

# **What Works in Youth Media: Case Studies from Around the World**

**by Sheila Kinkade and Christy Macy  
Foreword by Christiane Amanpour**



International Youth Foundation®



## Christy Macy

The Publications Manager at the International Youth Foundation, Christy Macy has written widely about children and youth, education, and development issues over the past decade. From 1998-99, she worked at the White House as a speechwriter to First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, traveling extensively with her overseas. She has served as contributing editor to the NAACP's *Crisis Magazine*; news editor for *First Principles*, a publication of the American Civil Liberties Union; and editor of *Ways and Means*, a monthly publication on innovative state and local public policies. She is co-author of *Documents: National Security Memoranda from the 1940s to 1976*, published by Penguin Books in 1978. Christy worked for National Public Radio's program, "All Things Considered," and has published numerous articles, reports, and opeds, with a focus on religious tolerance, human rights, and improving outcomes for families and children.

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## International Youth Foundation®

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) was established in 1990 to bring worldwide resources and attention to the many effective local efforts that are transforming young lives across the globe. Currently operating in nearly 50 countries and territories, IYF is one of the world's largest public foundations supporting programs that improve the conditions and prospects for young people where they live, learn, work, and play. IYF's "What Works in Youth Development" series examines cutting edge issues in the field and aims to provide practitioners, policymakers, donors, and others supporting youth initiatives with insights into effective practices and innovative approaches impacting young people worldwide.

*What Works in Youth Media: Case Studies from Around the World* was published with the financial support of Nokia, as part of the IYF/Nokia *Make a Connection* program. This global, multi-year partnership seeks to help young people "make a connection" to their peers, their families, their communities, and themselves. Currently operating in a dozen countries, *Make a Connection* supports programs that give young people educational opportunities and helps them to make a positive contribution to their communities. For more information go to [www.MakeaConnection.org](http://www.MakeaConnection.org).

**"WHAT WORKS" SERIES**

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Since I can remember, I wanted to report on the issues and events shaping our world, to help to inform the public and cast a spotlight on stories too often left untold. Yet as a reporter, I always knew there was much more to getting a good story than asking the right questions and knowing how to write. Effective reporting requires a passion for learning, confidence, perseverance, teamwork, communication skills, and the ability to follow through and meet deadlines. Most importantly, it requires empathy for others and a profound interest in the human condition. *What Works in Youth Media: Case Studies from Around the World* looks at how young people are harnessing the power of media to educate the public about issues they care about. It also explores the tremendous power of youth media programs to promote young people's personal growth and development—to equip them with essential “skills for life” that will enable them to succeed.

Those programs profiled here aren't as much about teaching young people journalism skills, as about enabling young people's voices to be heard, and helping them to learn and grow in positive ways. While many of the young people

engaged in these programs may never pursue a career in journalism, most will apply the skills they've gained in their relationships with others, in their school lives, and future work environments. For many, the experience they gain in analyzing and presenting the news will make them more informed consumers of the news they receive, and more active citizens in their communities and nations.

Profiled here are seven programs operating in diverse national contexts. Here you'll read about a national magazine in China, *Little Masters*, which is written and produced by young people, all under the age of 15. You'll learn about a youth-run television program in Albania that's educating the public about critical issues facing children while nurturing hope in the nation's future. And you'll be introduced to a youth-led magazine in Zambia that's playing a vital role in that country's fight against HIV/AIDS.

Youth media programs serve as a vital entry point from which youth learn about themselves and the world around them. Take Daniel, a 16-year-old former school dropout in Mexico. Through being involved in a video program for youth, Daniel gained the awareness that he, too, can contribute positively to society. Says Daniel, “Instead of rejecting me, they trusted me and made me work with others and take care of others. This made me feel completely different.”



While some of these programs originated in the minds of adults, all are carried out by youth. These programs capitalize on young people's creativity, passion, and idealism, offering their valuable perspectives on some of the most critical issues of our time—education, the environment, human rights, child abuse, the growing divide between rich and poor, and the impact of globalization. The list goes on.

And their voices are being heard. Through its twice-weekly broadcasts, for example, the Young Journalists Group is reaching over 30 million radio listeners in Viet Nam. In the United Kingdom, Children's Express-UK has forged long-term relationships with *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, Sky News, the BBC, and numerous other media outlets. With young people under the age of 24 making up half of the world's population, their perspectives on current issues and events are not only valuable and insightful, but essential to informing key decision-makers about the impact of their actions on those whose voices far too often go unheard.

Having worked for twenty years for what is now one of the world's largest and most highly recognized news organizations, I am struck by how much these projects are able to accomplish with so little. While most struggle financially, they capitalize on their assets, for example, engaging older youth and experienced journalists to serve as mentors of their young peers. Many are leveraging the power of the Internet with its ability to broadcast stories to diverse audiences around the world.

It is encouraging to note that those programs included here are merely a sampling of the extraordinary range of youth media programs operating around the world. I am deeply inspired by what these young people are accomplishing, and trust you will be too.

Christiane Amanpour\*  
Chief International Correspondent  
CNN

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\*Christiane Amanpour is on the Board of the Balkan Children and Youth Foundation, a member of the IYF Global Network.

This publication grew out of the International Youth Foundation's (IYF) core focus on promoting active youth participation in the communities where they live. IYF believes strongly in the power of young people to serve as agents of positive social change at the local, national, and international level. This report celebrates that power.

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Youth media programs provide a potent example of young people's passion, creativity, and engagement in the broader society. They also nurture the positive development of children and youth by actively promoting what IYF refers to as the 5C's: confidence, competence, character, connection, and contribution. From IYF's perspective, an added benefit of youth media is the role these programs play in engaging young people in the development of civil society. Today's young reporters are actively involved in their communities, casting a spotlight on some of the most critical, and all-too-often overlooked, issues around them.

With nearly half of the world's population under the age of 24, young people are major consumers of today's varied and rapidly expanding mass media diet. It follows that they, too, should be actively engaged in informing—and contributing to—its content. The mass media exerts enormous power over people's beliefs and preferences, not to mention their passions and prejudices. Young people have a right, as stipulated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to freely express their opinions and to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

In recent years, the advent of new communications technologies and growth of media outlets have contributed to a significant increase in the number of youth media projects operating worldwide. Helping to drive this growing movement, UNICEF and other partners working internationally have formed the Magic Network, and created a new website to link youth media projects around the globe, enabling them to share valuable ideas and information. (see [www.unicef.org/magic](http://www.unicef.org/magic))

Youth media programs can help create connections among young people who feel socially excluded, either because they're not in school, live in poor neighborhoods, or in some cases, are incarcerated. Sandy Close, Executive Editor of the Pacific News Service, who for years has inspired and supported youth-led media projects in the United States, underscores the growing hunger of today's young people to feel connected to each other, and to be visible in the media culture. "It is as if these new media outlets have become the bonding tissue that holds young people together. Being visible—expressing oneself and being read or seen by others—means you exist." That hunger among young people to have a voice has coincided with a revolution in technology, and the result has been a dramatic increase in youth media around the world.

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## The Programs

Our goal through this publication is to profile a diverse range of youth media projects operating internationally in the hope their experiences and lessons learned will help inform and guide the work of others contemplating or undertaking similar activities. We acknowledge that this is merely a sampling of the many inspiring youth media projects that exist today, not to mention the plethora of newspapers and other media produced by students around the globe.

Described in the following pages is a broad cross section of programs operating within diverse national contexts and employing diverse media, whether it be print, radio, television, or the Internet. Two of the programs included here—¡Cámara! ahí nos vemos (Mexico) and the *Little Masters* (China) are being supported through the IYF/Nokia “Make a Connection” initiative.

Some of the programs highlighted in this publication were launched directly by youth (e.g., Young Journalists Group–Viet Nam, *Trendsetters*–Zambia). Others emerged from a partnership between youth and adults (Troç–Albania, and *Youth Outlook* in the United States). Still others originated as youth development programs and were created by adults, with substantial youth input (¡Cámara! ahí nos vemos—Mexico, Children’s Express–UK, and *Little Masters*–China). Nearly all the programs profiled engage youth as mentors to their younger peers, thereby offering added benefits in terms of confidence building, teaching, and training opportunities.

The size and scope of those programs profiled vary considerably—from the Young Journalists Group in Viet Nam which engages over 300 young people and reaches more than 30 million radio listeners and the *Little Masters* in China which involves over 20,000 youth and reaches an audience of one million to *Trendsetters* in Zambia which is produced by 11 youth and has a national distribution of 10,000. The age ranges targeted by each program also vary considerably. For example, Children’s Express-UK members range in age from 8 to 18, and *Youth Outlook* participants are from 14 to 24, while *Little Masters* reporters must retire at the age of 15.

Those programs selected pursue a variety of strategic goals in their work. Sometimes their goals have shifted with time. Among them are facilitating the expression of youth voices, highlighting urgent social issues, impacting public opinion, equipping young people with employment skills, and promoting their positive development.

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**Many of the youth we interviewed spoke about being shy and reticent before their involvement in a given project, only to realize that when given encouragement—and a creative outlet—they were able to find their voices and articulate their views.**

In some cases, the primary aim of the projects is to educate and inform the public and policymakers about urgent social issues. For example, in launching Troç in Albania, UNICEF's primary goal was to raise public awareness of issues facing the nation's children and the importance of promoting and protecting their rights. While Troç's young reporters have benefited personally from their experiences and developed valuable professional skills, this was not the project's primary objective. Similarly, *Trendsetters* in Zambia was established with the principle goal of educating the nation's young people of the dangers of HIV/AIDS and the benefits of preventative measures.

### **The Power of Finding and Expressing One's True Voice**

A strong thread running through our conversations with young people involved in youth media projects was that they were involved in an activity that was interesting, that engaged them creatively and intellectually, and could make a difference. Youth media programs serve as a vital entry point from which youth learn about themselves and the world around them. Mary Phiri, 24, Co-founder and Editor of *Trendsetters* in Zambia, says that "we see this as a place where young people can learn the skills to put out a newspaper, but also a place where they can be exposed to new opportunities, and most importantly, influence the opinions of both peers and adults."

Many of the youth we interviewed spoke about being shy and reticent before their involvement in a given project, only to realize that when given encouragement—and a creative outlet—they were able to find their voices and articulate their views. Says Sherry Hu, 28, a former reporter with the *Little Masters* in China, "Most Chinese students can be very shy. They don't have the nerve to speak to strangers. *Little Masters* gave me the opportunity to speak to strangers... I developed the nerve and the courage to speak out in class and make friends."

### **Obstacles and Opportunities**

While each of these projects has reaped its share of successes, significant challenges remain. Primary among these is sustaining their work into the future. Those projects described here derive their income from a range of sources. In addition to support received from foundations, businesses, and the public sector, some generate revenue from subscriptions, advertising, and the sale of material to mainstream news outlets. Still, securing the necessary funding to continue—let alone strengthen and expand—their activities is a struggle for all.



In large part due to funding limitations, evaluating the impact of their work remains a challenge for each of the programs we spoke to. A funder for one of the projects admitted that while evaluations would be extremely valuable, they often cost more than the amount now being invested in the project itself. “It’s just prohibitive,” she said, “because most of these media programs are already stretched to the thinnest possible point.”

There is also a growing recognition that the current way of measuring the impact of youth media projects has to be seriously rethought. The number of people who read a publication, or listen to a radio program tells only part of the story. What’s more important—and more difficult to measure—is the impact on individual lives. Often it takes years for young people to be able to articulate what experiences have had a real influence on their lives, or the way they think about their future. “We need a new way of looking at how we evaluate these programs,” says Katherine Armstrong, a California-based private consultant who assesses youth development programs, “and then we need to persuade funders to agree with that new approach.”

We are encouraged that the number of youth media projects out there is increasing, stimulated in large part by the growth in media outlets and ease of use and affordability of today’s communications technologies. Our hope is that these stories will help pave the way for many more fruitful partnerships between young people and potential funders, as well as media outlets that recognize the importance of encouraging and promoting young voices in the mainstream media.

We also wish to express our deep gratitude to Nokia, not only for its support of this publication, but for its efforts worldwide to promote vital communications and other life skills among young people through the global *Make a Connection* program.

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## Through the Lens of a Video Camera, Young People See Their Community with New Eyes

Roughly a third of Mexico's population is under the age of 15—and almost a third of these young people are living in poverty. Key to breaking this vicious cycle of need and neglect is to ensure Mexico's youth gain the skills they need to connect to their communities and peers. In this way, they can contribute positively to their society—rather than being on the outside, looking in.

The “¡Cámara! ahí nos vemos” program uses video production as an educational tool, providing a sense of purpose and belonging to hundreds of young people who want to be engaged in their communities and give something back.<sup>1</sup>

Sonia Martínez Rubio, a 20-year-old college student living in Mexico City, felt there was something missing in her life. She didn't feel part of her local neighborhood, or truly connected to many of the people who lived there. “I was from this community, but I really didn't know it,” she admits. All of that changed when she joined “¡Cámara!” Today, after five months of working with disadvantaged youth to produce a video, she feels far more attuned to the needs of those around her, and better able to analyze the many challenges they face. “The video pushed me to do more,” she said. “I'm a better listener now and more observant. I'm also a better leader. I used to be very timid, but not any more.” The experience also changed Sonia's career goals. “I was studying psychology, but now I'm more interested in sociology, and I want to get more involved at the community level. My dream would be to run my own NGO.” Sonia now feels a strong personal commitment to change the conditions of extreme poverty that exists in her community.<sup>2</sup>

Daniel, on the other hand, was living in a poor neighborhood and having a very difficult time when he joined ¡Cámara!. “They threw me out of school because I was always beating kids up,” he says. Bored and restless, Daniel tried to pick up projects here and there, but nothing kept him engaged. Through ¡Cámara!, he discovered he loved filmmaking, but he learned a lot more than practical skills. “I began to feel different,” he says, “because instead of rejecting me they trusted me, and made me work with others and take care of others.” Life for Daniel has improved. “Now I get along better with my brothers, and am more respectful of women. I feel better about myself.” He's also working hard to get back into school, so he can warn his fellow students against dropping out and instead encourage them to get engaged in something positive in their communities.

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<sup>1</sup>This chapter draws on a recent program assessment of “¡Cámara! ahí nos vemos” (¡Cámara!) carried out by Dr. Cathryn L. Thorup for the International Youth Foundation. See “Make a Connection: Mexico—¡Cámara! ahí nos vemos,” Key Findings: Program Assessment, September 20, 2002.”

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., Individual Profiles.

## Learning Through Video Production

The primary strategy behind the “¡Cámara!” project, which was launched in Mexico in 2001, is to use video production as an educational tool for young people to learn about their communities, their peers, and themselves. The project is part of “Make a Connection,” a global youth initiative of Nokia and the International Youth Foundation (IYF) operating in a dozen countries worldwide. Through the Mexico program, young people not only gain technical training—they also learn to better express their ideas, to feel confident, to understand and connect to their communities.

The making of these videos helps young people see their communities in a different way, and often motivates them to engage in positive change. Eloisa Wolf, a Marketing Manager for Nokia who is involved in the program in Mexico City, observes, “By reflecting on the world around them, whether it’s drugs, family violence, or how people take care of their communities, these young people start questioning what’s right and wrong. They often take increased pride in their neighborhood, but they also can see the need for change.”

