



BULLETIN December 2008

international

International Programs

YMCA of Greater Montreal



At the Social Forum of the Americas...

On October 4, 2008, a group of 25 students from AlterUQAM and 25 young members of civil society accompanied by the YMCA of Greater Montreal arrived in Guatemala City for the Social Forum of the Americas. The group was led by Raphaël Canet of UQAM and Caterina Milani of the Montreal YMCA's International Programs. They had been preparing for this moment for the past 8 months; attending workshops, fundraising and bonding into a group.

They arrived in Guatemala City a few days before the October 7 start of the Forum in order to have the opportunity to visit the YMCA of Guatemala, a partner YMCA of the YMCA in Montreal. Staff of the YMCA of Guatemala greeted them at the airport, transported them to their hotel, and later that evening, gave them an introduction to the Forum.

The next day they were taken to see the ruins at Ciudad Antigua and had a presentation on educational challenges in Guatemala by Carlos Aldana, Vice Minister of Education, and Alejandro Melgar, a respected Sociologist.

"They (YMCA of Guatemala) believe in their work and they are not afraid of the struggle to "walk their talk". They believe in youth and their ability to act." Another world is possible if we believe that and above all if we take actions in our milieus."

Sofie Ferron, YMCA du Parc

Monday was spent organizing the FSA registration for the group, and in the evening, the YMCA of Guatemala staff presented their work with youth. The recent assassination of three of the YMCA volunteer Youth Leaders in Amatilan and the impact that had on the other YMCA youth were also discussed. The Montreal group heard how, for two weeks after the murders, the other youth stayed away from the Y out of fear. Then they decided that if they wanted to be part of a positive change in their country, they must continue their roles as young leaders. They returned to the Y to carry out an activity the three murdered youth had been planning to do, and they began an awareness campaign against violence.

Seven staff of the YMCA in Montreal were in the FSA group; **Brigid Glustein, Natalie Berubé, Mélanie Safi, Sophie Ferron, Alan Lajeunesse, Henri-Charles Baudot, Caterina Milani** as well as volunteer, **Anne-Marie Égré**. Members of the Montreal group presented five well-attended workshops at the FSA. Henri-Charles was invited to be part of a panel on Alternatives to Delinquency and another on Violence against Youth.



We wish to thank the Caisse Cité-du-Nord-Est Montréal, the Office Québec-Amériques pour la jeunesse and the ACJ of Guatemala for their support.

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Bikes for Honduras

The YMCA du Parc, with its partner YMCA in Honduras is in the process of finalizing a project with Cyclo Nord-Sud to collect and send bicycles to the YMCA in Honduras. Cyclo Nord-Sud is a Quebec non-profit organization that works with local NGOs with overseas partners to send bicycles overseas. These projects help people in impoverished communities set up small businesses that sell and repair bicycles for the local population while providing an affordable form of transport. One priority is to make these bicycles available to women, as they are often the ones responsible for taking food and wares to market, collecting firewood, etc.

Cyclo Nord-Sud currently has projects in Cameroon, Benin, Cuba and Nicaragua, and, we hope, will soon add Honduras to this list through the YMCA. We are looking forward to the final approval of the project proposal from Cyclo Nord-Sud, after which the first shipment of bicycles will be sent to Honduras.

To support Cyclo Nord-Sud, the YMCA du Parc asked people to donate bicycles for a collection on November 8, 2008, and the community responded! CycloNord-Sud staff and YMCA volunteers collected and prepared 35 bicycles for storage that day. This collection allowed a shipment to Benin to be completed and sent on its way. Thanks go out to everyone who made this collection so successful!

The main themes explored in the Forum were foreign mining practices (including Canadian companies), the impact of mining on the environment and on indigenous cultures, sweatshops and their impact on women, and issues facing indigenous cultures and youth in the Americas. The Forum ended with an Assembly of Movements, where recommendations for the future were presented.

The Montreal participants reported that the Forum experience was a powerful one, and that the extensive preparation process by the organizers allowed them to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of the workshops, and the Forum in general. They said that the time spent with the YMCA of Guatemala helped them to connect more with the realities of that country and of youth in particular. The success of this type of collaboration between the YMCA of Greater Montreal and UQAM has opened the door for other joint projects in the future.

“At the FSA I had the opportunity to attend a conference called Democratic Spaces and Participation of Youth and Children. This conference was animated by youth aged between 8 and 14 years old, and 90% of the participants were in that same age group. All of the youth were explaining realities they lived in their contexts, and were demanding that young people be listened to, and that their rights be respected. The youth elaborated on four issues that they felt are main concerns and central issues concerning the well being of children in Latin America.

Sitting and watching the children reclaiming their rights to have their voices heard, and listening to the issues they brought up was a strong reminder of how much children have to say and how we need to respect their role as future leaders.”

Brigid Glustein, Jardin Couvert, YMCA of Greater Montreal

