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INSPIRING AGENTS OF CHANGE

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SPONSERED BY UNITY FOUNDATION AND THE LUXEMBOURG GOVERNMENT

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THE GOAL OF YOUTH CAN MOVE THE WORLD (YCMTW) 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.



BACKGROUND

VARQA FOUNDATION (VF) OPERATES TWO MAJOR PROGRAMMES IN GUYANA, NAMELY YOUTH CAN MOVE THE WORLD (YCMTW) AND ON THE WINGS OF WORDS (OWOW).

YCMTW promotes youth empowerment through a training programme that integrates group study, service and the use of the arts. Youth begin their training at national and local intensive programmes, 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 programme is for youth participants (aged 15-25) to lead junior youth groups (ages 11-14) in their localities. The programme aims at intellectual, social and spiritual transformation of the youth. Youth acquire a knowledge of social issues, they involve themselves in the development of their communities, and they engage in reflection on their spiritual condition and personal choices. The goal of YCMTW 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.

The OWOW programme began more than 15 years ago and has now trained more than 3,500 literacy facilitators who, in turn, have assisted more than 12,000 children and youth in learning to read and in improving their powers of expression and comprehension.

For many years these two programmes have existed largely independently of one another and have focussed on different target groups. Over the past year however VF has tried to develop a greater synergy in its efforts by integrating the two initiatives. As a result the promotion of literacy has become one of the key paths of service for the youth involved in the YCMTW programme.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From September 2008 to September 2009, the YCMTW programme saw a significant growth in terms of ownership of the process at the regional level. For many years the programme has relied heavily on national training programmes - however in the past year the focus has been on providing training at the regional level. Central to this process has been the creation of regional YCMTW committees in six of the ten regions of the country.

A notable feature of the work of VF continues to be the geographical spread of its programmes. Intensive training has taken place in Georgetown, East Coast Demerara, East Bank Demerara, West Coast Demerara, West Bank Demerara, East Berbice, Upper Corentyne, and Essequibo Coast. Another significant aspect of VF's work over the past year has been the expansion of its efforts into the Amerindian region of Rupununi on the border with Brazil.

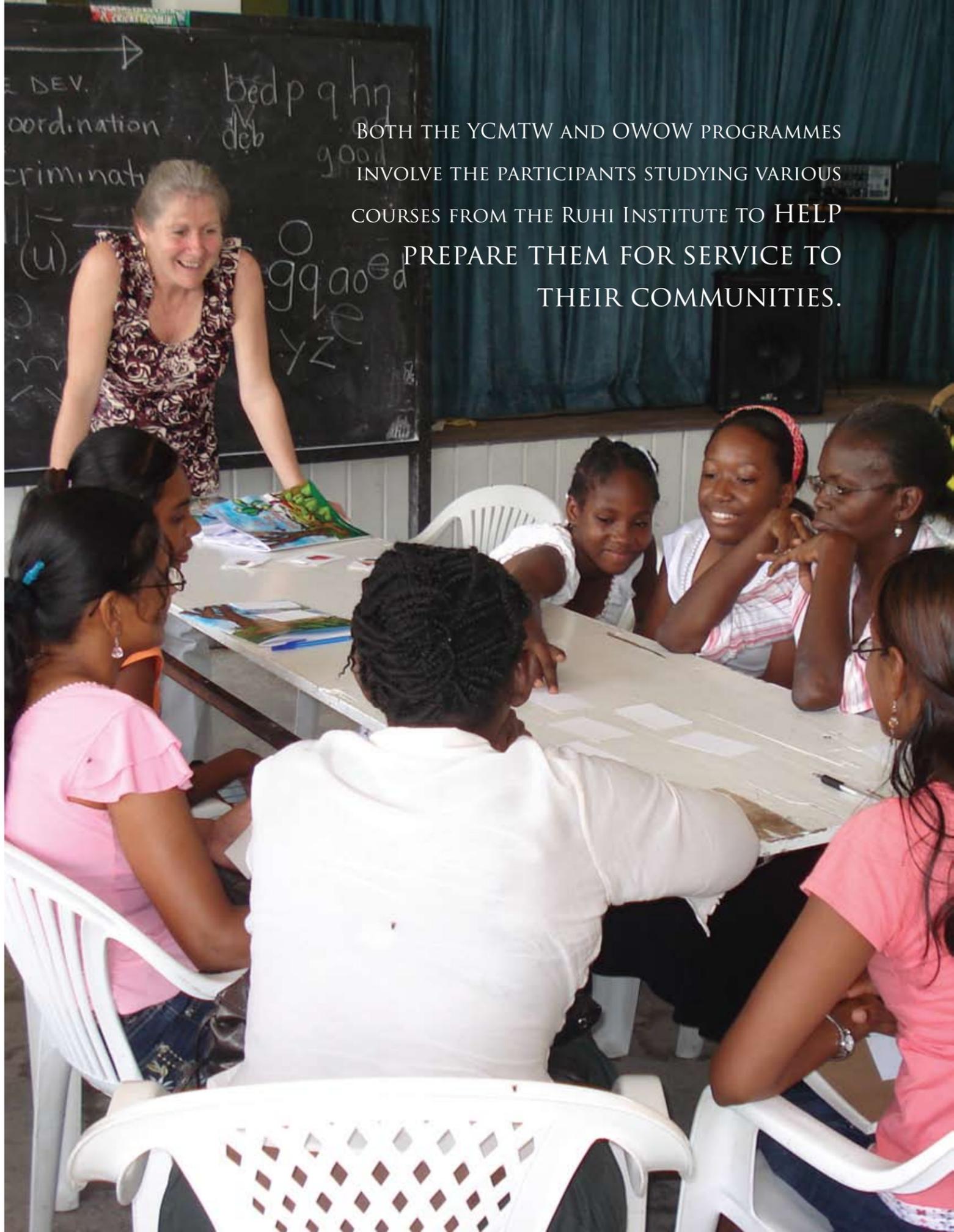
The YCMTW training has resulted in the formation of 25 weekly Junior Youth groups, serving the needs of 480 Junior Youth and 25, weekly or indeed, daily, OWOW literacy groups. The OWOW groups are presently working with more than 300 children and junior youth.