One young participant, María Irlanda Austria Garcia, talks about what she sees as the program’s mission. “The camera is a wonderful tool for exploring, imagining, and creating. We can produce an image that reflects the reality of our communities, and help others understand the concerns of the children who are in the streets every day... Making these videos gives me a real incentive to keep working to improve this community.”<sup>3</sup>

Cámara is supported and coordinated by a leading NGO in Mexico, Fundación Vamos, a Partner organization of the International Youth Foundation. When the program was launched, Vamos selected six local organiza-



tions to manage the program and each has developed its own unique elements. In all six of the programs, however, older youth (often college students) are paired with children (primarily from poor neighborhoods), and together, they produce a video. Each team decides what the subject of the video will be after a series of discussions. Often, the older youth operate the cameras, but children are the stars of the production, serving as network anchors and street reporters interviewing each other and community residents about local needs.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cited in Individual Profiles, “Make a Connection: Mexico--“¡Cámara! ahí nos vemos,” Key Findings: Program Assessment,” op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Thorup, Cathryn L. op. cit.

## Focus on Life Skills

The young people engaged in the program receive training in use of video equipment, editing, and script writing. But they also learn other skills “for life” that enhance their ability to be productive and engaged citizens, such as teamwork, confidence building, and community engagement—all of which takes place over the course of the production process. For these aspiring youth leaders, this is



a chance to gain a greater sense of self worth and to develop the skills to give back.

Teresa Lanzagorta, Program Coordinator at Vamos, explains how the young participants gain these skills. “We don’t teach them, but they learn by doing. They learn the skills through practice,” she says, “not in an academic way.” She says that they learn by talking about and presenting the project to others, and by feeling the challenges and problems of the commu-

nities in which they work. “It’s not like a lesson, but an experience.” After making the video, Lanzagorta explains, “they sit around and talk about it and the experience of seeing their communities in a new light, and seeing the possibilities for change, is deepened in each person.”

Working on something that’s difficult and having a finished product to show for their efforts is another valuable aspect of the ¡Cámara! program. “So many of these young people live in terribly poor and crowded situations, often sharing a room with many other adults,” explains Nokia’s Eloisa Wolf. “They don’t have their own space, and often don’t get the opportunity to begin and complete a project. The satisfaction of being able to finish something and show it to your family and friends is a great experience for them to have.”

The program is based on the belief that youth leaders are formed through real life experiences and activities, and that contrary to what one reads in the newspapers, youth represent opportunities rather than problems. One 13-year-old boy explains that when he made a video about the drug problem in his neighborhood, he saw the problem differently. “When I walked in the streets of my community and saw a junkie, I saw that it was so stupid and that it didn’t have a purpose.” Young people, however, don’t just see the problems in their communities through this program. They also become more aware of their rich cultural heritage.

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**“We are inviting young people who are studying (in university) to get involved with kids in very poor neighborhoods,” says Teresa Lanzagorta, Program Coordinator at Vamos. “It’s important for this generation to feel useful to society, and to contribute. And we have some good ideas for how to do that.”**

### **Adults as Key Supporters**

¡Cámara! ahí nos vemos” is a media program focused on youth, with significant youth participation. Yet, while these emerging young activists have some decision making powers, such as what community problem or subject they want to focus on in the video, they also receive guidance from the coordinating adults. As Lanzagorta explains, “This is not primarily youth-led. We are inviting young people who are studying (in university) to get involved with kids in very poor neighborhoods,” she says. “It’s important for this generation to feel useful to society, and to contribute. And we have some good ideas for how to do that.”

Another avenue for adult participation is the emerging involvement of Nokia employees in the program. There are now plans for some ¡Cámara! participants in Mexico City to visit the Nokia headquarters there. Employees will spend time explaining their jobs to the youth as a way to introduce them to different careers. The young people will also show their videos, in part to educate the employees about the program and its mission.

### **Changing Lives and Attitudes**

So far, the program has engaged 228 youth leaders in 11 neighborhoods in Mexico City, Puebla and Reynosa. They, in turn, have worked directly with more than 500 adolescents and children. All together, these young people have produced almost 20 videos, and in the process have indirectly benefited more than 3,000 people in those communities who have in some way been part of or contributed to the project. Yet as is true of so many human development programs, numbers don’t adequately convey the real impact on people’s lives.

One can see changes, for example, in how NGOs work with young people. ¡Cámara!’s achievements to date have led Vamos to deepen its focus on youth as a critical element in the area of social development. There is also evidence that as a result of the program, relationships between people and organizations have been strengthened. For example, adults in the various communities have volunteered their time, learned from their children, and become more engaged themselves in neighborhood projects and local NGOs.



The program has also boosted the organizational capacity of the community institutions that are managing the various projects. Some of those organizations are for the first time incorporating youth development into their organizational mandates. Others have overcome their initial reservations about working with the corporate sector. Networks established among youth and across these six organizations are further strengthening the civil society sector in Mexico. Because of Nokia's strong and sustained support, according to the assessment study, ¡Cámara! is viewed as "a positive example of how multi-sector partnerships can work effectively in the area of youth development."<sup>5</sup>

¡Cámara! also provides young people with an incentive to play together in safe and positive ways. Having formed new friendships as participants in the project, they now meet together more often to play basketball and participate in other fun activities.

One of the program's greatest impacts is changing minds and hearts. Adults see the capacity of young people to lead positive change and young people recognize their own



talents and abilities. Says Lanzagorta, "Impact? To me, it's about changing minds. Adults often think negatively of young people. We have to challenge that and change the representation of young people in the community," she argues. "These young people are a force for good, not bad. But if you just read the newspapers or watch TV, you think young people are the worst. We have to change that and we do every time an adult sees young people doing something good for the community." She notes that this kind of program demonstrates that youth can be accepted as they are, and seen as leaders by others in the community. "It's also important for young people themselves to feel they are contributing and can grow."

There are numerous anecdotal stories about how relationships and perceptions have changed over the time of the projects. Watching young people get involved in the community has changed how some parents view their own children. Some were surprised to see what their children were accomplishing. They would say, "Is

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that my kid?” One father laughingly explained that his very young daughter had pulled out a card listing the rights of the child in the middle of a family dispute. And of course, the youth themselves expand their vision of what they are capable of accomplishing.

Many participants come from extremely difficult circumstances.

The son of a violent father, Javier had spent much of the first 15 years of his life in a Mexican prison with his family. Getting involved in ¡Cámara! gave him a different perspective, and allowed him to begin to see himself in a more positive light. “These children (in the program) made me feel useful, valuable. They made me feel I was a positive influence on them.” Another 15 year old, Oscar, used to get into fights, and left school never to return. As a ¡Cámara! participant, he said: “I found a place where I didn’t have to hit anyone to gain respect. Now,” says Oscar, “I no longer need to be forceful or aggressive to get attention.”

Gustavo Rodriguez Zarate, 55, a program manager in Puebla, Mexico, is impressed with how the program changes the way young people see themselves, and gain confidence in their abilities. “I see these young people opening themselves to the younger children where before they would distance themselves,” he says. “They realize now that they have something to offer.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Challenges and Lessons**

As successful as ¡Cámara! has been over the past year, significant challenges remain. Among them:

■ **Retention of participants** “This problem is true of all work with young people,” says one of the organizers. “The challenge is keeping them in the program.” The problem can be traced back to a number of factors. Many of these young

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<sup>6</sup>Thorup, Cathryn L. op. cit.

people live in impoverished families and communities and have to work, often from the age of 15. Those jobs rarely pay well. With few skills or contacts, these young people get odd jobs here and there. They feel they don't have time for "social" work.

■ **Commitment** Many of the older ¡Cámara! participants are studying in college or university, and can't stay in the program because of competing time commitments. It's a challenge to encourage them to keep studying and participating in the program at the same time. For the younger participants, just getting someplace on time and on a regular basis is difficult. Tardiness is a particular problem among youth from the poorest neighborhoods who have to travel long distances to get to the project.

■ **Developing trust with parents** Some parents do not understand the purpose of the program and thus don't always want their children to participate. It takes time for them to feel comfortable that their sons and daughters can go outside their neighborhoods, with people they don't know, to work on a new project. It's not easy to build such parental trust, but it's essential for the success of the program.

■ **Building meaningful ties among different programs** One of the biggest challenges is to develop strong connections among the various clusters of programs so that the young people are able to share experiences and lessons learned. So far, two national meetings of participants have helped meet that need. The young people have said how important the first meeting was in terms of team building. The second one was aimed at celebrating young leaders' accomplishments, sharing learnings, and highlighting challenges.

■ **Working across different social divisions** It is not easy for youth of different social and economic backgrounds to work together. Some of the young leaders in the program were working with children from much poorer neighborhoods, where they have had little exposure or experience. Some of these primarily upper middle-class youth were initially rejected by the poorer children, which made them feel inadequate to the task. However, by the end of the project, most were comfortable and at ease working in diverse communities and grateful for what they had learned.

■ **Sustainability** Vamos wants to ensure the long term sustainability of the program, and is exploring ways in which the program can be continued or replicated in the future. Discussions are already taking place within the foundation

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about what to do when “Make a Connection” funding comes to an end. The fact that Vamos has a history of strong support from both international and Mexican foundations and companies is seen as a positive sign.

■ **Access and distribution** Youth are anxious to have their work shown publicly, but the sound quality and production values are still too poor for television. Some of the videos have been shown in the participants’ communities, however, and a number may be entered into a film competition. Some of the videos are now being shown at universities by those who are involved in the project.

■ **Staff capacity** Vamos is a small organization that relies upon a talented staff with deep commitments to their work. But there is a limit to how much can be accomplished with a small staff. They may need additional resources to keep up with this fast growing program.



■ **Need for a deeper focus** One of the lessons of ¡Cámara! is learning how important the relationship is between the younger generation and the media. As Lanzagorta says, “We need to work deeply in this area, and in new ways. The media is so important in their lives, and

they need to better understand its influence in today’s world. They have to feel and think about it.” Youth-focused media programs like ¡Cámara! help young people to more fully understand the power of media in their lives, while at the same time learn how to use that power in positive and constructive ways.

For further information see [www.makeaconnection.org](http://www.makeaconnection.org) or [www.vamos.org](http://www.vamos.org) (in Spanish).

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**“We need to work deeply in this area, and in new ways. The media is so important in their lives, and they need to better understand its influence in today’s world. They have to feel and think about it.”**





## Young Reporters Express Their Views While Learning Valuable Life Skills

On any given weekday afternoon, the London headquarters of Children's Express-UK (CE-UK) buzzes with activity. Newspaper clippings decorate the walls. The atmosphere can be chaotic, even messy. But from this ferment of activity, young people, ages 8 to 18, produce news stories on topics ranging from underage sex, drug abuse, and child labor to HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation, and child rights. More importantly, they gain valuable life skills—critical thinking, self-esteem, responsibility, time management, and the ability to work in teams and communicate their ideas effectively.

Christopher Wyld, CE-UK's Executive Director since 2001, is quick to point out that while journalism is the vehicle, the goal is promoting the positive development of young people. "It's not about training a new generation of journalists," he says. "It's about critical thinking, discovery, being challenged, and assessing issues. It's about writing, reporting, teamwork, and stamina." If a piece gets published, "it's an added benefit because children are given a voice," he adds.

Since its establishment in 1995, CE-UK has reached roughly 2,000 young people, most from disadvantaged backgrounds. In addition to its London headquarters, CE-UK operates satellite bureaus in Birmingham, Sheffield, Newcastle, Plymouth, and Belfast, Northern Ireland. For youth in each location, CE-UK offers a safe haven where they're accepted and where they can make friends, develop new skills, and explore their interests. As Akosua Bonsu, a 16-year-old London bureau reporter, says, "It's really cool that you meet people you can really admire. You meet adults that you can talk to on the same level. They're not patronizing."

Indeed, CE-UK's staff has witnessed first hand the power of youth voices to educate the public on critical issues. Many of the young people the program reaches experience such issues on a deeply personal level where they live and go to school. "We work with kids facing some tough challenges at home and at school," explains Wyld. "They have stories to tell but their voices are seldom heard. They offer authentic perspectives on what's it really like to be a ten-year-old refugee, or to have to visit your dad in prison."

Over time, mainstream news outlets in the UK have become increasingly interested in the viewpoints of CE's young reporters, with newspapers such as *The Guardian* and *The Observer* regularly publishing CE-UK stories. Recognizing that its model has much to offer school administrators and youth workers, CE-UK

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**Indeed, CE-UK's staff has witnessed first hand the power of youth voices to educate the public on critical issues. Many of the young people the program reaches experience such issues on a deeply personal level where they live and go to school.**

has also developed a school-based curriculum, as well as tools that youth workers can adapt to suit their own programming needs.

At the heart of the program's approach is a deeply held belief in the value of youth perspectives on a range of issues and respecting and nurturing youth voices.

### **The Origins of CE-UK**

CE-UK bases its approach on a model developed in the United States. Founded in 1975, Children's Express (CE) grew out of collaborative efforts between Bob Clampitt, a former Wall Street lawyer, and a group of New York City youth, who conceived of the program as a means of giving youth a voice on critical issues, while developing their skills and active participation in society. Over time, the program grew into a highly respected organization with a presence in five U.S. cities and two international locations.

It was on a trip to the U.S. in 1994 that Susannah Cheal, chief executive of a trust working with children in the UK was first introduced to the CE model. She returned home and promptly engaged Stephanie Williams, a former journalist with *The Sunday Times*, in an effort to replicate the program in the UK. With technical assistance provided by CE in the U.S., the UK program was formally established in 1995 as an independent, nonprofit, charitable organization. And while Children's Express in the U.S. ceased operations in 2001 due to financial pressures, CE-UK has continued on as an independent entity.

While the demise of the U.S. organization prompted, at times, negative media coverage, its legacy continues. Three of its national bureaus—Y Press in Indianapolis, 8 to 18 Media in Marquette, Michigan, and Children's PressLine in New York City—continue to operate as independent youth news organizations. While acknowledging the problems experienced at the national level, Lynn Sygiel, Director of Y Press, emphasizes that the CE approach and model so carefully nurtured and refined by Clampitt has survived. "CE's work continues no matter what the name," says Sygiel, adding that plans for rapid expansion and consolidation at the national level were in part to blame for CE's unfortunate end. There was a tension over governance issues, she explains, between programs at the grassroots level and the national office.

While CE-UK suffered some branding fallout as a result of its association with the American program, the impact was minimal. On the positive side, "CE-UK creatively adapted lots of information from America," says Wyld, and has put that information to good use.

## Learning the Basics

While CE-UK is not just about journalism, participants gain a thorough grounding in researching, interviewing, reporting, writing, editing, and production skills. Through developing such hard skills, they acquire soft skills such as confidence, learning to follow a line of inquiry, meeting deadlines, listening, working as a team, and articulating themselves clearly.

As a truly youth-led, youth-run initiative, CE-UK relies on older youth to teach beginning reporters the tools of the trade through formal training and shadowing. Responsibilities within the program are loosely based on age, though the old system of reporters becoming editors on their fourteenth birthday has recently been dropped. Instead, teams of Children's Express members are expected to divide up responsibilities before starting on a story. Before serving as trainers, veteran CE-UK members receive training themselves from adult facilitators. The key lessons referred to in the training are outlined in a detailed program manual. Particular emphasis is placed on journalism basics, including the six questions every good journalist needs to know in order to conduct an interview or write a story: Who? What? Where? When? Why? And how? The core elements of the journalistic process are outlined in a graphic "Story Mountain" (see Figure 1) that all CE-UK reporters become very familiar with.

