YouthActionNet

FELLOWS
We are pleased to introduce the 2006 YouthActionNet Fellows. Each is working to address an urgent need in his or her community — preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS, advocating for the rights of women and the disabled, feeding the hungry, rehabilitating child soldiers, creating educational opportunities for orphaned children. The list goes on. Each is the recipient of a YouthActionNet award.

The term “social entrepreneur” has come into our vocabulary over the last 15 to 20 years. It connotes those special energies and talents that creative and innovative leaders bring to the social arena.

In fact, two out of the last three Nobel Laureates — Wangari Matthai of Kenya and Mohammed Yunus of Bangladesh — are such social entrepreneurs. The rationale for their prizes, beyond their phenomenal leadership and zeal, comes from the recognition that true peace exists when communities are improving their lot and when human beings are developing their lives.

Launched by the International Youth Foundation (IYF) and Nokia in 2001, YouthActionNet honors 20 young social entrepreneurs annually in recognition of their far-reaching contributions to their local and global communities.

The following pages spotlight the 2006 YouthActionNet Fellows. Each has developed an innovative local solution to addressing an urgent global challenge. One uses music as a peace-building tool. Another relies on the experience of former drug addicts to prevent substance abuse. Some are leveraging the power of the Internet, while still others have formed win-win partnerships with government, businesses, and civil society organizations.

We are grateful to this year’s Fellows for their contributions and the example — and hope — they offer other youth.
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— Shakti Shali Ghimire, 24
Founder, Idea Action
Nepal

“We see communication among youth from both sides as an essential component of peace making efforts and try to contribute as much as we can.”

— Michal Eskanazi, 25
Program Manager,
Young Israeli Forum for Cooperation
Israel

PABLO EZEQUIEL WINOKUR
Argentina

Pablo Ezequiel Winokur, age 24, created Opinion Sur Joven, a free online monthly magazine, to promote youth political participation, entrepreneurship, and leadership in Latin America. The magazine encourages its readers to be engaged in their communities and think critically about the issues they deal with on a daily basis at school, at work, and in their personal lives. Most of the articles are written by young volunteers, occasionally supplemented by pieces from experts in various fields. Recent articles have focused on volunteer opportunities, the role of legislative elections, and youth entrepreneurship. Most importantly, articles always contain steps for action. Opinion Sur Joven currently reaches over 1,000 subscribers across Latin America and is in the process of expanding its network.
Some 30,000 Armenian youth are disabled, with most living in isolation and facing discrimination in terms of access to employment, education, and political participation. Through his work with Unison NGO, Roman Osipyan, 26, seeks to raise public awareness of issues facing disabled youth and promote their full inclusion in Armenian society. His project publishes educational materials to sensitize the public around disability issues. It also created the first Online Disability Resource Center devoted to connecting young Armenians with disabilities. Most recently, Roman has worked to eliminate stereotypes in the media related to the disabled. “Most media outlets describe those with disabilities as passive recipients of charity, rather than as active members of society,” he says. “This prevents their inclusion in the mainstream community and leads to violations of their human rights.”

David Bacon, age 26, launched Carpets for Communities to empower Cambodian women and their families to break the cycle of poverty by training them to produce carpets, which are then sold at prices that guarantee the women living wages. The program is run in partnership with a carpet factory in Thailand and a fair trade outlet in Sydney, Australia. A critical goal of Carpets for Communities is to reduce the number of child workers at risk for human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Says David, “Our intention is that some of the children we’ve put in school will eventually go to university and use the skills they have gained to contribute to their community — to work on the same problems that were holding them back.”
CINDY JIN & HOLLY HOU  
China

As China develops, more and more of its citizens are seeking volunteer opportunities. “But,” says twenty-year-old Cindy Jin, “in a society that offers few incentives for people to volunteer and even negatively stigmatizes people who get involved in volunteer work, many hesitate or are even embarrassed to get involved.” To help change this situation, Cindy, Holly Hou, and several of their classmates founded the Northeastern University Volunteer Club. The Club connects students interested in volunteering with organizations in need of help. Currently, it is working with four schools for the blind, deaf, and disabled, as well as with one orphanage.

