



www.varqafoundation.org

YOUTH CAN MOVE THE WORLD

A PROJECT OF Varqa Foundation

MID-YEAR REPORT

March - August 2008



...the junior youth groups become a focus of activity as youth walk along a path of service and learning with their younger counterparts in an environment that is encouraging and fosters personal growth.

VISION AND PURPOSE

Youth Can Move the World (YCMTW) is a project of the Varqa Foundation that works to promote youth empowerment at the grassroots through a training program that integrates group study, service and the use of the arts. Youth begin their training at national and local intensive programs, and continue the process of becoming a YCMTW Animator of junior youth groups through ongoing training over the following months.



YCMTW is run and delivered by youth. The central service component of the program is for youth participants (aged 15-25) to lead junior youth groups (ages 11-14) in their localities. The personal transformation experienced by the youth throughout their training is amplified as they contribute to the development of their communities through the education of junior youth. The nature of this transformation is intended to be intellectual, social and spiritual. Youth acquire a knowledge of pressing social issues, they involve themselves in the development of their communities, and they engage in reflection on their spiritual condition and personal choices. In turn, the junior youth groups become a focus of activity as youth walk along a path of service and learning with their younger counterparts in an environment that is encouraging and fosters personal growth.

The goal of YCMTW, therefore, is to raise up a generation of leaders imbued with a feeling of personal responsibility for the advancement of their communities, and the wider society. They will be optimistic about the future and possess a sense of purpose about their lives, characterised by high ideals and a desire to be of service to humanity.



The personal transformation experienced by the youth throughout their training is amplified as they contribute to the development of their communities through the education of junior youth.

REPORT OVERVIEW

From March to August 2008, YCMTW oversaw a rapid expansion in the number of youth participants and in the size of local junior youth groups. This expansion was achieved through two national trainings and 16 local training programs, which ranged in length from two days to three weeks. By August, more than 170 youth had participated in YCMTW training programs as Animators or participants. During the same period, about 600 junior youth became involved with intensive local programs that will be sustained by Animators and youth participants on a weekly basis.

A notable feature of YCMTW continues to be the geographical spread of its programs. Intensive training has taken place in Georgetown, East Coast Demerara, East Bank Demerara, West Coast Demerara, West Bank Demerara, , East Berbice, Upper Correntyne and Essequibo Coast. Many youth participants of the March and July national training programs proceeded to launch junior youth groups in their localities. In July and August, these junior youth groups were expanded and their youth leaders were supported through intensive local training programs. In some areas, local schools have recruited their students and area residents for new YCMTW programs that have brought additional youth participants and junior youth into the training process.

Institutional collaboration has also enhanced the quality of training programs. YCMTW works closely with the National Institute Board (NIB) of the Baha'i Community of Guyana to coordinate the participants' ongoing study of the sequence of courses developed by the Ruhi Institute. The ongoing training of youth participants will rely heavily upon the quality of the relationship between YCMTW and the NIB. Experienced and appropriate Ruhi Tutors will need to be systematically mobilised across Guyana to ensure that youth participants steadily proceed through the sequence of Ruhi courses, through which they are eventually trained to be YCMTW Animators of junior youth groups.

Much has been learned in the course of the past six months, and two lessons stand out in particular. The first is that accompanying youth participants to assume responsibilities for the planning and instruction of junior youth groups, concurrent with their training, has been highly beneficial. It is often invaluable to have more mentors on hand to assist with junior youth activities, and the youth participants have gradually increased their capability and confidence to lead junior youth groups. In local intensive training programs, this practice has also consolidated bonds of friendship and affection between the youth and junior youth of the same locality. These relationships lay the groundwork for the long-term sustainability of junior youth groups in these areas.

The second lesson has to do with the literacy of the junior youth. Even among the older junior youth (13-14 years), literacy skills differ greatly - from none at all to the highly literate. Learning how to adequately cater for such diverse groups has been a challenge and will likely continue to be a challenge in the future. Steps are already being taken to meet this need by offering 'On the Wings of Words' training in literacy instruction to youth participants and Animators.



The nature of this transformation is intended to be intellectual, social and spiritual.