Once beginning reporters are thoroughly versed in the basics, they break into teams of between three and five, which pursue story ideas that the youth themselves develop. Those not interested in writing need not worry as there are many equally important tasks (e.g., research, interviewing, editing) to perform in gathering

and producing the material needed for a good story.

Figure 1



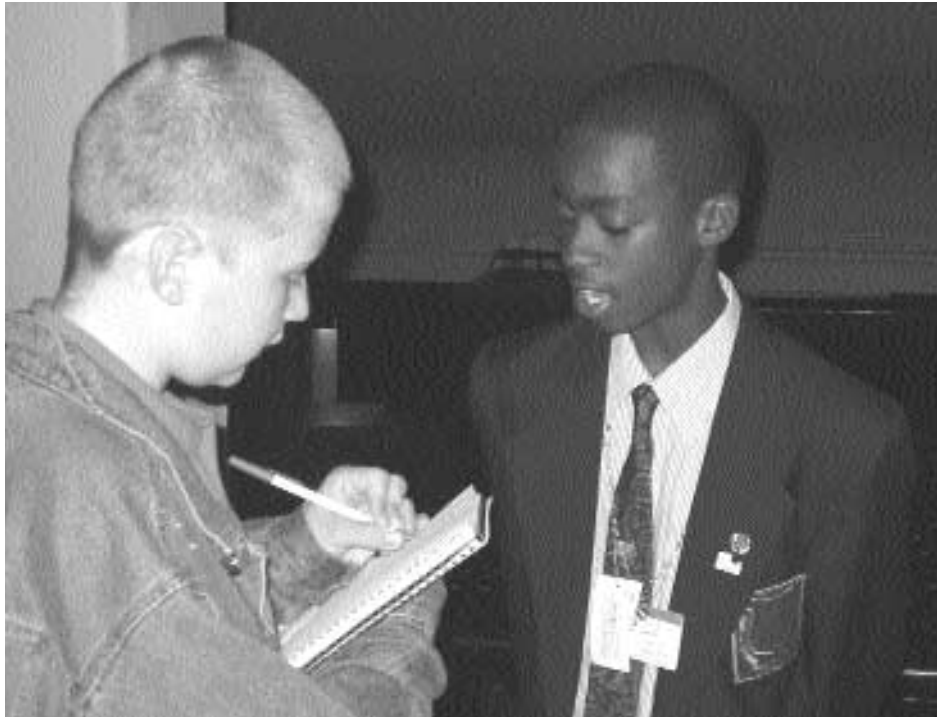
Producing stories at CE-UK can be like climbing a mountain. To get to the end of the journey (e.g., a completed article) you need to use the right tools and plan your route carefully. Children's Express members go through many stages to get their story into print.

**Particular emphasis is placed on journalism basics, including the six questions every good journalist needs to know in order to conduct an interview or write a story: Who? What? Where? When? Why? And how?**



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**Most CE-UK reporters will admit that the program challenged them to express themselves in new ways, and to overcome obstacles such as shyness, reluctance to assert oneself, and inhibitions around interacting with others from different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.**



Twelve-year-old Children's Express Newcastle bureau member Gavin Mather (left), interviewing one of the 360 youth delegates who gathered for the United Nations Special Session on Children in New York in May 2002. Children's Express took four members from three different bureaus to the USA for the event, producing articles for UK newspapers, and broadcasting on three different BBC radio stations.

### **Developing Awareness of Oneself and the World**

Most CE-UK reporters will admit that the program challenged them to express themselves in new ways, and to overcome obstacles such as shyness, reluctance to assert oneself, and inhibitions around interacting with others from different social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds.

"I was really shy and used to speak in a low tongue," says Danyel Edwards, age 16, a reporter with the London bureau. "[Through CE] I've become much more confident. I'm starting to train and getting to meet other people."

In May 2001, Edwards was one of a group of CE-UK reporters who interviewed British Prime Minister Tony Blair about his pre-election platform on critical issues such as the environment, Internet safety, and educational reform. "He was really friendly," she recalls. "He talked to use like we were normal. Not like we were children."

Annabel McLeod, also 16, has been involved with the program for two years. While she's not fond of writing, there are many other ways to participate, says McLeod, citing her completed radio stories. McLeod admits that she too has become more confident as a result of her CE experience. "You learn how to talk

to people who can be really difficult,” she says, recalling an interview with the cabinet minister for young people’s issues who refused to answer many of her questions. While the experience was challenging, McLeod persevered. Eventually her efforts paid off and the story was published in *The Guardian*.

CE-UK reporters also deepen their understanding of important local issues and events. At 16, Akosua Bonsu is pursuing a story on people who do harm to their bodies. Through the experience, she has had to walk the fine line between caring for and empathizing with her subjects, some of whom have become very emotional during interviews, and remaining objective as a reporter.

In addition to local themes, CE-UK reporters explore national and international issues, such as the experience of asylum seekers in the UK and the impact of the events of September 11, 2001 on young people. A small CE-UK delegation also traveled to New York in May 2002 to report on the UN Special Session on Children. In December 2002, two CE-UK reporters travelled to Ghana to interview child laborers who work in stone quarries and markets. Their story was broadcast on Britain’s Sky News, one of the nation’s leading sources of television news.

## **Another Country, Another World** **December 23, 2002**

*This story was produced by Gabriella Gay, 16, and Zak Garner-Purkis, 14 following a trip to Ghana. It was published on Sky television's Reach for the Sky website.*

In Accra you’ll find children selling water and breaking stones in quarries for just a few pence a day.

If you asked most British children whether they loved going to school the answer would almost invariably be “no.” Well, travel to Ghana in West Africa, like we did last month, and you’ll get a very different answer. In the capital Accra there are tens of thousands of children who have to work to survive. For them education is a dream.

Walk into any British school and you’ll find pupils with trainers worth a hundred pounds or a mobile phone worth two hundred pounds. Make the six hour flight to Accra and you’ll find children selling water, being a porter in markets and

breaking stones in quarries to earn just a few pence a day.

Things we take for granted in this country like an education, our safety and a meal when we get home are rarities for so many young people in Ghana. We witnessed children, some as young as four or five, breaking rocks with no protection for their bare hands or eyes. We met children with appalling eye and hand injuries. It was quite a shocking sight for us to take in. But if these young people didn’t work like this they simply wouldn’t be able to afford to eat.

The quarry we visited on the outskirts really opened up our eyes. The scorching sun beat down on the children who worked there from sunrise to sunset. The images of toddlers working so hard is one we shall never forget.

Eleven year old Samuel, a former quarry worker, showed us round: “I started at the age of six. Life was very difficult in the quarry. It was a very

**Another Country, Another World**  
continued from p. 25

difficult time for me and my mother. We woke up at four in the morning. Sometimes I couldn't take a bath. We'd walk from the house to the quarry. And then work from six in the morning until six in the evening. We sometimes didn't eat at all."

Wandering through the run down market, based alongside the tracks of the city's main railway station made us reflect on how lucky we are. The minor hassles that we face everyday pale into insignificance compared to the world in which so many Ghanaian children live:

"It's such a hard life," 12 year old Sylvia, a former street porter, told us. We could see that for ourselves. The dirty railway was both workplace and home to so many people. Sylvia used to work late into the night carrying spices on her head, for a tiny sum of money.

"There are a lot of children suffering here. They are struggling to get some money to eat and struggling to get some people to care for them. I feel so bad staying here because there are armed robbers, and lots of people who get pregnant. There was one girl here who gave birth at nine years old – that's not right."

It's desperately sad to think that so many of the young people we met in Accra may never find a way out of the poverty in which they live. They struggle day in, day out just to make enough money to survive.

Many of the children we spoke to don't even get a basic education. So they really don't have much of a future to look forward to. Education is the key to a good life, development and opportunities. Without it you're at a dead end.

Though it's illegal to have young children working in Ghana, it was a common sight on our travels through Accra. There were so many people of all ages selling absolutely everything on the streets to make ends meet.

The strange thing was virtually everyone was trying to make money legitimately. We hardly came across any beggars. In fact you probably find

more in London. Walking around the streets of Accra held none of the menace that you sometimes experience travelling around some British cities.

We were relieved to see small signs of a brighter future for some of those we met in child labour. We visited the charity, Children in Need Ghana, which now provides a foster home for Samuel and Sylvia and also pays for their education. The charity hands out gloves and eye goggles in the quarries for protection.

It has also set up a quarry classroom where children can at least spend some of their day getting an education. But the most encouraging news of all came from the owner who told us he had plans to introduce machinery to the his quarry to replace the children.

We really feel we were lucky to become friends with Sylvia and Samuel. We were so impressed to meet children who just a short while ago had nothing, but now are talking about putting their natural talent to good use. Samuel has amazing musical ability. He's a natural singer and impressive piano player.

Samuel already knows what he wants to do as an adult. "In the future I'd really like to be a musician and help children," he told us.

Sylvia also attends the appropriately named Future Leaders School, and she too has high hopes for her own future. "I feel so bad about children suffering in Ghana," she told us. "So I pray that one day I can be somebody great so I can have my opportunity to help children who are suffering here."

It's easy in our pampered lives to take for granted what we have. There are so many people around the world worse off than us. Compare our Gap jumpers with their torn hand-me-down-shirts, our cushioned beds to the tomato boxes we saw young people sleeping on in the markets in Accra. Our experience has given us so much to reflect on and made us realize how lucky we are.



Children's Express members in the back garden of 10 Downing Street, home of British Prime Minister Tony Blair. After interviewing him for a special four-part series for Sky News, a UK-based satellite TV news station, Mr. Blair gave the team a tour of the garden.

### **The Power of Youth Voices**

CE-UK has achieved notable success in developing working relationships with mainstream newspaper outlets keen on capturing young people's views. Among these are: *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Observer*, *The Belfast Telegraph*, *Highbury* and *Islington Express*, *the Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, *Birmingham Post*, and the *Sheffield Star*. In addition, CE collaborates regularly with radio and television outlets, including the BBC and Sky News. As proof of its belief in the concrete value of youth-produced stories, CE-UK charges news outlets a fee for its reports. This revenue is then channeled back into the program.

The British news media increasingly come to CE-UK for access to youth views that can be hard to get. "One of the missing ingredients [in news reporting] are the authentic views of young people," explains Wyld, himself a former foreign editor for BBC News. "You often see assumptions about what young people think." Wyld points out that it's often difficult for journalists to obtain youth viewpoints due to child protection laws that make it difficult to access young people.

CE-UK's members enjoy many benefits that their adult peers simply don't have. While sometimes CE-UK reporters have difficulty gaining access to the people they need to interview, more often than not, their experience is the opposite. "They get better access than other mainstream journalists because they're young," says Wyld,

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**Seeking to broaden its outreach to children in schools and with-in youth-serving organizations, CE-UK has developed a curriculum package—**

**Citizen's Express—**

**that stresses active citizenship through engaging young people in classroom dialogue about issues and events in the news.**

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**CE-UK currently raises half of its budget from government sources, its remaining revenue is generated from foundation grants, with earned income from stories sold amounting to just over US\$30,000 in 2001.**



Zak Garner-Purkis, 13, puts outspoken Labour MP and former Sports Minister Tony Banks on the spot at a Children's Express fundraiser, "The Sporting Lunch," held during the summer of 2001.

adding that people are more apt to trust them. The list of high profile individuals interviewed by CE journalists is long. Included among them are Government Ministers from the Prime Minister down, children's advocate Graça Machel, pop bands like Liberty X, disc jockeys, and actors like Richard E. Grant.

CE-UK reporters also have a unique advantage in that "adults find it more difficult to lie to children than to other adults," Wyld explains. "Kids tend to ask a question again and again until they get an answer," he says. "They're very effective at getting information."

Indeed, demand for the youth voices represented by CE-UK is on the rise. In 2001, *The London Times* published a weekly column over three months that explored young people's reflections on a range of issues including drug abuse. As a result, readers learned that young people don't merely want to be told to say "no." What they really want are hard facts about what is in drugs and their physical effects on the body. More recently, London's Open University commissioned CE-UK reporters to interview sixty young people about their needs and perspectives to see what its teaching staff should know about young people's interests.

What's surprising, according to Wyld, is the extent to which society doesn't consult young people on important issues that directly impact them. "It's simply mad to build a society, an educational system, housing, etc. without consulting the end user," he says.

While there are many joys in working with young people as news gatherers, there are also challenges, admits Wyld. Those youth involved in the program have busy lives and competing demands for their time at home and school. Sometimes they don't show up when they say they will, or take lengthy time in finishing assignments. As a result, CE-UK is unable to pitch breaking news stories to local and national news media which would require swift delivery.

Still, the rewards of working with youth far outweigh the challenges, adds

Wyld, who greatly appreciates the sense of humor exhibited by program participants and the fact that they're full of surprises. The bottom line is: "You have to trust them," he says. "You have to let them take the initiative. If they're treated like responsible people, they'll act that way."



## CE-UK in the Classroom

Seeking to broaden its outreach to children in schools and within youth-serving organizations, CE-UK has developed a curriculum package—Citizen's Express—that stresses active citizenship through engaging young people in classroom dialogue

CE-UK's website [www.childrens-express.org](http://www.childrens-express.org)

about issues and events in the news. Citizen's Express provides a 12-week course of study in which students analyze the news and talk through critical issues such as crime, teen pregnancy, racism, homelessness, and poverty. Participants engage in simulations based on stories written by CE reporters. Citizenship has only recently become a compulsory part of the U.K. curriculum, but early feedback has been positive. One teacher involved in the pilot program said she was "surprised at the variety and quantity of resources available and stimuli provided by the views of so many youngsters."

Recently, CE-UK entered into a partnership with Learnthings, one of the UK's most popular educational websites. Stories written by CE-UK reporters are now being carried within the "Learnnewsdesk" section of the site, thereby giving teachers an easily accessible resource for teaching current affairs and citizenship. All stories are tied to an activity within the school curriculum.

## Sustainability: An Ongoing Challenge

CE-UK currently raises half of its budget from government sources, its remaining revenue is generated from foundation grants, with earned income from stories sold amounting to just over US\$30,000 in 2001. CE-UK's headquarters, located on a quiet side street in central

London, operates out of donated space. To further diversify its funding sources, CE-UK is actively pursuing partnerships with the voluntary sector. CE-UK's Newcastle office, for example, is run in partnership with Save the Children. In the future, it seeks to engage the support of the business community, particularly companies with media interests.

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**To further diversify its funding sources, CE-UK is actively pursuing partnerships with the voluntary sector.**

Meanwhile, two of CE-UK's sister organizations in the United States—Y Press and 8 to 18—have formed partnerships with the local children's museum in the cities where they operate. While both have had to relinquish some level of autonomy in terms of financing and budgeting, the relationships have afforded them a greater sense of security.

While CE-UK still struggles with developing long-term funding sources, Wyld remains confident that through focusing squarely on the quality and cost-effectiveness of its programming—and on meeting the needs of local youth—the necessary support will follow. Wyld is encouraged by signs that funding is becoming available to work with particular groups of young people—such as those who are disabled or neglected—and to address particular areas of interest such as mental health. But, he adds, meeting core operating costs remains the biggest hurdle. “My salary, for instance,” he says, “I mean, what could be duller for a funder, but it is pretty essential.”