During this year significant strides have been made in expanding and consolidating the work of VF in schools with nine schools having weekly YCMTW and OWOW programmes serving the needs of 405 children and youth.

A key element of the efforts of VF is the attempt to include a spiritual element into its training programmes. Both the YCMTW and OWOW programmes involve the participants studying various courses from the Ruhi Institute to help prepare them for service to their communities. VF works closely with the National Institute Board (NIB) of the Baha'i Community of Guyana to coordinate the participants' study of the sequence of courses developed by the Ruhi Institute. The ongoing training of youth participants relies heavily upon the quality of the relationship between VF and the NIB. This report examines the effectiveness of this partnership and the quality of the training provided. 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 VF Animators of junior youth groups.

This report reflects on the lessons learned over the past twelve months. Some of these key lessons include:

- The crucial need to support the work of the animators and accompany them on their path of service
- The need to strengthen the literacy training component of the YCMTW programme
- Need to make the most effective use of the financial resources provided by Unity Foundation and the Luxembourg Government



BOTH THE YCMTW AND OWOW PROGRAMMES INVOLVE THE PARTICIPANTS STUDYING VARIOUS COURSES FROM THE RUHI INSTITUTE TO HELP PREPARE THEM FOR SERVICE TO THEIR COMMUNITIES.



...PARTICIPANTS OF ALL
BACKGROUNDS FIND IT ONLY
NATURAL THAT A PROGRAMME
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PURPOSE AND CAPACITIES
FOR SERVICE.

- Need to further expand and consolidate the efforts in the Amerindian areas of the country
- Need to strengthen the sense of ownership of the work within the regions.

VF TRAINING

PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

The VF 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' for those who have completed the three components of the programme: 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 trains participants in the arts, through singing, dance, drama, painting, and puppet-making.

A) STUDY OF SOCIAL ISSUES:

The first component of the training involves the study of 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 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. A key element of the programme is the use of the arts to communicate these social messages.

B) STUDY OF THE RUHI MATERIALS:

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 the individuals' moral purpose and their capacities for service. The use of the Ruhi Institute material has been embraced by VF participants, who represent all of Guyana's major religions: Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, or the Baha'i Faith. The participants are also encouraged to draw on their own religious experience and to view religion as fundamentally one. In the context of Guyana's religious culture, participants of all backgrounds find it only natural that a programme concerned with social transformation should address the spiritual dimensions of our moral purpose and capacities for service.

C) PARTICIPATION IN A JUNIOR YOUTH GROUP:

The third component of the programme is participation in a junior youth group. 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. Following a period of study, the junior youth participate in an artistic activity, which may include dance, drama, singing or painting. Finally, the youth Animators and participants lead small groups in 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.

VF has adopted several strategies for recruiting youth and junior youth into its programmes. These include promotion in the media, visits to schools and community venues, and encouraging leaders in the community to nominate youth for the programme.

VF NATIONAL & REGIONAL COORDINATORS

Following the intensive training programmes, the youth participants require ongoing training to complete the sequence of Ruhi books necessary to become a VF Animator. They also benefit from accompaniment in the process of initiating, maintaining and expanding local junior youth groups. To support this training process, VF has established an infrastructure of national and regional coordinators.

Rosheni Takechandra and Lomerharshan Lall served as national coordinators throughout the year and they also led many administrative and research aspects of VF. Lomerharshan Lall emigrated to Canada in August 2009. Lall, himself a VF 'graduate', gave invaluable service to VF over a number of years. In September 2009 he was replaced by Delon who has begun the task of Varqa coordinator with vigour and creativity.

Regional coordinators oversee the ongoing training of youth and monitor and assist with local junior youth groups. Over the year the regional coordinators were:

- 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

Gordon Roberts is leaving Guyana in September to take up a scholarship in Cuba. He has played a key role in the development of the work of VF in his region and a replacement needs to be found. In East Berbice a 'YCMTW graduate', Pride Ade-Thomas, has replaced Diya Dwarka as the Regional coordinator.

The regional coordinators have been instrumental in creating a sense of ownership of the programme within the regions. They have also played a key role in supporting and nurturing the work of the VF animators within their regions.

The ongoing training and accompaniment of youth participants is also 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 are deployed to meet the needs of youth participants for further training.

The NIB coordinator is also a member of the VF task force and meets on a regular basis with the Varqa team to ensure a unified focus is maintained. During the course of the year there were 22 such meetings.

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 programmes and recruiting new participants.

An exciting new development has been a partnership with School of Nations in the capital and in their branches in New Amsterdam and Essequibo Coast. This partnership has led to more than 150 Junior Youth enrolling in training programmes to begin in October 2009. This has attracted the attention of the national media (see Appendix #1 for copy of this publicity). The first meeting of parents of children enrolled in the Junior Youth programme at School of Nations in the capital was featured on the news on National Television.



TRAINING PROGRAMMES CONDUCTED

The following Table outlines the training undertaken by Varqa in the past year.

Table #1 TRAINING PROGRAMMES CONDUCTED

DATE	NATURE OF TRAINING PROVIDED	ATTENDANCE
September 2008 for 10 days	Intensive training for VF participants in Rupununi	30
15th-20th December 2008	Regional training held in Georgetown	10
November 7th to 9th 2008	National OWOW training & was attended by 215 persons representing 6 of the 10 geographical regions of the country. Ms Pat Cameron, a gifted educator from Canada, helped to facilitate the training. The workshop focussed on training in six different reading levels allowing participants to learn a wide range of skills in the teaching of reading. Notably, 40 of the participants came from the YCMTW programme and provided evidence of the growing synergy between the two VF programmes. 65% of those attending the workshop judged the content of the training as 'excellent' in the evaluation process conducted at the end. A further 33% judged the training as 'very good.'	215
1st February 2009	Regional training in Essequibo. Varqa undertook a Video production Workshop	18
7th February 2009	Regional training in Berbice. Varqa undertook a Video Production Workshop	15
22nd March 2009	Regional training in Georgetown. Varqa undertook a Video Production Workshop (A UNICEF rep. was present)	15
24th March 2009	Regional training in Essequibo	12
10th March 2009	Regional training in Corriverton	17
14th March 2009	Regional training in New Amsterdam, Berbice.	14
28th - 29th March 2009	National OWOW training & was attended by 158 persons representing 7 of the 10 regions of the country.	158
14th - 18th April 2009	Regional training in Essequibo	14
6th - 9th April 2009	Regional training in Corriverton	10
6th- 9th April 2009	Regional training in New Amsterdam	15
14th- 18th April,09	Regional training in Georgetown	25
7th - 9th and 12th - 16th April 2009	Regional Training in the Amerindian community of Lethem, Rupununi	8
19th-30th May 2009	Regional Training in the Amerindian community of St Ignatius in Rupununi	23
13th - 14th June 2009	Regional- Service weekend in Essequibo- This weekend was spent encouraging and accompanying participants to walk the path of service.	14
20th-21st June 2009	Regional - Corriverton-Service weekend.This weekend was spent encouraging and accompanying participants to walk the path of service.	8