YCMTW TRAINING PROCESS AND APPROACH

The YCMTW training process takes youth participants on a path to become Animators of junior youth groups. We use the term 'participants' to refer to youth who are proceeding through their training, and the term 'Animators' is reserved for those who have completed the three components of the program: the study of social issues, the completion of 5 books in the Ruhi sequence, and participation in leading a junior youth group. The training process also exposes participants to the arts, through singing, dance, drama, painting, and puppet-making.

The first component involves the study of contemporary social issues, which are presented in an Animator's manual that has been developed by YCMTW over the past several years. The manual presents information and concepts related to social issues and offers a structured set of questions that facilitate group discussion and reflection on the material. The social issues presented in the manual are: domestic violence, reproductive health, drug and alcohol abuse, gender equity, human rights, prejudice and discrimination, global prosperity, protection of the environment, and literacy. Experienced Animators lead participants through the material, and instruction in various arts assists them to express their understanding of the social issues and their relevance to their lives.

The second component of the training process is completing Books 1 to 5 in the sequence of courses developed by the Ruhi Institute in Colombia. These courses involve structured group discussion of passages from the Baha'i writings, which encourage reflection on individuals' moral purpose and their capacities for service. The Ruhi Institute describes the underlying philosophy of this curriculum:

The Ruhi Institute tries to understand the process of the transformation of human society in terms of ... a complex set of interactions between two parallel developments: the transformation of the individual, and the deliberate creation of the structures of a new society.... According to this vision of social change, the Ruhi Institute directs its present efforts to develop human resources within a set of activities that conduce to spiritual and intellectual growth, but are carried out in the context of each individual's contribution to the establishment of new structures.

The use of the Ruhi Institute material has been embraced by YCMTW participants, virtually all of whom have been raised in one of Guyana's major religions: Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, or the Baha'i Faith. While the material focuses on Baha'i writings, it encourages participants to also draw on their own religious experience and to view religion as fundamentally one, and to see its purpose as the promotion of unity and the advancement of civilization. In the context of Guyana's religious culture, participants of all backgrounds find it only natural that a program concerned with social transformation should address the spiritual dimensions of our moral purpose and capacities for service.

The third component of YCMTW is participation in a junior youth group. Many youth participants begin their involvement with junior youth during an intensive training program. YCMTW Animators lead junior youth programs in a morning session and youth training programs in the afternoons, an arrangement which gives the youth participants the opportunity to mentor their younger peers

from the beginning of their training. Following the intensive training, at least one local junior youth group makes its plans to continue on an ongoing basis with the support of an Animator or youth participant. Where the local training has attracted junior youth from other neighbourhoods or villages, more than one junior youth group may be formed.

The junior youth groups aim to engage the interests of their members, mold their capacities for service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth. A typical session will begin with prayers, songs and games before smaller groups are formed to study material that both helps to develop literacy skills and aims to empower junior youth. An example of this material is “Breezes of Confirmation”, developed by the William Mmutle Masetlha Foundation in Zambia, which follows the story of a young girl who is awakening to her capacities and desire to be of service to humanity. Following a period of study, the junior youth participate in an artistic

(PHOTO BELOW)
the First Lady, Varshanie Jagdeo (in white centred), after speaking at a gathering in Georgetown.



activity, which may include dance, drama, singing or painting. Finally, the youth Animators and participants lead small groups in structured discussions of the social issues that are featured in the Animators’ manual. The group usually closes with a period of reflection and sharing of what they learned during the day.

YCMTW has adopted several strategies for recruiting youth and junior youth into its programs. The first strategy has involved advertising in local and national media and subsequently enrolling youth through an application process. This strategy is used primarily to bring youth into the national intensive trainings, which took place this year from March 29th-30th and July 8th-12th. The second strategy has been for YCMTW Animators to visit neighbourhoods, schools and community venues to speak about the program and attract area youth and junior youth to attend a local intensive training. A third method of recruitment has been to rely upon a local school to assume ownership of the program by taking responsibility for registering their students and other youth and junior youth in the area. Where this strategy was used, at Camille’s Institute in Soesdyke (EBD) and Urmilla’s School in Enmore (ECD), a sizable group of about 100 new participants have been successfully recruited and they appear to be committed to the program from the outset. Furthermore, the schools provide a natural venue for ongoing junior youth groups and youth training after the intensive program.