## A National Magazine Written, Edited, and Produced by Children Under the Age of 15

Students at the Shanghai Middle School in China eagerly await the beginning of each month when they receive a copy of the *Little Masters*, a colorful magazine written and produced by children—all under the age of 15—in cities and towns around the country. The price of the magazine is the equivalent of US\$.37, which most take out of pocket money given to them by their parents.

Over the last twenty years, *Little Masters* has steadily grown in popularity and circulation. Currently, more than 20,000 young people participate in the program, producing a 48-page color magazine that is read by an estimated two million children and adults alike. Children read it to get informed about issues relevant to their lives. With colorful cartoons, drawings, and games, it's also entertaining. Adults read it to understand better children's perspectives on a range of issues, from pressures at school to communicating better at home.

“Young people can do things that are unimaginable to adults,” says *Little Masters*' Founder and President, Zhu Jieshi. Zhu was forty-years-old when he started the program. Previously a teacher working in Shanghai at the “Children's Palace,” a special place where children come to engage in productive leisure activities, Zhu conceived of a program whereby young people's creativity and natural expressiveness could be maximized through a newspaper. While at first many people, especially professional journalists, were skeptical that children possessed the skills and self-discipline to carry through with a newspaper, Zhu received modest government support and *Little Masters* was launched in 1983.

### Nurturing an Independent Spirit Among Chinese Students

The name “Little Masters” was chosen to reflect Zhu's goal that participants learn to express themselves, take on new challenges, and become “masters” of their lives, with opportunities to explore and develop their gifts. With many Chinese school children experiencing overly protective parents at home, and strict authoritarianism at school, Zhu sought to create opportunities for children to grow and express themselves on their own terms.

“We chose this name because of a dual phenomenon in China,” he recalls. “Parents lavish boundless love on their children who become overly dependent on their Mom and Dad... and teachers assume all the responsibilities at school,

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**Currently, more than 20,000 young people participate in the program, producing a 48-page color magazine that is read by an estimated two million children and adults alike.**

treating students as if they were born uncreative.”

Zhu is quick to point out that while journalism is the medium, *Little Masters* is not about training future journalists. It’s about enabling young people to pursue their interests and develop their skills, especially “soft” skills such as self-confidence, how to work in a team, communicate effectively, and set and meet specific goals.

While Zhu conceived of the program, young people were actively involved in its development from the start. Today, *Little Masters* is a successful partnership between children and adults. Students develop their own story ideas, conduct interviews, write, and edit—with older teens and adults assisting with layout, production, distribution, and transportation. Fundraising for the program and managing its day-to-day operations remain the responsibility of adults.



Ye Shi Tao, a senior reporter with the Xinhua News Agency (front right first) briefs Little Masters reporters during a visit to the Xiaozhuren Press.

### **How It Works**

Students find out about the program through seeing the publication at school, knowing peers who have participated, or through coaxing by their teachers. To become a “Little Master,” students must fill out an application form and pass an entrance test, which usually involves an interview, a written test for aspiring writers, and submission of artwork for those more interested in pursuing drawing, photography, or cartoons. Upon acceptance, participants select an area in which to specialize. Twelve-year-old Zhu Shi’en, for example, is now enrolled with the *Little Masters’* editing program. Through the program, he is gaining skills in how to interview, write, edit, and layout the publication. On weekends, he attends classes to help refine his skills. Classes and specialized trainings can last from several months to a year and cover topics such as writing, drawing, and photojournalism. Classes are taught by program graduates, interested adults, and professional journalists who enjoy the chance to share what they know with energetic novices.

Zhu, who has been involved with the program for a year, has already noticed

its impact. “I used to be quite introverted,” he says, “lacking the guts to talk to unknown people, to voice my thoughts in public, and exchange ideas with teachers.” Now, however, he’s more outgoing and sociable. “I have the nerve to speak up in public,” says Zhu, “to conduct an interview independently, to have a casual talk with my teachers and other adults.” In addition, his writing skills have improved measurably.

The program, however, is not limited only to those who like to write. Participants also apply and develop their skills in drawing, photography, cartoon making, calligraphy, and graphic design.

Participants come up with their own story ideas, in addition to generating copy for several regular columns. One recent story looked at the advantages and disadvantages of children surfing the Internet. Another story explored educational reform measures being implemented by the government to reduce the heavy load of homework assignments given to Chinese students. A “Looking from the East” column features travel stories by children who have just returned from vacation. “Stories from the Editing Room” gives readers an inside glimpse at what goes on behind the scenes in a newsroom. And “YaYa’s Mailbox” provides a place

for young people who seek help with various problems. Inquiries are fielded by senior student editors who pass on any issues they feel incapable of addressing to trained psychologists. The questions and answers are only printed in the magazine if permission has been given by the person who submitted the query. Participants have also had the opportunity to interview well known figures in China and internationally, including former U.S. President Bill Clinton, Britain’s Queen Elizabeth, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, and Chinese President Jiang Zemin.



Little Masters reporters from Shanghai and Jiangxi exchange contact information.

### **Learning Through Doing**

The essence of *Little Masters*’ approach is getting children out of the classroom where they are more apt to be passive learners and into the real world where they must take initiative, think for themselves, overcome obstacles, and

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**One recent story looked at the advantages and disadvantages of children surfing the Internet. Another story explored educational reform measures being implemented by the government to reduce the heavy load of homework assignments given to Chinese students.**

follow through. Over the past twenty years, Zhu has witnessed thousands of students grow and develop in powerful ways.

One *Little Masters'* graduate, Bangwei Hu, now 28, credits the program with enabling her to become far more confident and assertive in setting and achieving goals. Bangwei entered the program at the age of 12 when she was in fifth grade. She learned of the opportunity through several of her peers who were participating and her teacher who provided her with a recommendation.

Says Bangwei, “The most important thing is it encouraged me to identify my own perspective, rather than having others influence me. Kids tend to be influenced by parents and teachers. We’re always given topics to work on. *Little Masters* let us write about anything we wanted to in our personal life and school life.”

Today, Bangwei is studying at Indiana University in the United States toward a masters degree in business and says the communication skills she gained through *Little Masters* have been invaluable. “Most Chinese students can be very shy. They don’t have the nerve to speak to strangers,” she comments. “*Little Masters* gave me the opportunity to speak to strangers.” Through *Little Masters*, Bangwei was encouraged to speak and write about her opinions and beliefs. “*Little Masters* allowed me to accelerate my psychological transformation process when I came to the States,” she says. “I developed the nerve and the courage to speak out in class and make friends.”



The Little Master's website [www.xzrcn.com](http://www.xzrcn.com)

*Little Masters* participants also undertake group projects. For example, in 1998, the program mobilized more than 10,000 children to plant trees in the Shanghai Youth Park as part of the program's "Green Mission." Similar envi-

ronmental awareness raising events have been held subsequently. Most recently, participants launched an "I Love the Sea" campaign whereby young artists sent in their artwork relating to a "protect the oceans" theme. These artworks were then displayed on a beach in Shanghai to nurture greater public awareness and protection of fragile marine life.

**On-line readers are encouraged to submit stories electronically and exchange their opinions with other readers on the site's content. For example, each reader is asked to give a rating for articles that appear on the website.**

## Exploring Diverse Media

*Little Masters* was initially developed as a newspaper as it was relatively inexpensive to produce. Over time, however, the publication was transformed into a magazine.



Little Masters reporters from different parts of the country participate in an exchange.

on-air hosts. In 1997, the program worked with the Shanghai Oriental TV Station to produce a *Little Masters* television special in which children served as talk show hosts.

Most recently, *Little Masters* has adapted its approach to the Internet. With support from the International Youth Foundation/Nokia *Make a Connection* program, *Little Masters*' participants received web training and developed a website ([www.xzrcn.com](http://www.xzrcn.com)). Launched in 2001, the website logs 2,000-4,000 visits per day, with the volume of hits increasing on weekends. The site was designed and is maintained by young people, under the guidance of adults. It features an on-line version of the magazine, a chat room, a Little Masters Forum, and a "Green Mission" section devoted to environmental issues. On-line readers are encouraged to submit stories electronically and exchange their opinions with other readers on the site's content. For example, each reader is asked to give a rating for articles that appear on the website.

## Sustaining Its Efforts Over Time

While initially *Little Masters* derived the bulk of its support from the government, over time it has diversified its income sources. In addition to government funding, revenue is generated by sales of the magazine, mostly to children who use their pocket money to purchase it, and through paid advertising by businesses

It has also been adapted to other mediums such as radio, television, and most recently, the web. From 1985 to 1995, *Little Masters* cooperated with Shanghai Radio in producing "The Sound of the Little Masters," a weekly radio program in which children proposed story ideas, conducted interviews, and served as

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**In addition to government funding, revenue is generated by sales of the magazine, mostly to children who use their pocket money to purchase it, and through paid advertising by businesses targeting the children's market.**

targeting the children's market. *Little Masters* is careful, however, to limit the number of advertisements that appear in each issue so as to avoid being overly commercial. Advertisers are also asked not to make "hard sells" through the publication so as to not manipulate its readership. Instead of pushing stores and products, for example, the Shanghai Friendship Mall recently sponsored an English Speaking Contest in the magazine.

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**One of the program's lasting impacts has been a shift in public perceptions of what children are capable of. While this shift has never been formally evaluated, Zhu says there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that many adults respect children more as a result of what the publication has been able to accomplish.**

One of the program's lasting impacts has been a shift in public perceptions of what children are capable of. While this shift has never been formally evaluated, Zhu says there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that many adults respect children more as a result of what the publication has been able to accomplish. It doesn't hurt that a growing number of prominent newscasters, actors, and actresses were once participants in the program. This list includes popular actor Lu Yi; Chen Lei, a host on Shanghai TV; and Yang Yang, a reporter for the *Xin Min Evening Paper*.

All this is testimony to what Zhu knew all along. "Young people can do great things if they work and learn together, motivate each other, and channel their individual wisdom into collective wisdom."



希望之心手相连

小主人报

记者证

希望之心手相连





## A Magazine By and For Youth Dedicated to Preventing the Spread of HIV/AIDS

At first glance, *Trendsetters*, a monthly publication in Zambia, looks like a hip newspaper that's fun to read. It's filled with colorful photographs, advice columns, and interviews with pop stars, up-and-coming young politicians, and young TV entertainers. But a closer look reveals a far more serious subject—a focus on raising young people's awareness of critical health issues—particularly HIV/AIDS. Targeted to 15- to-25-year-olds, *Trendsetters'* distribution of 10,000 copies makes it the highest circulation monthly publication in the country.

This magazine, and a more recent publication distributed to schools, is the primary activity of Youth Media, an NGO headquartered in Lusaka that specializes in information, education, and communication. Its mission is to give young Zambians access to critical health information and services as well as train a new generation of journalists who help ensure youth have a voice on issues that directly concern them. (See [www.youthmedia.org.zm](http://www.youthmedia.org.zm)).

“We see this as a place where young people can learn the skills to put out a newspaper, but also a place where they meet people they would not otherwise meet, be exposed to new opportunities, get to see the world, and most importantly, influence the opinions of both peers and adults,” explains Co-founder and Editor, Mary Phiri, age 24. “There's a great deal of satisfaction in putting out information that you know is reaching young people and helping them do something different, or think about something in a new way.”

### How it Began

The idea to publish a newspaper by and for young people was hatched around a kitchen table in Lusaka, Zambia, one hot afternoon in 1995. Mary and her sisters, all high school students, were lamenting that yet another friend had gotten pregnant and was kicked out of school. Their mother interrupted their conversation, asking, “Well, why don't you do something about it?” Surely there were plenty of compelling reasons to act.

Seventy-five percent of young Zambians are sexually active by the age of 19, and almost 60 percent of the girls have had their first child. One in five Zambian youth are already HIV positive yet most of them (60 to 79 percent) don't believe they are at risk of contracting the disease. Mary and her sisters knew first hand what these statistics meant for themselves and their friends. So many young people

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**By the age of 19, 75 percent of young Zambians are sexually active, and almost 60 percent of the girls have had their first child. One in five Zambian youth are already HIV positive, yet most of them (60 to 79 percent) don't believe they are at risk of contracting the disease.**

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**Recognizing a major unmet need, Mary, along with her sisters and friends, decided to launch a magazine that would inform young people about critical health issues and help them to make more responsible decisions in their lives.**

they knew were sexually active, but had no place to turn to get the kind of information, services, and support they knew they needed.

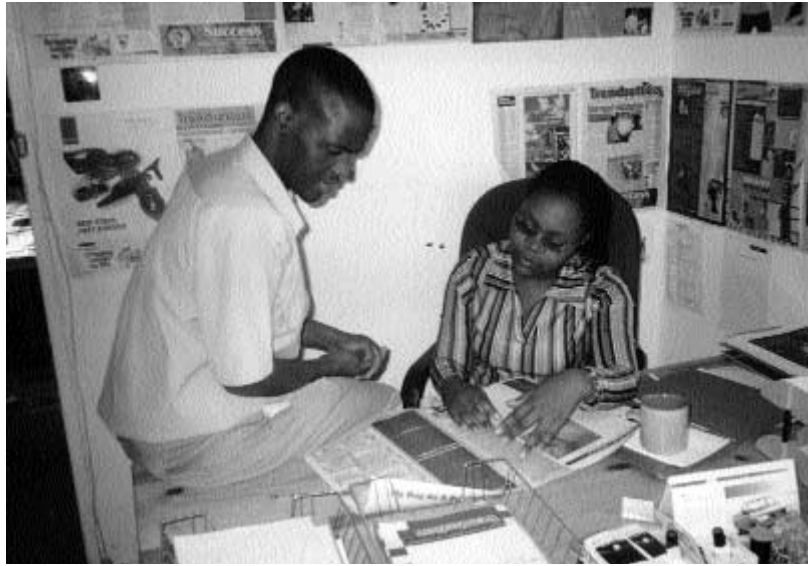
Lack of access to information was making it difficult for young people to make healthy and informed choices in their lives, particularly about HIV/AIDS. Last year, for example, more than 120,000 Zambians died of HIV/AIDS—and it's estimated 1.2 million are living with the disease.

Recognizing a major unmet need, Mary, along with her sisters and friends, decided to launch a magazine that would inform young people about critical health issues, and help them to make more responsible decisions in their lives. Having little experience of their own, they sought advice from a number of young people who were already working at a local newspaper. Then they went to work.

The first articles were written at the kitchen table in the Phiri home, banged out on an old typewriter. The young founders brought their first edition to a few interested people at the Johns Hopkins University's Center for Communication Programs (CCP), at its USAID-supported Zambia field office. There they found support to publish their first issue—but only the first. As Elizabeth Serlemitos, Resident Advisor to JHU/CCP/Zambia explained, "I felt it was a worthwhile endeavor, and in fact had already been thinking of something like it. Since they only wanted funding to print the first issue, I agreed." Serlemitos noted that it was not a very big gamble—about \$100 to print 300 copies. The first issue of *Trendsetters: Setting the Trends for a Wise and Proud Generation* was published in 1997.