20th-21st June 2009	Regional : New Amsterdam -Service weekend.This weekend was spent encouraging and accompanying participants to walk the path of service.	8
7th - 9th July 20 09	YCMTW national training, in Georgetown	30
13th-23rd July 2009	Regional Summer Intensive training ,West Coast Demerara	19
27th - 31st July 2009	Regional Summer Intensive training , East Coast Demerara, at Urmila's Institute	36
27th July -7th August 2009	Regional Summer Intensive training in Essequibo Coast at School of Nations	12
27th July - 14th Aug. 2009	Regional Summer Intensive training in East Bank Demerara at Camille's Institute	37
10th - 21st August 2009	Regional Summer Intensive training Corriverton at the Civic Centre, (an Arts Festival was held at the end of the 2 weeks of training).	69
10th - 16th August 2009	Regional Summer Intensive training in Essequibo Coast at the New Opportunity Corp	20

As the above table illustrates extensive training was undertaken during this period. A total of 126 days of training was undertaken in the period September 2008 to September 2009. This totals 630 hours.

A significant feature of the work of VF this year has been the focus of training on a regional rather than national level. Whilst this has resulted in less persons attending the training sessions than in some previous years, it has also created a greater sense of ownership of the programme within regions and thereby significantly increased the sustainability of the intervention. Now that the transition from a national to a regional focus has been achieved VF will focus on expanding the numbers of Animators trained in the coming year.

A key aspect of the success of VF programmes has been ongoing partnerships with local schools. This is well illustrated in Essequibo Coast where Junior Youth groups are established in 6 schools serving the needs of 199 youth on a weekly basis. In this region 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.

PARTNERSHIPS IN SCHOOLS:

Urmila's Institute- Mon Repos, East Coast Demerara

Urmila's Institute, is a private school located in East Coast Demerara. Over the past year, VF and Urmila's have had a strong partnership. This started off with a YCMTW training programme for the students from Urmila's, which later led to the formation of a junior youth group, which

was further nurtured when Pat Cameran, from Canada, did a workshop with the youth. The collaboration has now become through the work of Shelline Beaver, the Regional Coordinator for that area. Presently, a weekly junior youth group and a weekly youth group are held at the school which attracts the students from the school and the wider community. Over the summer, an intensive training was held there and plans are being made to have monthly regional YCMTW trainings at the school.

Camille’s Institute- Soesdyke, East Bank Demerara

Camille’s Institute, is a private school located in Region #4. Most of the teachers at the school have been trained by the OWOW programme, and the OWOW materials are being used extensively in the school. Over the past year, the youth at the school have been involved in the YCMTW training programme. This summer there was an intensive training, which lasted for three weeks. The junior youth were in literacy classes, while the youth went through intense animators training. At present, there is a weekly training session with a core group of youth, who once trained, will animate junior youth groups in the school and in their neighborhood. The Director of the school is very supportive of VF and its projects, and this collaboration is only getting stronger.

School of the Nations- (SON) Georgetown

SON and VF have organized an after School programme for persons aged 11-14 years. This programme offers help in the areas of reading, mathematics and comprehension and expression. It also focuses on the spiritual development of the junior youth. The programme also includes sports, arts and the development of projects to make the community a better place. Already 70 Junior Youth are enrolled for this twice weekly programme in the capital. This programme is to begin at the end of September 2009.

School of the Nations- New Amsterdam

Presently, in SON, New Amsterdam, two of the YCMTW animators are conducting junior youth groups in the School. Plans are now in train to offer a similar programme to the one offered by its sister school in the capital.

School of the Nations- Essequibo Coast

The branch of SON in Essequibo Coast has not functioned for 18 months due to a falling enrollment - however all the facilities are still in place. Plans are now in train to offer a similar Junior Youth programme to the ones offered by the other two branches of SON.

FORMATION OF GROUPS

JUNIOR YOUTH GROUPS

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of local VF 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 are monitored and supported by their VF Regional Coordinator and the National Coordinators.

The following table outlines the Junior Youth groups that operated over the past year. It should be noted that these groups all met on a weekly basis throughout the year.

Table #2 JUNIOR YOUTH GROUPS : SEPT 2008 TO SEPT 2009

NO	ANIMATOR(S)	VENUE	NO. OF JUNIOR YOUTH	MATERIAL USED
A) ESSEQUIBO COAST:				
1	Abeika Dupan	JC Secondary School	28	Walking the Straight Path
2	Abeika Dupan	Charity School	35	Walking the Straight Path
3	Abeika Dupan	Aurora School	35	Walking the Straight Path
4	Abeika Dupan	Darmouth School	35	Walking the Straight Path
5	Lisa Ramsahai	Affiance	7	Breezes
6	Abeika Dupan	Anna Regina School	32	Walking the Straight Path
7	Abeika Dupan	Mainstay,	5	Walking the Straight Path
8	Abeika Dupan	Cotton Field Secondary School	34	Walking the Straight Path
9	Natalia Jay	Bartica	15	YCMTW Manual
10	Carol Livan	9th St. 4th Avenue, Bartica	12	YCMTW Manual
B) GEORGETOWN:				
11	Rosheni	School of the Nations	21	Glimmerings of Hope
12	Rosheni	School of the Nations	20	Glimmerings of Hope
13	Rosheni	School of the Nations	25	Glimmerings of Hope
14	Lall	School of the Nations	25	Walking the Straight Path
15	Lall	School of the Nations	25	Breezes of Confirmation
16	Lall	School of the Nations	25	Breezes of Confirmation
17	Lall	School of the Nations	25	Walking the Straight Path
C) EAST BERBICE:				
18	Uma & Trishaun	School of the Nations	17	Walking the Straight Path
19	Uma & Trishaun	School of the Nations	10	Glimmerings of Hope
20	Uma & Trishaun	School of the Nations	8	Breezes of Confirmation

