLA SD, especialmente el fútbol ya que es un deporte que sobrepasa muchas fronteras. “Se trata de los niños,” él agregó. “Muchos de ellos han pasado por traumas terribles. Tenemos huérfanos y estudiantes que vienen de áreas de guerra, pero aún así encuentran pasión por el juego.”

A través de los programas de fútbol, YALLA SD desarrolla camaradería, conexión y comunidad entre jóvenes que vienen de todas partes del mundo. Esta organización dirigida por jóvenes está disponible para la juventud con medios limitados. “Somos accesibles,” él dice. “Los ingresos de las familias de nuestros estudiantes son alrededor de \$15,600. No queremos que nuestro programa de fútbol cueste una cantidad ridícula porque quere-

mos que estudiantes de todas partes puedan jugar.”

Hoy en día, YALLA SD también prepara jóvenes refugiados e inmigrantes académicamente. Los estudiantes tienen acceso a la tecnología moderna y pueden aprender a su propio paso. Desde que la organización empezó, la alfabetización de los estudiantes ha mejorado un 70 por ciento. De los 22 estudiantes de último año de preparatoria en la clase del 2015, 21 fueron aceptados a universidades de cuatro años, y 13 de esos estudiantes fueron aceptados en departamentos de ciencias, tecnología, ingeniería y matemáticas.

Para agregar, estudiantes le preguntaron a Kabban cómo pueden los jóvenes ayudar en las áreas necesitadas. Él compartió una historia del tiempo en que estuvo en el Mediterráneo y encontró a un grupo de niños saltando de un acantilado de 50 pies en el aire. “Me acobarde,” él dijo. “Pero eso es porque soy un adulto ahora y es más difícil para mí tomar riesgos. Eso es lo bueno de ser joven. ¡Nada te puede parar! Necesitas darte la libertad de caer, la libertad de fallar. Deja que tus éxitos te estimulen, y tenle paciencia a lo que te apasiona. Pero si encuentras una necesidad y la llenas completamente, siempre tendrás éxito en este mundo.”

Para obtener más información sobre YALLA SD o para participar, visite: www.yallasd.org o envíe un mensaje a: info@yallasd.com. ■



Moderadora De Almeida Amaral y presentadora Basatneh. Foto por Lisa Lee

Jóvenes Sobrevivientes y Activistas Combatiendo la Violencia Sexual Global

Escrito por Jiayong Li, Torrey Pines High School
Traducido por Alejandra Galindo Villezcas, Colegio Ibero Tijuana

CON TAN SÓLO 20 AÑOS DE EDAD, Joel Davis es el director ejecutivo fundador de La Juventud para Poner Fin a la Violencia Sexual, uno de los líderes de la Campaña Internacional para Detener la Violación y Violencia de Género en Conflicto, el embajador de la juventud de EE.UU. sobre La Violencia Sexual en Conflicto, y candidato al Premio Nobel de la Paz. En la Reunión Local de Jóvenes de WorldLink (YTM), Davis ofreció una conmovedora y personal visión de las vidas de los jóvenes que viven en zonas de conflicto y las luchas que enfrentan a diario.

Su organización La Juventud para Poner Fin a la Violencia Sexual opera en 11 países, incluyendo la República Democrática del Congo, Camboya, Colombia, India y Sudán, por nombrar algunos. Davis explicó que la violencia sexual contra las

mujeres se ha vuelto prominente, especialmente en las zonas de conflicto, y se ha convertido generacional, es decir, el ciclo de violencia continúa a la siguiente generación.

Davis asistió a la Cumbre Mundial para Poner Fin a la Violencia Sexual en Conflicto en 2014, organizada en Londres por William Hague y Angelina Jolie-Pitt, como representante de EE.UU. Sin embargo, a la llegada se dio cuenta de que los otros asistentes eran en su mayoría personas mayores. Los jóvenes no estaban involucrados en la conversación. “Eso no está bien,” declaró Davis. “Los jóvenes tienen su propia voz y saben mejor que todo el mundo, ya que son los que están viviendo por ese tipo de trauma, exactamente lo que está pasando y pueden saber exactamente lo que hay que cambiar para detener la [violencia sexual].”

La falta de representación de los jóvenes en la cumbre mundial llevó a Davis a establecer La Juventud para Poner Fin a la Violencia Sexual, una organización internacional que involucra a los jóvenes en temas que son estereotipados para “un público maduro.” Todos los empleados son menores de 30, muchos son víctimas de violencia sexual y han fundado sus propias organizaciones no gubernamentales en sus países. Por ejemplo, la embajadora de Somalia de la organización de Davis ayudó a establecer el primer centro de crisis de violación en su país. Esto demuestra la importancia de que los jóvenes tengan la oportunidad de expresar las mayores necesidades en sus comunidades e implementar soluciones sobre cómo abordar mejor estas necesidades.

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La Joven de Chicago

Escrito por Elle Necoechea,
La Jolla High School
Traducido por Marthapaola Martínez,
Options Secondary School

CUANDO PIENSO EN UN LÍDER FUERTE, la habilidad de mantenerse en calma no es una característica que me venga a la mente, o por lo menos no hasta que conocí a Ala’a Basatneh. La primera impresión que causa Ala’a es la de una estudiante universitaria algo reservada. Su voz es suave mientras habla sobre el trabajo que ha hecho, y es extremadamente modesta sobre las personas que ha conocido y con quien ha trabajado en los últimos años.

Ala’a, quien es la protagonista del aclamado documental *#ChicagoGirl*, comenzó su sesión en la Reunión Local de Jóvenes de WorldLink con unas escenas del mismo documental. En los primeros minutos, la audiencia fue testigo del humo y caos que emergen en las calles de Siria. Aun así, a sorpresa de muchos estudiantes, el documental muestra también escenas de Ala’a en su recámara de Chicago, explicando cómo ella está a cargo de una revolución en Siria a través de su computadora.

Fuera del alcance del gobierno de Siria, Ala’a puede tomar más riesgos y dedicar sus esfuerzos a las redes sociales para la revolución. A ella le apasiona el poder que tienen las redes sociales en el mundo para crear cambios. Con un aproximado de 12,000 amigos en Facebook y como administradora de la *Syrian Page of Rage* (Página de la Ira de Siria), ella tiene una presencia extremadamente poderosa en esos medios.

En la preparatoria Ala’a trabajó con Amnistía Internacional, donde absorbió experiencias como protestante que la llevó a desarrollarse como una agente de cambio. Ala’a cree que los jóvenes de hoy tienen suerte porque las generaciones anteriores no tenían herramientas tales como el Internet y las redes sociales.

La generación del milenio es constantemente criticada por estar muy envuelta en sus teléfonos y computadoras, pero Ala’a demuestra que usar estas herramientas puede generar un cambio positivo en el mundo. Durante su discusión, ella enfatizó que “encontrar tus propias causas y tus propias pasiones” es la clave para mejorar tu bienestar y el del mundo. “Intenta educarte, no sólo a ti mismo, pero también a los que están a tu alrededor,” declaró Ala’a.

Aún habiendo recibido muchas críticas y amenazas de muerte, Ala’a no se ha vencido en su misión de educar a los demás y de ayudar a Siria a lograr un mejor futuro. Ala’a explica, “Lo que me mueve es saber que vienen generaciones fuertes y queriendo hacer cambios, y necesito hablar por ellos.” No solo defiende a los demás, pero además desarrolla relaciones personales con ellos. Ala’a tiene hojas donde anota la información de todos los activistas con los que ha trabajado por medio del Internet, para poder conocerlos en persona después de la revolución.