GAUTAM GUPTA  
India

Founded by Gautam Gupta, Activists in Action for Women Aid and Justice (AAWAJ) mobilizes youth to end violence against women and girls. “When women are molested or abused, they have nowhere to go and are often told by family members and government authorities to simply keep quiet,” explains Gautam. AAWAJ works through Rapid Action Teams, groups of student volunteers who raise awareness in the community about violence against women, patrol areas where women are often targeted, and spearhead petitions and other legal actions to seek justice for victims. AAWAJ also organizes Legal Camps in community centers, schools, and colleges where women can seek help. Over 100 youth are now part of Rapid Action Teams and 18 legal camps have been established with the help of local lawyers.
Vikram Laishram, 23, founded Better Treatment Equals Better Life to improve the health of the people of Manipur, where rates of drug addiction are among the highest in India. With a program developed entirely by recovering drug users and tailored to meet the needs of youth, Better Treatment Equals Better Life provides young people with drug counseling and education on preventing HIV/AIDS and reducing high-risk behaviors. More than 300 youth have also been trained to serve as peer educators for other affected youth. Says Vikram, “Our goal is to ensure that every youth seeking to recover from drugs is offered support to attain good health and training to help them educate other youth.”

Michal Eskanazi, 25, organizes conferences and projects designed to encourage pragmatic discussions between Israeli and Palestinian youth that allow them to see beyond fixed stereotypes. “We see communication among youth from both sides as essential to peace making efforts in the region and try to contribute as much as we can,” says Michal. YIFC brings together young leaders and engages them in dialogue, not only with each other, but also with policy makers, government officials, and leading scholars in hopes of contributing to the realization of sustainable peace.
**SELENE BIFFI**  
*Italy*

Selene Biffi, age 23, created Youth Action for Change (YAC) as an online initiative by youth for youth. “Most young people really want to make change,” says Selene. “The challenge is how to reach those who lack information and resources.” To meet this need, Youth Action for Change provides youth in more than 80 countries with free online training modules and courses taught by their peers. At present, there are 20 local YAC chapters across the globe tackling issues such as youth empowerment and inclusion, the environment, human rights, and public health. Youth Action for Change’s efforts have been recognized by UNICEF, the International Youth Parliament, and Oxfam, among others.

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**DANIEL NDUATI**  
*Kenya*

In Kenya, there are 250,000 street children; 60,000 in Nairobi alone. Having lived on the streets himself, Daniel Nduati, 26, founded the Emmanuel Boyz Rescue Center to provide a safe haven for homeless boys. Many of the city’s most vulnerable children are forced onto the street as a result of poverty caused by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In fact, 75 percent of the boys at the Rescue Center come from homes affected by HIV/AIDS. The Center provides them with quality health care, ensures they are enrolled in school, and offers on-site vocational training. “The boys believe in me because I can talk about my own experience and how I’ve changed,” says Daniel.
ALEXEI BUZU  
Moldova

At 18, Alexei Buzu founded Geronimo, an organization that promotes youth leadership and participation in community development. At 19, he was the youngest elected councilman in his district of Criuleni. Since then, Geronimo has successfully advocated for the adoption of a youth strategy for the Criuleni district and has worked to mainstream the concept of gender equity in the community. Its most recent project, the “Kindergarten that Deserves Children’s Smiles” repairs local kindergarten facilities. Through exhibits, town hall-style meetings, and other events, Alexei and his team have transformed citizen apathy and frustration into concerted action. “People have a mindset that there’s nothing you can do to fix things,” says Alexei, now 22. “I try to convince them of what can be done.”