D) WBD:				
21	Tiffany and Ryan	West Bank Demerara	8	Breezes of Confirmation
22	Subrina and Rosheni	418 Crane Housing Scheme, WCD	7	
e) ECD:				
23	Shellline	Urmila's Institute, East Bank Demerara	15	Walking the Straight Path
F) UPPER CORENTYNE				
24	Anis	#77 Village, Corriverton	11	
25	Pride and Allison	Angoy's Avenue		Breezes of Confirmation
Total			480	

Over the year therefore a total of 25 Junior Youth groups functioned on a weekly basis. These groups were in 6 of the 10 regions of the country. 480 Junior Youth attended these classes. New developments in the School of Nations in the capital and at its two regional branches promises to add significantly more junior youth to this total over the coming year. Whilst the above figures are encouraging even a cursory examination of the above table will reveal that a small handful of Animators are facilitating these groups. Significant attention will be made over the coming year on raising up a larger pool of Animators that are committed to working with the various groups.

Already some hopeful signs in this connection are evident at the intervention in the three School of Nations locations where more than 150 persons have been mobilised to serve the programme.

OWOW GROUPS

In addition to the above Junior Youth groups Table # 3 outlines the OWOW groups have functioned throughout the year.

Table #3 ON THE WINGS OF WORDS GROUPS

FACILITATOR(S)	LOCATION	LENGTH OF FUNCTIONING	MATERIALS USED	REGULARITY
Alisa Waithe	Linden Academy Primary, Upper Demerara			Twice weekly
Amanda Hamilton	Victoria, ECD			Daily
Anika Abel	Mae's Primary School, Georgetown			Daily
Anita Persaud	Kitty, Georgetown			Four days per week
Anne Collins	Nabacalis, ECD			Twice weekly
Cassandra Collins	S12 North Sophia, Georgetown			Daily
Charlene Micheal	Samatta Point Primary			Daily

Bianca VanDiamond	136 Shell Road Kitty, Georgetown			Daily
Barbra James				Daily
Lennox Allicock	Sophia Primary, Georgetown			Daily
Abeka Dupan	C.V Nunes Primary, Essequibo Coast			Twice weekly
Roxanne Pollard	East Ruimveldt Life Improvement Church, Georgetown			Twice weekly
Paula French	Val's Play School			Twice weekly
Grace Grant-Andries	71 West La Penitance, Georgetown	12 months	`Through the Forest' bk 5, `In the Garden', `Wings of Words Level 2	3 days per week
Andrea Bearan	Mountain Heights Weslyn Church	8 months	`On the Path' & `Over the Hill'	Sundays
Pettie DeNobrega	Brickdam Church, Georgetown	7 years		Saturdays
Pondai Persaud	Vreed-en-hoop#2 Nursery Craine Housing Scheme, WBD	1 year 7 months	`Steps to Reading'	Daily
Nneka Adonis	114 Canterbury Walk, BV, ECD	3 years 6 months	`On the Path', `Over the Hill', `In the Garden', `By the Creek'	3 days per week
Coreen Pitt	Elaine Pentecostal Church	3 years	`In the Garden'	Twice weekly
Dacia Samaroo	Camille's Institute, ECD	1 year		Saturdays
Amanda Hamilton	Victoria Craft Centre, ECD	More than 14 years	Student Workbook level 1	Once a week
Gem Barton	Kitty 7th Days Baptist Church, Georgetown	7 months	`Steps to Reading', `On the Path'	Varying
Evelyn Sawh	85 Mon Repos Housing Scheme, ECD	8 months	`In the Garden', `On the Path', `Down the Road'	Everyday
Savitri Sharma	18 Shell Road, Kitty, Georgetown	5 years	`On the Path', `In the Garden', `Through the Forest'	Twice a week

As can be seen from the above table a total of 24 literacy classes have operated throughout the year. Indeed 9 of the groups met on a daily level !! This shows a remarkable level of commitment on the part of the volunteer facilitators. Moreover the table also illustrates that a number of these groups have been operating for several years.

SERVICE COMPONENT

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 programme.

The Regional Coordinators share the following vignettes from their communities:

On 17th and 24th July 2009, VF participants in Essequibo Coast visited the Children's Ward of the Suddie Hospital. The participants made cards and took refreshments for the children. The VF youth made a 'Get Well' banner for the children.



“OUR COMMUNITY BENEFITTED GREATLY FROM IT, HEARTS WERE INSPIRED AND EVERYONE WAS HAPPY!”

On 27th June 2009 the Junior youth and animators organized a service project in ECD. They decided to paint the blackboards at the school in which the junior youth programme is held. The junior youth were very excited when they realized how all the other students in the school will benefit from the brighter boards. The Regional VF coordinator reported, 'the junior youth have been transformed by the programme and they really enjoy the service project.'

On the 29th August 2009, the Crane Village junior youth group, carried out a service project. The junior youth donated food to a single parent mother and her 5 children. They said prayers, sang songs and roasted marshmallows over a bonfire. The group enjoyed dinner together and the Junior youth expressed the joy they felt, and the happiness the kind act brought to the children, because for some of them it probably is the only meal they would have had for the day. They are planning another service project!

REFLECTION & CONSULTATION

Local intensive programmes 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 programme allows them to be actively involved with problem-solving and they feel empowered to volunteer for new duties and tasks.

PRAYER & SONGS

Feedback from intensive programmes 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.

USE OF ARTS

The use of the arts in the intensive programmes 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.