El dolor en sus ojos es evidente cuando habla sobre cómo hay personas en Siria de todas las edades que se encuentran sin voz. La entrega emocional y personal que demuestra es aún otra cualidad del liderazgo de Ala’a Basatneh.

Fue después de haber conocido a Ala’a que me di cuenta que para ser un líder no necesitas ser ruidoso ni personificado. Ala’a es única, ya que cuenta con una energía serena que logra tranquilizar a todos donde esté. Es de mi creencia que esta cualidad es una de las razones que la ha llevado a ser una figura tan poderosa en medio del caos. Ella tiene la habilidad de mover a aquellos que la rodean. Si más jóvenes tomaran la iniciativa de Ala’a de encontrar sus habilidades y pasiones, estoy segura de que el mundo sería un lugar más positivo.

Para ver la sesión de Basatneh, visite: www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern. ■

Noticias

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Conflicto y uno de los líderes de la Campaña Internacional para Detener la Violación y Violencia de Género en Conflicto.

Finalmente, la oradora Ala'a Basatneh se dirigió a los delegados de la conferencia y nos animó a compartir en nuestras comunidades las lecciones, ideas, y soluciones intercambiadas en la Reunión Local de Jóvenes. Basatneh es originalmente de Siria y es la protagonista del documental premiado *#ChicagoGirl* (La Joven de Chicago). Ella fue inspirada a dedicar su vida al activismo después de aprender del grupo de niños de 9 y 10 años que fueron detenidos, torturados y matados por el gobierno de Siria por escribir en las paredes de la escuela la frase, “Nosotros queremos tumbar el régimen de Siria.”

El Poder de la Juventud: ¿Usarlo o Abusarlo?

En ese momento, a la edad de 19, Basatneh volvió a evaluar sus planes de la tarde para ir con sus amigas al centro comercial. Ella decidió, “Yo tenía que hacer algo sobre esos niños a los que los estaban torturando. Vi alrededor de mi cuarto y todo lo que vi fue mi computadora, y pensé que esta era la ventana al mundo.” Basatneh explicó que nosotros también podemos tener ese nivel de influencia en nuestro mundo hoy en día. Les pidió a los delegados de



Los delegados se preparan para la plenaria de apertura.

Foto por Mychal Johnson

levantar su mano si tienen un celular. Casi todas las manos fueron levantadas. Ella describió al celular como una “espada de doble filo” que es capaz de ser usada para el bien o para el mal. Ala'a Basatneh inspiró a delegados de la conferencia a usar sus voces y tecnología en una manera responsable para tener un impacto positivo en nuestro planeta.

La Reunión Local de Jóvenes comenzó con una llamada de acción.

Nuestra generación tiene que coleccionar su poder y usar su influencia para crear un cambio positivo en nuestras comunidades locales, nacionales, y transnacionales. Un estudiante de Hoover High School definió a un activista como alguien que aspira a cambiar el mundo con la ayuda de la comunidad. Como la antropóloga cultural Margaret Mead dijo, “Nunca dudes que un grupo pequeño de ciudadanos bien intencionados y dedicados puede cambiar el mundo. De hecho, es lo único que lo ha logrado.” El mundo nunca ha visto una población de jóvenes más grande como la que hay hoy en día, así que aprovecha cada oportunidad porque, como jóvenes, nosotros tenemos la llave del futuro.

Para ver la plenaria de apertura, visite www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern. ■

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el número de muertes por armas ha excedido el número de muertes por accidentes de carro. El objetivo final de la Campaña Brady es reducir las muertes por armas a la mitad para el año 2025.

A este punto de la sesión, un mapa en blanco de Estados Unidos apareció en la pantalla. El mapa comenzó a llenarse de pequeños puntos rojos en las cuatro esquinas del país, y parecía que se esparcía como una plaga. “¿Ven todos esos puntos rojos?” dijo Haber. “Cada uno representa la ubicación de una escuela que ha sido víctima de un tiroteo entre 2013 y 2015.” Hasta este momento, había un total de 161 escuelas en el mapa, incluyendo universidades, preparatorias, secundarias, primarias, e incluso preescolares. Lo más aterrador era que 52 de esos tiroteos sucedieron solamente en 2015. Esto representa más tiroteos escolares que en cualquier otro año. Fue impactante darse cuenta de que existen personas en el mundo que pueden llegar a ser tan crueles que intentan matar niños que ni siquiera han aprendido el abecedario.

Inevitablemente uno reflexiona en cómo es que puede un adulto o adolescente adquirir una pistola tan fácilmente aun no estando en un sano estado mental. ¿Cómo es que podemos ponerle un fin a esta situación? Las soluciones a estas preguntas son increíblemente complejas. Sin embargo, Haber compartió tres pasos que son clave y que pueden ayudar a crear un impacto en la reducción de violencia

Entendiendo la Violencia Armada

con armas: cambiar las leyes, cambiar la industria y cambiar la cultura.

Por más abrumador que pueda parecer influenciar las leyes o la industria de armas, el cambio puede comenzar a formarse si se hacen peticiones al congreso. Que pasen propuestas que requieran revisiones de antecedentes en todos los lugares donde se pueda comprar un arma, no solo en las tiendas. Esto incluye revisiones de antecedentes por el Internet y en ferias de armas, donde actualmente no existen este tipo de requerimientos. Unas semanas antes de la Reunión Local de Jóvenes de WorldLink, el Presidente Obama tomó cartas en el asunto de control de armas. De acuerdo con la Oficina de Prensa del Secretario de la Casa Blanca, esta acción implica crear un sistema mucho más efectivo al realizar revisiones de antecedentes. Por ejemplo, utilizar los fondos y recursos para contratar más personal que ayude a implementar estas leyes, mejorar el acceso a servicios de cuidado de salud mental, y desarrollar tecnología para hacer armas más seguras.

En un esfuerzo por educar a los niños y padres en todo el país sobre los peligros de la violencia armada, la Campaña Brady ha creado una serie de videos cortos. Un video destaca el hecho de que 90 por ciento de las armas usadas en crímenes son del cinco por ciento de las “manzanas podridas,” o sea los comerciantes de armas que no aplican estrictas verificaciones de antecedentes de las personas que

compran un arma de fuego. Por lo tanto, los individuos que se encuentren mentalmente inestables o que tengan un historial criminal ya existente pueden fácilmente comprar un arma de dichos distribuidores. Por ejemplo, una de las armas que fueron utilizadas en los recientes ataques en París fue comprada a través de un distribuidor por Internet en Florida. Reducir la violencia armada al cambiar las leyes actuales e industria de armas debería ser una prioridad urgente.

También tenemos que preguntarnos cómo nosotros, como jóvenes, podemos directamente abordar el problema de violencia armada en nuestra vida cotidiana. El primer paso que podemos tomar es influenciar la percepción juvenil acerca de las armas, reduciendo la actitud indiferente con la que la mayoría de los jóvenes se relaciona con el tema. Podemos guiar conversaciones formales e informales que hablen de la interpretación irreal de las armas en los videojuegos, videos musicales, programas de televisión y películas. Como sociedad, estamos introduciendo una interpretación sesgada de la violencia armada a los niños a una muy temprana edad. Los adolescentes crecen disparándole a personas virtuales, zombies y animales. Por lo tanto, hay una falta de empatía para muchos jóvenes cuando se topan cara a cara con tragedias reales como el tiroteo de Sandy Hook, no apreciando realmente la devastación que causa a todos aquellos que se vieron afectados

directa o indirectamente.

