My Life as a Refugee

By Kira Elliott, San Dieguito Academy

At first glance, the session title "Young Peacemakers: Refugee Stories from Around the World" suggests that the "young peacekeepers" are probably in their twenties, here to share their experiences about how they overcame their hardships. However, once sitting down and facing the speakers, this image is shaken ever so slightly. The young speakers look just as nervous about telling their stories, as the audience is curious to finding out about them.

Student moderator Hayley Palmer introduced the first speaker, Armand Binombe. He walked over to the podium and explained that his PowerPoint presentation was not working, "I'm going to have to use," he paused, "my mind." There were a few giggles in the room. Binombe smiled, then launched into his story. He is sixteen years old. Originally from the war-torn Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), he and his family left their home when he was eight years old. In the Congo, he explained, education is not free. Some schools have electricity, libraries, and computers, while others may barely have chairs. For seven years, Binombe received an education in the Congo, where he was taught in French – the official language of the DRC. After turning eight, Binombe’s family decided to move to Uganda, for the area in which they lived suffered constantly from war.

In Uganda, he was taught for seven years in English. His family then sought to be relocated – not back to the DRC, but to the United States. After numerous interviews and finally being approved by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) relocated his family to San Diego, California, where their case managers helped them settle in. The flight, or rather series of flights, to San Diego was Binombe’s first. He is now a sophomore at Crawford High School.

In the session, Myo Ti followed Binombe. Using his PowerPoint, "because my English is very broken," he explained, "I use lots of pictures. Hope you like them." Like Binombe, Ti is sixteen years old. He was born in Burma – a country, he explained, that is brutally controlled by the military since 1962. He is part of the ethnic minority group the Kachin people, which is made up of seven tribes and has its own language, culture and traditions. Ti explained life in Burma by saying, “The government blinds the people. They edit education systems, and there is no real information about human rights. They cut out powerful sources of education.” The government significantly censors the education of Burmese people. It controls the economy, policies and just about everything. "They repress their people," Ti said, "and persecute the minorities like the Kachin people.”

In order to avoid this persecution, Ti fled to India when he was around ten years old, where he lived with his sister and brother-in-law. He lived in New Delhi, India, for four years as an undocumented immigrant, and tried to go to school for a couple of months. However, he faced some difficulties being the only Burmese student there. In November 2010, the Red Cross gave him the opportunity to move to the United States as a refugee. He had no passport, and like most refugees, he simply had a bag that kept all of his information. "Going into the air [in the airplane], I lost my heart. It was very scary," describing his first flight.

According to Ti, life in San Diego has several benefits. In the United States, there is free education, but in Burma, you have to pay. "There is hope, freedom and a better life. He spoke about his experience at farmers markets and the availability to use food stamps to pay for his food. Ti also explained that refugees under eighteen years of age receive free medical assistance. He concluded his presentation with a picture of him on the beach, on a PowerPoint slide that read "Happy Ending.”

The final speaker was April Moo. Of the three, Moo is the oldest at nineteen. Moo’s parents left Burma during the civil war after the military burned down their village. She was born in a refugee camp in Thailand along with her two sisters and two brothers. Her family belongs to the ethnic group the Karen people, which, like the Kachin people, is a minority in Burma with its own language and culture. For example, one tradition customary to her ethnic group is that unmarried women wear white dresses. She had conference delegates pass around a beaded shirt unique to the Karen.

Moo spent most of her life in a refugee camp. In school, they were taught Thai, Burmese, Karen, and English, and some of their homework required memorizing and reciting large passages of text. Teachers were allowed to hit the students. She added, “If you forgot to do your homework, you were made to run around the school, which was embarrassing because everyone would know.” Families had to pay for education, and her parents could not afford to send her to school past the 7th grade. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) gave the camp food each month, such as rice, beans, fish paste, chili peppers, oil, and flour. There was no electricity, and water came from a well. Her family applied to a relocation program.

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WorldLink’s 15th Annual Youth Town Meeting
“The Right to be Human”

**Culture & Identity • Disabilities • Displacement • Responsible Business • International Justice**

**Where Worlds Change: A Girls School in Kenya - Film Premiere**
Presenters: Aneesha Bhogal and Shelley Boniwell, University of San Diego
Moderator: Savannah Jo Dowling (LJCDS)

**IPJ Theatre**

**Young Peacemakers: Refugee Stories from Around the World**
Presenters: Armand Binombe, April Moo and Myo Ti, International Rescue Committee Peacemakers
Moderator: Hayley Palmer (OLP)

**Room B**

**Rebuilding Communities: A Refugee Network**
Presenters: Ayan Mohamed, chair, San Diego Refugee Forum; program manager, Somali Family Service, Timothy Slade, vice chair, San Diego Refugee Forum; acculturation team supervisor, Catholic Charities-Refugee Services
Moderator: Marija Bosnjak (OLP)

**Room C**

**Beyond Borders: Peacebuilding Among Refugees**
Presenter: Abdi Mohamoud, executive director, Horn of Africa
Moderator: Tomer Mate-Solomon (BS)

**Room D**

**New Americans, New Lives**
Presenter: Walter Lam, president and CEO, Alliance for African Assistance
Moderator: Josh Clapper (BS)

**Room E**

**Bringing Mental Disabilities to the Forefront**
Presenter: Shannon Jaccard, executive director, National Alliance on Mental Illness, San Diego
Moderators: Sebastien Akarmann (CCHS) and Hayley Clark (IMAN)

**Room F**

**Does the Constitution Protect Undocumented Immigrants?**
Presenter: Peter Schey, president and executive director, Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law
Moderators: Alejandro Gavino Espinoza (IMAN) and Marcela Sotelo Bucardo (OLP)

**IPJ Boardroom**

**Youth Journalism: A Global Network of Advocates for Human Rights**
Presenter: Mark Schulte, national education coordinator, Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting
Moderator: Luz Elena Castellanos Aleman (CETYS)

**Room H**

**Social Entrepreneurship: Doing Business for a Cause**
Presenter: Nina Church, co-founder, Nika Water
Moderator: Ana Ivette Preciado (IMAN)

**Room I**

**Excluded: Struggles Against Discrimination**
Presenter: Lisa Nunn, assistant professor of sociology, University of San Diego
Moderator: Maria Jose Zepeda Flores (IMAN)

**Room 214**

**Los Ninis: Mexico’s Lost Generation**
Presenter: Dominic Bracco, freelance journalist and founding member of Prime Collective
Moderator: Aric Yael Bandera (IMAN)

**Room 217**

**Realities and Recoveries of Torture Survivors**
Presenters: Sol d’Urso, marriage and family therapist, Survivors of Torture International, Ticia Hilliard, senior mental health clinician, Survivors of Torture International
Moderators: Domenica Berman (SDA) and Alejandro Palacios Chavez (FLC)

**Room 218**

**Stop Impunity: Consequences for Human Rights Violators**
Presenter: Carlos Mauricio, executive director, Stop Impunity Project
Moderators: Alexis Miranda (CETYS) and Rebecca Young (OLP)

**Room 219**

**Where Futures Begin: Microfinance**
Presenter: Murugi Kenyatta, vice president of community development, Foundation for Women
Moderators: Pablo Amahile (FLC) and Alexander Dey Bueno (CETYS)

**Room 220**

**Assuring Rights in the Business of Development**
Presenter: Darrett Byrd, director of program quality support, Catholic Relief Services
Moderator: Isaac Hortiales (IMAN)

**Room 223**
Dr. Armando Biznoria was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 1995. Due to war and insecurity in the eastern part of the Congo, he and his family fled to Uganda in 2008, where he lived as a refugee for two years. In 2010, Biznoria and his family were resettled in San Diego by the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Biznoria is currently the student body president of the Law Academy at Crawford High School. He also serves as a member of the City of San Diego Youth Commission.

Dominic Bracco II is a photographer, sound engineer and video journalist based in Mexico City. He specializes in documenting the effects of Mexican and North American policies on the border region where he was raised. Bracco has degrees in journalism and Spanish literature from the University of Texas at Arlington. Past clients include The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and The New York Times Sunday Magazine. Bracco is also a founding member of the photographic Private Collective.

Dorrett Byrd is the director of the Program Quality Support Department at Catholic Relief Services (CRS), where she manages the provision of technical assistance to CRS country programs. Prior to this position, Byrd was deputy director for Overseas Operations, where she provided support to CRS projects that addressed the prevalence of child labor in India. Byrd joined her career as a research associate with the Center for Policy Research before accepting a position with African's country office in Nigeria. In this role, she designed and implemented development and relief projects, including nutrition, fisheries, water and sanitation, and health programs.

Nina Church is a co-founder of Nika Water, a unique social enterprise model that donates 100 percent of its profits to poverty alleviation through clean water, education, sanitation and disaster relief programs around the world. Church is a senior at La Jolla Country Day School and a former WorldLink intern. She is actively involved in extra-curricular clubs, such as Model United Nations, Mock Trial and Fine the Children. Church spent the summer of 2011 working as a facilitator for MYF's trip in Kenya. She speaks natively only of Nika Water on the world water crisis, as well as on youth empowerment.

Sol d’Uso is a licensed marriage and family therapist who works with various populations including survivors of domestic violence, at-risk children and youth, and adults with career and cultural challenges. A native of Guinea-Bissau, d’Uso's passion has been with individuals and families from multiple backgrounds, taking into account issues of immigration, acculturation, violence and culture. d’Uso himself speaks only of Nika Water on the world food crisis, as well as on youth empowerment.

Tricia Hilliard is a writer and correspondent. Hilliard has spent time as a facilitator for Free the Children. Church spent the summer of 2011 working as a volunteer for the organization. A confirmed tech enthusiast, Schutte is interested in using innovative tools to connect students globally to their world and to each other. Schutte graduated from Oberlin College and holds a master's degree in international journalism from American University.