One of the Regional coordinators reports:

On 21st August 2009 the youth in Corriverton, concluded their YCMTW training with an Arts Festival. A total of 64 persons from the community attended. The programme included, dances,

poems, songs, a banner display and skits. These arts form served as means of awareness on the different Social issues affecting the community and Guyana. The audience requested that the Racism and Drug dance for the second time. The Neighborhood Democratic Council (NDC) of that area, commended the youth and regional coordinator for this admirable act of service rendered to the Community.

RUHI TRAINING

The following table illustrates the numbers of persons completing the books in the Ruhi sequence as part of their training to become VF Animators.

The Table below illustrates the number of persons who have completed the various books in the sequence of the Ruhi programme to date and the numbers that are presently engaged in the study of the respective books.

Table #4

COMPLETION OF BOOKS IN THE RUHI SEQUENCE AS PART OF THE VF PROGRAMME

DATE	BOOK 1	BOOK 2	BOOK 3	BOOK 4	BOOK 5	BOOK 6	BOOK 7
May 2007	168	93	68	50	37	33	27
Sept 2009	215	110	85	58	37	34	28
In process of studying	29	21	16	6	8	4	2

DEVOTIONAL MEETINGS

An important component of youth training within the VF programme is completing the service and practice components of the Ruhi materials. The first book of the Ruhi sequence encourages participants to host weekly devotional gatherings, which serve to foster personal reflection and deepen the bonds of friendship between participants. 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.

YCMTW training programmes 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 programmes, which then lead to regular gatherings in their localities.

One example of this is in Corriverton where the youth get together for YCMTW training, youth group, children's classes and junior youth group. They usually begin their meeting with a simple devotional meeting. The participants are from diverse, racial and religious backgrounds.

REGIONAL REPORTS

The following vignettes are provided by the VF Regional Coordinators;

Gordon Roberts, VF Regional Coordinator for WCD, reports:

'July was a very successful month for the West Coast Demerara Cluster. The YCMTW intensive training programme once again sparked a lot of excitement and fostered an uplifting spirit to the community. A total of 19 youth participated in this training, some of which are new to YCMTW while others are returning participants. The programme included: devotionals, games, Ruhi Training, training in Social Issues and promoting the Arts. The participants enjoyed a full two weeks of fun. Of course there were also challenges but overall the programmes was a great success!'

Pride Ade-Thomas, VF Regional Coordinator for East Berbice reports:

"The YCMTW training, July 13th - 23rd, was one of great learning and at the same time full of joy! Each day the number of participants varied from 16-20 in attendance. Not only did we explore social issue, engage in the Arts and service projects and Ruhi training but the participants were also given the opportunity to create their own songs, poems and skits about issues that are rampant in our society today. This allowed them the opportunity to express their feeling in a creative way! Because of the positive feedback, we decided to meet once a week to continue the Ruhi training and to learn more about incorporating the arts in our life and youth groups as a means to raise awareness about the social issue affecting us."

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

"This is the third year for YCMTW in Corriverton and it has never been better than this. A total of 15 participants attended the intensive training and it turned out to be a time for bonding. The first few days was focused on creating a bond with every one and an understanding that YCMTW is not just about a certificate but its about changing the lives of Junior Youth and children and leading them on the right path. I would say that the training was successful because all the participants were actively involved in teaching children's classes, animating junior youth groups and they were involved in Ruhi training every Saturday and Sunday at Dukestown and also at #77 Villag. As I quote from a participant "this should happen more often in Corriverton" and "what more better holiday can we get." personally as regional coordinator I think Corriverton has come a long way and its because of the devoted youth who reside there. To end it with a bang a cultural programme was held on the last day where we had a total 64 people. The participants displayed a number of dances and songs. I would like to thank all those resource persons who attended and assisted in making this intensive one to remember."

Abeka Dupan, VF Regional Coordinator for Essequibo writes:

“The Essequibo training went from 13th to 23rd of July 2009. . The intensive training went very well. The participants, accompanied by VF Animators, visited the children’s ward at the Suddie hospital, they made cards and took sweets for them. It was a very touching service project! The youth revisited, this time they made a ‘Get Well Banner’ for the Children. On the last day of the training we had a concert, everything the youths did in the arts session was presented, that day we invited a few friends and after the presentation we all had snacks. It was an excellent presentation done by the youth, the dances, songs, display of Banners, skits and reciting quotes all reflected the purpose of the YCMTW programme. It was a productive training. Our community benefitted greatly from it, hearts were inspired and everyone was happy!”

Shelline Beaver, VF Regional Coordinator for East Coast Demerara writes:

“ In the first of the two week of the intensive training we did Ruhi training, promotion of the Arts and study of Social Issues. We had Karen Hall and Shevon Lewis from the ‘ Facilitators Forum’ who did a wonderful presentation on Human Rights using the method of the arts, such as skits and posters to get across the social issue. ‘ Walking the Straight Path’, lessons 7-12, was studied with the Jr. youth as part of the junior youth empowerment programme.

The youth studied book one and undertook practice components such as memorization of writings and prayers and the studying of two prayers with two people. A variety of social issues were discussed over the two weeks and there was a great increase in the level of participation from all the participants. The arts were one of the most popular parts of the training. They also learned such secrets of the theatre as stage presence, voice projection and proper method of entry and exit from the stage. In total we had 12 youth and 22 Jr. who participated. The intensive training concluded with a festival, where the audience included the Head Teacher and other students from the school. The wonderful presentations gave new spirit to the gathering and prizes were given for best participation and best improved behavior at the end of the intensive. This training has surely helped in the success and growth of our community, as the training transformed hearts and brought participants close to the source of the knowledge they received”



QUOTE FROM A PARTICIPANT “THIS SHOULD HAPPEN MORE OFTEN IN CORRIVERTON” AND “WHAT MORE BETTER HOLIDAY CAN WE GET.”

FOLLOW-UP & CONSOLIDATION

As the intensive summer programmes 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 year. 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 VF 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 programme, 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 VF Animators and participants with their junior youth groups. Junior youth groups, led by VF 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 VF-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. VF 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 VF-supported curriculum. A beginning has been made to address this challenge in East Berbice where an intensive training is presently being undertaken by a number of young persons.