Además, los padres de familia pueden influir para ayudar a cambiar la cultura. Los adultos tienen que ser más conscientes de los tipos de juegos y programas a los que tienen acceso sus hijos, porque pueden causar una diferencia significativa en la manera en la que crecen y ven la vida los jóvenes. Otro problema que los padres pueden abordar es el peligro de tener una arma cargada en casa, al alcance de los niños y adolescentes. La Campaña Brady también hace hincapié en que es 22 veces más probable que una arma sea utilizada para herir o matar a otro ser humano si se tiene cargada y al alcance en casa. El 80 por ciento de las muertes no intencionales con armas de fuego ocurren en casa. La curiosidad es parte de la niñez. Los padres necesitan entender esto y mantener sus armas descargadas y guardadas en un lugar seguro.

La sesión de Haber acerca de violencia armada fue provocadora y crítica de nuestro mundo actual. Su llamado a tomar acción introdujo una multitud de recursos que los jóvenes pueden utilizar para convertirse en defensores para combatir la violencia de armas. Darle una voz a la juventud acerca de la violencia armada en sus casa, escuelas y comunidades locales permite que se vuelvan agentes de cambio influyentes e involucrados. Para aprender más acerca de la Campaña Brady, visite: www.bradycampaign.org. ■

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Jóvenes Sobrevivientes y Activistas Combatiendo la Violencia Sexual Global

Permitiendo el espacio para la discusión o ofrecer escuchar la historia de alguien puede ser también una forma de apoyo. Tres meses antes del YTM, Davis estaba en Nueva York reunido con jóvenes refugiados que huían de Siria, cuando conoció a Ahmed (el nombre del joven ha sido cambiado para proteger su privacidad). La historia de Ahmed comenzó con soldados no identificados entrando en su casa en Siria, matando a sus padres, y vendiendo a su hermana como esclava sexual. Después de no avanzar nada en la búsqueda de su hermana perdida, decidió ir a Turquía ilegalmente debido al aumento de la violencia en su ciudad natal.

Ahmed abandonó Siria con nada más que la ropa que usaba y un teléfono celular, que esperaba utilizar para ponerse en contacto con su pareja

con la cual tuvo una relación secreta. Acostado en la cama de un camión de plataforma durante tres días, ni siquiera se atrevía a salir para ir al baño o comer, Ahmed llegó finalmente a un campo de refugiados en Turquía. Sin embargo, después de haber sido identificado como homosexual en el campo de refugiados, su teléfono fue robado y él fue severamente golpeado y abandonado hasta casi morir, hasta que la Agencia de Refugiados de las Naciones Unidas lo apoyó.

Esta realidad no es exclusiva de Ahmed, es en cambio la realidad para un sinnúmero de jóvenes en todo el mundo que se quedan con opciones limitadas de dónde buscar ayuda y cómo cambiar su situación. Davis dijo, “[La historia de Ahmed] era algo que realmente me ha tocado, y llevo esa historia conmigo hasta este día.”

Él explicó a los delegados de la conferencia que a pesar de que este tema es muy “exigente emocionalmente,” es algo que ya no puede ser mantenido en la oscuridad.

A pesar de estas dificultades, sin embargo, Davis destacó la fortaleza y la resistencia de la gente que traen una luz de esperanza a un entorno desolado. “Cada día en este campo veo lo peor que la humanidad tiene que ofrecer, pero también veo lo mejor. Veo la fuerza que poseen las personas, y es exactamente esa fuerza lo que hace que valga la pena,” declaró Davis.

Enfatizando con su audiencia juvenil, explicó que a pesar de no poder hacer cambios sustanciales o tener un gran impacto en un problema internacional como la crisis de los refugiados de Siria, podemos correr la voz

y hacer que los que nos rodean sean más conscientes y conozcan mejor nuestra situación global actual. Por lo tanto, el mensaje de la conferencia se materializó. Conflictos globales a veces pueden parecer demasiado difíciles de discutir. Sin embargo, la fuerza y la perseverancia humana surgen de conflictos globales, que son algunos de los aspectos más inspiradores de la humanidad.

Para ver la sesión de Joel Davis, visite: www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern. Para obtener más información sobre La Juventud para Poner Fin a la Violencia Sexual, visite: www.youth2esv.org, y la Campaña Internacional para Detener la Violación y Violencia de Género en Conflicto, visite: www.stoprapeinconflict.org. ■

Thirsty for Change

The story of a group of youth turning their passion into tangible results in the country of Swaziland.

Written by Ana Sofia Rivera, IMAN

“**THE WATER CRISIS** is not something foreign to us, that we don’t know the solution to. Yet, there are still 663 million people that lack access to clean water.” Such were the words of Evan Wesley, director of education for the Thirst Project. As the world’s leading youth organization in water activism, the Thirst Project stands up against the challenges brought forth by the global water crisis. Currently, Wesley and his team develop clean water projects in seven countries, including India, Uganda, Ethiopia, El Salvador Kenya, Colombia and Swaziland.

The project in Swaziland, in particular, demonstrates the dedication of this youth-led organization. By 2022 the Thirst Project aims to “give the entire nation of Swaziland safe, clean drinking water,” which is an incredible feat that no one has achieved before. The people of Swaziland face many struggles. It is a country where violence against women and HIV are prevalent. In addition, “approximately 40% of the population is unemployed, and 63% live in poverty,” according to the Thirst Project.

Three-fourths of the population in Swaziland live in rural areas, and many of these individuals walk miles each day in order to retrieve water.

For about six to eight hours a day, women and children will carry water containers or jerry cans, which can weigh up to 44 pounds once full. Not only does this cause spinal deformity in children and miscarriages among pregnant women, but it also prevents children from going to school and women from finding work.

Furthermore, the water that is available may sometimes be polluted by rain, dirt, bugs, bacteria and parasites. Drinking this water is extremely dangerous since it causes diarrhea, cholera, schistosomiasis, dehydration, and guinea worm disease. Although many of these health concerns are treatable and even curable, the people in rural areas of Swaziland do not have access to quality healthcare or viable treatment.

Thus, working globally with educators, business leaders, faith-based leaders, philanthropists and more, the Thirst Project is working towards raising \$50 million by 2022 to implement collaborative clean water projects in Swaziland. As demonstrated in the other countries they work in, Wesley and his team have played a role in helping end the water crisis through hand pump freshwater wells, bio sand water filters and rain-water catchment systems.

The Thirst Project began after a



Evan Wesley discusses reasons for why the water crisis is often overlooked. *Photo by Paige Nordland*

group of seven 19-year-olds learned of the world’s current state and became concerned about the wellbeing of people affected by the water crisis. They became passionate about the concept of change. In the hopes of “building a socially-conscious generation of young people,” the Thirst Project continues to reach out to students to educate and motivate them to engage in water activism.

As Wesley said, we have known about the water crisis for quite some time now. We have witnessed its severity, seen its global impact, and most importantly know we can solve it. With youth as a powerful force behind water activism, change is no longer a mere possibility; it is a tangible reality. To learn more about the Thirst Project, visit www.thirstproject.org. ■

Water is Life

Water is life.

And if you don't believe it, then see this.

It's in our makeup and what we take up.

It's in all of biology, runs through our geology, sustains ecology, we call it hydrology.

And then there is we.

What's up, WorldLink, the name is Evan Wesley.