### **A Publication By and For Youth**

From the start, *Trendsetters* set out to be a youth-led and youth-run media project. "We knew from the beginning that young people should write this, and that



Staff members Munalula Mulonda (left) and Masuka Mutenda (right) discuss a *Trendsetters School* article.

it had to be by and for youth,” recalls Mary Phiri. “We also wanted it to provide employment. So many young people were out of work, and they needed to gain experience and get a job.” She was determined to make the paper a voice for Zambian youth. “We wanted to create a forum in which issues that young people care about can be discussed, because we are the ones going through all of this,” she explained. “We should be the ones who people listen to—and there was nothing like it before we started.”

Today, the magazine has a full time staff of eleven, and two part-time staff, all ages 18 to 29. They do everything: edit, write, research, design, photograph, sell ads, and manage other Youth Media programs and projects. Serlemitos of JHU/CCP underscores the importance of having a youth-run magazine. “I believe very deeply in the notion of by youth for youth. They are the leaders of tomorrow, and they need a chance to grow and develop today.” There are a lot of very talented young people who are unemployed, and she believes in rewarding them with opportunities. In comparison to another newspaper she’s familiar with which is run by adults, she says *Trendsetters* is different. “It’s vibrant, and really

feels like a young person would want to read it. The other newspaper I know is more didactic about health issues. It’s not so alive.”

*Trendsetters* touches on a wide range of issues of interest to youth. Yet while there is always a major and minor theme to each publication, driven in large part by what’s happening in the news and current youth culture, the

magazine deals primarily with health issues, with a major focus on HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.

There’s often a headline interview of a well known figure, but with a strong health message. For example, the paper interviewed the youngest-ever member of Parliament in Zambia. He talked about the fact that he got where he was—and didn’t get infected with HIV/AIDS— because he wanted to achieve something in his life. “We try to have role models like this in the paper,” Phiri explains, “so people can see what others have been able to accomplish.” The paper seeks to help

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**The paper seeks to help young people make sound decisions about relationships, gain the skills to negotiate safe sex, and become goal-oriented in life.**



Founding Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda visits a Youth Media exhibit.

young people make sound decisions about relationships, gain the skills to negotiate safe sex, and become goal-oriented. In order to accomplish these ambitious goals, *Trendsetters* offers a series of regular features, including a “Dear Auntie Josephine” column, a Q&A section on health, and a “celebrities” section, as well as in-depth articles and letters to the editor.

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**After a number of years of having to prove its credibility, *Trendsetters* is now on the list of media outlets in Zambia to be called for national news events and press conferences, a sign of its impact and credibility.**

### **Who’s Reading It and Why?**

While *Trendsetters* is read by roughly 10,000 people, its impact in the community is not solely through its youthful readership. Many of those who buy the paper are parents. “We realize that parents are able to use *Trendsetters* to communicate with their children about issues they are not comfortable talking to them about,” says Distribution Manager Namonje Nakanyika, age 23.

The impact of the paper can be viewed from different perspectives. A review of the “letters to the editor” provides some indication of how the magazine is a valued and useful source of information, and one that often influences young readers to change unhealthy attitudes and behaviors. Many young people write in to say they have volunteered at a local NGO because the paper suggested it, or that they had changed their minds about something because of the way it is written. One letter reads:

We the youth of Zambia have no one who talks to us on issues and matters that pertain to reproductive health, our well being, and how to live and behave as responsible citizens of society... Your paper has taken over most of our parents’ roles in trying to inform and educate youth on how to handle situations faced in life and behave responsibly.

—John Katwishi Jr., *Trendsetters* reader who had recently lost his father

If one measure of impact is to be recognized as a leader, then *Trendsetters* is doing well. It received the Global Media Award from the U.S.-based Population Institute, for best team reporting in 1997, its first year of publication. It also received the Radio Phoenix Millennium Pacesetters Award 2000—for a leading youth NGO contributing to the development of young people. After a number of years of having to prove its credibility, *Trendsetters* is now on the list of media outlets in Zambia to be called for national news events and press conferences, a sign of its impact and credibility.

One unexpected outcome has been an improvement in reproductive health services for young people. *Trendsetters* promotes the idea of young people going

to health services that have been identified as “youth friendly.” However, when a number of youth did so, they had negative experiences, and wrote to the paper that they were very disappointed. As a result, the paper confronted the health clinics, arguing that if it was willing to recommend them, the clinics had to improve the quality of their services.

*Trendsetters* has also become engaged in promoting civic engagement among young people. In 2001, for example, it joined “Operation Young Vote,” distributing flyers, informing young voters about the positions of the various candidates, identifying locations of the polling booths, and generally trying to combat voter apathy among young people. Many of those who registered to vote for the first time reported that they were motivated to do so through *Trendsetters*.



Reporter Natasha Phiri helped found the paper.

youth in the Zambian capital of Lusaka read the paper. There are also statistics that show changes in behavior, knowledge, and attitudes about safe sex, and there appears to be a reduction in HIV/AIDS transmission to 15- to 18-year-old girls—changes that Serlemitsos attributes, in part, to the large readership of the newspaper.

It is always difficult to measure the impact of a particular media on changed minds or shifts in public consciousness. “We can’t afford a formal evaluation of what we do,” Mary Phiri says, “but we know some things have changed, among them, a relaxation of abortion laws.” JHU/CCP’s Serlemitsos agrees. To do a real evaluation of *Trendsetters*’ impact would take more money than to publish it, she says. But new surveys have shown that up to 20 percent of

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**Staff talk about having gained more confidence, and feel they are much more ambitious in terms of what they think they can accomplish, as a result of working at *Trendsetters*.**

## Gaining New Skills

Through working at *Trendsetters*, young staff acquire a range of new skills. All of them go through a training period in one or more of the skills needed for the success of the paper, such as graphic design, web design, feature and investigative writing, and management skills. There's also a lot of learning around project management. While the editors have the final say, there are regular editorial meetings and brainstorming sessions where the staff inform them about what's going on, both in the country and around the world. "We don't assign pieces, but let writers choose, so they are truly interested in what they write," explains Phiri. Topics range from how to budget your money and interviews with those living with HIV/AIDS to how to lower your risk of getting raped.

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**Another sign of success is that some who have worked at the newspaper have pursued meaningful professional endeavors elsewhere.**

Interviews with the staff reflect that while they are gaining valuable professional skills, the greater learning occurs on a more personal level. Many young people join the paper to widen their horizons. "*Trendsetters* has introduced me to a whole new world of mass media and has enabled me to meet and interact with people of different races and cultures, from politicians to sports stars and entertainers, both local and international," says Munkulwa Hatembo, age 22, who covers the sports beat at the paper. "What attracted me to come here is that it's a paper written by young people and for young people, where youth can speak out on various issues affecting their lives."



Youth Media's Project Coordinator Mildred Chuumbwe explains the organization's mission to a visiting Swedish journalist.

Many staff also talk about having gained more confidence, and feel they are much more ambitious in terms of what they think they can accomplish, as a result of working there. They are learning “life skills” that make them more articulate leaders as well as better journalists. “I’m a totally different person than I was before I joined *Trendsetters*,” says Distribution Manager Nakanyika. “I’m more informed, responsible, and able to make better decisions about my health and future. I’m now able to talk to anyone, including my mother, about sex, HIV/AIDS, and any health issues.” A lot of young people don’t have any source of information about sex and reproductive health, she explains, “and I was one of them at one time. I guess that is why I am so dedicated to my work.”

Another sign of success is that some who have worked at the newspaper have pursued meaningful professional endeavors elsewhere. One writer began his own nonprofit youth community center, while another is the editor of the One World aidschannel.org, a multimedia web portal on issues relating to HIV/AIDS. Nakanyika has moved on to managing an HIV/AIDS outreach program at Care International.

### **Hitting the Tough Issues**

*Trendsetters* not only offers critical information to youth but also engages the broader community in debating issues of vital importance. Its most controversial issue spotlighted the personal diary of a young girl who had an illegal abortion, and who suffered terribly as a result. The fact that Zambia is a majority Christian country led to some pressure on the editors not to run the piece. “But the statistics—that 15 to 18 percent of young women become pregnant—made us feel we had to talk about it,” Phiri explains. The issue was delayed, but it was a complete sellout on the newsstands. The piece sparked an outpouring of letters from young women and men who wrote in to the paper saying how true the article was to their own experiences, and thanking the editors for helping them understand the issues better. “The emphasis that we are always trying to make,” she says, “is that in the end, prevention is better.”

Such editorial independence is critical. One major contributing factor, according to Phiri, is having a strong and supportive Board of Directors. When controversy does arise, she says, it’s important for those at *Trendsetters* to have the support of the Board, who are all professionals in various disciplines. Youth Media board members include respected journalists, media educators, lawyers, and financial analysts. When *Trendsetters* first started, it formed a steering committee whose members included representatives from the Ministry of Health and

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**“I’m more informed, responsible, and able to make better decisions about my health and future. I’m now able to talk to anyone, including my mother, about sex, HIV/AIDS, and any health issues.”**

**—Nakanyika Namonje,  
Distribution Manager**



Education, with the purpose of reviewing articles to make sure that they were factually accurate and culturally appropriate. As the paper gained editorial autonomy, the steering committee was disbanded.

### **An Ongoing Discussion: Can We Be Sustainable?**

While *Trendsetters* is primarily supported by USAID, through Johns Hopkins University's Center for Communications Program, it also receives some funding from the Ministry of Education HIV/AIDS Unit, through Ireland AID, UNICEF, and in-kind support for advertising and distribution from Coca-Cola. Only eight percent of its budget is covered by circulation and advertisements. In the absence of long term revenue streams, sustainability is clearly a major concern.

In part to expand its readership, and in part to diversify its funding, Youth Media launched a sister publication, *Trendsetters School*, which was initially supported by UNICEF and is now funded by the Ministry of Education HIV/AIDS Unit. "We started it because we wanted *Trendsetters* to reach more young people, and obviously a 15-year-old and a 29-year-old often can't relate to the same things," Phiri explained. "The problem was we were distributing the paper in the schools, and we couldn't afford it." She and others approached UNICEF and suggested that instead of buying 20,000 copies of the paper for school children and then distributing them, why not establish a newspaper for school children specifically and distribute it free of charge. The plan worked. Now, Youth Media prints 50,000 copies of *Trendsetters School*, which is distributed to every primary and secondary school in the country. Each school gets copies for their libraries. As a result, *Trendsetters* can focus on a slightly older readership (18 to 29) which can then attract more advertising for the paper, thereby helping to make it sustainable.

Other efforts to expand the paper's impact and funding, such as beginning a youth-led radio station, for example, remain in the planning stages. And there remains a major gap between what it takes financially to publish the magazine and what is raised through sales and advertisements.

JHU/CCP/USAID and the newspaper staff are seeking to help move *Trendsetters* toward greater self sufficiency. Right now JHU/CCP is covering printing costs (\$2,500 a month) plus contributing to staff salaries and some of the overhead costs. "I feel now they should have the capacity to sustain the organization," Serlemitos says, but it is clearly a challenge. She admits that breaking into

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**When *Trendsetters* first started, it formed a steering committee whose members included representatives from the Ministry of Health and Education, with the purpose of reviewing articles to make sure that they were factually accurate and culturally appropriate.**



*Trendsetters*, written and produced by 11 staff members, ages 18-29, is the highest circulation monthly in Zambia.

began reading the paper in 1997 are still reading it. But now, they are young adults with other concerns such as unemployment, pregnancies, and 'serious' relationships. The combination of the 'commercial' edition and the *Schools'* edition means that *Trendsetters* is reaching a wide range of youth in Zambia.

## Challenges

As successful as Youth Media is, the organization and its projects continue to face a number of challenges. In addition to the issue of funding, these include:

■ **Credibility** At first, few people took the magazine seriously. It was, after all, written and edited by young people. But over time, *Trendsetters* has found its niche and is respected by other media.

TV or radio is very difficult in Zambia, and that while Youth Media is exploring such new avenues, there needs to be a commitment to make the magazine more financially independent before branching out into other media. There are also funding concerns around the fact that the paper is attracting an older audience—perhaps reflecting the ages of those on staff who have grown up since its founding—and that some parents, who are major supporters of the paper, may be turned off by the increasingly young adult-oriented content. That, again, could hurt paid circulation. “If parents don’t like the way the paper looks,” says Serlemitsos, “we’ve lost that audience.”

Yet some of the staff disagree, arguing that the paper is growing with its audience. Teenagers who

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**While *Trendsetters* has expanded its circulation—and is now publishing a school version—it continues to grapple with the challenge of reaching young people living in rural areas.**

■ **Staying relevant to a young audience** “When you’re a young person, you don’t want to be reading something stagnant—you want it to grow, to look different, to have new graphics,” says Phiri.

■ **Retention** As staff gets older, they want to start something new, and get on with their lives. The challenge is identifying new young people and getting them to a high level of training. But there remains a question about continuity, and the level of investment in training that is appropriate—and affordable—if many of the staff leave in a year or two.

■ **How to keep good writers** One strategy is having an informal mentoring system. In this case, professional journalists who have worked in the field help to guide and inspire new staff. Also, the Board of Directors is partly made up of media and health professionals, who can be contacted when writers have questions.

■ **Effective Outreach** While *Trendsetters* has expanded its circulation—and is now publishing a school version—it continues to grapple with the challenge of reaching young people living in rural areas. Such youth are outside the traditional circulation of the paper, which primarily serves the urban, more literate population. The fact that *Trendsetters* is now available on line does enhance the number of people who can read it. Those who live abroad, for instance, can keep in touch with what’s going on in their home country.

### **Lessons Learned**

Among the lessons drawn from experience, *Trendsetters* offers the following tips to those engaged in similar youth-led publications:

- Have your circulation plan worked out ahead of time.
- Don’t shy away from controversy. The most popular edition so far caused a lot of debate, but was a sellout at the newsstands.
- Know your audience. Know who you are writing for and for what purpose. Try to picture who it is you are speaking to, because if you do that, your story will make people want to pick up the magazine.
- Keep trying to diversify your funding base. Among other things, it can help the organization be more independent in terms of its content.
- Have a strong, diverse, and well connected Board of Directors. When things get tough, and people object to controversial topics being written about, it’s important to be able to say that top leaders in the community and in the govern-

ment are on the Board. A good Board can give a youth-led organization a higher level of legitimacy.

- Have adult allies. JHU/CCP, for example, is not only a primary funder, but also a real partner. They helped open doors by giving *Trendsetters* staff training opportunities and providing enhanced access for them to speak at top level local and international conferences.
- Always believe your audience can grow. You can start with one media—as *Trendsetters* did. Then you can spin off other publications, websites, radio programs, books—all complementing the others and expanding the impact on young people.
- Try to have your staff commit to stay for a particular time period. Otherwise you invest valuable time and resources to train someone who leaves in a year, or even less.

Even given all of the challenges, long hours, and hard work, the young people who produce *Trendsetters* feel it's an invaluable personal experience, as well as an opportunity to make a difference in their communities. "I would advise young people who want to work in youth-led media to do so, because you learn so much and become responsible at a very young age," says Distribution Manager Namonje Nakanyika. "It's a challenge, because you have so much influence over young people's lives," she says. "I know that whatever I write will make a difference in a person's life or will make them take a different turn."

For more information on *Trendsetters*, please go to [www.youthmedia.org.zm](http://www.youthmedia.org.zm).