Following the intensive programs, the youth participants require ongoing training to complete the sequence of Ruhi books necessary to become a YCMTW Animator. They also benefit from accompaniment in the process of initiating, maintaining and expanding local junior youth groups. To support this training process, YCMTW has established an infrastructure of national and regional coordinators. Rosheni Takechandra and Lomerharshan Lall serve as national coordinators and they also lead many administrative and research aspects of YCMTW. Regional coordinators oversee the ongoing training of youth and monitor and assist with local junior youth groups. These coordinators are:

- Anil Singh: Georgetown
- Shallini Misir: East Coast Demerara (ECD)
- Gordon Roberts: West Coast Demerara (WCD)
- Diya Dwarka: East Berbice
- Anis Ade-Thomas: Upper Corentyne
- Abeka Dupan: Essequibo Coast

The ongoing training and accompaniment of youth participants will also be supported by the National Institute Board of the Baha’i Community of Guyana (NIB). The NIB oversees the activity of tutors trained to facilitate the Ruhi materials, and these human resources will be deployed to meet the needs of youth participants for further training.

YCMTW has also forged valuable partnerships with other local and national organizations. Camille’s Institute in Soesdyke (East Bank Demerara) and Urmilla’s School in Enmore (East Coast Demerara) have been generous in their support of YCMTW by hosting programs and recruiting new participants. Parent workshops held at the conclusion of intensive training programs have been conducted in partnership with the Mother’s Union and the National Commission on the Rights of the Child. We have been honoured by the support the First Lady, Varshanie Jagdeo, who spoke with large groups in Georgetown and New Amsterdam.

RECENT ACTIVITIES: MARCH - AUGUST 2008

Reflection

From March to August 2008, YCMTW oversaw a rapid expansion in the number of youth participants and in the size of local junior youth groups. This expansion was achieved through two national trainings and 16 local training programs, which ranged in length from two days to three weeks. By August, more than 170 youth had participated in YCMTW training programs as Animators or participants. During the same period, about 600 junior youth became involved with intensive local programs that will be sustained by Animators and youth participants on a weekly basis beginning in September.

Conducting intensive local training programs this summer has significantly advanced our goal to create junior youth groups that are sustained by YCMTW Animators and participants. Feedback from coordinators suggested that two-week periods (or longer) for intensive training proved an effective way to cultivate an environment in which participants could experience the unique approach of YCMTW to training and capacity building. Longer training provides the opportunity for youth participants to take an active leadership role in the junior youth programs in their area. This allows the youth to gradually assume ownership of the intensive junior youth programs, and they establish strong bonds of trust and friendship that are integral for the sustainability of junior youth groups after the intense training. In the three-week training program in Soesdyke, for example, of the 30 youth participants about half became regularly involved with leading aspects of the morning junior youth program. Following the program, the youth were enthusiastic to expand one existing junior youth group in Soesdyke and others agreed to coordinate new groups in the three nearby villages of Coverden, Timehri and Sarah Johanna.

In several locations, the planned intensive training sessions were extended by one or two weeks to allow youth participants to rapidly advance through their study of Ruhi Institute materials. In Essequibo, the program was extended by an additional three weeks to allow nine participants to continue their training. In Coverden/Soesdyke (EBD), De Willem (WCD) and New Amsterdam (East Berbice), youth participants continued their training for an additional week after the intensive programs. By offering these extra opportunities for training, dozens of youth were able to complete at least one additional Ruhi Book in the sequence of courses.

A key aspect of the success of YCMTW programs has been ongoing partnerships with local schools. The Essequibo Coast experienced high enrolment in their July intensive junior youth programs primarily because they built on relationships between the Regional Coordinator and local schools, many of which began hosting YCMTW junior youth groups earlier in the year. In a period of two weeks in July, more than 150 junior youth in Essequibo participated in intensive programs led by YCMTW Animators and participants. During this period, nine YCMTW participants significantly advanced in their training and each of them plans to start junior youth groups in their own homes. In Essequibo Coast we have written permission from the Regional Education Officer to offer Junior Youth training in all the schools in the region, during the school day. This is a unique opportunity and we need to take fuller advantage of the permission.