I'm a student with a dream.

A dream to change the world of water, a dream for me that starts in small town Kentucky.

So make no mistake, there is a lot at stake.

For the sake of this conversation, know we could change entire nations.

Let's be clear, lend me your ears, so you can hear

About the story to give and save a life,

Because water... is... life."

Rap by Evan Wesley,
Director of Education, Thirst Project

Doing WIT for Social Change

Written by Nanitzia Comparán Cuadras, CETYS Tijuana

AS SOON AS I ENTERED the session “Innovation and WIT for Social Change,” I discovered that WIT was an acronym for “Whatever It Takes.” Before me stood five WIT representatives, which included Aly Arrington from Francis Parker School, Esmeralda Lopez from The Preuss School UCSD, Gisselle Morales from San Diego High School International Studies, Natasha Tayebi from The Bishop’s School, and WIT co-facilitator Karina Olsen.

It was astonishing to see that these conference speakers were mostly high school students, and it soon became evident why. Despite being from different schools, the young women shared a common interest. They each described themselves as a social entrepreneur, which is a term that I was unfamiliar with. WIT teens explained that a social entrepreneur is “a person who establishes an enterprise with the aim of solving social problems.” Their interest in social entrepreneurship led them to become participants of WIT, which is the only college-credit, social entrepreneur and leadership course in the United States that gives teenagers the tools to design, launch and measure social enterprises.

WIT teens have the autonomy to select the social problem that they would like to address. Through this, they develop social enterprises focused on the prevention of bullying, awareness of street harassment, and capturing seniors’ stories through art. Their proposed solutions are simple yet effective. They are based on the acronym KISS, which stands for Keep It Super Simple. The KISS solution serves as a reminder that in many cases, simple and direct solutions are often the most effective methods for solving modern day social problems.

Arrington, Lopez, Morales and Tayebi continued to speak about how they developed their social enterprises and how the process has changed their outlook on life. Their session was powerful and inspiring. No one said it better than WIT’s very own Aly Arrington, “If you want something, go for it because no one will want it more than you.” Keeping in mind the effectiveness of the KISS approach, Arrington reminded us of the individual power we, as young people, possess in order to make positive social change in the world around us. To learn more about WIT, visit www.doingwit.org. ■

Wildlife Solutions Through Community-based Conservation

Conserving our world, one community at a time.

Written by Stephannie González Esparza, Colegio Ibero Tijuana

RESEARCH HAS SHOWN US that some of the biggest threats to wildlife are caused by human action, such as trade, pollution and conflict. Human beings have exploited Mother Earth for its resources and have left an everlasting footprint on the world’s ecosystem. However, when it comes to wildlife conservation, ecologist and researcher David O’Connor said, “People are the key.” The true focus of conservation is the collaborative effort made by groups of people.

Samantha Young, WorldLink conference co-presenter, and O’Connor both work for the San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research. Young leads conservation research programs in the Gulf of California for the endangered vaquita porpoise and in Peru for the threatened Andean bears. O’Connor leads a community-based giraffe conservation program in East Africa and helps combat the illegal trade in bears and bear parts in Southeast Asia. While their work takes them to different places around the world, their primary focus is the same: to encourage wildlife conservation on a local level.

Threats on the environment happen worldwide, including right here along the San Diego and Tijuana coast. For instance, Young and O’Connor explained that in Mexico’s Gulf of California, the vaquita porpoise is in danger of extinction. Vaquitas are often caught and killed by accidental catch by fishing operations in marine protected areas, and because of this there are now less than 100 remaining in the world.

Although fishing is important for the economy, since a large amount of seafood comes from this region, the way in which fishermen work is also crucial to the survival of the vaquita. Fortunately, the San Diego - Baja California - Gulf of California conservation program has begun to explore alternative methods in order to preserve the endangered vaquita porpoise while considering the livelihoods of the local people.

As described by Young and O’Connor, conservation education for youth is an essential component of saving this species and others alike. Education is the first step toward achieving real and sustainable change. In order to have an impact, the educational program should include an ecological literacy component, descriptive ways to build local leadership, and connections to zoos and aquariums in support of conservation programs. The San Diego Zoo Institute for Conservation Research is meeting this particular need through partnerships with

other like-minded organizations, including La Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, the University of California San Diego, Pronatura Noroeste, and Red Social Pro Vaquita San Felipe.

O’Connor expressed that their fight is indicative of a far greater, macroscale conservation crisis. While a lot of environmental protection has already been put into place, the work is far from over. Society must understand the benefits that conservation creates, as well as the dangers that are present without it. As youth, the choices we make can have both positive and negative effects on the world around us. That is why we must make well-informed decisions and collaborate with experts on programs, such as the conservation programs led by San Diego Zoo Global. We must ensure that our actions affect the world in a positive way. Through this, we will be on the right track to establishing a healthier more diverse planet. ■



WIT teens Morales, Lopez and Arrington. *Photo by Luz Hernandez*

Simple Seat, Better Lives: What We Take for Granted

How local university students are transforming lives through social entrepreneurship.

Written by Marthapaola Martínez, Options Secondary School

THIS YEAR’S YOUTH TOWN MEETING focused on exploring the complexities of youth’s influence around the world. With more than 800 youth in attendance, it is evident that young people’s influence is both focused and growing. This year, WorldLink’s Youth Town Meeting presented two young women



Delegates listen to Naugler explain her project, involving low-cost, portable toilet seats for landmine victims.
Photo by Angela Peralta Frago

who we should all aspire to become more like, Grace Michel and Alix Naugler. Michel is assistant director of the University of San Diego’s (USD) Center for Peace and Commerce (CPC) and Naugler is a junior at USD who participated in CPC’s 2015 Social Innovation Challenge.

During their session, “Transforming Lives in Uganda, One Seat at a Time,” both Michel and Naugler engaged student delegates on the topic of social entrepreneurship — a term many of the delegates were not familiar with. Naugler, a business major at USD, explained that there is often a disconnect between the business world and enacting social change. People tend to see the global business market as something completely unrelated to social change when

in reality quite the opposite is true. Naugler underwent this same experiential process, along with three USD engineering students, when developing their winning project, Simple Seat, Better Lives.

Frank Jacobitz, a professor of mechanical engineering at USD’s Shiley-Marcos School of Engineering, introduced Naugler and her team to Margaret Arach Orech from Uganda, a 2014 Woman Peace-Maker at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice. Orech is the founder and director of the Uganda Landmine Survivors Association, and is a landmine survivor herself dedicated toward finding solutions on how to better the lives of other landmine victims.

Orech explained to Naugler that landmine survivors battle daily with simple tasks that most of us take for granted, such as the ability to use the restroom. Often times, rural areas of Uganda lack the infrastructure to

support flush toilets, and so most are instead pit latrines. For landmine survivors, many of whom are left with physical disabilities, using a pit latrine becomes a near impossible task.

Inspired by Margaret Orech and having increased their knowledge on this issue, Naugler and her teammates developed a solution, Simple Seat, Better Lives, through which they constructed a portable toilet seat made solely from local Ugandan materials. Construction of the new portable seat offers a helpful and cost effective solution for those whose lives have been impacted by landmines. Though the project is still evolving, it is already well on its way to improving the lives of hundreds more landmine survivors. Naugler’s story represents just one of the many ways in which youth-driven social entrepreneurship can enforce positive change, helping to create a more peaceful and just world. ■

The Malala Movement: Champions for Girls Education

Students stand with Malala, the girl who rewrote history by standing up for the right to education.