April Mosi is a Karen refugee who was born and raised in the Mae La refugee camp in Thailand. The Karen people are a minority ethnic group in Burma. Mosi's parents fled Burma to escape ethnic persecution by the Burmese government. Mosi and her family were resettled in San Diego in 2007, when she was 15 years old. She is currently a student at City College and is very active in the Karen community. Mosi is the co-founder of the Karen Youth Organization, and is also a member of the AYA Project's Youth Advisory Council.

Shannon Jaccard is the executive director of NAMI San Diego. After completing her MBA, she founded Compeer San Diego, a non-profit organization with the goal of providing a safe, nurturing, mentoring program for individuals with a mental health challenge. Today, she is a board member for NAMI California and the Meeting Place, Inc. She sits on the Client/Family Leadership Committee for the Oversight & Accountability Commission, and has taken on the challenge to eliminate seclusion and restraint. Jaccard is a LEAD San Diego 2010 graduate and recipient of the Channel News Leadership Award and San Diego Magazine’s 50 People to Watch.

Steven Kachestew became consul general for the Department of State Consulate in Tijuanas, Mexico in August 2009. Prior to this assignment, he served four years as the elected head of the American Foreign Service Association, the labor union for U.S. diplomats at the Department of State. He served as U.S. consul general in eastern Canada, based in Halifax, in 2001-2003. His previous overseas tours of duty, as a political officer, include the U.S. embassies in Lima, Peru, and the U.S. Consulate General in Jerusalem. From 1998-2001, Kachestew was senior advisor to the State Department’s Coordinator for Counterterrorism.

Muriogi Kenyatta is the vice president of community development and the former executive director of the Foundation for Women in Nairobi, Kenya. She is responsible for overseeing operational programs and program development. Born and raised in Kenya, Kenyatta knows firsthand the power and effectiveness of microfinance and brings her personal experience and passion to the mission. She has an extensive background in marketing and nonprofit management and ten years of experience in project management, strategic planning and public relations.

Walter Lam, born and raised in northeastern China, is the founder of the Alliance for Asian Assistance. After graduating high school, he fled to Kenya because of political persecution and attended Egerton University, where he graduated with a degree in agricultural engineering. He then returned to China, but was persecuted again and forced to flee to Kenya in 1986. In 1989, Lam founded the Alliance for Asian Assistance with the purpose of helping fellow refugees from Asia. Over the past 20 years, the alliance has greatly expanded to serve thousands of refugees from all over the world.

Carlos Mauricio is a professor at the University of El Salvador in June 1983 when he was kidnapped from his classroom and taken to National Police headquarters, where he was tortured for two weeks. In 2002, Mauricio founded the Stop Impunity Project, which works to bring an end to the impunity granted to human rights abusers in El Salvador. Since moving to Washington, D.C., in 2010, he has been working to build a coalition of Salvadoran torture survivors and human rights activists to continue to press for justice in El Salvador, and to build bridges between Salvadoran NGOs in El Salvador and the Salvadoran community in the United States.

Abdi Mohamed is a refugee from Somalia and arrived in the United States in 1993. Since 2002, he has volunteered with various refugee organizations in San Diego, including the East African Mothers Group. Mohamed currently works with Somali Family Service as a business counselor and program manager, helping refugees start businesses in the community. She also manages Project Refugee, a transitional housing program for asylum seekers that provides a network of supportive community services. Mohamed holds a bachelor's degree in accounting from San Diego State University.

Abdul Mohammed is a refugee from Ethiopia and arrived in San Di-ego in 1982. Mohammed has more than fifteen years of experience in leadership in the East African community through his work as one of the founders and executive director of Horn of Africa, a refugee assistance organization that combines cultural and linguistic knowl-edge with case specific expertise in social service delivery. He obtained his M.A. in management from the University of Reeds. He also completed an advanced management program at Stanford University and graduate certificate program on prevent-ing violent conflicts at the United States Institute of Peace.

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Shelley Boniwell is a member of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Boniwell is currently the student body president of the Law Academy at Crawford High School. She also serves as a member of the City of San Diego Youth Commission.

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Timothy Slade is the vice chair for the San Diego Refugee Forum and currently serves as the acclimation team supervisor for the refugee services section of Catholic Charities. He holds a master's degree in international studies from North Carolina State University. His professional experience includes public health work in Nicaragua and Benin; educational program design in Egypt; French and Spanish instruction in secondary school; and tutoring elementary schoolchildren through AmeriCorps St. Louis.

Aneesha Bhogal is the director of the development department at Shobhan Education Alliance. Bhogal came to Shobhan from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, has taught global issues-based journalism and has an extensive background in marketing and nonprofit management and ten years of experience in project management, strategic planning and public relations.

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The annual WorldLink Youth Town Meeting brings together youth who are interested and committed to making a change. These 18- and 19-year-olds, in-depth discussions with distinguished speakers, delve into world issues with their peers and learn about what is happening in the world around them. This year, the topic that brought youth together was “The Right to be Human.”

At a second year participant of the Youth Town Meeting, I had the chance to experience a day in the life of a student delegate. From waking up at the crack of dawn, to arriving, bleary-eyed, at the registration courtyard greeted by a huge breakfast buffet; from the excitement of seeing my friends from other schools, to filing into Shiley Theatre eager to hear the opening speakers and get a taste of what the rest of my day would be like; from receiving my group number, to finding (while completely lost) my assigned briefing, where I would hear the amazing guest speakers passionately to their peers; to the closing ceremony, where I ask questions and converse with leading experts and conference delegates about current world issues and solutions, how to become involved and ways to make an impact. However, most importantly, I had the chance to experience the feeling of leaving the Youth Town Meeting with my head full of statistics, opinions, ideas and the inspired will to make a difference.

When I was selected as Editor-in-Chief for the 2012 WorldLink youth newspaper, I was overjoyed. The role was a perfect opportunity to be able to reach out to youth and share the incredible dialogue and knowledge presented at the conference this year. The newspaper is an opportunity to have student journalists and photographers voice their opinions through writing and photography, while connecting with a wide range of youth, from both San Diego County and Baja California, Mexico. Each year that I have attended the WorldLink conference, I have attended the WorldLink conference, I was amazed at the amount of students that bring their passion and curiosity and are determined to make a change in their community.

While producing the newspaper, my primary focus has been to help the reader gain an understanding of the topics covered, and make the reader feel as though they were present at the Youth Town Meeting. Through opinion pieces, briefing summaries, student photographs and translated articles, I hope that the newspaper will do just that.

I would like to thank all the wonderful student writers and photographers who contributed to the newspaper. I could not have compiled this newspaper without my editorial team, who looked meticulously at each article and photo. Thank you to our wonderful donors, and thank you to our speakers who gave their day to meet with hundreds of youth. Most importantly, I would like to thank you, the reader, for taking the time to pick up this newspaper and educate yourself about the pressing issues occurring in our world today. After all, “knowledge is power” and the first step in making a change is simply through education and understanding the world around you.

The youth are the next generation, the change. The role of young people is incredibly important. I challenge you to make a change – in your school, community or wherever you feel your voice and opinions should be heard. I end this letter with another incredibly cliché, yet meaningful quote that I feel sums up the message conveyed at each briefing session at the 2012 Youth Town Meeting. Gandhi once said, “Be the change you wish to see in the world.” So go on and be that positive change, that influence, that voice. As you can read on page 8, Nina Church asked over 700 student delegates, “What would you do with a free afternoon?” So I bow to her question and ask you: What will you do with a free afternoon?

Fondly,
Katherine Guerrero
High Tech High International
2012 Editor-in-Chief

Letter from the Editor,
Before entering the University of San Diego’s (USD) graduate school program of sociology. During graduate school, Nunn began filming the documentary Excluded, which she shared at the 2012 WorldLink Youth Town Meeting. At first, it was only a tiny film project, and she had no big visions for it. After the graduate and became part of the USD faculty, she followed up on the project and completed the film, now a 46-minute long document available for free at www.excludedthedocumentary.com. It chronicles Thomas and Tony’s problems with the U.S. federal law and the unfairness of being excluded from the 1000+ rights that opposite-sex couples receive after marriage. Before Excluded, Nunn was interested in promoting the rights of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) community, but did not know how to take an active role. Making the documentary “allowed [her] to take a political stance [on the issue] and make [her] role as an ally meaningful.” An ally is an individual who is part of the majority group, but aims to help a group that has been oppressed. Nunn outlined various ways youth can get involved as allies to the LGBT community. Although it would be wonderful if every young individual could make a documentary, this is not a reality. Nunn discussed the significance of starting or joining a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) organization at schools. In addition, a great and easy way to stay updated on LGBT rights issues is by signing up for e-mail updates from organizations, including Human Rights Campaign (www.hrc.org). She also spoke about the importance in combating the use of the words “gay” and “lesbian” as synonyms for stupid. Nunn encourages each person to police one another and remind each other that using the phrase “that’s so gay” is harmful and disrespectful. Nunn concluded by saying, “don’t laugh at gay jokes: they are not nice” — a simple, yet meaningful statement.

Daraja: Giving Education to Girls in Kenya

By Diego Breton, IMAN

“When one door closes, another opens. But we often look so regretfully upon the closed door that we don’t see the one that has opened for us.” —Alexander Graham Bell

Kenya has been the cradle of a series of ethnic conflicts for many years now. With over forty tribes, this issue has been gaining more attention due to the rising number of violent cases directly related to it. In the WorldLink documentary Where Worlds Collide: A Girl’s School in Kenya, Alice Nanywata, a fifteen-year-old girl, reveals the horrors she witnessed between the different tribes. In the short film, which premiered at this year’s 15th annual WorldLink Youth Town Meeting, Njonjo explains that ethnic groups are told to stay away from each other if they ever encounter a member of an opposing group. This problem came to the public eye in 2007 after the elections in Kenya, when Mwai Kibaki, a Kikuyu, was re-elected as president. Disillusioned rioters of other tribes started a rebellion, which led to the death of over 1,500 civilians.