An important component of youth training within the YCMTW programme is completing the service and practice components of the Ruhi materials. The first book of the Ruhi sequence encourages participants to host or participate weekly devotional gatherings, which serve to foster personal reflection and deepen the bonds of friendship between participants. More than 10 regular devotional meetings have been started by YCMTW participants in their areas. As youth assist one another to host devotionals in their homes, a sense of community within the villages begins to flourish that is centered on an uplifting activity that involves the participants' parents, siblings, neighbours and friends. For example, a gathering in the Sarah Johanna village (EBD) is attended by four YCMTW participants, family members and an area youth.

The service component of the second book for the Ruhi institute develops the skills of the youth in presenting and discussing themes on the oneness of religion, the promotion of unity, universal education and justice. When the youth visit community members to share their learning, they consolidate their knowledge and develop confidence in presenting themes and ideas central to the junior youth program. In Coverden, eight youth shared presentations on two themes with four area residents. While they were nervous at the beginning of the exercise, following the presentations several expressed the desire to share the presentations with their families and all of them felt enthusiastic about sharing what they had learned from their visits.

Local intensive programs have been most successful where organizers and participants have participated in daily reflection and consultation. These discussions provide an opportunity in which the project can be analyzed and improved in the light of daily learning and experience. Goals and plans are determined through consultation, and roles and responsibilities are shared. The integration of youth participants into daily reflection and planning for the junior youth program allows them to be actively involved with problem-solving and they feel empowered to volunteer for new duties and tasks. It has been found that regularly switching roles within the programs has served to allow new youth participants to develop skills and confidence, thereby enhancing the sense of collective ownership over the project.

Feedback from intensive programs has also highlighted the central importance of integrating prayer and song into many activities. In particular, beginning with prayer and song awakens a sense of unity among participants and organizers and it creates an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. The organizers of the West Coast Demerara junior youth intensive program reported that integrating music into their activities half-way through the program dramatically enhanced the quality of youth and junior youth training. In Coverden, West Bank Demerara and Upper Corriverton, it was reported that saying and studying prayers had a transformative effect on the youth participants and helped to deepen their commitment to the goals of the program.

The use of the arts in the intensive programs has also been a key element of success. Regional Coordinators highlight the enthusiasm and talent of the junior youth and youth as they steadily worked to portray their understanding of social issues through various arts, such as dance, drama, puppetry and banner design. These activities facilitate both comprehension and expression, and it has been reported that the arts have awakened new talents and confidence within youth and junior youth participants.

Analysis: Intensive Training Programs

Most local training programs held between March and August were focused on two goals: initiating or expanding an existing group, and initiating or continuing the training for area YCMTW participants. Often, the junior youth program and youth training would be conducted on the same day. The Regional Coordinator oversaw both aspects of the program, which were led by a small team of YCMTW Animators. Youth, training in the afternoons, were invited to assist with the junior youth program, and in some areas, to gradually assume responsibility for most aspects of the program. In July and August alone, 429 junior youth and more than 130 youth participated in YCMTW programs. We expect that a significant proportion of these participants will continue with the youth training or junior youth groups in the coming year.

The following table outlines the national and local trainings undertaken since March 2008.