Written by Olivia Zaller, Coronado High School

RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF TIME MAGAZINE’S 100 most influential people in the world in 2015, Malala Yousafzai is a name that nearly every young person has heard. At the Youth Town Meeting, her name was familiar but the full details of her story had yet to be told. To be in the presence of Erica Ales, from the Malala Fund, and Joyce Im, from the Students Stand #withMalala campaign, was truly a surreal experience.

Ales and Im opened their session by sharing Malala’s story. Malala Yousafzai was born in the Swat Valley of Pakistan. At the young age of 15 she was attacked, shot and nearly killed by the Taliban. The Taliban specifically targeted her because she stood in defiance against their repressive beliefs towards women and girls. Malala believed, and still believes, that girls too are entitled to the right to pursue education.

Rather than submit to fear, Malala used her close encounter with death to promote and inspire the

empowerment of girls through education. Today she stands as an international symbol for human rights and girls’ education. By combatting violent extremism, Malala has transformed into an international figure and became the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Her movement continues to touch the hearts and minds of people all across the world.

As the session continued, Ales and Im proceeded to share a poignant, short film depicting two young girls, both of whom live entirely different lives based on the level of education, or lack thereof, that they receive. One girl is denied an education while the other is encouraged to go to school. While one works to make bricks and carry heavy materials, the other happily learns to write and plays with her friends at school.

The video served as a catalyst for the discussion that followed, at which time the speakers shared an astonishing statistic. According to

the Malala Fund, over 60 million girls around the world are denied access to an education. A disheartening, yet true reality, this statistic is one that must be exposed to the world. This is the essence of the Malala Fund.

The Malala Fund, inspired by both Malala and her father Ziauddin Yousafzai, aims to give young women and girls 12 years of free, safe and quality education. Achieving this goal not only ensures equality and

education, but provides young women the opportunity to become positive changemakers in both their families and larger communities. The Malala Fund works with partners worldwide, empowering girls and amplifying their voices. Once these voices are heard, a larger, supportive network will emerge that includes the voices of others who also face similar situations. As Malala so eloquently put it, “I am not a lone voice, I am many.” ■



An interactive session led by the Malala Fund and Students Stand #withMalala, where delegates created a public service announcement.
Photo by Imee Torres Pizarro

Creating Change: The Duty of Today’s Youth

We do not need to venture far to change the world. Change can start at a local, community level.

Written by Isabel Harmet, Cathedral Catholic High School

BETTINA HAUSMANN is the President and CEO of the United Nations Association, San Diego Chapter, which is a program of the UN Foundation that “informs, inspires and mobilizes the American people to support the principles and vital work of the UN by actively engaging partners and stakeholders at a local level.”

Hausmann holds a strong sense of community and an understanding of the impact of collective memory, cultural conflict, and peace. This is largely due to the influence of Cold War politics on her life, as she grew up in East Germany. Hausmann explained that the “understanding of how to embrace diversity” drove her to the United Nations and that her strong sense of self has allowed no

limits for what she can and wants to do with her life.

At WorldLink’s 19th Annual Youth Town Meeting, she inspired youth listeners to become active global citizens who advocate for peace and justice by sharing these personal experiences and knowledge. She insisted that, as youth, we must “be the game changers.” As young people, we are often told that we are the future leaders of the world and need to create positive social change. However, the common question is how?

Hausmann explained that we could become game changers by “sharing and amplifying ideas, and coming together with one another as a whole.” This means that working together as a community, whether

local, national or transnational, is imperative for positive change. Additionally, Hausmann stated, “We need to make this world a place where we can and will live together,” implying that collaboration is key to social progress.

Hausmann believes that youth are not constrained by the same limitations that adults are. Thus, the time to take initiative and start our journey toward social change begins now. Getting youth more involved in global affairs is just one of the sustainable development goals that she presented. There are endless possibilities for youth involvement, including advocating for legislation, running for student government office, creating public awareness campaigns, and engaging in community

service. As a starting point, we must look at our own communities. We can play a leading role in creating change in our own neighborhoods, in our own country. “Developed or developing, we need to look at our own country,” said Hausmann.

One month prior to the Youth Town Meeting, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2250, the first ever resolution on Youth, Peace and Security that recognizes youth as influential actors and peacebuilders in their communities. So, it is our *duty* to get involved in our society, take initiative, and work collectively for the greater good. ■

Investing in Honduran Youth: Solutions to Poverty

How E2E's Katia Gomez learned how to fight poverty from the 'inside out' versus from the 'outside in.'

Written by Durana Saydee, Kearny High School

“ONE DAY SOMETHING KIND OF HAPPENS. There’s an experience that you have that makes you question everything you thought you were going to do in life,” said Katia Gomez. “From there, a seed is planted.” Gomez is the executive director of Educate2Envision International, a nonprofit that invests in youth from underserved areas in Honduras to be their own innovators in tackling extreme poverty.

Gomez never imagined herself to be the type of person to start a nonprofit organization. As an undergraduate student at the University of California, San Diego, she decided to major in human biology because she believed the medical field was the right path for her. However, one day in her International Studies 101 class, she was faced with one simple question that led her to switch from human biology to international studies. She was asked, “What is poverty?” This was the first seed that was planted in her life.

She turned to WorldLink conference delegates and posed the same question to us. Students’ replies ranged from “not having enough money” and “having less in general” to “not having the basic necessities in order to live a fulfilling life.” Although several delegates had an understanding as to what constitutes poverty, a clear definition could not be reached. This sparked an educational discussion on global poverty and its effects on humanity, providing Gomez the opportunity to expand on the origin of Educate2Envision International.

During her senior year of college

in 2009, Gomez decided to travel to Honduras along with her classmates. Together, they sought to help improve water and sanitation conditions in rural areas. It was at this moment that Gomez became aware that in the rural areas of Honduras, especially the farming regions, over 80 percent of youth between the ages of 12 and 18 do not attend high school. The causes varied from gender inequality and limited familial support to low prioritization of education and an international culture of handouts, which perpetuate the cycle of poverty present in rural Honduran society.

One day during her trip, Gomez met a young local girl and asked her, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” The young girl did not have a response. This moment impacted Gomez because she realized that the people she was meeting were entrapped within the bitter cycle of generational poverty. One can hope for a brighter future for this young girl, but in this case it did not seem like a reality. This revelation is what motivated Gomez to initiate her journey towards creating Educate2Envision International.

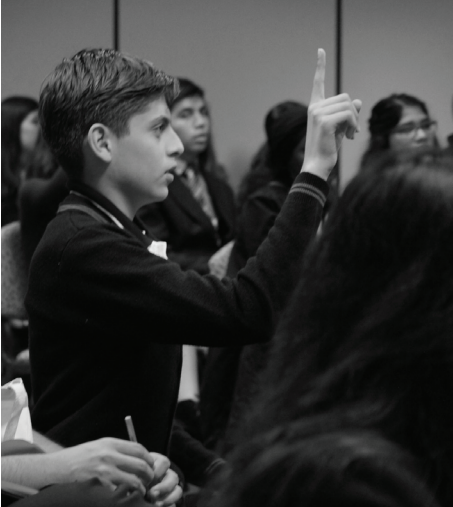
Like most new organizations, Educate2Envision International faced its fair share of obstacles. Through trial and error Gomez realized they were fighting poverty in Honduras from the “outside in.” In other words, they offered support to the Honduran population through premeditated solutions without consulting local Honduran people. Supplying children with school materials and backpacks can be helpful,

but these are only short-term solutions that run the risk of creating a culture of dependency.