These long-standing and deeply rooted conflicts keep the country away from peace and progress. Each tribe is heavily affected, particularly the children, youth and women. In many parts of Kenya, women are seen as less valuable than men. Similar to several countries worldwide, many women are forced to stay in their homes to clean and take care of their children. In Kenya, women devote a great majority of their time to household chores and other tasks, such as having to travel long distances to collect water.

Nanywata and Jenni Doherty were well aware of this. Nanywata, an alumna of the University of San Diego, knew that he wanted to return to Africa after working in Tanzania a year after graduating from college. He was devastated to see that many young and eager girls in primary school tried very hard to get good grades (many accomplishing it); yet no matter what the results were, poverty would prevent them from entering secondary school. In fact, many of them would end up resorting to prostitution to sustain a household. For Jason, it was a very sad situation, but it was one with a solution, nonetheless. This is where Daraja Academy was born.

The Daraja Academy is a free boarding school in Nanyuki, Kenya that provides a secondary education to girls with good grades, leadership skills and the drive to make a positive change in their community. Statistically, the main reason children suffer from hunger is the mother’s limited level of education; and according to the Daraja Academy’s website over 130 million youth worldwide are not in school and 70% of this number are girls.

The girls are supplied with lodging, food, healthcare, and other services; the lack of which would result in being a hindrance because of their education situation. The Daraja Academy currently hosts over 100 Kenyan girls, coming from twenty-four varied tribes and four different religions. It is funded by the Carr Educational Foundation, which was founded in 2007 by Jason and Jenni Doherty. After fundraising and forming a Board of Directors, the Daraja Academy received its first twenty-six students in 2009.

Youth Town Meeting speakers Anesha Bhogal and Shelley Boniwell, who helped produce the WorldLink documentary, led through their experiences volunteering at the Daraja Academy. Bhogal and Boniwell, current graduate students of USD’s School of Leadership and Educational Sciences, commented that their trip was a perfect way to connect with international youth. Not only did their visit and volunteer work benefit the Kenyan school and its students, but also naturally developed a strong sense of unity. It was heart-warming to hear from people who had actually visited the Academy, and learn of the affection and passion that the young girls displayed. Smiles and hugs were plentiful.

While many students our age need to be towed off from our beds in the morning, the Daraja girls eagerly wake up every day at 5:00 a.m. to make their beds, scrub their floors and wash their uniforms. From there, they are served breakfast, and once they are done; a new school day begins. The school aims to channel the girls’ intelligence in a way that once they graduate, they can return to their homes and make positive changes throughout their villages — changes they want to see. The Daraja Academy carries out various clubs and courses, like Women of Integrity, Strength, and Hope (WISH), in order to empower young women and encourage the appreciation of diversity. Molly, a thirteen-year-old Daraja student, said that she was going through school just so she could change her village and family.

Although not stated, it can be thought that at the end of the day, the girls at the Daraja Academy go to bed with a huge grin drawn on their faces, ready for the sun to rise again.

Their big hearts and inexorable drive should be an inspiration to everyone. They prove that your environment does not dictate who you are or will become. Even in the most dire circumstances, those who really want to succeed will find a way to do so. Daraja has given these girls hope and has rewritten their lives and futures dramatically.

For students attending WorldLink’s Youth Town Meeting, it may be hard to relate to the ethnic conflict in Kenya. However, gang wars and poverty are terms we know very well. While education systems are different in every country, many people can have their educational path obstructed because of a lack of income that prevents them from reaching their dreams. It is a disappointment. However, if this briefing has given us any teachings, they are never to give up on your dreams and to always stay focused on your goal. A door apparently closed for our fellow youth in Kenya, but their efforts and fiery souls allowed them to reach the door that opened. Hold your head up high, for you never know what your very own Daraja (which means “bridge” in Swahili) will notice your efforts and reach out to you.

To watch the WorldLink documentary Where Worlds Collide: A Girl’s School in Kenya, visit http://peace.sandiego.edu. To learn more about the Daraja Academy and become involved, visit www.daraja.academy. You can get a greater insight on their ideals and mission, and most importantly, the various options you have to support this organization that strives to make this world a better place.

In Summary

Student at the Daraja Academy in Nanyuki, Kenya carrying WorldLink’s 15th Youth Town Meeting tote bag. (Photo by Peggy Hetherington)
My Life... (Continued from page 1)

By Kira Elliott, San Dieguito Academy

Moo and her family left the camp when she was fifteen, and moved to the Unit-
ed States in September of 2008. She described her drive to the airport, where she thought the trees were following her because she had never been in a car before. She explained how her family was given bags to keep all of their personal information in, and how her father was reluctant to leave and adapt to a new place.

Moo has had to overcome several challenges, like learning English, making new friends, learning how to live in a new country and adapting to the American culture while retaining her identity of being Karen. Today, Moo is a student at City College and plans to become a nurse so that she can help the Karen people in Burma.

Leaving the briefing session, student delegates carried with them the feeling of experiencing three lives at once. The sign reads “Young Peacemakers: Refugee Stories from Around the World.” Little did they know that they would not only listen to stories of three refugees, but would also learn the importance of preserving one’s culture and identity.

In Summary

Stirring the Melting Pot
By Gabriela Hartman, The Bishop’s School

“If we are not doing it, no one would.” This mentality gives Ethiopian refugee Abdi Mohamoud the strength and resil-
ience to continue developing and improving his non-profit organization, Horn of Africa. As founder and executive director of this San Diego-based organization, Mohamoud has provided resources to countless refugees for over fifteen years through programs, such as Refugee Case Management, the Health Ac-
cess Initiative and the Childcare Training Initiative. Horn of Africa reaches over 1500 people a year with its services, and has helped establish twenty-five refugee-owned businesses.

Mohamoud, a refugee himself, fled the Fik region of Ethiopia with his neighbors and older brothers in 1997. He left during the Ogaden War to escape ethnic tensions in his country of origin. Mohamoud traveled from refugee camp to refugee camp, after being forced to leave his mother behind who was wrongly arrested and imprisoned. In 1980, Abdi and those he traveled with were fortunate enough to be part of the 0.5% who received American refugee status and aid from President Carter’s resettlement pro-
gram for African refugees on humanitarian grounds.

In 1982, Mohamoud resettled in San Diego, where he eventually recon-
ected with his mother for the first time in six years. He had a very hard time in the American educational system after being placed in the 5th grade on arrival in San Diego. Overcoming all barriers and ob-
stacles that came his way, he graduated from Crawford High School and the Business School at San Diego State University (SDSU). He also went on to earn his mas-
ter’s degree in management from Redland University. As stated at the Youth Town Meeting, “it would have been so easy to work for the government, but [realizing that his] life wouldn’t have been complete if [he] hadn’t spent it helping people,” Mohamoud started building up Horn of Africa to help refugees like himself resettle in San Diego.

Mohamoud encourages refugees in his programs to retain some semblance of their culture while striving to become active participants in their communities in the United States. He also encourages us to aid refugees in their struggles by ad-
vocating for greater understanding of their wonderful contributions to American so-
ciety.

For more information on Horn of Africa, visit www.hornafrica.org.

Conversations with Young Peacemakers
By Kira Elliott, San Dieguito Academy

During the Question and Answer period, student delegates from San Diego Country and Baja Mexico discussed a variety of topics.

Q: What were your first impressions of America?
A: [Myo Ti] It’s more or less than what I expected. I had to do more than I expected, but I know that I’m not alone.

Q: What are the challenges and benefits of the American culture?
A: [Armand Binombe] Immigrants and refugees try to change their ways, try to blend in. People expect families to throw away their traditions. I stay who I am. Learning the language makes you feel more comfortable.

Q: Do you consider yourself “Americanized”?
A: [April Moo] I’m like fifteen percent “Americanized.” I’m not a Thai citi-
zen. I’m not a Burmese citizen. I consider myself Karen.
[Armand Binombe] You can try to become “Americanized,” but you can’t change who you are.
[Myo Ti] I have to preserve my culture and my traditions.

Q: What is a goal you have in life?
A: [April Moo] I want to help the Karen people in Burma as a nurse.
[Armand Binombe] I want to get as high of an education as possible.

“If we are not doing it, no one would.”

~ Abdi Mohamoud, Horn of Africa
Microfinance: How a Few Dollars Can Change the World
By Kira Elliott, San Dieguito Academy

After a visit to southern India in 1997, Deborah Lindholm started the San Diego-based organization Foundation for Women (FFW). During her trip, she witnessed the power of a small loan when she saw a woman establish a barber shop with her husband after being given four dollars. This woman then did what was considered unimaginable. She raised herself out of poverty, bought a home and sent her children to school. Lindholm decided that a program focusing on small business loans could help impoverished women around the world realize their full potential.

The non-profit organization Foundation for Women oversees a program that is working towards breaking the poverty cycle by empowering women through microcredit. By giving small loans to women living at or below the poverty level, FFW initiates the “women effect.” The “women effect” supports the idea: “When a woman has economic security, her family has economic security. When her family has economic security, her community has economic security. When her community has economic security, her nation has economic security. When nations have economic security, the world is secure” (http://www.foundationforwomen.org/our-mission.html). The “women effect” helps alleviate the cycle of poverty and creates a long-lasting, positive impact on families and local communities. Through this, there is money for education, nutrition, health care and medical services, as well as a resulting sense of economic security.

