



## Global Voices: Celebrating International Development Week 2008

### Youth plant trees to offset greenhouse gases

Canada World Youth

The Canada World Youth (CWY) Green Miles program is a six-month educational program with a focus on climate change, clean air and environmental responsibility. Based on CWY's model, with a phase in Canada and overseas, the program promotes environmental awareness, accountability and stewardship through tree-planting and the delivery of environmental educational workshops. In 2007-2008 the program is hosted in Sudbury, Ontario, and Kimende Township, Kenya, Africa, and will run from September 2007 to February 2008.

The program is divided into three components: environmental education for youth, tree planting to carbon-neutralize the program's flights, and public education and community engagement. These components offer participants and community members the opportunity to learn both theoretical information and practical hands-on applications on leading greener sustainable lifestyles.

#### *Environmental education for youth*

At the beginning of the Canadian and Kenyan phases the young volunteers spend one intensive week devoted to environmental learning. This year, in Sudbury, the Green Miles participant attended several presentations regarding local environmental action as well as global environmental action, participated in a stream clean up with the Junction Creek Stewardship Committee, went on a tour of the Sudbury Land Reclamation site, participated in several interactive activities to understand the benefits of tree planting, and received training from Earth Day Canada to become Eco-Mentors and deliver workshops in schools.

From December 2007, the young volunteers continued their environmental education and action in Kimende, Kenya, doing similar activities. The exchange nature of the program gives participants the unique occasion to compare environmental regulations and practices in their two different host communities. Tree planting to carbon-neutralize the program's flights

A primary objective of the Green Miles program is to root youth in environmental responsibility and sustainable transportation. This is realized by engaging the participants in tree planting in order to offset the greenhouse gases emitted by their international flights. The number of trees planted by each participant directly correlates with the amount of green house gases emitted by their flights between Canada and the partner country. By planting trees, the young volunteers take accountability for the air pollution produced by their air transportation practices. This activity, combined with the installation of near-by plaques to explain the carbon offsetting endeavor, enables youth to spread environmental consciousness to others and inspire others to take responsibility for the effects of their actions on the planet.

In Canada, the 2007 team planted 3,000 trees on the Sudbury Land Reclamation Site, a site where thousands of hectares of land have been left bare for over fifty years, following severe deforestation, wildfires and mining activities. Planting here allowed the young volunteers to learn about environmental issues such as deforestation, fire and mining, and serves as a notable example of reforestation efforts and environmental preservation efforts. In Kenya, the group will plant trees in partnership with KENVO, an award-winning community-based organization who specializes in forest rehabilitation projects.

#### *Public education and community engagement*



In the Sudbury area the youth used their newly acquired skills to engage community groups and schools in interactive workshops and presentations. Participants volunteered at the Sudbury Children's Water Festival, organizing activities to inform children about the importance of water. A separate event was organized to facilitate the collaboration with youth from the Otesha Project, in order to network and share best practices regarding environmental projects and education. Finally, a dinner banquet was organized in mid-November with 80 members of the Sudbury community as well as international guests to highlight the lessons and actions of the Green Miles program.

#### *Origin of project*

In 2005 CWY's Environmental Committee launched an environmental impact assessment to evaluate the ecological footprint of the organization. Findings clearly identified that CWY's principal source of green house gases stem from the programs' international traveling practices. With the purpose of reducing their negative impact on the planet, the Green Miles project was created in the spring of 2006 by a volunteer youth intern. It underwent a pilot project in the autumn of 2006, which resulted in three CWY groups successfully planting over 1,250 trees in Granby, Quebec, and Fergus-Elora and Thornbury, Ontario. In 2007, the Green Miles project evolved into the Green Miles program, growing from a small initiative to a six-month intensive environmental training program.

#### *Impact of project*

Increasing numbers of air passengers are offsetting their share of aviation pollution by paying a third party organization or company to plant trees, such as The Carbon Neutral Company. Participants of the Green Miles program, however, plant the trees themselves, thus assuming full responsibility and taking on every step of the carbon neutralizing process, from the calculation of emitted greenhouse gases to the manual labor of actually planting the trees. The Green Miles program is based on CWY's model of non-formal education and interactive learning, which has proven its benefits over the years. By getting their hands dirty, participants truly interact with the Earth, developing a deeper relationship by nurturing and caring for it. The connection between the polluter/planter and the Earth is as direct as possible.

#### *Training environmental leaders from Canada and around the world*

Another distinctive aspect of this program is the reciprocal nature of the CWY programs and the partnership principles exercised to work with communities and partners in Canada and overseas. Canadian participants, along with their international counterparts, work collaboratively and plant trees and deliver environmental workshops in Canada and overseas. It offers participants the chance to acquire environmental information and experience from two very different world locations. Young volunteers therefore come out of the program aware that environmental issues differ from location to location and numerous components – cultural practices, financial accessibility, physical geographical characteristics, leadership, etc. – influence our relationships with the environment. They have a chance to realize that environmental problems and solutions are diverse and global. These concepts provide participants the leadership tools to apply this knowledge locally once they return to their own home communities.

*Canada World Youth (CWY), a non-governmental national organization, offers international educational programs for young people aged 17 to 24. Since 1971 more than 30,000 volunteers from Canada and around the world have participated in CWY programs in 67 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas and Eastern Europe, and close to 700 communities in Canada. Through CWY groups of 18 young people from Canada and other parts of the world live with host families and work together on volunteer projects for six months - three in a Canadian community and three in an exchange country. Participants voluntarily contribute to the well-being of their communities and enjoy a fulfilling international experience, discovering other cultures.*



*For more information about Green Miles visit [www.cwy-icm.org/en/aboutus/green\\_miles](http://www.cwy-icm.org/en/aboutus/green_miles)*