Gomez realized that Educate2Envision International needed to work towards long-term solutions and put the power in the hands of the Honduran people, especially the youth. With a new and improved “inside out” approach, Educate2Envision International focuses on working with youth towards self-sufficiency by offering them business skills and linking them to different companies around the country. In addition, through its work-study programs, Honduran youth are also back in school and earn money through youth-led entrepreneurial initiatives. These programs supply Honduran youth with a way to pay for their own school supplies, which helps break the cycle of poverty.

Gomez explained that many of the world’s problems are interconnected, whether it is women’s rights or access to clean drinking water. These human rights issues all tie back to education, which is what makes the “inside out” approach so crucial to societies today. As we see in Honduras, through capacity building, young people become more autonomous and can contribute to economic development, thus decreasing dependence on external assistance and helping mitigate generational poverty.

WorldLink conference delegate Amber Escobar, from the Academy of Our Lady of Peace, remarked, “Being able to sit through this briefing session has made me realize how we constantly take our education for



Delegates in Gomez's session.
Photo by Sofia Vega

granted. I see that education is an investment in human capital, and it can have a great power on a nation’s growth and development. I’m very grateful Ms. Gomez was able to take time out of her day to come and share her experiences with us.” Educate2Envision International has impacted many lives in Honduras, and at WorldLink’s Youth Town Meeting Katia Gomez enlightened youth leaders, leaving us more motivated and purposeful than ever before. Through her words and, more importantly, her actions, more young people are now eager to continue advocating for educational empowerment from the “inside out.”

Watch Katia Gomez’s session at www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern. To learn more about Educate2Envision, visit www.educate2envision.org. ■

Protecting the Rights of Sexual Minorities

Patrick Tindana highlights key ways you can be an ally.

Written by Erika Zepeda, CETYS Tijuana

PATRICK TINDANA, a consultant for the United Nations Development Programme, is a brave advocate for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) community. He began his Youth Town Meeting presentation with a video, titled *The Price of Exclusion*, which confronts the shocking statistics of suicide rates among both homeless and non-homeless LGBTI youth. Did you know that gay and lesbian youth are four times more likely to contemplate suicide? Or that transgender youth are ten times more likely to have attempted suicide than the general population?

Homophobia and transphobia have a profound impact on our world today. As described in *The*

Price of Exclusion, workplace discrimination against the LGBTI community has an economic impact, costing an economy the size of India’s roughly \$32 billion dollars every year, according to the World Bank. By excluding members of the LGBTI community, employers are engaging in discrimination and overlooking brilliant, creative and talented young employees. Rather than being given the opportunity to be judged based on merit, these individuals are instead alienated and repressed, making it nearly impossible for them to reach their full potential.

Patrick Tindana identifies as being one of these individuals. As a young man who grew up in the West African country of Ghana, Tindana was unable to embrace his gay identity. Not only did his family disapprove, but also the political framework of Ghana incriminates anyone who identifies as homosexual. In fact, identifying as gay would have been punishable by three years in jail, and in other countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, the punishment is death.

Completely alone and with nowhere to turn, Tindana decided to leave his home country and move to the United States at the young age of 18 in pursuit of higher education, since his parents appreciated the value of an education. In-

spired by his own life experiences as well as the tribulations of others, Tindana began a career in protecting the rights of cultural, ethnic, gender and sexual minorities. His current role in assisting the United Nations involves gathering data to support policy changes towards the reduction of inequality. Through his determination and grit, and many other advocates like him, the United Nations has rewritten the global narrative of LGBTI rights, which now specifically prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

This session left student delegates feeling more informed than ever, and we soon began to realize the role young people could play in supporting the LGBTI community. Tindana provided us with valuable, out-of-the-box ideas and new practices that each one of us could implement on an individual level. First, he explained, “Be aware. Be an ally. When you see someone in trouble the automatic instinct is to simply

observe, although we should try to help in any way possible.” Tindana encouraged delegates to volunteer at centers or institutions that offer services to LGBTI populations, such as The Trevor Project, which “provides crisis intervention and suicide prevention for LGBTQ youth.”

His call to action continued. “Be educated,” he said. “Most people that make major decisions are in power, so try to ascend the system and help the LGBTI community from the inside.” Tindana left us with one important message. He urged us to be proud of who we are, and reminded us that high school is not the end. For anyone who identifies as LGBTI and feels as though the pressures in life are too difficult, he urges us to seek support because each life is immensely valuable and precious to our peers and to our country.

To watch Patrick Tindana’s session, visit www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern. ■



Journalist Erika Zepeda interviewing Patrick Tindana. *Photo by Sarah Sanchez*

The Trevor Project: If you are a young person in crisis, feeling suicidal, or in need of a safe and judgment-free place to talk, call the Trevor Lifeline at 866-488-7386 or visit the web site at www.trevorproject.org.

- Resources on how to Be Aware and Be an Ally:**
- Free and Equal - www.unfe.org
 - OutRight - www.outrightinternational.org
 - Immigration Equality - www.immigrationequality.org
 - The Council for Global Equality - www.globalequality.org
 - Various LGBT Centers in our community - www.thecentersd.org

App-ied Activism: Battle For Humanity

Learn about the new app that allows you to change the world from your cell phone.

Written by Crystal Coriano, Academy of Our Lady of Peace, and Leily Rezvani, High Tech High North County

VIOLENCE is a leading cause of death for youth between the ages of 15 to 29 worldwide, according to Search for Common Ground (SFCG), an international nonprofit that strives to combat this violence with offices in over 35 countries. John Marks, founder and former State Department diplomat, stated, “We all ‘win’ when the focus is on

what we want to achieve — not what divides us.” During the height of the Cold War, SFCG was founded on a set of core principles aligned with uniting people worldwide based on shared goals. Since then, its mission has been to facilitate conflict resolution around the world and transform the manner in which we solve conflicts, demonstrating that “peace is a process, not an event.”

Jessica Murrey is the communications manager for the nonprofit, and is currently developing the SFCG app called Battle For Humanity, a digital platform for grassroots activism that initiates a youth movement to end human violence. The first

step in Battle for Humanity involves user enlistment and a pledge to eradicate violence in one’s community. This allows any interested individual, regardless of what country they live in, to join the global movement towards preventing and countering violence. Next, the user receives two assignments: to complete their training and achieve real life missions. The purpose of these missions is to disrupt the spread of violence in their own local community. Lastly, the user earns points, badges and rankings as they help their community by way of completing each assigned task.

To gain a better understanding of the app, conference delegates joined Murrey in an activity. WorldLink students were divided into smaller groups. They were given the task to discuss their community’s most pressing needs and identify the changes that need to be made. Subsequently, each group was asked to brainstorm potential mission ideas

for the app, as solutions to the concerns identified in each community.

Through collaborative discussions, conference delegates developed several ideas, such as welcoming a transfer student into your school club in order to create a more peaceful and inclusive environment. Another idea involved painting over graffiti-covered walls in order to mitigate the promotion of violence. As more and more students shared their community’s most pressing needs and possible solutions, a sense of inspiration and hope began to fill the room. After all, as Search for Common Ground demonstrates, it is cooperative action that helps achieve change.