Lindholm established FFW in order to provide women access to credit and support the development of their income-generating activities. Today, the Foundation has provided microcredit loans to women in the San Diego area, as well as in Niger, Liberia, India and Zambia. The structure of the program brings groups of women together where they discuss their personal situations in confidence, support each other’s loans and create a feeling of community. The only collateral used for microcredit is trust. Each individual must have trust in their group members and in oneself to pay back the loan at their weekly meetings. Loans begin at 100 or 250 dollars. Then, if the borrower has paid the original loan back in full, the loan increases to 500 dollars, and then finally to 1,000 dollars. After building their credit history, a borrower can apply to the Foundation’s funding partner ACCION San Diego for a larger business loan. In addition, FFW helps women establish and build personal savings accounts, and also provides financial literacy and business skills training.

The FFW San Diego pilot program has helped over 1,200 women and their families improve their lives. Women in San Diego have a chance to promote their businesses and products through local farmers markets, swap meets, on-line stores, special events and outside retailers, all of which are accessed through the Foundation. The organization has been very successful with an average loan repayment rate of 98%.

Microfinance may seem like a small step, but the impact of that step is huge. A small investment in one woman can result in national economic security, and then perhaps international security. The benefits are endless.

Inspiring World Change
By Gabriela Hartman, The Bishop’s School

As director of the Program Quality Support Department at Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Dorrett Byrd has provided technical aid to CRS’s many programs. A native of Kingston, Jamaica, she has particular expertise concerning African issues. Byrd has designed and managed many programs with various foundations and centers, including the African Development Foundation and the International Division of the National Council of Negro Women, to help alleviate social and economic issues in Africa.

Throughout her briefing session at WorldLink’s Youth Town Meeting, Byrd concentrated on irresponsible business and the impact it has on child labor, trafficking, slavery and environmental issues. According to Byrd, irresponsible businesses are crucial to a country’s development. Employers must be socially conscious and help prevent or eliminate chances of workers being negatively or adversely affected by their company. Oftentimes, however, businesses do not keep their employees’ working conditions and environment in mind. Sadly, child labor has become a miserable reality for many children. Alleviating the prevalence of child labor around the world has been an important, if almost impossible, goal for Byrd. Through projects like the “My Rights Matter Project,” she hopes the world will free all child labor and children will no longer work in exploitative conditions to support their families or through force.

Acts of slavery and human trafficking have become far too prevalent for our generation. In her speech, Byrd noted that there are more slaves in the world today than any other time in history to date. Victims of slavery are subjected daily to gross human rights violations. However, several countries have begun to address and fight the issue of slavery, as well as aid survivors of human trafficking. According to Byrd, due to the fact that many Brazilian plantations and cattle ranches have about 25,000-40,000 slave laborers, Brazil introduced a pact to ultimately eradicate slave labor.

Irresponsible businesses also perpetuate environmental offenses with no thought to the impact their company has on the natural world. Byrd gave an example of a company’s lack of thought to the environment. She explained the destruction of a mangrove system with both fresh and saltwater swamps in the Delta of Niger. Careless dam construction and petroleum enterprises contaminated both the soil and ground water, negatively impacting the health of local residents.

Byrd emphasized that each individual has a social responsibility to help the world. By supporting the passage of laws and enforcing regulations, child labor, trafficking, slavery and environmental offenses can be reduced. Education and advocacy efforts can enlighten others about these issues. By supporting fair trade companies and checking supply chains, youth can help eradicate the world of these unfair and wrong business practices that negatively impact humanity. The human race should always support integral human development because “every citizen has the right to live their full lives to their full development.”

Ten Ways to Make a Difference
By Nicole Sadowsky, The Bishop’s School

Start an International Rescue Committee (IRC) club at your school

Become a WorldLink Intern
Participate in a National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Walk

Send a letter to your representative urging him/her to co-sponsor H.R.2024, the Torture Victims Relief Reauthorization Act of 2011, which would provide funds to torture rehabilitation programs, such as Survivors of Torture International

Stay updated with Project Concern International (PCI) email reports

Start a WorldLink club at your high school

Plan a “Day of Action” at your school with Gay Straight Alliance to celebrate LGBT History Month in October

Run a “Basics Drive” for Alliance for African Assistance

Donate used toys to Horn of Africa, for the graduates of the Childcare Training Program

Become a Campus Representative for Nika Water at your high school

Interested in the WorldLink Program?

Apply to be an intern, or start a WorldLink club at your school!

For more information, visit http://peace.sandiego.edu/worldlink, or find us on Facebook!

“When a woman has economic security, her family has economic security. When her family has economic security, her community has economic security. When her community has economic security, her nation has economic security. When nations have economic security, the world is secure.”

~ The Women Effect
Responsible Business: A Gateway to Providing Services to Those in Need

By Eric Nicolas, Canyon Crest Academy

One of the biggest challenges in the developing world is the ongoing water crisis. Currently, over 1/6 of the world’s population lives without access to clean water, and over 4,500 people die each day as a result of water-related illness. In fact, “Water related diseases kill more people each year than all forms of violence combined,” explains Nina Church, a high school senior and co-founder of Nika Water. Though these statistics might seem alarming, there is still hope. In her presentation titled “Catching the Wave of Social Change,” Church outlined the key points of responsible business, and made it clear that the alleviation of water problems is well within our reach.

In 2007, Church and her family visited East Africa, and what they saw inspired them to make a difference. On their trip, the Church family witnessed entire communities living in absolute poverty. Water, something many of us take for granted, was scarce in these communities and hard to come by. Together, the Church family decided to found Nika Water with the intent of providing clean water, a fundamental human right, to some of the poorest places on earth.

The idea behind Nika Water is simple: create a business model that unites commercial enterprise with philanthropic goals. Ever since its creation in 2009, Nika Water has been doing exactly that. Nika is a responsible business that operates with the “triple bottom line” in mind. This means that it works to promote social good and ecological preservation while maintaining economic profitability. Unlike several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other humanitarian efforts, Nika is self-sustaining and operates like a for-profit business. However, instead of going to shareholders and company managers, all profits from sales go directly to humanitarian efforts around the world. Through its efforts, Nika has funded the construction of wells, schools, and community projects in five different countries, including Nicaragua, Kenya, Uganda, Sri Lanka and Tanzania.

Church emphasizes the power of youth, and asserts that the younger generation can be advocates of change. Her advice to students is to find one’s passion. “It doesn’t matter how old you are, what matters is that you are passionate about what you do.” As a society, we have the resources to change the world, but we need the willpower to match it.

Along with providing clean water to those that need it, Nika Water aims to raise awareness about important issues around the world. After all, education is the first step along the road to making a difference. As Church expressed, “Youth can change the world, though it requires a conscious choice and the ‘courage to place your dreams above your fears.’”

Water is at the root of humanity, and it is the lack of water that is at the root of many of the world’s problems. By uniting the goals of business and social work, it is possible to make a tangible difference in the world we live in.

In Summary

“What Would You Do With a Free Afternoon?”

Speech by Nina Church, Nik Water Transcribed by Morgan Chen, The Bishop’s School

“What would you do with a free afternoon?”

While this may make many of my fellow students in here weep in pain with memories of responding to this very common, often very frustrating college essay prompt, I ask everyone to seriously take a second and think about it:

What would you do? Would you watch TV, hang out with your friends, your family, cook, go play a sport? It could be anything. And that’s the beauty of it. Because every single one of us in this room has the freedom to choose what we will do, and the fortune of opportunities to choose from.

But millions of people all over the world don’t have that same freedom. People our age, people older, people younger, chained by issues of culture and injustice, discriminated against because of disabilities, confined by displacement, repressed by irresponsible business practices. These people can only dream of the millions of things you can do with a free afternoon.

Four years ago, I sat where you’re sitting now. And I asked, “so what?” I was tired, I was hungry, battling to keep my eyes open, and awkwardly scoping out the girl’s shoes in front of me and the hot guy across the aisle. (As I’m sure many of you are right now). But most of all, I was disturbed. I was moved. I was disgruntled at the state our world was in. And I was scared. What could I do? How could I help? I looked to my left, and I looked to my right. And I looked all around me, and I realized that I was not alone. That we are seven hundred plus strong in this room. Seven hundred plus people who are going to make a difference in our world. Because we care. Because we’re here.

And so, four years ago, as I sat where you’re sitting, I went home with my family, and I was inspired. And my family created, and chose to channel that inspiration into something called Nika Water. Nika is a social entrepreneurship which means that we donate one-hundred percent of our profits towards poverty alleviation projects around the world. So every bottle of water that we sell, all that money goes to building schools, drilling wells, putting in water catchment systems, all around the developing world in order to provide people with the basic right to education, health care, sanitation, and the freedom of an afternoon, and the lifetime free of having to walk for water.

Over four years later, Nika has now donated seven thousand people’s worth of clean water in the developing world. Seven thousand people, just like every one of us. That’s ten times the amount of people in this room, and all because people like all of us decided to make a change, to be inspired, decided to switch from drinking Smart Water to Nika Water, decided to be socially responsible and smart consumers, and that is it.

It’s ordinary people who do extraordinary things. Ordinary people like every single person in this room. It’s always the same story. It’s people like my brothers, my sister, my parents, my family, my friends, the amazing WorldLink staff and interns, and people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa. They all started somewhere. They all started by taking the first step, the first step to seek, to understand our world issues, to understand the injustice done to them. And then, they worked to annihilate them.

Each day, we make progress towards a happier, healthier, stronger tomorrow. All because every single person in this room chooses to care. I know that it’s scary to take action. Believe me, I’ve been there. I’ve stood up in front of rooms of people, and tried to convince them why they should care about something as abstract as the world water crisis. Why they should trust and invest in a five-foot-two, high school freshman’s dream. But I took the first step, and so have all of you, you’ve taken it today. So give yourselves a round of applause, it’s exciting.