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## Using the Power of Television to Educate the Public about Critical Issues Facing Children

At 6 o'clock on Saturday nights, television viewers throughout Albania tune into a news magazine called Troç (which in English means "Straight Talk"). The show represents a dramatic departure from the typical Albanian TV diet. Its two hosts and on-air reporters range in age from 13 to 18. Visually, the show has a raw, youthful, documentary quality. But most unique is the show's content. Reports range from investigative pieces on child rights to human interest features on talented youth to educational stories highlighting the nation's culture, traditions, and points of interest.

"Media is very powerful here in Albania," comments Ingrid Hajax, 18, a member of Troç's Tirana bureau. Participating in the program and reporting on events has made Ingrid feel more powerful, listened to, and more involved in her community and country. "I understand better all the things around me," she says, "so I can do more things for people, for young people."

Troç has also instilled in Ingrid and her peers a greater sense of national pride and belonging. With more than 40 percent of Albanian youth seeking to emigrate from the country in search of opportunity, Troç is working to connect them with reasons to stay. It's also working to make the country a better place for its youngest citizens to grow and develop by educating the public about urgent issues facing young people and the importance of children's rights.

### An Experiment That Worked

While Troç prides itself on having fostered a high degree of youth participation in all aspects of producing a national TV show, the idea itself was conceived of by adults. In the late 1990's, UNICEF began looking seriously at ways of improving the situation of young people in the country, which had undergone years of political instability and conflict, leading to widespread corruption and violence. Given television's reach, UNICEF staff began brainstorming ideas for engaging young people in creating better quality programming for their peers, which would also have the benefit of educating the public and policymakers about critical issues impacting young lives.

Their concept was given a green light by Albanian National Television executives, who began exploring a show design featuring young children; yet produced

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**With more than 40 percent of Albanian youth seeking to emigrate from the country in search of opportunity, Troç is working to connect them with reasons to stay.**

by adults. Subsequent discussions eventually led to a proposal to actively engage youth as producers of a program focused on issues they felt important. While convincing the station's management wasn't easy, they finally agreed to a pilot run, which was partially funded by UNICEF.

"I haven't heard of other projects where youth participation in media production is quite so extensive," says Dale Rutstein, Communications Officer for UNICEF in Albania and one of Troç's key originators. "While UNICEF undertakes dozens of well conceived youth media projects around the world, this is probably its first attempt to engage youth in a nationally-broadcast television production."



Troç anchors alternate each week, introducing material collected from its eleven bureaus around the country.

The stakes were high, with a deep-seated fear among some local broadcasters that the quality of programming would suffer if young people were given so much autonomy over the show's content. "Initially people in the industry said you're going to set television back fifty years, standards will go down," Rutstein recalls.

But the show had several key factors in its favor. First was a technological revolution that enabled UNICEF to equip the young reporters with affordable mini DV cameras. Whereas in the past, professional quality broadcast cameras ran upwards of US\$50,000, the new mini DVs could be purchased for as little as US\$500. Second, was the fact that the station itself was struggling to overcome years of crisis in the country, was under-funded, and open to new ideas. And lastly, was a receptiveness

among the Albanian public to a show that was new and innovative. With a steady stream of foreign-made programming, Albanian audiences quickly developed a taste for the more rudimentary, but infinitely more original, content produced by local youth. Says Rutstein, "It doesn't look like anything else on the dial. It has this stop and look factor. You can be clicking and because you see this, you stop. That's what TV execs want to hear, the stop factor."

### **How They Did It**

To ensure national coverage, eleven Troç bureaus have been established around the country in conjunction with a school or local NGO. Participants are selected

by adult facilitators, which assist and coordinate the youth video bureaus. Applicants are selected based on their ability to communicate well through the medium of television. Whereas some bureaus are not able to accept all youth who apply, others have an open door policy.



Given the technical know how needed to produce professional quality television, a premium is placed on training. Participants each take part in an intensive six-day training during which they are taught the basics of researching and conceptualizing a story, operating a camera, conducting interviews, script writing, editing, and narration. While adults provide the training and continue to provide technical assistance, each show is conceived of and executed by youth.

Each bureau is staffed by five to ten young people, who meet after school and on weekends. These youth produce an average of three stories per month, ranging from two to ten minutes in length. A part-time adult coordinator is assigned to each bureau to assist with troubleshooting and overall coordination. The youth select their own story ideas and shoot the footage, sending the raw materials they've generated to the station's Tirana headquarters for final editing by adults.

To date, Troç has produced over 400 stories and recently celebrated its 75th broadcast. Says Rutstein, "It's the authentic voice of youth on TV, week in and week out." Past stories have included:

- A report on a shortage of books within schools in Korça. Interviews revealed that students often didn't have textbooks and those they did have were extremely outdated. As a result, teachers spent precious class time lecturing on the textbook content, with little time for explanation or dialogue. Students devoted most of their class time to quickly transcribing their teacher's remarks so as to have a written document to study from. Government officials responded to the Troç report by providing schools in the area with current educational materials.
- An investigative story into the "Blood Feud" tradition in Albania. Through this centuries-old practice, revenge for a crime may be targeted at any male relative of the perpetrator. As a result, hundreds of male children are kept in their homes by

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**While UNICEF put up the bulk of funding at the beginning, and donated much of the equipment being used, additional support has come from the governments of Italy and the Netherlands, and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD).**

parents who are frightened for their safety. One sixth-grade boy featured in the story told of spending his days at home because his parents were scared he would get beaten as a result of a murder committed by his cousin. The story focused widespread public attention on an issue rarely talked about.

- Stories about poor conditions in schools and school dormitories that resulted in repairs to plumbing and windows, and in one case, the firing of an abusive dormitory director.
- A story on how the Youth Parliament of Gjirokaster lobbied local government officials to address the problem of young people frequenting pubs and discos where alcohol was consumed. As a result, the local Council increased the legal drinking age from 16 to 18 years.

Additional stories have focused on the aspirations of graduating high school students, the relationship between students and teachers, environmental cleanup efforts by youth, anorexia among young girls, tobacco use by teens, and fun things to do ranging from scenic outings to sporting activities.

Mirian Bllaci, 18, has been with Troç's Tirana bureau for a year and worked on the boarding school segment that resulted in the dismissal of a dormitory director. Mirian admits it's hard work, particularly because people in Albania can be reluctant to talk about their feelings and opinions, particularly to a reporter. He sees the program as ushering in greater openness in Albanian society. "I'd like to think of Troç as a new wave, something that has not been done before," he says. "We are like pioneers of free-thinking, opening our minds, showing our problems without a set point of view."

### **Costs, Benefits, and Long-Term Prospects**

Rutstein estimates that over the past two years the program has cost roughly US\$3,000 per episode to produce. (However, this does not include UNICEF's contribution of equipment to TVSH that is used by Troç and other children's programs.) While UNICEF put up the bulk of funding at the beginning, and



donated much of the equipment being used, additional support has come from the governments of Italy and the Netherlands, and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). Most recently, funding has been received from INSIG, the state insurance company. While the show has relied on bilateral donors in the past, Rutstein believes that the corporate sector will soon be playing a larger role, in part due to its interest in reaching the youth market and in being perceived as a good corporate citizen.

What's the evidence that Troç is succeeding at its main goals—e.g., increasing public awareness of children's rights and strengthening youth involvement in civil society? A recent survey found that 40 percent of Albanians watch the show either regularly or intermittently, with 55 percent discussing the issues raised, a key indicator of raising the profile of children's rights. In addition, the show is viewed by audiences in the neighboring countries of Macedonia, Kosovo, and Serbia, and is seen via satellite by Albanian expats living around the world.

To date more than 80 youth have participated in the program, with an increasing number of them gaining notoriety through their on-air reports. Rutstein conjectures that a handful will pursue careers in professional journalism, with broadcast outlets already eyeing several of Troç's reporters for apprenticeship opportunities.

Aside from acquiring hard skills such as learning how to operate a camera or edit footage, participants report an increase in self-confidence, assertiveness, teamwork, and communication skills. "I'm a very different from what I was last year," says Ingrid Hajax. "I can express myself and feel more powerful than I did before. When I see someone I can immediately talk with them. It wasn't that way before."

What's more, Hajax's attitudes toward her country and her future have changed. "Now I feel I can do something here that is interesting for me," she says, adding that she will likely pursue a career in broadcast communications.

She and her peers are also working to alleviate tensions within the region. Last summer they toured Kosovo and Macedonia, with a slogan of "Let's Make Peace a Fashion." Their message was simple: youth throughout the region share many similarities, for example their clothing and musical tastes, which should be cause for celebrating commonalities, instead of emphasizing differences.

While Troç has had a clear impact on the skills and ambitions of its participants, those youth involved in the program are not considered its main beneficiaries. Troç was conceived of primarily as a communications project, not a youth development program. "Our efforts are primarily focused on the show's audience," Rutstein explains, adding that Troç's real purpose is to connect young people throughout the country with a sense of hope about Albania's future and their role

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in contributing to the nation's development. At the same time, UNICEF sought to increase awareness among key decision-makers of critical issues facing Albanian children and the importance of investing in solutions. Says Rutstein, "We wanted to create a more child friendly society."

Judging from recent survey results of audience numbers and attitudes toward the show, there's evidence that progress is being made toward reaching that ambitious goal. With local funders now in support of the Albanian program—and audience members still hungry for its content—Troç can see ahead into the future, at least for the next few years for which funding has been secured.

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## Young Journalists Seek to Engage Their Generation

A Vietnamese teenager growing up in Hanoi, Ha Thi Lan Anh was in the eighth grade when she conducted her first major radio interview. It was with an American doctor who had come over to Viet Nam to treat young children with facial deformities, as part of Operation Smile. “He was very busy, and it was difficult to pin him down for an interview,” Lan Anh admitted, “and my friends and I ran around the hospital, trying to find him.” When she finally found the doctor, he was amazed that his interviewer was so young, and had waited so long to talk with him. But to this 14-year-old, it was worth the wait and the effort. “I had felt so distant from these children in the hospital, who were suffering, and who had such hard lives,” Lan Anh said. “During the interview, this doctor was teaching me, and I was learning so much, about him, about the children and myself.”

Today, Lan Anh is in the eleventh grade, and while keeping up with her studies, has become a pioneer in youth radio—helping to launch Viet Nam’s first youth-led media organization. She’s also energized a growing number of young activist journalists who seek to ensure young people in Viet Nam have a strong voice in shaping government policies that affect their lives and futures.

### A First in Viet Nam: A Youth-Led Radio Program

The event that helped spark the development of Viet Nam’s youth radio programming was a visit by a number of journalists to Lan Anh’s school in 1997. They were from the government-run radio station, looking for young people to read stories on the radio. They thought Lan Anh had a wonderful voice. At first, she loved her new internship, and was pleased she could get such a job and make some money. But slowly, she realized that the radio programs were all the same—and didn’t reflect the lives or concerns of her peers. There was no music, and no independent children’s voices. Also, those youth who were being interviewed just repeated what the adults were saying, not their own ideas. “Some stories were unrelated to our real experiences, and I was determined to do something new,” she recalls. Lan Anh wanted to find a way she and her fellow students could voice their opinions and concerns about the world around them. So she began to write her own stories. While few were broadcast or published in the beginning, she kept trying, and became increasingly successful at placing her pieces. Her friends, encouraged by her success, also began to write and contribute to the radio

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**It wasn't easy to convince adults of the importance of having young voices in the media, particularly in an Asian culture in which young people are taught to follow the rules.**

station and to a children's newspaper, and together, they created a club for young people who loved to write.

Supported by adult journalists who became their mentors, these young people established the Young Journalists Group (YOJO), in 1998, with the support of UNICEF and the Vietnamese National Radio. There were 20 original members from Hanoi, ages 12 to 14. "We wanted a place to write more freely and to study journalism," Lan Anh explains. "We wanted to be useful and professional." The group, which is also known as the Junior Reporters' Group, currently involves more than 300 youth across the country in eight provincial chapters in its network of contributing writers.

It wasn't easy to convince adults of the importance of having young voices in the media, particularly in an Asian culture in which young people are taught to follow the rules. But believing in her mission, Lan Anh persevered. "Just because something hasn't been done doesn't mean it can't be done." Today, YOJO produces "Children's Aspirations," broadcast twice a week—the first such youth media program of its kind in Viet Nam.



Lan Anh sees the promotion of youth activism as key to the work of the Young Journalist Group.

Every Tuesday and Thursday morning, at 7:30, roughly 30 million radio listeners tune in to the program, broadcast by "Voice of Viet Nam," the government radio station. YOJO also produces "Voices of Youth," a monthly newsletter, and has published a book, also named *Children's Aspirations*, containing children's writings about social issues. Over the past four years, YOJO has produced roughly 500 radio programs and published hundreds of articles in over 20 print media outlets.

The radio program has two young hosts, and is often

organized around a particular theme—such as the Rights of the Child, the lives of street children, or the UN Special Session on Children. While young people develop the content, adults work with them in the radio studio to help edit the tapes and produce the program.

Why focus on radio? The group recognizes that most Vietnamese citizens don't own televisions, having far greater access to radios. Also, many young people living in rural areas work in the fields in the morning. Now they can now listen to the program over a loudspeaker. Lan Anh believes that when young people watch TV, they focus on whether the speaker is handsome or beautiful, but don't listen seriously to what is being said. "With the radio, it's different," she says. "It's much more lively. People are more apt to pay attention to your story and to your message." While young people are the target audience for the radio programs, adults listen also. The program receives letters from their listeners, and many are parents.

### **Impact on Young Lives**

YOJO members believe that by raising their voices through the media that they can help educate and inform the public on issues that are of particular concern to youth, often pursuing stories that adults don't consider "news." Some stories, for example, seek to increase public awareness of excluded youth, including the plight of orphans, street children, and the disabled. YOJO records their voices and stories on the program as a way to dramatize both their needs—and talents.

The group is currently engaged in efforts to train street and working youth with the skills to produce their own print and broadcast stories. Thanks to support from UNICEF and adult journalists, YOJO plans to not only equip these young people with media and journalistic skills, but also educate them about their rights. In 2000, for example, UNICEF sponsored the young journalists to organize a "Street Voices Forum" for street youth to discuss their concerns about employment, reproductive health, and other obstacles they have to overcome.

Among the topics covered in the "Children's Aspirations" radio program are reports about the pollution of Hanoi's rivers, gender equality, sustainable development, and ways in which youth can volunteer. Getting youth informed about issues that directly impact their lives and their communities is the first step. As a result, a growing number of youth and others are working to come up with solutions to improve their communities.

Some of the group's stories have, in fact, prompted individual and community action. In one case, feature stories on the enormous challenges facing Viet Nam's

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street children not only generated charitable donations, but prompted volunteers to visit the children. An article on a local flood helped raise money from a German foundation to build a new school located in the flooded community. Another piece led to high school students being invited to spend time with children affected by chemical poisons resulting from the U.S. military involvement in Viet Nam in the 1960s and '70s.

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**“Young people today are really unaware of the issues,” Lan Anh worries. “They may care about the environment, and youth rights, but it’s all very theoretical, they have no hands on experience.”**

To date, there has not been any formal evaluation of YOJO’s impact. Yet Misbah M. Sheikh, Partnerships Officer with UNICEF Viet Nam, notes that the young journalists (also referred to as the Junior Reporters’ Group) is “making its members more confident, articulate and outspoken—which, in itself, is a great outcome.”