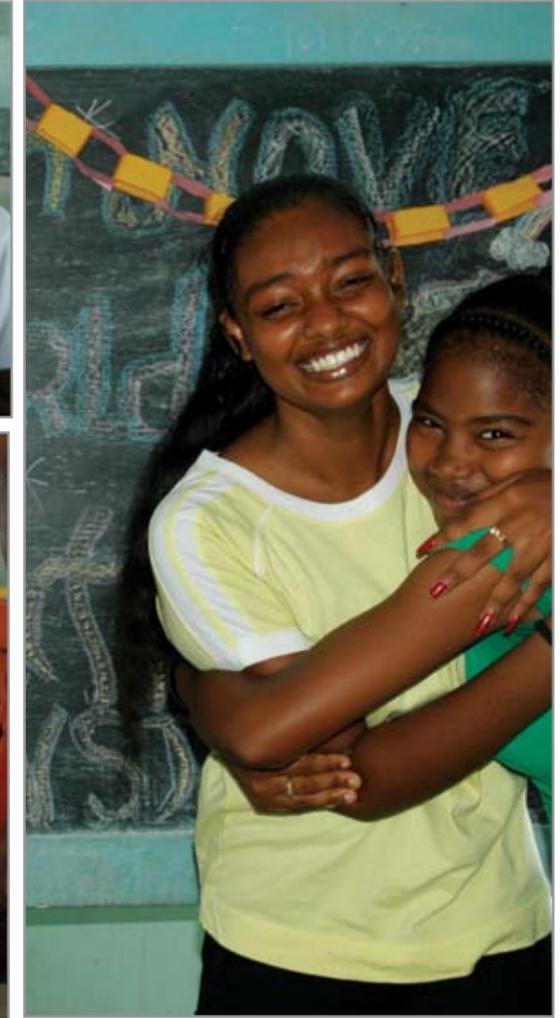
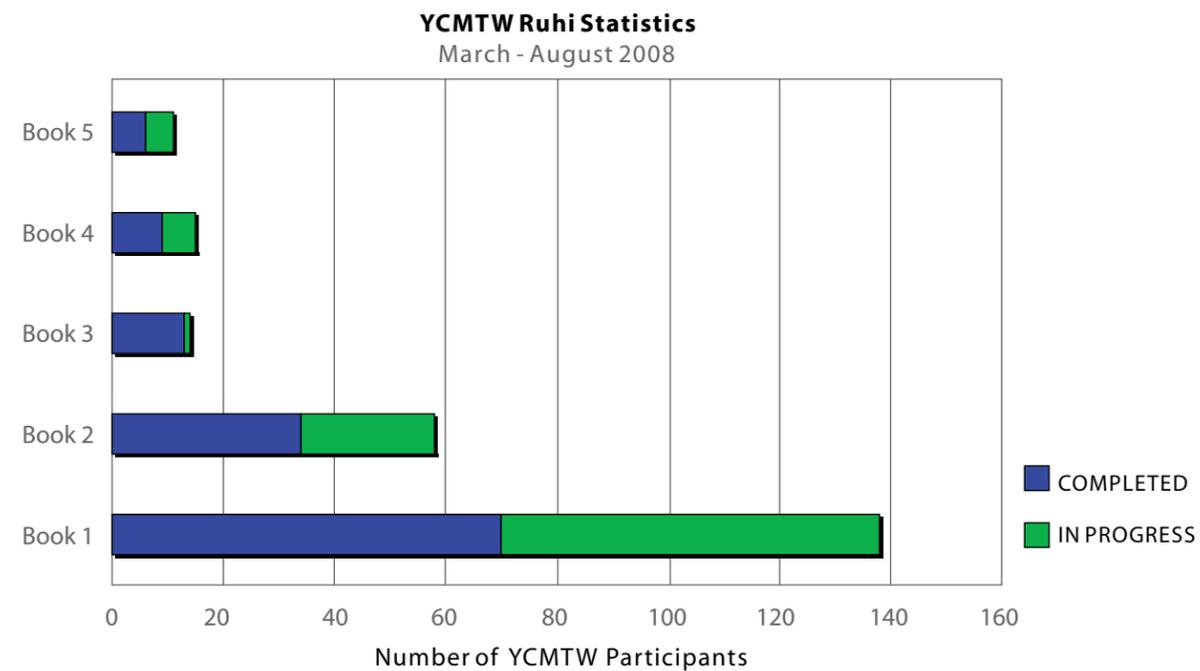
Figure 1: YCMTW Training from March - August 2008