And even though the successes are only achieved after many, many defeats, hours of jittery nerves, and hours and hours of caffeine upon passion-powered research, you will do it! You can do it! And I’ll let you in on the best-kept, Youth Town Meeting secret: you’ve already done it. You’ve already taken that first scary step. You’ve spent a day learning, opening, or in some cases, perhaps, widening your outlook on the world, the issues we face, the solutions out there. And the solution is waiting to be discovered by you.

So when you leave here, I challenge you. I challenge every single one of us, not to let the passion go, not to let what you’ve learned today go. Find your passion, cultivate it, live by it. Whether that means you start your own business, whether that means you put on a fundraiser, combine your talents with something you care about, your cause, or even something as simple as shopping smarter with keeping in mind where your profits are going. Or even living more empathetically, being kinder to the people around you. You can do it!

This is our world. It’s our community, every single one of us in here, every single person outside of this room, it’s our world, and it’s our time to start taking ownership for it. And we start today. And so, this afternoon, all of you guys have dedicated one of your free afternoons to making our world a better place. I challenge each of you to dedicate a few more, so that one day, every person will have the right to a free afternoon.

Thank you.

Choosing speaker Nina Church, co-founder of Nika Water, talks about her hopes for the future, and changes possible through the involvement of youth in global issues.

(Photo by Alexandra Cheney)

“It doesn’t matter how old you are, what matters is that you are passionate about what you do.”

~ Nina Church, Nika Water
**In Summary**

Shannon’s Story (NAMI San Diego)
By Emily Wolfe, San Diego School of Creative and Performing Arts

On the morning of the Youth Town Meeting (YTM), walking alone through the empty hallways of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice was the least of my concerns. A much larger issue was going through my mind: mental disability. I could not help but overthink and worry about what I could be doing to help, and hoped that I would get a few ideas by attending this year’s conference.

The YTM had not yet started. Thus, as I walked down the hallway to the room of the briefing session, “Bringing Mental Disabilities to the Forefront,” my thoughts wandered. There, a woman and her student moderator would be waiting for me. This woman, Shannon Jaccard of the National Alliance on Mental Illness San Diego (NAMI), is inspiring. I quietly opened the heavy door to the room where she awaited. I was surprised to find that Jaccard was not an intimidating person, as I envisioned her to be. Rather, she was calm and approachable.

I sat down and began to ask a few questions to ease my curiosity. I learned that she is a well-known speaker for NAMI, and organizes conferences in various locations to discuss disability. Most importantly, I discovered that her inspiration is her brother, Jeff. Being enthralled by her words and experiences, I became distracted from my surroundings. Before I knew it, it was time for the Opening Plenary. Our discussion ended on the topic of her brother.

Once the opening session was complete, I joined Jaccard in her first briefing. I paid close attention and jotted down every little detail, silently hoping that she would talk about her brother. Jaccard shared that she is against over-medicating, seclusion and restraints as treatment, and explained that NAMI has hotlines for individuals in need of someone to talk to about issues concerning suicide, depression and other concerns. Her empowering words left me in thought, and my countless pages of notes left my hand quivering. In her second session, Jaccard discussed the media and its ability to portray mental disability in a negative way. NAMI, however, involves family members and peers, who walk a patient through recovery. Ultimately, it was time for lunch, and I finally had the opportunity to have one-on-one time with her. I was hesitant to talk with her about her brother Jeff, so I asked about other topics initially. Jaccard expressed her appreciation for her husband and described him as a great source of support for the work she does. She spoke briefly about a traumatic experience she and her husband had when having her baby, which impacted her greatly and triggered a dislike for certain medical clinics and the way they run.

I finally worked up the courage to ask her about Jeff. She smiled at the thought of him, which greatly touched my heart. Jaccard told me of his personality, and explained how great he was with kids, even claimed that her child resembles him sometimes. I enjoyed hearing past stories about his antics and his advice to her. As the conversation progressed, Jaccard began to share about his disability and explained that he had been diagnosed with schizophrenia.

There were many times he had to go to the hospital, and also take medicine often. This made both her and Jeff unhappy. Eventually, her brother was killed by his treatment while Jaccard was away in Brazil. She described how hard it has been without Jeff. He was her rock. I was struggling to hold back tears while we spoke. Jaccard was incredibly close to her brother and could always talk to him about anything. She gave good advice. I could not help but smile at the thought of her and her brother together.

After hearing about Jeff and her experiences with mental illness, I finally understood where all of her drive came from. She is fighting for him and for others who are in similar situations. Shannon Jaccard is an inspiration, and so is her brother. I cannot say for sure what happened to me that day, but something changed for me. I felt all of her inspiration flow through me, and told myself that some day, I will change the world just as Shannon is doing now.

**Disability Report**
By Eric Nicolas, Canyon Crest Academy

The World Health Organization’s World Report on Disability (2011) states that one billion people worldwide have disabilities. According to the United Nations Development Program, eighty percent of these individuals live in developing countries. For those who are living in poverty, disability has several challenges. The source www.disabled-world.com describes the link between poverty and disability and states, “Poor people are more at risk of acquiring a disability because of lack of access to good nutrition, health care, sanitation, as well as safe living and working conditions. Once this occurs, people face barriers to the education, employment, and public services that can help them escape poverty.”

Armed conflict and violence are also significant factors that have an effect on disabilities. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), for every child killed in warfare, three are injured and permanently disabled. The World Health Organization reports that in some countries, up to a quarter of disabilities result from injuries and violence.

In the United States, the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Service and the Council for Disability Awareness Report that over 36 million Americans are classified as disabled, which equals 12% of the total population. Other statistics include:
- Almost 1/3 of American families have a member with a disability.
- Approximately 95% of disabilities are caused by illnesses rather than accidents.
- Just over 1 in 4 of today’s 20-year-olds will become disabled before they retire.
- One in eight workers will be disabled for five years or more during their working careers.
- 64% of persons with disabilities aged 21-64 are unemployed.
- 26% of persons with disabilities are living below the poverty line.

The UNCRPD, passed in 2006, is a global declaration to protect the rights of people with disabilities. The convention states that societies should “recognize that all people must be provided with the opportunities to live a life to their fullest potential” and encourages countries to pass laws to secure rights for those with disabilities. To date, 153 countries have signed the Convention, and 112 countries have ratified it. The United States signed the Convention in 2009, but has yet to ratify it.

Several organizations, including the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), have taken action to change the stereotypes associated with disability by advocating for services and treatments, as well as increasing awareness on disability.

**Important Numbers**

| NAMI SD Family & Peer Support Line - 1(800) 523-5933 | California Youth Crisis Line - 1(800) 843-5200 |
| Optum Health Access & Crisis Line - (888) 724-7240 | Peer2Peer Youth Talkline - 1(877) 470-LINE |
| National Suicide Hotline - 1(800) SUICIDE | National Depression Hotline - 1(800) 273-TALK |

“Illness does not define a patient. A patient is not schizophrenic. A patient has schizophrenia.”

~ Shannon Jaccard, National Alliance on Mental Illness, San Diego
In Summary

Spreading Awareness through Photography

By Morgan Chen, The Bishop’s School

For many people, inspiration comes from celebrities, friends or family members. For Dominic Bracco, it was the photography project: “We Are Animals in a World Nobody Knows.” Shot by photographer Bill Eppridge, the project documents a heroin-addicted couple. “It’s a beautiful love story,” Bracco described. After seeing the project, he realized that he wanted to show things “through photography in a way people could relate to.”

Bracco, who is a photographer, video journalist and co-founder of Prime Collective, has worked with The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting and was one of the twenty-two distinguished speakers at WorldLink’s Youth Town Meeting (YTM). The topic, “The Right to be Human,” was covered in fifteen unique briefing sessions. Bracco featured Los Ninos – Mexico’s lost generation. Los Ninos are impoverished children that ni estudiante, ni trabajador (“neither study, nor work”). In Mexico, they have become easy victims of the local drug cartels. Many of these children find themselves in the midst of drug wars. Bracco lived with some of these children for a period of time, documenting their daily experiences.

In his session, Bracco presented a slideshow of photos he captured while in Mexico, specifically in Ciudad Juarez. What I saw was expected: photos of the violence broadcasted on the news. There were snapshots of blood on a front door, a couple murdered in a car and a young girl standing next to her mother’s coffin. However, I also saw photos of how the Ninos were young teenagers just like me. The only difference was that they had been born into a life of fear and violence. As Bracco stated during the YTM Opening Plenary, “These people are similar to ourselves. These are real people.” Despite the dismal environment, I saw that life went on in Ciudad Juarez.

Bracco spoke of teens he had worked with whose lives took a turn for the worse. “It’s hard, often, to take a photo of people in a tragic situation,” he says. However, he hopes that people will see his photographs and take away ideas or messages from them that he might not have realized himself. He shared a story of a woman who began to cry upon the sight of her son. “She realized that there are bright and alert as he recounts his horrific story to the class,” he says. “I tried to begin a new life,” he says, “It was so difficult to talk about what happened to me.” In the U.S., Mauricio slowly began to tell others his experience. “It left a big, big mark on me,” he says, “I did not have the words.” What I saw was unexpected: photos of Mauricio sharing his experience as a survivor of torture.

By Iselle Guerrero Gonzalez, CETYS Universidad

Possibilities Help Produce Change

What right do I have in the torture chamber?” asked Carlos Mauricio, a survivor of torture and executive director of the Stop Impunity Project. Mauricio spoke of his experience in El Salvador when he was kidnapped and tortured by the national police in June of 1983. He was tortured in order to extract information about the guerrillas, since his girlfriend at the time was a guerrilla chief. Mauricio not only shared his story but also relayed a positive message to his audience. He informed teenagers to gather together and understand that the lifestyle people have in some areas are completely different from ours. In some places, people are violated and their freedom is limited. His messages gave an opportunity to see the world in a different light and to realize that there are people in the world trying to make a change.