### **The Media as a Path for Youth Leadership**

The young journalists who are members of YOJO develop a range of skills. A number of adult journalists serve as mentors, sharing their interviewing and writing techniques with the youth. Writing and other workshops offer participants additional opportunities to sharpen their technical expertise. Yet clearly these young people are learning more than journalistic skills. Membership in YOJO also provides an avenue for young people to get more involved in society, and to gain a voice in the decision making process. “Young people today are really unaware of the issues,” Lan Anh worries. “They may care about the environment, and youth rights, but it’s all very theoretical, they have no hands on experience.” She and her colleagues see their work as a way to spur more engagement in social issues among their peers. “That’s why we want to be more than youth journalists. We see ourselves as youth activists and youth innovators.”

As a result, YOJO has organized local and national forums between youth, government leaders, social workers, and other leaders around the country. Believing that young people don’t have adequate opportunities to meet with national policy makers, YOJO organized the first meeting of youth with top government officials, including the President of Viet Nam and the Prime Minister. The young people told these top officials that they did not want to be mere decoration, but instead wanted to have input into policies that affect youth, and to help implement government initiatives in areas such as children’s rights and the environment. The result: Lan Anh and her group were invited to a national conference, and asked to comment on Viet Nam’s National Action Plan for Children 2001-2010.



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**Clearly, YOJO has made the transition from a youth-led media project to a strong force for youth empowerment across the country.**

“We were ten kids among 300 adults,” says Lan Anh proudly, “and just in case they forgot what we said, we wrote out a young people’s declaration and printed it out for the leaders.” Today, Viet Nam is one of the few countries that allows children to participate in shaping and implementing child policy at the highest level. Among their recommendations (which has not been acted upon) is the establishment of a Youth Advisory Board to help oversee the implementation and evaluation of the Plan.

The group’s organizational leadership was highlighted at the UN General Assembly’s Special Session on Children held in New York in May 2002. Lan Anh was chosen as one of the 12 delegates to participate in the International Dialogues with leaders of the countries attending the UN General Assembly, and presented UN Secretary General Kofi Annan with a message from Viet Nam’s youth. With two friends from Poland and Nigeria, she also helped organize a seminar entitled “Ways to set up projects with children’s participation.” It was the only one entirely implemented by children at the UN Special Session, and attracted 50 participants.

Clearly, YOJO has made the transition from a youth-led media project to a strong force for youth empowerment across the country. As an International Youth Parliament Action member, YOJO is now directing Global Youth Service Day celebrations across Viet Nam, as well as the Youth for Employment

Campaign and the Street Voices Project. The group is guided by the philosophy that you must be the change you want to create. “We stress children’s rights, youth participation, and youth empowerment,” says Lan Anh, “which are new issues in Viet Nam for adults and for youth—but are too important not to be addressed.”

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**“I feel this organization is incredibly important, not only to serve as an example that youth can be more involved in producing their own media, but in facilitating the creation of other youth-led initiatives, such as web pages, hotlines, and other media outlets.”**

**— Misbah Sheikh,  
UNICEF—Viet Nam  
Office**

## **Sustainability**

The “Children’s Aspirations” radio program is sponsored by “Radio Voice of Viet Nam,” the government radio station, which provides technical equipment, radios, and tapes to YOJO members, as well as the use of the radio station itself.

UNICEF sponsors skills training workshops, and provides financial support to print the newsletter—which is distributed to leaders in the NGO, public, and private sectors. UNICEF covers the group’s annual budget for the newsletters and the programming, which is roughly US\$8,000. When a special need arises, such as special youth conferences, the group raises additional funds. Yet funding remains an ongoing need and concern.

According to Misbah Sheikh at the UNICEF–Viet Nam office, “we hope we will be more involved technically in making this a truly viable vehicle for youth participation in the coming year.” She added: “I feel this organization is incredibly important, not only to serve as an example that youth can be more involved in producing their own media, but in facilitating the creation of other youth-led initiatives, such as web pages, hotlines, and other media outlets.”

Even though funding is a challenge, the group has plans to expand its work in the future. They want to get more “excluded” youth groups involved in the projects, including rural and ethnic children and youth, and plan to publish a second *Children’s Aspirations* book early next year.

## **Challenges**

While YOJO has made significant strides over the past few years in gaining a voice for children and youth in Viet Nam, through the airwaves, print media, and outreach efforts, the group still faces a range of challenges. Among them:

■ **Organizational structure** Because YOJO has chapters in eight provinces nationwide, it is hard to keep them coordinated and connected. To make the local offices more efficient, YOJO tries to build effective and strong management structures at the local level. A board of managers is elected in each office, which then works with the lead office in Hanoi.



Lan Anh meets with other young representatives at the UN Special Session on Children, held in May 2002.

■ **Editorial control** With 300 young journalists who want their pieces to be published, there's a real strain on the editors for what to publish. Increasingly, local radio stations will broadcast their pieces, which somewhat alleviates that pressure.

■ **Financial stability** YOJO recognizes the need to expand their expertise in fundraising, as well as their donor base, being primarily dependent upon Viet Nam's official radio station and UNICEF for funding and support. Lan Anh admits: "We need to attend fundraising workshops, and talk to people who already have experience in the field. Our proposals need to be well written, with clear goals and outcomes for the populations we seek to reach."

■ **Age-ism** At first, working with adults was difficult. How to overcome their lack of trust? "Be persistent, committed, and dedicated," says Lan Anh. Young people, she says, must be creative in terms of lobbying for what they want, both in conferences and with government officials. "Too often, adults don't take young people seriously. Children are supposed to obey adults, and not break the rules."

■ **Time management** This is a skill that everyone needs to learn. Members of the group are students who are also working very hard at writing and producing radio programs. Being organized is important, but according to Lan Anh, "knowing you have this high level of energy, and focusing that energy, is key."

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**"We need to attend fundraising workshops, and talk to people who already have experience in the field. Our proposals need to be well written, with clear goals and outcomes for the populations we seek to reach."**

**— Lan Anh,  
YOJO Founder**

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**For Lan Anh, the mission for YOJO is to “work with people, connect them, and be connected.”**

■ **Organizational capacity** In order to strengthen the capacity of YOJO, its members have developed a strategy of mentorship and peer training—where the senior journalists in the group train the younger ones. This means that new leaders can emerge and run the organization and the projects when the “seniors” leave.

■ **Evaluation** While no formal evaluation is in place, YOJO sends out questionnaires to schools in cities where the group has offices, as well as to NGOs, sponsors, and their nationwide listeners, to get feedback on the effectiveness and impact of their radio programming. These questionnaires are evaluated by the Society Research Institute, and the results are discussed at YOJO’s annual meetings.

### **Lessons Learned**

A number of lessons have emerged over the years as YOJO has continued to expand its efforts. Youthful creativity is essential, says Lan Anh, but so are professional skills and experience. “Working with journalism and radio in particular is fun, but if you want to gain recognition, then you have to work professionally and have technological expertise.” She also believes that if you want to inform, inspire, and influence people, you have to be open minded, and be willing to get to know people and build up your contacts. Learning how to work cooperatively with children and adults is critical. Also, if you work in youth media, “you have to communicate voices of young people, their concerns, needs, and aspirations.” Another word of advice: “be brave, speak out about what you think—but also be open-minded about the diverse opinions you will get back in response.”

Perhaps most importantly, have a mission that drives your work. For Lan Anh, the mission for YOJO is to “work with people, connect them, and be connected.” She also has her own personal goals, which include becoming a full time journalist, being a diplomat, and perhaps running her own NGO. Put simply, she wants her work “to contribute to the revolution among the younger generation that wants to promote and spread the positive side of the world—the side that allows people to live up to their fullest, develop their potential, and enjoy being special human beings on this earth.”



Members of the Young Journalist Group help produce Vietnam's only youth radio program, and have a growing voice in shaping policies. Here, Lan Anh interviews a government official.



## Chronicling Life Through the Eyes and Voices of Youth

Each issue of *Youth Outlook (YO!)*, a monthly literary journal published in California (USA), begins with an invitation to its young readers to participate in the magazine's weekly editorial brainstorming sessions. The notice is a reflection of the paper's commitment to being a magazine by and for young people, ages 14 to 24, who live and work in the San Francisco Bay area. The award-winning magazine, founded in 1991 to give young people a public voice, reaches 40,000 people nationally. Recent stories include young women learning the martial arts of Kung Fu and kickboxing; a first person story of a visit to the West Bank and Gaza; an article about youth activists fighting toxic waste in their communities; a piece on how to survive on your wits in a "rough" neighborhood; and a poem by a young Vietnamese man who's serving time in prison.

*YO!*'s current editor, Kevin Weston, was 22 when he joined the paper. "I was a poet, and wanted to become a better writer and develop my communications skills," he says. "I wasn't sure *Youth Outlook* was the place for me, but once I saw I could keep my same voice, in poetry and music, that drew me in." After spending a number of years in other pursuits, Weston returned last year to become editor of the paper. "We're building young people's capacity to communicate in a literary way, and I wanted to be involved in that."

### Led and Inspired by Young People

*YO!* is a project of Pacific News Service (PNS), a San Francisco, California-based wire service that syndicates articles to subscribing publications worldwide. PNS also organizes forums linking public policy to grassroots experiences, and consults with government, private, and non-profit groups to enhance their capacity in the areas of communications and outreach to ethnic minorities and youth. Over the years, PNS has helped launch and support a series of youth media outlets.

In explaining how *Youth Outlook* came into being, Sandy Close, Executive Editor of PNS and New California Media, talks about the devastating budget cuts for youth media and journalism that were taking place in the late 1980s in California. "I felt the hunger for young people to express themselves and to find their voices, and there weren't any outlets for them," she recalls. As a result, Close and others at PNS began meeting with young people in the San Francisco area, particularly those from "high risk" backgrounds, to discuss innovative ways for

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**"I felt the hunger for young people to express themselves and to find their voices, and there weren't any outlets for them."**

**— Sandy Close,  
Executive Editor of  
Pacific News  
Service.**



**YO! is unique in the region as a youth-run and written journal which seeks to “chronicle the world through the eyes and voices of young people.”**



them to express their ideas and concerns.

“Something began to explode during that time, because there was so little communication or human relationships in our culture, and young people wanted to connect,” Close explains. “Communications had begun to supplant community as the bonding tissue for young people, who began to see that if you didn’t have a voice, if your group wasn’t visible or recognizable in the media, that in many ways, you just

didn’t exist.” In large part as a result of these ongoing conversations among youth and journalists, *Youth Outlook* was created in 1991—the first in a range of youth-led media that would be developed and supported by PNS.

While *YO!* is now youth-led, it was started as a joint project by adults and young people. “At PNS, we were able to create venues for young people to come together. They wanted us there,” says Close. “We couldn’t do it without them, and they couldn’t do it without us.” Today, she says what’s so exciting is that *YO!* and similar youth publications have been taken over by young people, writing for each other. *YO!* is unique in the region as a youth-run and written journal which seeks to “chronicle the world through the eyes and voices of young people.”

*YO!* is produced monthly by a staff of 13, ten of whom are between 17 and 21 years of age. Weston, as editor, is 33. As noted, people from the ages of 14 to 25 are invited to participate in the weekly editorial meetings. “Anyone of that age can come and generate ideas,” says Weston, “and since we meet in the Pacific News service newsroom, we get ideas from others as well.” About 70 percent of the articles are written by staff, and the rest are sourced out to a regular group of young local freelance writers. Articles are also submitted through the website ([www.youthoutlook.org](http://www.youthoutlook.org)).

While outside contributors include students who write for their high school newspapers, many of *YO!*’s readers and contributors are youth who are in the juvenile justice

system, homeless youth, or those in foster care. With most articles written in the first-person narrative, the stories provide intimate views of people's life experiences. "We think that's how we get the most value out of these pieces," explains Weston. "For us it's more interesting, and it's what differentiates us from other youth newspapers." The editors rarely assign articles to specific writers, they can decide for themselves what they want to write. This strategy comes from a belief that if an individual chooses to write about a specific topic, that means they're interested in it, and will more easily find their own voice.

### **A Focus on Stories Not Often Told**

The articles and special features of each edition of *YO!* cover a wide range of topics. The March 2002 edition focused on the theme of personal struggle. The cover story is on girls' self defense—with articles by young women learning martial arts. Another traces a graffiti writer's journey from offender to educator. The issue also includes a photo journal of a young man's visit to the West Bank, and poetry from youth being held in Juvenile Hall facilities in the San Francisco Bay area. "The issue was about struggle—the fight everyone has to engage in to survive in the world today," explains the editor.

Recent editions have included an article about a Silicon Valley Chinese American millionaire who committed suicide; a "letter from the enemy," about a young woman who writes from Afghanistan; an interview with a 20-year-old undocumented youth from Mexico; and "Living Without My Tongue Ring," a personal lament against tongue piercing. Regular features include photo essays, comic strips, an art gallery, and interviews with local artists and musicians. "There are so many voices, urban black youth, suburban kids, street people," says Christina Wong, who joined *YO!* as an editor and art director, and has been freelancing for the paper since she was 18.

"This is not to say we can print anything," Weston clarifies. The print magazine goes to high schools, so there are limits to what it can contain. Issues do deal with more controversial subjects, such as young people's sexuality and the way they express it. Another focus: how young people these days are making money—not just through drugs, but in the underground economy and off the radar screen. "We interview guys who fix cell phones, entrepreneurial stuff," says Weston. "These youth are creating jobs for themselves—alternatives to public and formal education. The fact is," he continues, "college doesn't have to be for everyone. You can go into business for yourselves." The journal also explores issues such as race, and class and gender gaps. This past year, *YO!* has gone through a re-inventing

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**Recent editions have included an article about a Silicon Valley Chinese American millionaire who committed suicide; a "letter from the enemy," about a young woman who writes from Afghanistan; an interview with a 20-year-old undocumented youth from Mexico; and "Living Without My Tongue Ring," a personal lament against tongue piercing.**

# toxic bay areas

## HOME SINCE GREAT-GREAT-GRANDMA

RICHMOND : Story : Erricka X

**A**n odd feeling came over me. I watched Julia Roberts in *Erin Brockovich* uncover environmental injustices, and I thought about my hometown of Richmond: abandoned shipyards, oil refineries and toxic waste dumps. Growing up around such a contaminated environment, it's no wonder that I – as well as many members of my family – have asthma.

My family has lived in Richmond for four generations, since before the city was named. We moved to these low-income areas because of two reasons: we could afford it, and banks and real estate investors limited people of color from moving elsewhere. My grandmother, Dessie Fortson, is a registered nurse. She believes that the environment has had a significant impact on the health of the people of Richmond.

*Yol: Grandma, can you briefly explain Richmond's industrial background?*

**DESSIE FORTSON** Tens of thousands of Black workers migrated from Arkansas, Louisiana,

Oklahoma and Texas during WWII to build ships in Richmond. We lived in the new homes constructed with lead and asbestos products. Most houses surrounded railways, industrial mining complexes and the oil refineries. The disastrous mix of chemical compounds often led to health problems ranging from asthma & bronchitis to cancer.

*Yol: How does this affect the families who live here today?*

**DF** A family that has lived in Richmond for many years like ours is more likely to have hereditary predisposition to asthma and certain cancers, as well as other diseases.