SHAKTI SHALI GHIMIRE  
Nepal

Shakti Shali Ghimire, 24, founded Idea Action with the vision of creating equal access to information among Nepali youth. At the same time, he hoped to empower youth and provide them with valuable skills. “Our aim is to develop a culture of peace and nonviolence and encourage youth to volunteer and engage in their communities,” says Shakti. Idea Action promotes the use of ICT through advocacy, awareness raising, trainings, and publications at the local, national, and regional levels. Idea Forum, an initiative of Idea Action, provides a virtual platform for Nepali youth to connect with other young people around the world to access resources, raise awareness of their projects, share ideas, and discuss challenges. Idea Action has also established an ICT Training Center where under-privileged youth receive technical training. Idea Action was recognized by the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS) and has been home to the Southeast Asia Youth Secretariat since 2003.

Idea Action  
www.idea.org.np
OKOLIE UGOCHUKWU
Nigeria

Twenty-three year-old Okolie Ugochukwu founded Youth Leadership for Health to educate young people about HIV/AIDS with a focus on fostering responsible behavioral change. Okolie, whose brother died from HIV/AIDS, believes that a lack of basic education is a major factor contributing to the spread of the disease. To address this need, Youth Leadership for Health carries out monthly workshops for youth and adults in rural communities. The program also supports members of the Orsuihiteukwa community who are infected with HIV/AIDS. Youth Leadership for Health works in collaboration with grassroots health organizations, faith-based groups, and community officials to ensure that as many community members as possible are reached. In 2005, Okolie was recognized by LEAP Africa with its National Youth Leadership Award for his HIV/AIDS prevention initiatives.

RAMZI ABUREDWAN
Palestine

At the age of eight, Ramzi Aburedwan lost a friend to a stray bullet near his home in a Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank. After years of anger and frustration, he found a new way to express himself — through music — and has since become an internationally renowned musician. Now 25, Ramzi founded Al Kamandjâti to provide other refugee youth with a message of hope and tolerance through music. “Music is the universal language that everybody all over the world can understand,” he says. “It is above words, so when human links are broken music can be a bridge.” Al Kamandjâti establishes music schools where refugee youth learn to play instruments. It also organizes public concerts and an annual workshop, which brings together children from refugee camps and allows them to express their creativity.
ANDREA ARGINTARIU
Romania

Andrea Argintariu, 25, is founder of the Career Development Center, the first of its kind in Timisoara, Romania. The center serves over 10,000 students and graduates, helping them to identify employment opportunities and providing them with career counseling and information about the labor market. The project also developed The Career Guide, which provides young people with valuable tools related to securing employment, internships, volunteering, starting a business, and investing in the stock market. Says Andrea, “Our vision is that all students in Romania will get to know themselves better, to plan their career, and to create a life that moves and inspires them.”

KATARINA ZUGMAN
Slovenia

Launched by Katarina Zugman, age 26, We Are What About You? (WAWAY), works with young people who have been separated from their families and now live in youth homes. Because many of the youth have emotional or behavioral problems, they are often shunned by the community. WAWAY strives to reconnect the youth with their communities by mentoring them and helping them to discover their talents through creative workshops and summer camps. “Youth from residential homes are often labeled as lazy or spoiled,” says Katarina. “Through our work, we have found these youngsters just need stimulation, support, and opportunities for growth.” The project works to eliminate negative stereotypes and improve community perceptions of the youth by creating films, CDs, and other materials to raise community awareness about the situation of youth living in residential homes.
ABDINASIR NUR
Somalia

Abdinasir Nur, 24, founded Somali Youth for Peace and Democracy (SYPD) to mobilize the nation’s youth to participate in social activities that promote positive values. Its signature project is its workshop, which teaches youth about human rights, peace, and democracy. In partnership with other local organizations, SYPD provides free primary school education for more than 100 orphans in Mogadishu. In a country where thousands of young people are recruited into warlord militias, SYPD provides youth with technical and vocational skills training so that they can become economically independent, productive citizens. “Children and youth make up more than half the population of my country,” says Abdinasir. “Many live on the streets; some lost their parents. We empower and unite them in order to form a peaceful and democratic Somalia.”