After Mauricio shared his personal story, he mentioned that it took eleven years before he could speak of what he endured. At the Youth Town Meeting, he said, “I came to tell my story because I am not afraid anymore.” He is not afraid to share his experience unlike many others that were kidnapped along with him. Mauricio explained that all imprisonments are traumatic enough to motivate most people into choosing to forget the ordeal and never talk about it – to live on as if it never happened.

Mauricio decided to speak about his experience, raise his voice and continue with his life in the United States. Mauricio stated, “After a miracle, I left prison and came to the U.S. and got the healing and help I needed.” He expressed his gratitude towards Amnesty International, a global organization with over 3 million members and activists all dedicated to the defense of human rights. After arriving in the U.S, he found a job as a salsa teacher in Washington D.C., and established a life with his wife and children.

However, words alone are not enough to take action against these atrocities. After several decades, Mauricio, along with Nestor Gonzalez and Dr. Juan Romagosa, who were also survivors of torture, faced two former Salvadoran generals in a Florida courtroom. In 2002, Jose Guillermo Garcia and Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova were found responsible of the crimes committed. This verdict heralds a major victory in the global fight against impunity for human rights violations.

According to Mauricio, family members of Salvadorans who were murdered and tortured wanted revenge. However, as Mauricio explained, “That would be sticking to their level. It is good that they were exposed for what they did. At least now the world knows we were not lying. What is important is that the truth is out there.”

Mauricio stated, “The truth is out there among thousands. Although injustice and impunity seem stronger and threaten to overcome us, we must stay strong and fight for our rights to be human. In the words of Carlos Mauricio: ’My rights cannot be taken from me no matter what.’ The truth is in our hands and we, as the future, have the choice to either be part of the action or just be silent witnesses of crime.

Carlos Mauricio, The Stop Impunity Project

Yet, they did not kill him, and instead took him into a torture chamber. He “smelled death” inside the chamber as he was blindfolded in the dark. Mauricio listened to the sounds of other people being tortured, raped, beaten and shocked. “I was next,” he said.

And indeed, they showed no mercy to him, continually torturing him for five days until he confessed that he took an illegal trip to Cuba – something he never did. “The information was useless,” says Mauricio with vehemence, “I confessed something I didn’t do in order to stop torture.” Therefore, he says, torture is useless.

Fortunately, the Red Cross found him and demanded his release from the prison. It was then he left for the United States “to heal.” He tried to begin a new life, he says, “It was so difficult to talk about what happened to me.” In the U.S, Mauricio slowly began to tell others his experience. “It left a big, big mark on me,” he says, and indeed it had. He empowered Mauricio to become a human rights activist while looking for other torture survivors to share their own stories.

On July 15, 2002, Mauricio, along with two other torture survivors, filed a lawsuit and rightly secured justice upon two former Salvadoran defense ministers, Jose Guillermo Garcia and Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, who were responsible for his kidnap and torture. He was lucky, he says, because the U.S. allowed him to come out and tell his story.

However, Mauricio is still on the search for other survivors of torture from El Salvador in order to raise awareness of what took place and continues to take place around the world. “I feel responsible for telling a story that is mine, but also others,” he shares. In 2002, Mauricio founded the Stop Impunity Project, aiming to end the impunity granted to violators of human rights in El Salvador. Today, he also leads a summer intensive program in Modern Salvadoran History and Human Rights, in collaboration with the University of El Salvador and the Office of the Ombudsman for the Protection of Human Rights. For Mauricio, it is vital to continue to share his story – a story of courage, a story of truth.

Carlos Mauricio has “never, never” given up. His eyes are bright and alert as he recounts his horrific story to the room of eager listeners at the 2012 WorldLink Youth Town Meeting. Mauricio was a professor at the University of El Salvador before his whole world changed. One day, he was on his way to teach his class when a man approached him. This man asked Mauricio to move his car, so since he claimed it was “blocking his.” He hesitated; not wishing to be late to his class, he eventually obliged and walked out to the parking lot. "I sensed something odd," he said, when he noticed that his car was not in the way of any other car at all. It was then that the same man attacked Mauricio. He desperately tried to run back to the university, but was blocked by a group of men. Mauricio then realized that the notorious Salvadoran “death squads” were kidnapping him. However, he would not go without a fight. Mauricio held tightly to the bumper of a car, until he was kicked in the stomach and dragged away.

He was blindfolded, taken into a van and pushed down onto the floor, face-up. The blindfold served a special role, because “you lose sense of space and time.” However, through the small crack of space between the cloth and his face, Mauricio was able to see a sliver of the window. He watched as the light eventually darkened, as day became night. He listened for clues to locate where he was. He knew he was still in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador, because of the “noises of the engines and merchants on the street.” His heart sank as he began to realize that he would be taken to the outskirts of the city, where most of the kidnapped were killed.

Mauricio decided to speak about his experience, raise his voice and continue with his life in the United States. "After a miracle, I left prison and came to the U.S. and got the healing and help I needed." He expressed his gratitude towards Amnesty International, a global organization with over 3 million members and activists all dedicated to the defense of human rights. After arriving in the U.S, he found a job as a salsa teacher in Washington D.C., and established a life with his wife and children. Mauricio decided to speak about his experience, raise his voice and continue with his life in the United States.

New Americans, New Lives
By Ruth Natalia Nevarez Zambada, IMAN

Walter Lam, founder of the Alliance for African Assistance, is a refugee from Northern Uganda who wanted to make a difference by helping others. During his briefing, he explained all the purposes of his organization. The Alliance focuses on the protection of refugees, which takes forms exponentially in places such as Afghanistan, Colombia, Sudan, Somalia and Iraq.

There are about 50 million refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide, with 2 million having been uprooted by war. Lam emphasized that life living in refugee camps is not safe. The camps are overcrowded, have limited medical care and have a high incidence of abduction and abuse. Because of his own experience fleeing his country due to political persecution, Lam has dedicated his life to assist refugees, such as Emmanuel Onno - a young Ugandan boy born without arms, hands, forearms, calves and feet. Emmanuel’s mother gave birth to him in a Kenyan refugee camp. After meeting them at this camp, Lam obtained authorization from the U.S. State Department to have Emmanuel and his family move to San Diego.

Each year, thousands of individuals come to the United States to begin a new life, which can be very difficult, in particular for those in need of refuge. For those who are forced to leave their home countries, finding work and a place to live are significant obstacles, especially if there is a language barrier. Often, refugees do not have family members who can support them. The Alliance aims to provide alternatives, such as assisting refugees in finding homes. Because of organizations like the Alliance for African Assistance, refugees can establish new lives. The Alliance not only provides job training and other resources, but also a feeling of hope and faith.

Our Rights Migrate with Us
By Stephanie Mastrocola, IMAN

Peter Schey left a lasting impression on his audience when he voiced his opinion on human rights, saying, “I think the world needs the most is better education. People have rights, they just don’t know them.”

His statement is more than just a problem that is just amongst immigrants. Today, many people do not have an understanding of their constitutional rights. Governments and even fellow citizens take advantage of the naivety of a large portion of our population and their rights. However, there are still incredible people, like Peter Schey, who take the risk and fight for justice, individuals who are considered to be heroes.

Peter Schey is a lawyer who has made a tremendous impact on the lives of immigrants. Schey, born in Durban, South Africa, is just an ordinary man doing extraordinary things. Defending and protecting the rights of immigrants is not an easy job, but he has done it well. Recently, he became involved in a delicate case involving the American government. A large group of undocumented children were at risk of being denied access to public education in Texas.

Schey was curious as to why state officials wanted these children to leave their schools. The explanation given to him was, “We don’t have enough classrooms and schools.” However, this answer was unacceptable. Schey explained, “I went on to investigate, and I found empty classrooms.” This realization was shocking and it made him recognize that this form of selfishness was taking humanity away from children.

He became lead counsel in Doe v. Plyler – a statewide class action case wherein children were denied access to education. As a result, the U.S. Supreme Court found it unconstitutional to deny public education to these students.

Our nation is fortunate to have people like Peter Schey – a person who fights for justice. This hero has helped many children and adolescents continue their education in school. It is important to remember that it does not matter where one comes from. Each person should still be treated as a human. The U.S. Constitution does protect the rights of immigrants. A person’s humanity and basic rights cannot be taken away from them.

The great disregard of human rights and freedom all around the world is unbelievable. It seems that the observance of human rights is not a large concern in the eyes of many. Fortunately, there are still incredible people, like Peter Schey, who are making a difference. As an ordinary man, he proved that anybody can make a positive change. In this particular case, he affected the lives of many children, whose right to education was being threatened to be taken away. Due to his courageous efforts, these children continue to receive education and have new opportunities to continue towards higher education.

Schey has proved that through passion and dedication, justice and equality are possible in our world today.

### The Protection of Human Rights
By Diego Beeton and Eric Nicolas, IMAN and Canyon Crest Academy

"Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa – they all started somewhere. They all started by taking the first step – the first step to seek to understand our world’s issues, our basic human rights and the injustice done to them. And then... they work to annihilate them."

Such was the statement articulated by Nina Church during the YTM Closing Plenary, “The Protection of Human Rights.” Over 700 student delegates anxiously waited to hear from Steven Kashkett, Adam Finck and Nina Church. These closing speakers, although referring to different issues and coming from very different backgrounds, delivered a great message and highlighted the idea that all people can have positive and long-lasting impacts on society, at both the local and international levels. Despite the diversity of backgrounds, beliefs, and nationalities, the attendees shared one fundamental similarity – the desire to produce change.