*Yol: How do you think this affects my mother's generation and mine?*

**DF** If you have a history of avoiding doctors, you aren't just going to start doing it one day, especially if it costs money. Unfortunately, you pass those bad habits on to your children and family members. Many people in our community can't afford basic health cov-



Reprinted with permission from Youth Outlook

## HUNTER'S POINT, RICHMOND, EAST PALO ALTO YOUNG ACTIVISTS FIGHT FOR HEALTHY NIEGHBORHOODS

Photos: Russell Morse

erage, let alone expensive testing that may not be covered under their medical plans.

I thought about what my grandmother had said. If asbestos and lead poisoning is common, our community must face many more problems because of our environment.

For example, why do women in Richmond have such a high rate of breast cancer-related deaths? To find the answer to this question, I went to The Laotian Organizing Project (LOP), based in Richmond, to speak with head coordinator Grace Kong. LOP specializes in educating young people about how pollution affects our environment.

The LOP office is full of pictures of youth activists, newspaper clippings, and brightly-colored leaflets with facts about Richmond. Grace, 25, has been working at LOP for only one year, but listening to her you would swear she had been there much longer.

*yo: Why does Richmond have such a high*

*rate of deaths from breast cancer?*

**GRACE KONG** Breast cancer and many other cancers are rampant in industrial areas. In Richmond there are chemicals and toxins all around us. The mixture of these chemicals, when inhaled on a regular basis, can cause cancer cells.

*yo: Can't doctors detect those things before they become dangerous?*

**ek** Survival is highly dependent on the stage the cancer is diagnosed. Richmond is a working class city. The mean income here is about \$29,000 per year for a single family, and many women living at or below the poverty line may not be getting diagnosed. It is often detected at later stages, and therefore, the patients have fewer treatment options resulting in higher mortality rates.

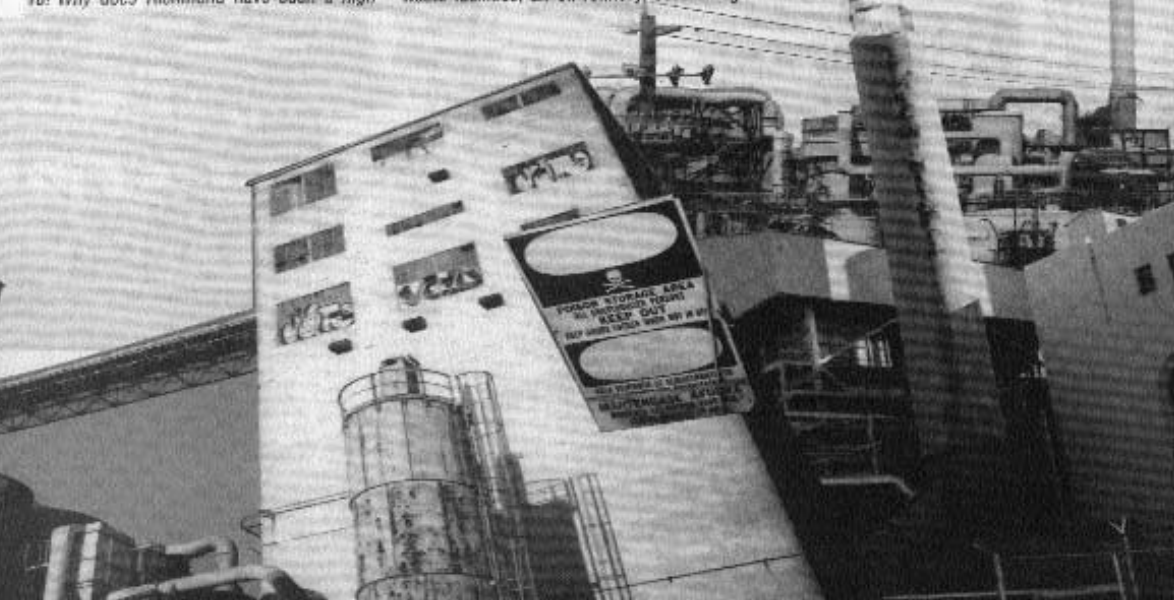
*yo: Where are some of the major areas of pollution?*

**ek** Richmond has two official hazardous waste facilities, an oil refinery, several legal

and illegal landfills and an East Bay MUD facility.

*yo: How can we get young people to understand environmental issues?*

**ek** Generally the way young men and women get involved is through outreaches we do at high schools or through our website. Once young people get involved in our environmental leadership workshops, they can let other people know about what is going on in our community. The problem is attracting young people's interest. A lot of this stuff seems normal to young people because they grew up with it. Our job is to teach them that this is not normal. The more people understand Richmond's environmental problems, the more we can do to change them. Environmental justice is also about awareness. The more awareness friends, neighbors and relatives have, the more they will be able to help themselves.



period, moving from a tabloid to a more comic book form. “This new form really sparkles and pulses with youth energy,” says Sandy Close.

In addition to helping to raise sensitive issues in the paper, and in the other publications that have spun off, YO! also sponsors quarterly forums, and invites people to come to talk about issues that young people are dealing with. One recent forum focused on identity, race, work, and religion—areas that are changing rapidly for youth in that region. “We have to be able to reflect their realities, and to remain relevant to our audience,” says Kevin.

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**All of the new media outlets are targeted to youth—with a particular focus on youth outside the system—including those on the streets or in jail.**

### **A Proliferation of Youth Media Outlets**

Seeking to expand the voice of youth in the region, Pacific News Service has developed a range of youth media outlets, in addition to YO!, that are both local and national in circulation. All are targeted to youth—with a particular focus on youth outside the system—including those on the streets or in jail. These new youth media, according to PNS, “represent a model of communications creating community, and community creating communication.”

■ YO! has a regular column in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, is featured on a local radio program (WALW FM), and has launched a video project. In addition, YO! sponsors an annual expo of new youth communicators—from website designers and graffiti artists to poets and video producers.

■ *The Beat Within* is a weekly “zine” that publishes the writing and art of incarcerated adolescents in Northern California prisons. PNS editors and YO! writers conduct about 40 workshops every week in these facilities. The project also generates the *Beat Without*, which is compiled from letters received from ex-juvenile detainees. As one outside expert notes, “these young people, who have been told they’re failures all of their lives, find that it’s magic to write something, see it published, and know others read it.”

■ *Silicon Valley Debug* is a media outlet for articles, poetry, and art from Silicon Valley’s “young and temporary” youth. It’s a platform for the unheard voices of those who “really make Silicon Valley happen.”

■ *Roaddarwz* is a website by and for young people who are “seeking their freedom” outside the system—riding the rails, hitchhiking across the country, looking for spare change, and “leading nomadic lives.” It calls itself “a free-thinking oasis amidst the desolation of conformist society,” and invites young people to submit their art, stories, advice, and folklore. A print version will soon be available, called *Freedom Manual*.

# yo! Youth Outlook

YOUTHOUTLOOK.ORG

OCTOBER 2002



## centro americanos SEARCH FOR HOME

MOTOCROSS

DON'T LEGALIZE IT

HAUNTED HOSPITAL

DORM LIFE

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## YO's Impact

While a major segment of its target audience is clearly the young, *YO!* is often used by teachers to spark discussions and enhance communications skills among their students. "People come to us because they identify with stories about race, identity, and what's going on in the streets," says art editor Christina Wong. "That's why teachers pass it out in their classrooms." About 50 percent of the paper goes to subscribers, and the other half is distributed free at schools, libraries, and other public locations.

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Staff members talk about the impact on their own lives and abilities while working at *YO!* Wong says she has sharpened her skills as an artist and an illustrator. "But I've learned other things as well," she says, "such as why it's more important to communicate something in simple elements, so people get the idea right away." She and others on the staff also talk about how working at the paper broadens them in other ways. Christina Wong, for example, now has the chance to supervise and teach up-and-coming writers and artists at the paper, and she's trying to learn more about the ad market and taking on more assignments in that area. "I have more confidence in my work and my abilities," she says, "both at the paper and outside in the larger world."

Another level of impact, of course, is how these youth-led publications reach their readers on a personal or emotional level. The special 80-page weekly publication for incarcerated youth, *The Beat Within*, has gained many devoted followers. The newspaper serves as a platform for young prisoners to express themselves and learn about others in similar situations. "This is a collection of voices no longer marginalized, and it reflects the realities to every degree of our generation, however raw and uncut," says one reader. Another comments: "I sometimes think if the *Beat* were a land or a country, it would be that liberated territory we all mentally escape to, where expressing the truth makes us stronger, not weaker."

A significant and valued element of *YO!*'s work is its sponsorship of writing workshops in schools and juvenile detention facilities. *YO!* journalists visit classrooms to encourage young writers to contribute to the paper. These interactive sessions offer students opportunities to express themselves, with no "censorship" of ideas. *YO!* also offers 40 weekly workshop sessions in the region's prisons, providing incarcerated youth the encouragement and skills to contribute their poems and writings to *Beat Within*. Some of those who have contributed to the paper while they have been in jail decide to work for the publication when they leave prison.

## Ongoing Challenges

■ **Sustainability** *YO!*, with an annual budget of US\$400,000, is a project of Pacific News Service, which is supported by a range of foundations, including California Wellness, the Ford Foundation, Open Society Institute, and the Richard and Rhonda Goldman Foundation. But sustained funding remains a major concern. Katherine Armstrong, a private consultant who assesses youth programs, notes that funding often follows an inspirational leader in the field, not always specific media programs. That situation presents its own challenges.

In the beginning, *YO!* had a tough time gaining sufficient funding, and began as a quarterly newspaper distributed by the *Oakland Tribune*. Today, an established paper, it has expanded into multi-media channels—with a website, radio division, and video. *YO!* is looking at ways of generating additional revenue for the website and magazine. The effort to become more financially independent will include getting more paid subscriptions and ads. The editors still want to be able to distribute it for free—but they also want more colored pages, better stock, more content, and the capacity to get it out on time. All that takes money.

■ **Remaining relevant to youth** A significant challenge is remaining relevant to young people, and producing a product that young people want to read.

■ **Maintaining good writers** Attracting and retaining quality writers is not easy. *YO!* tackles the problem by supporting significant on-the-job training, so that its young staff has the skills to update a website, edit a video, conduct interviews, and make the transition from first person essays to reports. “I consider us a news gathering organization,” Westin says, “and that means a whole new set of skills needs to be learned by the incoming staff.”

Also, while young writers are encouraged to write about what they are passionate about, that self selection process poses problems. “Since we let people approach us, and some of the same ones keep coming to meetings, they keep writing,” Christina Wong explains. “Sometimes that means we take really strongly opinionated people instead of the shy ones, who might have a lot to offer. Persistence can win out over talent, so you have to watch that.”

■ **Too wide a focus** *YO!*'s strength is its ability to capture the literary voice and talents of youth in the San Francisco area. But that broad focus also means it competes with a lot of other youth magazines and media in the area. It may suffer, therefore, because it doesn't have a more clearly defined focus or audience. Publications like *Beat Within* or *Debug* have more defined audiences and contributors, which may lead to a stronger base.

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**Another lesson: be honest to the culture. Don't shift away from the very difficult and often raw topics that young people are really dealing with, and want to talk about with their peers.**

■ **Access to other media outlets** In part because of its affiliation with Pacific News Service, *YO!* gained early credibility with other news organizations. The *San Francisco Examiner* runs a weekly column from *YO!* and sometimes reprints *YO!*'s articles. In addition, the Pacific News Service wire regularly features *YO!* writers. There's also a new youth video program that can be seen on the website.

■ **Evaluating Impact** *YO!* is currently undergoing an external evaluation. While that has not been completed, the paper is now systematically looking at distribution and assessing its readership, including how it is being used in schools.

### **Lessons Learned**

While a critical element for success at the paper is having a pool of young people to work with directly, it's clear that merely working with them as young professionals is not enough. According to Kevin Weston, "It's critical that this kind of work promotes youth development." He believes there has to be a plan and a focus on young people's personal development—and it has to fit in with the vision for the publication. "You will rarely see me speak," says Kevin. "Staff handles it all—the ads, public outreach, maintenance, public speaking skills. That's why I keep a low profile—so they can learn how to do all of this, and promote their product," he says. "You can't just take from them, you have to provide them with a space to learn new things and be challenged."

Another lesson: be honest to the culture. Don't shift away from the very difficult and often raw topics that young people are really dealing with, and want to talk about with their peers.

You need a culture of support to ensure success. *YO!* and the growing number of youth-led media in California may be the result of an unusually high level of acceptance and community support for young people expressing themselves in the public realm, in addition to strong leadership at Pacific News Service. "There are some unique qualities in this region of the country that may not be so true in many other areas," says consultant Katherine Armstrong.

On the other hand, there is evidence that this is a period of enormous vitality and innovation within the field of youth communications, both nationally and internationally. "The hunger for voice is coinciding with today's explosion in technology," says Sandy Close, "and who knows where it will morph next." See [www.youthoutlook.org](http://www.youthoutlook.org) and [www.thebeatwithin.org](http://www.thebeatwithin.org).

## LIVING WITHOUT MY TONGUE RING

Story : Ann Bassette // Illustration : Geoffrey Carnady

It was a week after my 18th birthday when the huge needle was shoved through the middle of my tongue by the buff dude with the funny holes in his ears.

My girlfriends had their tongues pierced when we were sophomores, with the help of fake IDs.

I asked a guy I was dating what he thought about tongue rings, but he gave me a totally different answer than what I expected. It would bother him to kiss a girl with one because he didn't like the idea of something hard and cold in an area that was soft and warm.

This didn't stop me from getting one a few years later. My best friend already had two rings in her tongue when she was holding my hand at the parlor. My legs went crazy and spread out when the piercer pierced the black marked spot on my muscle. My eyes watered a little, but it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.

I had a pretty ring. It was a silver rod with gems; a green one on top and pink on the bottom. Most people didn't notice that part though. I didn't tell my mom when I got it — I knew she would have some medical mumbo jumbo about it, seeing that she's a nurse. But she saw it eventually; it only took her three months before I accidentally stuck it out to run across my lips.

"Annie, let me see your tongue!"

"Huh?" I tried to play stupid.

"Let me see it!"

So I stuck it out, rolling my eyes, not wanting to hear her run her mouth.

"Tongues aren't cartilage; you could get mouth cancer!"

"Whatever," was my reply as I hurried off to work. She kept bugging me about taking it out for the next week. I ignored her. I was an adult; maybe she didn't see that part in me yet. Wait till she finds out that I want a tattoo. It's really not that big of a deal seeing that people get so many other places on their bodies pierced.

The thing is that everyone seemed to have a piercing in his or her tongue. I didn't want to be like everyone else. I didn't show it off either, but it was something that people were bound to notice, I suppose.

The thing that I hated about my ring was that new guys that I met treated me funny. Just because I had a tongue ring didn't mean I was going to fulfill their oral fantasies. It just brought a lot of negative sexual attention and I didn't welcome it. It was annoying.

I always got these comments like: "I've never kissed a girl with a tongue ring before." And I care because...? Point is, I don't care if you're fine or not, just because you never have doesn't mean your tongue is going to be in my mouth to see what it feels like.

I got fed up with the attention my pretty little ring brought me. I took it out two weeks ago. I heard it was supposed to heal up pretty fast, like in a couple of days. I haven't tried poking it through... and I don't plan on missing it. It was cool during the time that I had it, but I got over the phase. When I stick out my tongue, I now have a little indent on the top of my tongue muscle. I don't know if it's a scar, but my jewels no longer live there.

*I didn't want to be like everyone else. I didn't show it off either, but it was something that people were bound to notice.*





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