TRAINING DATES	REGION	LOCALITY	YOUTH IN TRAINING TO BECOME ANIMATORS	ANIMATORS & YOUTH FACILITATING THE PROCESS	JY PARTICIPANTS
29 - 30 March	National Training	Georgetown	85		
10 - 11 May	National Training	Georgetown	57		
7 June	East Berbice	New Amsterdam	12		
8 June	Upper Correntyne	Skeldon (Upper Correntyne)	14		
8 - 12 July	National Training	Georgetown	85		
14 - 26 July	Georgetown	School of Nations	13	12	63
14 - 26 July	WCD	De Willem Baha'i Centre	28	9	32
14 - 26 July	East Berbice	New Amsterdam	22	8	30
14 - 26 July	Essequibo	NOC		6	50
14 - 26 July	Essequibo	Joanna Cecilia High School		6	65
14 - 26 July	Essequibo	Lima Sands		4	20
14 - 26 July	Essequibo	Cotton Field Secondary School		6	35
17 July - 2 Aug	WCD	Coglan Dam	10	10	20
28 July - 1 Aug	Essequibo	Capoey Lake		8	6
28 July - 1 Aug	EBD	Soesdyke/Coverden	32	15	82
4 - 15 August	Upper Correntyne	Skeldon	--	11	6
18 -22 August	ECD	Enmore	20	3	20
		Total			429

Ruhi Training

During the most intensive period of YCMTW expansion in July and August, more than 130 youth began to study at least one book in the Ruhi sequence. By the end of August, 70 had completed Book 1 and 61 were in progress. It is especially worth noting that more than half of those who began their training this summer have already progressed onto Book 2 of the sequence. This indicates an impressive level of commitment that bodes well for keeping a large contingent of youth in the project. Only six participants since May, however, have completed Book 5, and five are in progress. Given the number of junior youth groups that will need to be sustained over the following year, strategies to quickly train the most capable and committed YCMTW participants must be adopted as well as mobilization of previously trained YCMTW Animators.

Figure 2: YCMTW Ruhi Training Progress





Devotional Meetings

YCMTW training programs integrate prayer into the daily routine, and one aspect of Ruhi Book 1 involves study and reflection about prayer. As a result, youth participants often organize impromptu devotional gatherings throughout their programs, which then lead to regular gatherings in their localities. As an outcome of the July and August intensive programs, 10 regular devotional meetings have been initiated around the country.

Figure 3: Regular YCMTW Devotional Meetings

REGION	# OF REGULAR DEVOTIONALS
Georgetown	--
East Coast Demerara	--
East Bank Demerara	2
West Coast Demerara	1
East Berbice	2
Upper Corentyne	3
Essequibo	2

Junior Youth Groups

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of local YCMTW junior youth groups around Guyana. Some of these groups are not led by fully-trained Animators, and as a result they are limited to the study and discussion of social issues and use of the arts. Our goal is for all groups to be led by at least one Animator trained to use materials developed by the Ruhi Institute to improve literacy and enhance spiritual perception among junior youth. The junior youth groups will be monitored and supported by their YCMTW Regional Coordinator and the National Coordinators.

The following table outlines the plans for consolidation of the YCMTW junior groups following the July/August training. These plans are based on consultations held with the NIB and the various collaborative bodies in the regions.



Figure 4: YCMTW Junior Youth Groups: formed before July and to begin in September

Region	Groups formed before July	New Groups from September	Ruhi trained Animators	Youth training to be Animators
Georgetown (PEG): • Tiger Bay • Plaisance • Cambelville • Sophia	0	4	Rosheni Takechandra Lall Anil Singh Lana Leach Lua O'Toole	Youth attending Nations Sixth Form College
ECD: • Mon Repos	0	1	Shallini Misir	
EBD: • Soesdyke • Coverden • Sarah Johanna • Timehri	1	4	Lall Richard	Nicola, Darcia, Niomi, Shara, Subrina, Amelia, Dacia, Jamay, Richard, Kesha, Quinton, Samantha, Dacia, Rebecca, Jeana, Tima, Jeffrey
WCD: • Cornelia Ida • Stewartville	1	2	Gordon Roberts	Malisa Roberts, Onika
WBD: • Coglan Dam	1	1	Tiffany	Ryan
East Berbice: •Stanleytown (Wed) •Stanleytown (Thurs) • Theatre Alley	3	3	Pride Ade-Thomas Alicia Sampson Diya Dwarka Assiyih Munessar	Tracy, Ian
Upper Corentyne:	0	3		Anis Ade-Thomas, Keith Da Costa, Shalina, Cindy, Rema, Nasema, Omaro, Allan
Essequibo Coast: • Johanna Cecilia • NOC • Cotton Field • Lima Sands • AR Multi • Abram Zuil	5	6	Abeka Dupan Indy Ramsahai Goshme Abyaneh	Alexi, Sivinand, Raul, Darshanie, Analisa
Bartica	1			
Total	12	24		