 Promoting democracy and an end to violence

ANA LUISA AHERN, JESSICA MOCKRIN & JUSTIN OTERO
United States

Together, Ana Luisa Ahern, Jessica Mockrin, and Justin Otero founded the Organization for Youth Empowerment (OYE), which supports and empowers orphaned and impoverished children and youth in Honduras. OYE believes that education is the key to improving self-esteem, increasing life options, and achieving financial stability for at-risk youth. Working with COPROME, an orphanage for abandoned children in El Progreso, OYE provides young people with education, health, and art programs. Youth receive high school scholarships and are educated about how to avoid critical health risks, such as HIV/AIDS. “I’ve grown a lot and learned to take initiative,” says Ana Luisa of her experience in developing OYE. “All the things we’re trying to teach the young people, I’ve learned by being here.”

 Empowering disadvantaged children and youth

Somali Youth for Peace and Democracy
www.sypd.org

Organization for Youth Empowerment
www.oyehonduras.org
DANA FRASZ
United States

Hunger and food insecurity affects more than 30 million Americans. Meanwhile, over 96 billion pounds of edible food, with a value of $100 billion, is discarded each year. Empty Bellies, founded by Dana Frasz, age 22, seeks to reduce food waste and hunger while simultaneously increasing community awareness about alternatives. Every evening, the project’s student volunteers drive to eight donors in Bronxville, New York to collect food that would otherwise be thrown away. Students also collect leftover food from campus dining halls. These are then brought to “Part of the Solution,” a kitchen that feeds 500 people daily. In the future, Dana would like to see the project expanded to other communities.

MARK HANIS
United States

Mark Hanis, 24, is the founder of the Genocide Intervention Network (GI-Net), which empowers communities to prevent and stop genocide. GI-Net pursues a three-fold strategy of “Educate, Advocate, Donate” to provide citizens with tools to stop genocide and create the first permanent anti-genocide constituency. Its current focus is ending the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan, where more than 300,000 people have been killed and two million more displaced. Through its 400-plus student chapters, GI-Net has raised over $250,000 for civilian protection and successfully lobbied local representatives to pass Darfur legislation. The key to GI-Net’s efforts is making information actionable. Says Mark, “You not only need to tell people there’s a genocide happening but show them what they can do about it.”
Mobilizing America’s Youth, founded by David Beaumont Smith, is an all-partisan organization dedicated to educating, empowering, and energizing young people to increase their civic engagement and political participation. Through conferences, seminars, and publications, Mobilizing America’s Youth shows young people how public policy affects their lives and how they, in turn, can affect public policy. “We don’t push issues,” says David, 26. “We train young people to find their own issues. It all starts with dialogue and reflection.” The organization works through 25 Mobilizer Teams across the U.S., which provide youth with opportunities to debate issues and connect with their local representatives. Between 2002 and 2004, Mobilizing America’s Youth registered over 50,000 youth voters.

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Founder, Mobilizing America’s Youth
USA
About YouthActionNet

YouthActionNet is a program that invests in the power and promise of young people to create positive change. Through its dynamic website (www.youthactionnet.org), awards, customized training programs, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities, YouthActionNet offers young social entrepreneurs ideas, resources, and connections to like minds around the world. Launched with generous support from Nokia in 2001, YouthActionNet is an initiative of the International Youth Foundation.

About the International Youth Foundation

IYF believes young people possess the power to shape the future. To learn, work, thrive, and lead, they need access to programs and resources that inspire and challenge them. IYF is a global nonprofit organization that makes this possible. Today in 70 countries, IYF collaborates with businesses, governments, and civil society organizations that share a common desire to improve the life conditions and prospects of young people. Together, IYF and its partners build effective, sustainable, and scalable programs that positively impact the lives of young people worldwide.