The first panelist, Steven Kashkett, is the U.S. Consul General in Tijuana and has over twenty-eight years of diplomatic experience. He began his address by outlining some of the most important aspects of human rights: liberty, security and dignity. Drawing on his experience in the United States Foreign Service, Kashkett went on to illustrate the dangers of intolerance and the importance of human dignity as the foundation for other rights.

Thus, when he said that human rights were an important issue to discuss, it was something he believed. He addressed a variety of global concerns, from Tijuana’s human trafficking problems to the arbitrary arrests and forms of torture in Haiti. Kashkett went on to present the tools that could be used to confront such crimes and abuse, such as bilateral diplomacy, multilateral engagement, supplying foreign aid, making the issue public and, in the case of the United States, applying economic sanctions to violators.

During his short talk, he presented the theme of human rights from a very methodical point of view, and gave examples of human rights that should be observed, including the prevention of slavery and torture, freedom of expression and movement and basic human dignity, among many others.

Kashkett emphasized the power of youth to change the thinking and consciousness of society, stressing that youth involvement is key to promoting meaningful change.

Closing Plenary panelist, Adam Finck of Invisible Children, shares a list of children kidnapped from one village in Central Africa. He closed by talking about his hopes for the future, and changes possible through the involvement of youth in global issues. (Photo by Natasha Thomson)

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Closing Plenary panelist, Adam Finck of Invisible Children, shares a list of children kidnapped from one village in Central Africa. He closed by talking about his hopes for the future, and changes possible through the involvement of youth in global issues. (Photo by Natasha Thomson)
Donde Hay Cambio

Nuevos Americanos, Nuevas Vidas

Por Ruth Natalia Nevarez Zambada, IMAN

Desde el comienzo de la “Nuevos Americanos, Nuevas Vidas,” todos en la audiencia lograron percibir la importancia del tránsito. Walter Lam condujo el tema con gran motivación y de manera muy inspiradora. Lam es el fundador de la Alianza de Asistencia Africana (“Alliance for African Assistance”) donde mediante su experiencia de refugiado nos describe el propósito claro de esta organización.

En principio, durante su juventud, el experimentaba de manera variada décadas que nadie como ser humano debe pasar. Formaba parte de una comunidad donde la vida no era segura en lo absoluto y las personas sobrevivían, por ello que carecían de medicamentos, doctores, además de existir un tremendo número de abusos y secuestros.

La vida de un refugiado ya a partir de una catástrofe o guerra. Viviendo en esas condiciones llevan consigo problemas internos, separación de familias, y profundas heridas que marcan la vida de millones de personas en todo el mundo. Las heridas después de una guerra son difíciles de superar o de sobrellevar.

Es por eso que Walter Lam, poco a poco, realizó esta organización por la cual ayuda a personas como algún día él fue ayudado, teniendo estas personas así, una ayuda, un soporte para empezar una nueva vida. La mayoría de las ocasiones, solo unas pocas personas se salvan de salir de esta situación. Pero si algunas personas se salvan, hay esperanza en ayudar a quienes no han podido ser salvados. Hay 50 millones de refugiados en países como Afganistán, Colombia, Sudan, Somalia, e Irak y aproximadamente 2 millones de personas víctimas de la guerra. Ahora hay esperanza en ayudar a quienes son menos afortunados que nosotros.

Esperamos que este artículo nos ayude a recordar la importancia de la ayuda y el amor, como lo demuestran estas personas que luchan día a día por llegar al éxito.

Nuevos Americanos, Nuevas Vidas

Por Aneesha Bhogal, Molly, y Shelley Boniwell

Estudiantes escuchan a Aneesha Bhogal y Shelley Boniwell hablar sobre Daraja Academy en Kenia. (Fotografía por Frances Chen)

“Cuando una puerta se cierra, otra se abre. Sin embargo, a menudo miramos con mucho pesar a la puerta cerrada y no vemos la puerta que se ha abierto para nosotros.”

—Alexander Graham Bell

La Academia Daraja

Aun hay esperanza si hay gente que se preste a ayudar a quienes sufren de hambre. Desde hace muchos años, esta problemática ha estado atrayendo más atención debido al incremento del número de casos violentos relacionados con ella. En el documental de WorldLink Donde Hay Cambio del Mundo: Una Escuela de Mujeres Jóvenes en Kenia, Alice Nyawira Njonjo, una niña de quince años de edad, revela los horrores que presentó entre las diferentes tribus.

En el cortometraje, que se estrenó este año en la 15ª reunión local de jóvenes, llamada “Youth Town Meeting,” Njonjo explica que a los grupos étnicos le se han indicado que se deben matar los unos con los otros, si en algún momento se encuentran con un miembro de un grupo adversario. El problema se hizo público en el 2007 después de la elección en Kenia, en la que Mwai Kibaki, un Kiluyi, fue reelegido como presidente. Los rebeldes insatisfechos de las otras tribus comenzaron una rebelión, que condujo a la muerte de más de 1,500 habitantes.

Estos viejos conflictos que están profundamente arraigados son los que mantienen al país lejos de la paz y del progreso. Cada persona es afectada enormemente, especialmente a las mujeres. En muchas partes de Kenia, las mujeres se han visto como menos valiosas que los hombres. Al igual que varios países a nivel mundial, muchas mujeres han sido forzadas a estar en la casa para limpiar y cuidar a sus niños. En Kenya, las mujeres dedican la gran mayoría de su tiempo a los quehaceres de la casa y otras actividades, como viajar largas distancias para recoger agua.

Jason y Jenni Doherty tenían conocimiento sobre esto. Jason, un graduado de la Universidad de San Diego y ex alumno del programa WorldLink, sabía que quería regresar a África después de trabajar en Tanzania, un año después de graduarse de la universidad. El estaba destinado al ver que muchas mujeres jóvenes y entusiastas de la escuela primaria se esforzaban mucho para conseguir buenas calificaciones (muchas lo lograban); aun así, sin importar sus resultados, la pobreza les prevenía de la escuela secundaria. De hecho, muchas de ellas terminaban recurrir a la prostitución para sostener el hogar. Para Jason, esto era una situación muy triste; sin embargo, esto podría tener una solución. Así fue como la Academia Daraja nació.

La Academia Daraja es un internado gratuito en Nanyuki, Kenia, que les proporciona un nivel de educación secundaria, habilidades de liderazgo y la guía para hacer un cambio positivo en su comunidad a las jóvenes con buenas calificaciones. Estadísticamente, la razón principal de que muchos niños sufren de hambre se debe al nivel de educación limitado de la madre; y de acuerdo con la página de Web de la Academia Daraja, existen cerca de 130 millones de jóvenes a nivel mundial que no están en el colegio y un 70% de ellos son niñas.

A las jóvenes se las da la hospitalidad, cuidado de salud, y otros servicios; su falta podrían ser un impedimento debido a la situación económica. La Academia Daraja actualmente patrocina a más de 100 jovencitas de Kenia, procedentes de veinticuatro tribus y de cuatro religiones. Esta academia fue financiada por la Fundación Educativa Carr (“Carr Educational Foundation”), la cual fue fundada en el 2007 por Jason y Jenni Doherty. Después de la recaudación de fondos y de la conformación de la junta de directores, la Academia Daraja recibió sus primeras veintiséis estudiantes en el 2009.

Las oradoras de “Youth Town Meeting,” Anesha Bhogal y Shelley Boniwell, quienes ayudaron en la producción del documental de WorldLink, nos relataron sus experiencias como voluntarias en la Academia Daraja. Bhogal y Boniwell, estudiantes graduados de postgrado de la Escuela de Liderazgo y de Ciencias Educativas de la Universidad de San Diego, comentaron que su viaje fue la forma perfecta de conectarse con la juventud internacional. No sólo su visita y su trabajo voluntario beneficiaron a la escuela de Kenia y a sus estudiantes, sino que también se desarrolló un fuerte sentido de unidad. Fue muy reconfortante escuchar a las personas que hablan visitado a la academia, y aprender del cariño y la pasión que esas jóvenes demostraban. Hablaron muchas sonrisas y abrazos.

Mientras que muchas estudiantes de nuestra época necesitan ser sacados forzosamente de la escuela cada mañana, las jóvenes del Daraja se despertaron entusiastamente a las 5:00 a.m todos los días para organizar sus camas, restregar el piso y lavar su ropa. De ahí a partir de ahí, se les sirve el desayuno, y una vez que terminan, un nuevo día en el colegio empieza. La escuela pretende canalizar la inteligencia de las jóvenes de tal forma de que, una vez se gradúen, ellas puedan regresar a sus hogares y hagan un cambio positivo en sus comunidades – los cambios que las jóvenes quieren ver. La Academia Daraja lleva a cabo varios clubes y cursos, como “Mujeres de Integridad, Fortaleza, y Esperanza” (WISH), con el fin de fortalecer a las jóvenes y fomentar el reconocimiento de la diversidad. Molly, una estudiante de Daraja de trece años, dijo que iba a asistir a la escuela para que así pudieran cambiar su comunidad y a su familia.

Aunque no se indique, se puede pensar que al final de los días, las chicas de la Academia Daraja van a la cama con una enorme sonrisa dibujada en sus caras, listas para que el sol salga de nuevo. Sus inmensos corazones y determinación debe ser una inspiración para todos. Ellas demuestran que tu entorno no dicta quién eres y en que te convertirás. Incluso en las circunstancias más terribles, aquellos que realmente deseen salir adelante encontrarán la manera de hacerlo. Daraja les ha dado esperanza a estas jóvenes y les ha permitido volver a escribir sus vidas y sus futuros dramáticamente.