ACCOMPANIMENT

The following chart illustrates the support given to the Regional Coordinators and Animators during the year.

Table #5 ACCOMPANIMENT

DATE	REGION	TEAM	COMMENTS
18/04/08	East Berbice & Upper Corentyne	Lall & Rosheni	Visit to Berbice youth group comprised of 7 members. VF team also visited youth in Upper Corentyne to promote youth groups in that area.
22/04/08	Essequibo Coast	Lall & Rosheni	60 persons attend training session organised by VF team and local animator. VF team support & nurture the work of Animator, Nichel

28/04/08 to 08/05/08	Rupununi	Lall & Rosheni	Identified youth to participate in the YCMTW programme. Met with Regional authorities to gain support for the programme.
12/04/08	Coverden, EBD	Lall, Rosheni, Dr O'Toole & Ganesh Ramsahai	Met with VF animators.
15/04/08	Coverden	Lall, Rosheni, Dr & Mrs O'Toole	Visit Camille's Institute and the 200 students at the school to promote the upcoming VF training.
06/06/08 to 10/06/08	East Berbice & Corriverton	Lall & Rosheni & Louisa (NIB coordinator)	Meetings with VF Regional Coordinators & arrangements made for upcoming intensive VF training
06/09/08	Essequibo	Dr O'Toole	Training of youth
26/09/08	New Amsterdam	Dr O'Toole	Meeting with youth
24/10/08	New Amsterdam	Dr O'Toole	Planning meeting
26/10/08	Essequibo	Dr O'Toole	Visits along with youth Animators
28/11/08 to 30/11/08	East Berbice & Corriverton	Rosheni & Anis	Support to two VF Animators & made plans for upcoming training.
07/12/08	Corriverton	Rosheni	Meetings with VF Animators
14/12/08	Corriverton	Rosheni	VF Coordinator accompanied VF Animators in the field and supported them in conducting a children's class.
26/12/08 to 30/12/08	Essequibo Coast	Rosheni	Visits made with Animators to promote the work in the villages & to visit the homes of the Junior Youth. A social outing for the youth was organised.
07/03/09	East Berbice	Rosheni	Visits to VF Animators.
08/03/09	Corriverton	Rosheni	VF Coordinator joined VF Animators in inviting youth to attend the training & explaining the programme to the parents.
12/03/09	East Berbice	Rosheni	VF Coordinator assists VF Animator in conducting a Study Circle.
04/04/09	East Berbice	Dr O'Toole	Meeting with youth
05/04/09	Essequibo	Dr O'Toole	Meeting with youth
01/05/09 to 03/05/09	East Berbice & Corriverton	Rosheni	Reflection exercise with VF Animators on their roles & responsibilities. Joint teaching of a children's class.
09/05/09 to 10/05/09	New Amsterdam	Rosheni	Refresher course in Ruhi Book 5.
18/05/09 to 19/05/09	Essequibo Coast	Rosheni	VF Coordinator met with VF Animators to organise upcoming training. Visit to Junior Youth group.
23/05/09	New Amsterdam	Dr O'Toole	Visits with Animators

30/05/09	Essequibo Coast	Dr O'Toole	Visits with Animators
13/06/09 to 14/06/09	Essequibo Coast	Rosheni & Dr O'Toole	Accompany Regional Coordinator & assist in formation of new Junior Youth group
13/06/09	East Berbice	Dr O'Toole	Visits with youth
20/06/09 to 21/06/09	East Berbice & Corriverton	Lall & Rosheni	Accompany Regional Coordinator & assist in formation of new Junior Youth group
21/06/09	East Berbice	Dr O'Toole	Training day with youth
July - August 09	All regions	Lall, Rosheni, Brian & Louisa	Several visits made throughout the two months to the different regions to organise the regional trainings & then to assist in the training.
27/06/09	Essequibo Coast	Dr O'Toole	Planning visit
19/07/09	Essequibo Coast	Dr O'Toole	Accompanying of Animators
11/09/09	East Berbice	Dr O'Toole	Visits with youth
19/09/09	East Berbice	Dr O'Toole	Training of youth

As can be seen from the above Table significant efforts were made by the VF team to support the work of the Varqa animators through almost weekly visits into the various regions.

FUTURE PLANS

While we will be focusing primarily on consolidating our gains made over the year, two exciting opportunities have also presented themselves.

- Collaboration with the three branches of School of Nations: plans are now in train to offer a comprehensive package of training, twice weekly, for Junior Youth at the three locations of SON, in Georgetown, East Berbice & Essequibo Coast. The programme features support in literacy, numeracy and promoting the powers of expression & comprehension. It also includes promotion of the arts, a sports programme, service projects and the creation of an Environmental Club. This initiative has attracted extensive media coverage and interest in each of the communities. A proposal has been submitted to the UNDP (at the request of the UNDP Programme Director) for financial support for these initiatives.
- An exciting development this year has been the work done in the native Amerindian region, Rupununi, on the border with Brazil. Five visits have been made to the region during the year

and a series of trainings conducted in this isolated region. Varqa already has a wide network of contacts in this area through past work in literacy and public health. In the past, the high costs of transport between this region and Georgetown have made it difficult to make long-term plans for work in Rupununi, but new funding from the Unity Foundation specifically for Amerindian areas will now allow us to move forward.