To learn more about Search for Common Ground and its work with children and youth, women, military and police, religious leaders, political leaders, media professionals, artists, and prisoners, visit www.sfcg.org. ■



Murrey introduces Battle for Humanity, a digital platform for grassroots activism. *Photo by Aldous Morlan Beltran*

Peace by Piece: The Critical Role of Youth

Kara Wong identifies the youth generation as the missing piece to the peacebuilding puzzle.

Written by Mireah Larson, Kearny High School

IMAGINE JOURNEYING OFF ALONE to a new country. Would you make that move? At the age of 25, Kara Wong, who had already worked with nonprofits in Canada, Thailand and Mozambique, moved to Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) to help establish a new English language program and a civics education initiative. However, due to the complex history of Myanmar, developing these programs and achieving their goals would be far from easy.

Ongoing conflict has affected the nation since its existence. The conflict between the largest ethnic group the Burman, or Bamar, and minority groups has served as the foundation for much of this violence. An oppressive military dictatorship ruled in Myanmar for almost 50 years, from 1962 to 2011. And today, over 150,000 refugees live in camps along the Thai-Myanmar border, according to the U.S. State Department. Although in 2010, a gradual liberalization process was instituted and progressive governmental changes were expected to be seen as early as 2016, the complexities throughout Myanmar’s history has contributed to the development of many internal social problems difficult to combat.

Wong identified that the missing piece is the youth generation. While working in Myanmar in 2009, Wong and her colleague witnessed the power of education and its impact on the younger generation. Thus, they decided to establish a school called the Kant Kaw Education Centre. The school’s mission is to build a network of committed individuals who work towards positive change. The Kant Kaw Education Centre provides academic courses and leadership development opportunities, in order to help support young people in Myanmar as they construct positive social, economic and political change. She made these opportunities available to youth from the

most marginalized communities, inviting those who cannot afford to go to school. At the Kant Kaw Education Centre, students from different ethnic groups engage and build relationships despite the various forms of oppression within the country.

Like any other changemaker, Wong had to overcome numerous obstacles in order to make her mission an ongoing success. Her first obstacle came in the form of registering the school. Since only government funded schools were allowed, it was illegal to create an institution of this nature. Thus, Wong took a creative approach and registered the school as a computer repair shop. This would allow students to have computers and use the Internet, and would encourage young people to join the school.

A second obstacle was gathering the necessary equipment. While Wong was developing the school, economic sanctions between Myanmar and multiple countries put strains on the national economy and foreign relations. Consequently, access to imported goods was nearly impossible. Due to her networks, Wong had a contact who imported cars from Japan, and so she decided to store school supplies inside of the cars in order to bring them into the country.

There was also the issue of limited electricity throughout the day. Myanmar has access to only four hours of electricity per day, so Wong had to gather generators in order to achieve a full day’s worth of schooling. Additionally, Internet was very limited in Myanmar. The school had to wait two months to be issued a permit to legally install Internet connections throughout their school, which cost \$2,000 U.S. dollars.

Despite these challenges and more, Wong explained that the Kant Kaw Education Centre became a “beautiful program that incorporates and creates the space for young

people to ask important questions, to build real life skills, to build friendships and networks, and to build trust.” Without the Kant Kaw Education Centre, students in Myanmar would not have had the opportunity to build a community with young people from different backgrounds, nor learn valuable skills that would later translate into the progression of their country. Since the school opened, several graduates have developed their own initiatives building peace throughout Myanmar, such as Khun Sai, Lay Nwe Thwe, and Zon Sapal Phyu.

Khun Sai is a 2010 graduate who is currently developing innovative ways in which mushroom farming can support monastic schools that serve marginalized communities. Lay Nwe Thwe, a 2011 graduate, established a school of her own by the name of Dignity Myanmar, which helps bring Muslim and Buddhist communities together to collaborate peacefully on various social issues despite their many differences. Another graduate of the school, Zon Sapal Phyu, became a campaign manager for one of Myanmar’s first women members of parliament. In the short time that the school has been in existence, numerous graduates have managed to impact the social, economic, and political sectors of Myanmar.

The Kant Kaw Education Centre serves as a great example of what is possible when

combining quality education and the younger generation. We must acknowledge the critical role that youth can play in peacebuilding. Young people can help societies evolve and ultimately lead these communities towards creating positive social change. The Kant Kaw Education Centre demonstrates the power that youth hold and the potential that we each have in achieving goals for the greater good of humanity. This process may feel tedious, however through the collective efforts of youth, it can be achieved regardless of the many obstacles. Peace within a society can be obtained one piece at a time. ■



Conference delegate in session “Peace by Piece: The Critical Role of Youth.” *Photo by Marla Ramírez Servin*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Young Filmmakers Look Beyond the Crossfire

students and teachers met to discuss their concerns. They decided that if their goal was to make a meaningful difference, they would make a documentary exploring violence and its root causes.

For instance, Bimbela and Ruland explained the film’s segment on “brain health” and the effects of compromised brain health. The HTHCV documentary team traveled to Newtown, Connecticut to meet a neurologist whose daughter, Avielle, was killed in the Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting. He established the Avielle Foundation with the purpose of focusing on brain health research while fostering community development and inclusion.

After meeting with the Avielle Foundation, the documentary team was inspired to meet with students from a San Diego youth-led program

dedicated to creating community development and inclusion. Canyon Crest Academy is accredited with beginning its very own Peer Assisted Listeners program (PALs), which creates community-based education initiatives. PALs was established with the hope of creating a more inclusive high school environment meant to benefit students susceptible to social isolation and those prone to feeling overwhelmed.

Youth become empowered by empathy, compassion and leadership skills. The PALs program encourages the use of this newfound empowerment to reach out to peers and prevent isolation and exclusion. This in turn helps mitigate violence. If every school had a program like PALs, students would engage in far safer and more inclusive environments.

Community building begins with



Moderator Remy Reya with conference speakers Nuvia Ruland and Eduardo Bimbela.
Photo by Alejandra Galindo Villezcas

action. We must all learn to pause, take a step back to listen, and make the effort to talk to a classmate who may feel isolated. As leaders in our communities, we must acknowledge that educating others about the importance of empa-

thy can often be the difference between inciting violence and preventing it.

To learn more about *Beyond the Crossfire*, visit www.beyondthecrossfiremovie.com. ■

iGeneration: Collecting Our Power

Local youth challenge one another to be innovative leaders who use their power for good.

Written by Leily Rezvani, High Tech High North County

THE WORLDLINK 19TH ANNUAL YOUTH TOWN MEETING (YTM) came to a close by featuring four conference panelists who helped the 800-student delegation reflect on the day’s thoughtful discussions. Collectively the delegation took a critical look at the positive and negative influences the youth generation has on the world.

Erica Ales from the Malala Fund and Joyce Im from Students Stand #withMalala were the first featured speakers in the Closing Plenary. Ales and Im shared the inspirational story of Malala Yousafzai, a teenager who reminds us that even the most ordinary people can make a difference. The Malala Fund and Students Stand #withMalala campaign work to raise awareness about the 60 million girls worldwide who are denied education and help give them access to such rights

and civil liberties. To help understand the magnitude of this number, 60 million is equivalent to 800 World Cup stadiums. It is unacceptable that this many girls are deprived of the right to receive an education.

We must stand together in order to make it stop. Ales and Im challenged conference delegates to take action in five different ways: (1) use the student tool kit available at www.malala.org; (2) donate gently-used clothing through the *He Named Me Malala* Schoolbags; (3) screen *He Named Me Malala* in your classroom; (4) start a Girl Up club or an education club on your campus; and (5) spread the word online about the influential work you are doing by using the hashtag #withMalala. They challenged each of us to be inspirational change-makers in the world around us.