Para los estudiantes que asisten el “Youth Town Meeting,” es posible que haya sido difícil reforzarse al conflicto étnico de Kenia. No obstante, las guerras de pandillas y la pobreza son términos que conocemos muy bien. Mientras que los sistemas de educación son diferentes en cada país, muchas personas pueden tener su trayectoria educativa obstructa debido a la falta de ingresos que les impide alcanzar sus sueños. Ellas han demostrado que en un ambiente de paz y a pesar de las circunstancias más adversas, ellas pueden escribir su propio futuro. Ellas pueden demostrar que en un ambiente de paz y a pesar de las circunstancias más adversas, ellas pueden escribir su propio futuro.


La Academia Daraja


Estudiantes escuchan a Aneesha Bhogal y Shelley Boniwell hablar sobre Daraja Academy en Kenia. (Fotografía por Frances Chen)


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La imagen muestra una escena del documental "Excluido". En la escena, Tony y Tomás, dos chicos de la comunidad LGBT, hablan sobre su experiencia con el trabajo infantil, la esclavitud y el tráfico de personas. Lisa Nunn, directora del documental, habla sobre la importancia de la lucha contra la discriminación y la necesidad de abordar estos problemas desde una perspectiva de género. Se menciona la importancia de promover el desarrollo integral humano y de apoyar a las empresas justas con el fin de reducir los problemas de trabajo infantil, tráfico de personas y esclavitud. Se destaca la necesidad de un papel activo en la lucha contra la discriminación y la importancia de promover la igualdad de derechos para todos.
WorldLink Workshops and Youth Forums

The WorldLink Program of the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice also offers smaller, specialized Workshops and Youth Forums throughout the year. Globally minded youth receive the opportunity to engage in dialogue with fellow students, as well as international leaders and experts.

In April 2012, the University of San Diego (USD) was pleased to welcome His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama as part of a two-day symposium entitled “Compassion Without Borders.” To prepare for his visit, WorldLink hosted a local workshop to create peace banners and a peace book filled with messages from the youth of San Diego and Mexico. The students’ inspiration for their messages came after touring Michael Collopy’s exhibit “Architects of Peace,” through which Collopy photographed over 75% of the world’s greatest peacemakers. Nancy Young, Executive Director of Art Trek, Inc., served as guest speaker for the April WorldLink Workshop. The peace banners and peace book were presented to His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama by Rishika Daryanani, first year USD student and WorldLink alumna. Concurrently, the youth of the Daraja Academy made peace banners in Kenya to show that peace can be felt around the world.

Dr. Qamar-ul Huda
Dr. Huda is a Senior Program Officer in the Religion and Peacemaking Center and a scholar of Islam at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP). His areas of expertise are Islamic theology, intellectual history, ethics, comparative ethics, the language of violence, conflict resolution and non-violence in contemporary Islam. WorldLink welcomed Dr. Huda as guest speaker of the First WorldLink Workshop of the 2011-2012 year, “The Right to be Human.”

Maria Luisa Gambale
Gambale is the co-director of the 2011 award-winning documentary “Sarahleh,” the story of singer, rapper, and activist Sister Fa, who travels to rural Senegal to try to eradicate the practice of female genital cutting, which she suffered as a child. A first of her kind, Sister Fa began rapping in 2000, becoming Senegal’s first female rapper. She uses her music to raise awareness about women’s issues and to inspire and empower young women in Senegal. Gambale served as keynote speaker of WorldLink’s 2012 Spring Youth Forum.

Manjula Pradeep
As the executive director of Navasarjan Trust, a grassroots Dalit rights organization based in India’s Gujarat state, Pradeep is a respected and prominent woman leader of the Dalit movement. She has taken on the two most significant social injustices in India, devoting her life to championing the dignity and rights of her own community. Her voice is an amplifier for those whom society silences, or simply ignores, Pradeep served as guest speaker for the WorldLink Workshop in October 2011.

Rashad Zaydan
Zaydan of Iraq is the founder of Knowledge for Iraqi Women Society (K4IWS). Through this organization, Dr. Zaydan seeks to rebuild the tattered lives of Iraqi widows, women and children through educational, financial, occupational and medical services. Alongside Manjula Pradeep, WorldLink welcomed Zaydan as guest speaker for its October 2011 WorldLink Workshop.

The Dalai Lama Through Our Eyes
By Evan Agarwal, Mollie Appel-Turner and Madison Ledger, Roosevelt Middle School

In late April, San Diego welcomed one of the greatest peacemakers of all time: His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. His time in San Diego was spent giving speeches on issues close to his heart. From compassion to the state of our environment, he gave his insight. Those who attended his talks and watched him via live streaming learned many lessons. The 14th Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of Tibet, a small country north east of the Himalayas. How did he become a leader, and how did he become the spiritual leader of Tibet? With this question, the 14th Dalai Lama is born.

The following letter chronicles the reaction of three seventh grade students from Roosevelt Middle School, who attended the 15th Youth Town Meeting and the Peace Banner Workshop, as well as a talk given by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama during his first public visit to San Diego.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama returns to San Diego, which will be part of the problem, be part of the solution. This was one of the many underlying messages from the Dalai Lama’s talk.

All in all, it was a remarkable experience, and the words of the Dalai Lama will stay with the three of us forever. He had a great sense of humor, and it was an amazing opportunity for all who had a chance to see him. We hope that His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama returns to San Diego, and gives others the chance to learn from his wisdom and experience the presence of one of the greatest peacemakers of our time.

“Human beings, indeed all sentient beings, have the right to pursue happiness and live in peace and freedom.”

~His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

By Evan Agarwal, Mollie Appel-Turner and Madison Ledger
human beings, indeed all sentient beings, have the right to pursue happiness and live in peace.

The right to be human is, first and foremost, the right to be known. He has worked in Africa, his victims remain nearly unknown in the United States and other western countries.

directioning attention to the theme of this year’s youth town meeting, finck explained, “the right to be human is, first and foremost, the right to be known.” he has worked in Uganda, Congo and the Central African Republic. After visiting several communities and receiving long lists of missing children that Kony had cruelly and forcibly taken as his, Finck decided to join the Invisible Children (IC) organization in San Diego. In Africa, IC works with individuals that have been affected by the LRA. Their programs provide plans for the improvement of schools and education, as well as financial aid.

in the United States, IC encourages the government to raise its voices and bring Kony to the public spotlight. As stated on their website, they want us to “do more than just watch.” despite the heavy topic, Adam Finck’s message was one of empowerment and hope. He pointed out that as individuals, we have the power to cause change. By choosing to take action and support causes we feel are just, we can make the world a better place.

the final speaker of the panel was high school senior Nina Church, co-founder of Nika Water – a company that donates 100% of its profits to raise awareness and initiate clean water projects in impoverished countries. She began with the simple question, “What would you do with a free afternoon?” Though many of us have the power to do anything we want because of the country we live in, the situation is very different for millions of people around the world.

The main goal of Nika Water is to raise awareness because, while fresh water is something that most of us take for granted, many zonas all over the world consider it a luxury. As expressed by Church, lack of freedom stems from discrimination, intolerance and injustice. Thus, Nika works towards providing clean water to these regions and end the poverty cycle, all done while staying eco-friendly.

Finding your passion is everything she advised. For Church, this passion was helping alleviate water problems in the developing world and creating a business model that could help promote social change. By channeling her inspiration, Church and her family created Nika Water, turning a dream of making a difference into a reality.

Church spoke with a fervent drive that made the crowd cheer more than once. They cheered not only because she shared her company’s statistics and on-going impact, but also because she took us through an emotional journey. Her words were rousing and touching, and she invited us to take the first step towards something great, for “it’s ordinary people, who do extraordinary things,” calling on every student in the room to follow their own passion and take action.

together, the speakers of the closing plenary helped summarize the message of this year’s youth town meeting: the protection of human rights can be difficult, but it should not be ignored. Youth can make a difference by working together and choosing to stand up for what is right. Until then, the problems of today will remain.

Everything heard and learned is not meant to stay on the USDP campus. It needs to be planted and nourished within us and not fade with time. In the end, progress will occur. Not because of those who are passive observers to the injustices of our time, but rather those who make the decision to put an end to oppression, discrimination and intolerance. As youth move forward into the future, it is our responsibility to find a sense of unity through the diversity that makes us human. This new generation must cherish the ties that hold us together instead of dwelling on what keeps us apart.

Nina Church speaks during the Closing Plenary at WorldLink’s Youth Town Meeting. (Photo by Victoria Acosta)
This year’s Youth Town Meeting inspired my classmates and me to start a club at school built on the ideas we got from the conference!
– 11th grade student, Sweetwater High School

After attending the Youth Town Meeting, I have a much greater understanding on global issues, and a huge appreciation for efforts to help and solve problems. WorldLink calls for action and follows through.
– 11th grade student, Sunset High School

Today was filled with inspiration and motivation for me to continue in my path in trying to make a difference.
– 12th grade student, Escondido High School

It can be a great challenge for us (as teenagers) to do something different, to take the first step, but WorldLink gives an opportunity to involve teenagers with global issues.
– 12th grade student, IMAN

Being able to join other students from different schools, who have some concern about what goes on in the world makes me feel like I’m not the only person who cares. One person can make a difference, but it’s a stronger power when it’s more than just one person, and I felt that power when I sat down in that room and listened to everyone speak. It was a beautiful experience and I’m glad I was able to be a part of it!
– 11th grade student, Lincoln High School

Being close and interacting with students of different ages and cultures made me feel that if we really want to accomplish something or make a difference in society, we need to join together and forget the differences between us.
– Student, Federal Lazaro Cardenas

I felt like my voice was being heard when I was allowed to offer my opinion and ask questions, especially since adults are usually involved in global issues. It was great to be able to interact with the speakers and have actual conversations about the issues we all have to face.
– 11th grade student, MAAC Community Charter School

It was an honor for me to not only learn about what other adolescents are accomplishing in the world, but also to be able to participate in a conference alongside them.
– 11th grade student, San Diego Early/Middle College