POINTS OF LEARNING

Much has been learned in the course of the past year, including the following:

- *The crucial need for accompaniment: VF is blessed to have had the services of two devoted National Coordinators, Lall & Rosheni. They travelled consistently throughout the year and spent time lovingly & patiently nurturing the services of the Regional Coordinators and VF Animators. Lall has now moved to Canada and we take this opportunity to thank him for his many services to the work of VF over many years.*
- *Nurturing a sense of ownership: In the past much of the training done by VF was delivered in the capital. Now almost all is presented within the various regions. VF Task Forces were created in each region to organise the regional trainings over the summer thereby developing a sense of sustainability to the intervention.*
- *Development of facilitation skills: Most of the youth attending the VF trainings were exposed to very restricted training styles at the schools they attended during their own school days. Much of the work of the VF coordinators has been to model a new style of intervention based on problem solving, and nurturing rather than the mindless rote learning that deadened their own educational experience .*
- *Synergy in programmes offered by VF: The decision to fuse the YCMTW and OWOW programmes has assisted in promoting greater literacy skills on the part of the VF Animators themselves. The YCMTW Animators were eager to include the promotion of literacy into their work with junior youth.*

RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

- *VF 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. A more focused approach however needs to be adopted to ensure the data is gathered to complete this research undertaking*
- *Dr Shoma Stout, an instructor at Harvard Medical School, has plans on writing a book on Varqa Foundation. Consultations need to be held to see if this can be completed.*

MONITORING & EVALUATION

Unity Foundation organized a very successful conference in Luxembourg to reflect on the VF experience and to chart further collaboration with Varqa Foundation. Dr. Brian O'Toole visited Luxembourg for 3 days to take part in this process.

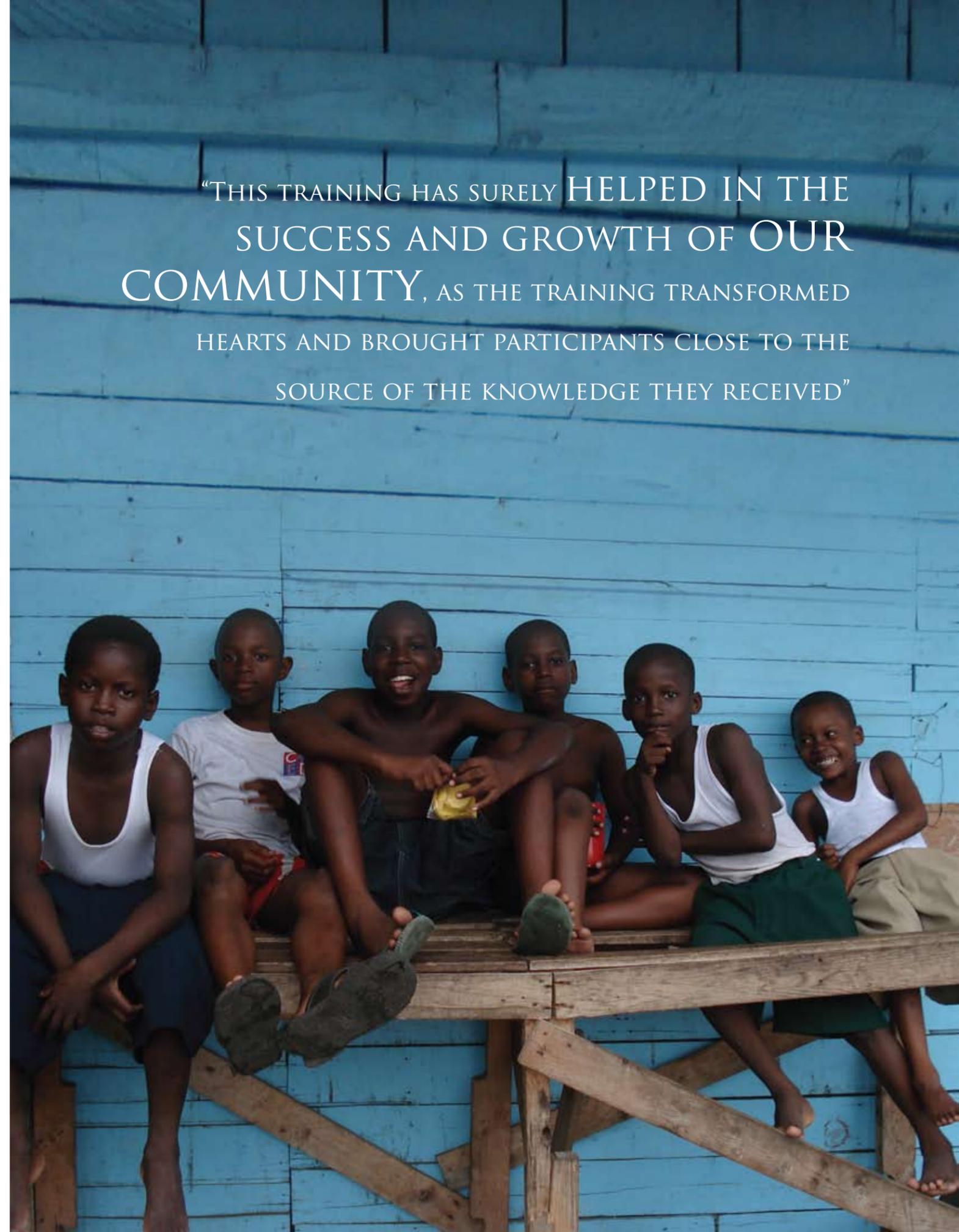
THANKS

VF expresses its sincere thanks to Unity Foundation and the Luxembourg Government for the support given throughout the year and for the confidence they have shown in the potential of the work with Junior youth in Guyana. We are also very grateful for the loving guidance provided by the Office of Social & Economic Development at the Baha'i World centre in Israel for all the insightful guidance they shared throughout the year.