Regional Reports

Gordon Roberts, YCMTW Regional Coordinator for WCD, reports:

“From July 14th to 25th and August 4th to 8th a team of facilitators worked with a group of Junior Youth in De Willem, WCD. This has been a huge achievement for WCD ... before it was always difficult to gather together a core group of youth for training. A strong team of nine YCMTW Animators worked with the Junior Youth. A total of 32 junior youth gathered each morning at the Baha’i Centre in De Willem to study the YCMTW programme and the Ruhi junior youth books. In the afternoons a further 28 youth gathered to study about social issues, use of the arts and the Ruhi books. The Animators spoke about the serious involvement of all the participants throughout the 15 days of training in their region. We now have plans for two regular Junior Youth groups in this region. The youth were at first conservative and shy. As we proceeded into the middle of the training, they began talking, smiling, reading and discussing. When it came to expressing their thoughts they participated fully... what attracted them to the program was the arts session ... they were into developing their skills; painting banners and dance...they all have hidden talents that they want to show”.

Diya Dwarka, YCMTW Regional Coordinator for East Berbice reports:

“New Amsterdam Junior Youth and Youth came alive this summer at the YCMTW training at School of Nations in New Amsterdam. Every person who attended the three week training left with spiritual and material knowledge. They also discovered unknown talents in the arts in making banners, puppets and song writing. Sadly we saw that many of the youth had already learned first hand about many of the social issues, e.g. domestic violence and drug & alcohol abuse”.

Anis Ade-Thomas, YCMTW Regional Coordinator for Upper Corentyne reports:

“YCMTW has come with a bang to this region. More than 150 persons attended the YCMTW Festival they hosted at the end of the training. A regular junior youth group is now planned for Corriverton. The participants enjoyed identifying with something important. Now they see the need to be part of the group - it’s part of their identity. Their coming here is like their second home. They are interested in helping and being of service to their community”.

Abeka Dupan, YCMTW Regional Coordinator for Essequibo writes:

“Even before the YCMTW intensive programme started in July there were already a number of vibrant Junior Youth groups in Essequibo. The Regional Education Officer gave permission for Abeka to visit schools to invite youth to attend the YCMTW programme. Essequibo then undertook a three week intensive YCMTW training, and the youth now plan to have 9 additional junior youth groups on a regular basis in Essequibo. Many of the junior youth, however, struggle with reading, but despite this the junior youth vie with each other to see who knows more quotations. We could just see the virtues of love and unity within all of the junior youth them.”



FOLLOW-UP AND CONSOLIDATION

As the intensive summer programs conclude, YCMTW will begin to focus on two tasks: continuing the training for youth participants and sustaining the junior youth groups that have been launched in the past six months. The training for youth participants will involve providing them with opportunities to move steadily through the sequence of Ruhi courses to become YCMTW Animators. National and Regional Coordinators will need to collaborate closely with the NIB to mobilize experienced and capable Ruhi tutors to accompany youth participants across the country in their studies and service. It will be necessary to determine which tutors possess the skills and disposition to work constructively with the YCMTW participants. Tutors will need to be persistent and flexible, and they will need to follow up individually with youth participants and actively encourage them to continue their training. Some of those who began their training this summer may not be interested in continuing with the program, so it will be necessary to carefully nurture and accompany those who are motivated to continue. Attention should be focused especially on those who have already arisen to serve by leading junior youth groups.

National and Regional Coordinators will also focus their energies on accompanying YCMTW Animators and participants with their junior youth groups. Junior youth groups led by YCMTW participants that have not completed the Ruhi sequence of courses will especially require support. Without the participation of an Animator trained with Ruhi Book 5 to facilitate the YCMTW-supported curriculum, the core components of junior youth groups will be limited to studying social issues and using the arts. Some regions do not have enough Animators to sustain all of the junior youth groups that have been started. YCMTW may consider identifying highly capable and motivated participants for special training in Book 5, to equip a small group of youth with the knowledge and skills to facilitate the YCMTW-supported curriculum.