#WITHMALALA CAMPAIGN

**WE WILL NOT BE SILENT.
WE WILL NOT BE INVISIBLE.
WE ARE SPEAKING OUT, SETTING OUR WORDS ON FIRE.
WITH OUR BOOKS AND PENS, WE ARE WRITING THE STORY OF OUR LIVES.
WE WILL RAISE OUR VOICES HIGH.
WE ARE STRONGER THAN ANY FEAR.
WE ARE EVERY GIRL WHO WANTS TO LEARN AND LIVE IN PEACE.
WE ARE EVERY GIRL WHO WANTS TO RISE UP AND TOUCH THE SKY.
THE WORLD HAS BEEN WAITING FOR US WITHOUT KNOWING IT.
OUR STORY IS JUST BEGINNING.
OUR VOICES WILL BE HEARD.
FOR WHEN WE STAND TOGETHER, WE DO NOT STAND ALONE.
STAND UP, STAND NOW.
STAND WITH MALALA.**

A short film presented by the Malala Fund at the Closing Plenary of WorldLink’s 19th Annual Youth Town Meeting.

Second, Patrick Tindana from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took the stage. Working as a consultant with UNDP’s Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, Tindana specializes in areas of gender equity and promoting the rights of LGBTI populations. Tindana, who himself identifies as a proud gay man, grew up in Ghana, a country that criminalizes homosexuality. Fearful of government retribution for his sexual identity, Tindana made the difficult decision to leave his home country. He moved to the United States to seek asylum.

Using the power of education to help catapult himself forward in life, Tindana now works as an advocate for the LGBTI community, encouraging youth worldwide to use the power of education to open new doors and break through social barriers. He explained that we, as youth, can also play a leading role in helping promote LGBTI rights “in our own backyards.” Tindana left delegates with a simple, yet powerful message, “Be an ally. Be kind.” As high school students, we should “stand up for what is right.” His words reminded us that despite our sexual preference or gender identity, we are all humans who deserve to be treated equal and it is in our power to help change negative social norms.

The third and final guest speaker of WorldLink’s 19th Annual YTM was Katia Gomez, executive director of Educate2Envision International. Gomez advocates for investing in the youth of Honduras, since they are emerging leaders who can play a role in economic development and help alleviate poverty in their country. Her vision began during a volunteer trip to Honduras as an un-

dergraduate student at the University of California, San Diego. Inspired by what she saw, Gomez made the impulsive decision to return to Honduras months later with suitcases filled with school supplies. However good her intentions were, Gomez realized that her donations were nothing more than a hindrance to the sustainable, long-term growth of the Honduran communities.

This approach ran the risk of creating a culture of dependency. Instead of fighting poverty from the “outside in,” Gomez decided it was time to fight poverty from the “inside out.” Meaning, she needed to work closely with local community members and help foster capacity building through Educate2Envision’s different programming, in order to reach economic development and independence. “There’s so much that we can learn by asking questions,” said Gomez, as she encouraged conference delegates to approach human rights work from the “inside out.” “This world is as interconnected as ever. Now more than ever we need you.”

The number of youth between the ages of 15 and 24 is 1.8 billion, comprising 18 percent of the global population. **We may be tomorrow’s lawyers, educators and politicians, but we are the changemakers of today.** As WorldLink intern Ananya Krishnan said, “From what we have seen today, it is possible to bring youth together so we can solve problems for the greater good. It takes only your concern and your effort to be a part of a team, a world-changing team.”

To watch the Closing Plenary, visit www.youtube.com/user/WorldLinkIntern. ■



Photo by Luz Hernandez



Photo by Mychal Johnson

SAVE THE DATE!

WorldLink will present the

20th Annual Youth Town Meeting

"Gender Equality"

on Wednesday, January 18, 2017

We hope to see you there!



Photo by Justine Chen



Photo by Luz Hernandez

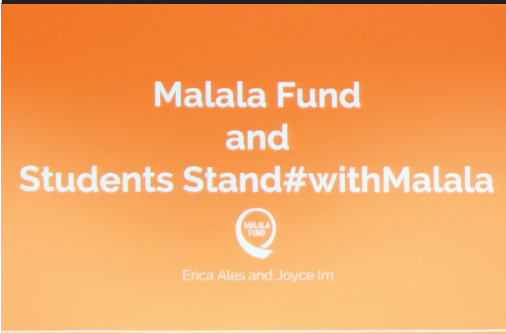


Photo by Imee Torres Pizarro



Photo by Mandalyn Kime



Photo by Sophie Rickless



Photo by Mandalyn Kime



Photo by Sofia Vega



Photo by Luz Hernandez



Photo by Alejandra Galindo Villezcas

Our Voices

"As youth, we tend to be underestimated on what we are capable of. However, the Youth Town Meeting demonstrated that every individual has the ability to make an impact, whether it be on a community scale or a global scale."

— Alexa Hernández, Chula Vista Learning Community Charter

"The Youth Town Meeting was really special because it isn't every day that people are willing to believe in you as a teenager."

— Grecia Gisselle Hernández Solis, Colegio Baja California de Rosarito

"Mark Kabban taught me that you should never give up even if you face hardships in the problem solving process. He showed us that real change comes from determination and consistency."

— Katherine Pedroza, Escondido High School

"WorldLink has inspired me to become a more involved person within my community. I learned that even one person has the ability to make a difference."

— Lizbeth Campana, Sweetwater High School

"I learned that if you want to make a mark on the world, you must never give up on your dream."

— Mauricio Sanchez, Instituto Mexico Americano Noroeste

"To be among a group of individuals that share the same passion for change and activism with me was a complete honor. This conference was living proof that youth can take action and the initiative needed to make this world a better place for all."

— Erick Vasquez, Chula Vista Learning Community Charter

"[Evan Wesley] inspired me to believe that to change the world, we must lose our fear of being wrong all the time. We must first make a difference in ourselves and in our way of thinking, and then begin to take action one step at a time."

— Katia Sarina Luna de la Fuente Acosta, CETYS Tijuana

"In the past my peers and I have had few opportunities to express our opinions and take in those of others, and the Youth Town Meeting changed that."

— Allison Dacpano, San Diego Early Middle College

"This year was my first as a moderator at the Youth Town Meeting. Paired with two speakers on gun violence, I didn't only gain a much better understanding of the issue but I also formed a connection with the presenters that will allow me to look to them for advice on how I can affect change in my own community in the future."

— Remy Reya, La Jolla Country Day School

"This experience at the University of San Diego is going to remain in my mind probably forever because the speeches, the youth that I met, and the topics that I care about make me want to do something positive in my community and my surroundings."

— Mario Montoya Llamas, Federal Lázaro Cárdenas

"[Katia Gomez's session] inspired me to explore more about poverty throughout the world and how it affects youth my age. Throughout the Youth Town Meeting, I was inspired countless times."

— Ana De Almeida Amaral, High Tech High Chula Vista

"Walking out of the building when everything was over made me feel like I had the world in my hands, literally. I felt so powerful, and I know most of the participants had the same mutual feeling."

— Paola Cortez Magdaleno, Colegio Baja California de Rosarito



Photo by Sofia Vega



Photo by Sarah Sanchez



Photo by Marla Ramírez Servin



Photo by Herman Saldaña Toledano



Photo by Outside the Lens



Photo by Lisa Lee



Photo by Angela Peralta Fragoso