



MEMBER CHARITIES | TELL-A-FRIEND | CONTACT US

SEARCH



MEMBER CHARITY FEATURES

Member Charities

- Where We Work
- Program Areas
- Member Charity Features
- Honors and Awards
- What Others Say About Global Impact

Membership Criteria

Patriot Act

An ongoing series, "Member Charity Features" offers history, program descriptions and firsthand accounts from staff of Global Impact member charities.

International Youth Foundation Helps Young People Close the Hope Gap

Paul Lagasse
December 2007

William Reese might surprise you when he says the biggest challenge facing world youth today isn't education or health, but rather employability.

"If you have a job, you can better take care of those other needs," says Reese, President and CEO of Global Impact member charity **International Youth Foundation (IYF)**. "The employability of this young generation is a social and political challenge as big as anything else out there."

Since 1990, IYF has been helping to address that challenge through its emphasis on positive youth development, stressing education, employability, leadership and health. "Our mission is to help ensure that young people become healthy adults who are civically engaged and ready for work, and who gain the skills they need for lifelong learning," says Reese.

Addressing the Hope Gap



In 2002, Jordan's Queen Rania described a "hope gap" separating the world's people into two groups: those who have a future and those who do not. IYF programs strive to bridge this gap, because young people surrounded by poverty and death may make destructive choices—for themselves and others.

"We need to be doing things for young people because they're the right things to do, not because we're afraid of them becoming criminals or terrorists," says Reese. "On the other hand, kids who aren't working aren't contributing much, are they?"

The program provides disadvantaged young people, ages 16 to 29, with information technology skills that are competitive in the employment market, and with complementary life skills needed to be successful. (Photo: IYF/Colombia)

Although it supports programs worldwide, IYF itself has a small staff—60 in the United States, 20 overseas—because it partners with 46 local organizations that look to IYF for training and capacity building. "We work through a network of well-vetted, local, autonomous organizations with track records," Reese explains. "Our staff provides

[PLEASE DONATE NOW](#) ▶



Global Citizen E-Newsletter
E-mail Address
[Sign Up](#) ▶



▶ Leadership Giving Program

exchange of best practices, identifies usable methodologies and helps with financial resources. It's their program, not ours."

In 2006, IYF provided \$15.6 million to programs in 70 countries that fall into four categories:

- **Education:** Over 125 million children aren't in school. IYF's curriculum development, e-learning and training programs improve the number and quality of educational opportunities.
- **Employability:** Sixty-six million youths are unemployed. IYF's skills development programs build capacity and help prepare them for productive work.
- **Leadership and Engagement:** IYF believes that experience is essential for developing values and leadership skills. IYF's leadership programs promote youth engagement to effect positive social change and active citizenship.
- **Health Education and Awareness:** Approximately 6,000 young people become infected with HIV/AIDS *every day*. IYF's prevention, reproductive health and family planning programs provide knowledge and skills needed to lead healthy lives.

Canine Therapy Program Helps Hospital Patients Make a Connection

Karolina Eckschlagrova, a 19-year-old college student in Prague, Czech Republic, found an innovative way to combine her love of dogs, her life lessons as the daughter of a physician and her experiences working with cancer patients. Three years ago, she rallied a group of friends and applied for—and received—an IYF Make a Connection grant to launch "Not Only People Help," a weekly hospital visitation program in which dogs and their young owners spend time with hospital patients.

Not Only People Help is one of more than 250 Czech youth-led volunteer projects supported through IYF's innovative Make a Connection partnership program. Make a Connection, started in 2000 by the international consumer electronics firm Nokia and IYF, supports community-based life skills programs in 17 countries. The young pet owners of Not Only People Help have trained their dogs to act as bedside companions for cancer, psychiatric and long-term care patients at Motol Hospital, the country's largest medical facility. Petting and playing with the dogs helps patients overcome isolation and feel more positive. The weekly visits are supplemented by special events such as art workshops.

Not Only People Help was successful enough to win a second grant, which increased the number of volunteer handlers, allowing them to receive valuable project management and fundraising training from the local IYF partner organization. Now a member of the Czech Republic's Make a Connection Alumni Club, today Eckschlagrova helps other young people develop their own programs to help make a difference in their local communities.



Through the Dreams Workshop, now in its second phase, teenage volunteers receive training to serve as teachers to their younger peers from disadvantaged communities. During weekly workshops, children explore their creativity, learn to express themselves, and develop relationships with positive role models. (Photo: IYF/Turkey)

[PLEASE DONATE NOW ►](#)

Focusing on "Better Practices"

IYF stresses the principles of effectiveness, scale and sustainability. "We try to focus on what I call the 'better practice' programs," Reese says. "I prefer that term because there's not one best practice around the world. We encourage them to invest in what works to help them go to scale. Why keep it small?"

IYF helps program leaders establish public-private partnerships with corporations seeking social investment opportunities. This distinctive aspect of IYF's mission brings in much-needed investment capital while helping sponsors meet corporate philanthropic goals. One such program is the Make a Connection grant program established by Nokia (see sidebar).

Reese says that more investment is critical—over 1 billion new jobs need to be created to absorb the next generation of young workers, and in some places youth unemployment is already 50 percent. “We’ve got the largest youth cohort in the history of the world today,” he says. “If they’re not employed or employable, there will be real social and political challenges. Fifty percent unemployment is outrageous and untenable if you’re trying to grow out of poverty.”

Even so, Reese is optimistic about the prospects for the up-and-coming generation. “We believe that young people need to be protagonists in their own development,” he says. “We want to provide a sense that they have a stake in their community’s and their countries’ future.”

YouthActionNet™

The YouthActionNet™ Global Fellowship Program is an innovative training and educational program launched by IYF in 2001 that links young people with the tools, resources and contacts they need to launch programs that preserve the environment, advocate for human rights, curb the spread of HIV/AIDS and encourage civic participation.

Every year, YouthActionNet™ selects 20 young social entrepreneurs from all over the world to receive a \$500 stipend and participate in a variety of events including

- A week-long peer training workshop in Washington, DC
- An annual awards ceremony
- Networking opportunities with non-governmental organizations and donor institutions

Last year, YouthActionNet™ undertook the creation of national institutes to bring the experience and opportunities of the international program closer to home for more young entrepreneurs. The national institutes will offer 10-12 month fellowships, small grants, networking opportunities and technical support. The first national institute was launched in Mexico with support from the Sylvan/Laureate Foundation, and IYF expects to launch similar institutes in 15 countries worldwide.

Find out more at www.youthactionnet.org.

[Your help](#) can ensure that IYF continues to make a difference in the lives of youth around the world.

[PLEASE DONATE NOW ▶](#)

▶ [Read More](#) Member Charity Features