FUTURE PLANS

While we will be focusing primarily on consolidating our gains made over the summer, two exciting opportunities have also presented themselves. The first is that a large school, with 1,000+ students, in Diamond, East Bank Demerara, has requested that its students be trained by YCMTW during the upcoming school year. The second opportunity is that of expanding the program into the Rupununi region of Guyana - a more isolated area in the south near the Brazilian border with a large Amerindian population. The participation of six Amerindian youths from this region in national and local trainings over the summer has already laid the groundwork for this exciting task. Varqa already has a wide network of contacts in this area through past work in literacy and public health, and we have already received encouraging support for YCMTW training to be held in September or October. In the past, the high costs of transport between the region and Georgetown have made it difficult to make long-term plans for work in Rupununi, but new funding from the Unity Foundation for this purpose will allow us to move forward. Presently two teams of YCMTW Animators are in Rupununi laying the foundation for three, one week, YCMTW training programs for youth in Karasabi, Lethem and Annia in early September.

POINTS OF LEARNING

Much has been learned in the course of the past six months, and two lessons stand out of particular. The first is that accompanying youth participants to assume responsibilities for the planning and instruction of junior youth groups, concurrent with their training, has been highly beneficial. It is often invaluable to have more mentors on hand to assist with junior youth activities, and the youth participants have gradually increased their capability and confidence to lead junior youth groups. In local intensive training programs, this practice has also consolidated bonds of friendship and affection between the youth and junior youth of the same locality. These relationships lay the groundwork for the long-term sustainability of junior youth groups in these areas.

Related to this point of learning is that in the initial stages of their training, youth may lack skills of facilitation and an attitude of encouragement with junior youth. They often mimic the styles of instruction that they receive in their schools, which can be paternalistic and emphasize rote learning over discussion-based study. The use of the Ruhi materials as an integral aspect of YCMTW training is one strategy to assist Animators to adopt a supportive attitude in their work with junior youth. However, the regular accompaniment of new youth participants by experienced Animators is equally important so that the necessary skills and attitudes can be quickly adopted and applied within junior youth groups. Incorporating youth participants into the junior youth intensive programs has been a key form of accompaniment, and we will need to ensure that the new groups that are currently forming receive a similar level of support from Regional Coordinators and Animators.

The second lesson has to do with the literacy of the junior youth. Even among the older junior youth (13-14 years), literacy skills differ greatly - from none at all to the highly literate. Learning how to adequately cater for such diverse groups has been a challenge and will likely continue to be a challenge in the future. Steps are already being taken to meet this need by offering 'On the Wings of Words' training in literacy instruction to youth participants and Animators. On the weekend of August 9th & 10th a group of 65 YCMTW youth attended training in literacy using the 'On the Wings of Words' materials. The training was conducted by Penny Gaime from Bahamas and Carol Mancey from Guyana. We have identified literacy training as one of the key lines of action of the YCMTW Animators.

RESEARCH PROGRAMS

We are excited about two new research initiatives focusing on YCMTW. First, the Varqa Foundation has formed a partnership with the University of Ulster to research the effectiveness of the YCMTW programme. In August 2008 Varqa secured a grant from the Government of Ireland for the research. World renowned educator, Professor Roy McConkey, from the University of Ulster will be visiting Guyana in November to develop the research plan. Second, Dr Shoma Stout, an instructor at Harvard Medical School, is planning on writing a book on Varqa Foundation. She recently visited Guyana with her research assistant, Nikita ?? to begin the process of data collection for the book.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Unity Foundation, one of our funders, recently sent Anissa Fallahzadeh and Sebastien Dawant to visit YCMTW programs and report on our progress. We were delighted to host them during their stay here, and they travelled to almost all of the intensive training programs in July, winning the hearts of everyone they met. Their feedback on the project was very encouraging and we look forward to continuing collaboration with Unity Foundation. Unity Foundation is presently organizing a conference in Luxembourg to chart further collaboration with the Varqa Foundation, and Dr. Brian O'Toole will be attending to speak about YCMTW.

Submitted by Varqa Foundation, August 30th 2008 (YCMTW Report August 2008)