*Submitted by
Varqa Foundation
September 2009*

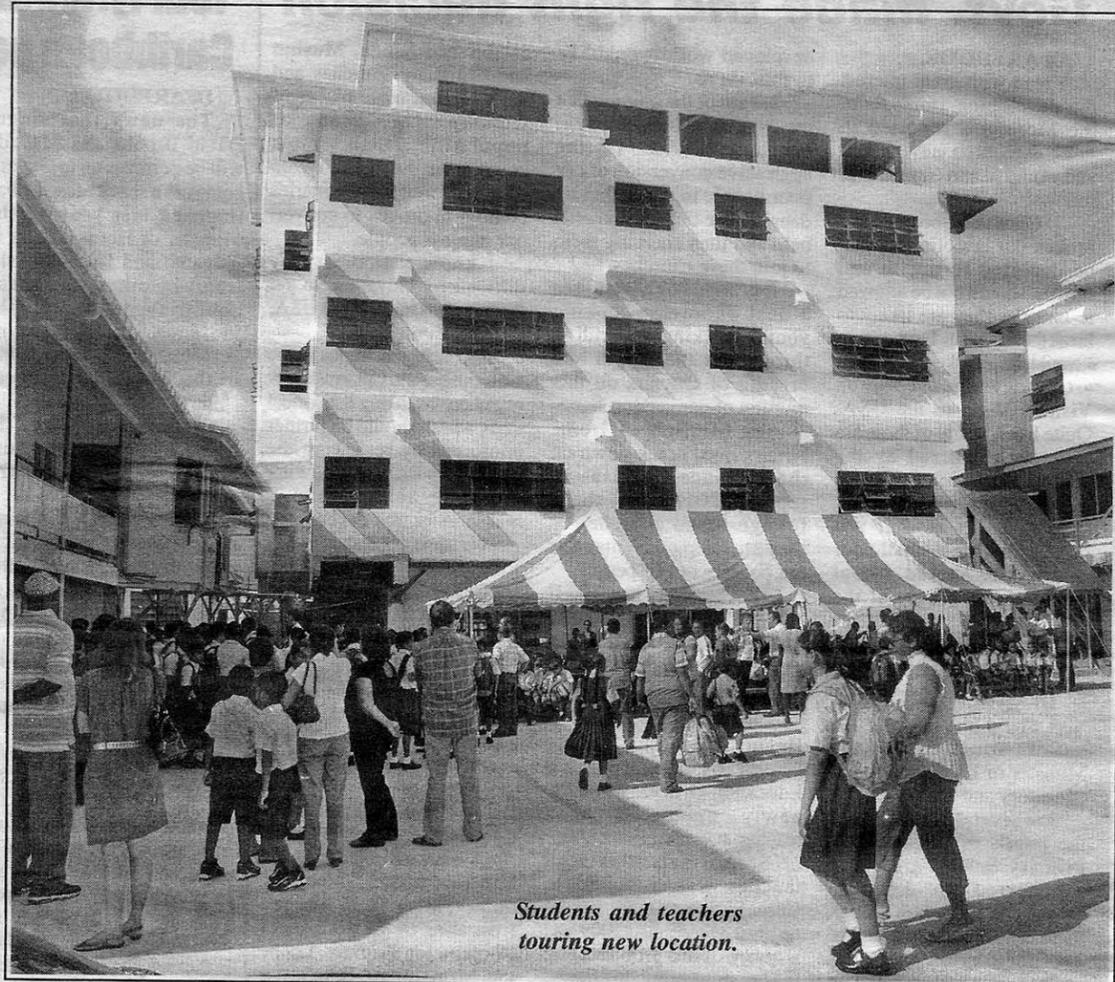
(YCMTW Report Sept 2009)

*"THIS TRAINING HAS SURELY HELPED IN THE
SUCCESS AND GROWTH OF OUR
COMMUNITY, AS THE TRAINING TRANSFORMED
HEARTS AND BROUGHT PARTICIPANTS CLOSE TO THE
SOURCE OF THE KNOWLEDGE THEY RECEIVED"*



Thursday, 10 September 2009, Kaieteur News

School of Nations opens new location



Students and teachers touring new location.

Following months of renovation to the former Woodbine Hotel complex in New Market Street, School of Nations opened its new location on Monday. The new

building offers more than twice the space of the previous one.

The school offers a comprehensive list of services including nursery, primary and secondary education. There is also a special needs unit for children. There is a sixth form that caters for 140 students pursuing 18 different subjects from the University of Cambridge (UK).

Additionally, the school has a partnership with University of London where students in Guyana can earn a degree at the prestigious institution without leaving the country. These degrees are in

a number of areas including; Business, Economics, Accounting, Business Administration, Banking & Finance, Information Systems & Management, International Relations, Management, and Sociology. There is also a one-year Diploma for Graduates in International Development.

School of Nations is also offering after-school classes for CSEC and Advanced Level. In addition the school is providing free after-school classes, two afternoons per week, to children (aged 11-14 years) living in the immediate area of the school.

Dr Brian O'Toole, the

Director of the school said, "We feel that the period between 11-14 years, which we call junior youth, is a very special time. During these years, he or she leaves childhood behind and undergoes profound transformation".

Towards this end School of Nations and Varqa Foundation is offering an after-school programme that seeks to enhance the spiritual and intellectual capacities of junior youth. Dr O'Toole believes the programme will contribute to their development in a significant way.

Wednesday, 16 September 2009, Guyana Chronicle

An amazing gesture by School of the Nations

SCHOOL of the Nations recent press release of offering classes to its new neighbourhood children is indeed an amazing gesture and this is also an ideal practice of community development.

I view it as a once in a lifetime opportunity for the selected candidates to garner personal self development, become role models and ambassadors for their community which has on many occasions in the past come under a lot of negative outlook.

The elders of this community also need to display their input in supporting the young ones in every way possible especially with encouragement. The end products will be a representative of all in the community and I am also confident that if the selected

participants produce unbelievable results, the institution might eventually consider offering to some, the opportunity of attending full time classes.

Change is good because I believe it brings about progression and positive image development and I now wonder if the community would consider participating in a discussion with a government official, a representative of the institution and support a name change of the community from "Tiger Bay" to "Nation's Bay."

If the answer is yes, it would be an awesome decision and this in many ways can be a perfect example of community upgrading.

Take it from here and have the project executed.

T. PEMBERTON

Monday, 21 September 2009, Guyana Chronicle

School of Nations offers free after-school classes to Tiger Bay youths

By Vanessa Narine

In an attempt to fulfill its social obligation, School of the Nations is providing free after-school classes, two afternoons per week, to children 11-14 living in the Tiger Bay Area.

A registration session on Thursday, saw 70 youngsters interested in the programme, signing up with the school.

Dr Brian O'Toole, the Director of the school, said, "We feel that the period between 11-14 years, which we call junior youth, is a very special time.

During these years he or she leaves childhood behind and undergoes profound transformation."

He added that School of Nations, therefore wishes to offer an after school programme that will enhance the spiritual and intellectual capacities of junior youth.

"We believe that this programme will contribute to junior youth developing the gem-like qualities that they possess and will help along the path of creating a better society. A key part of this programme will be the development of moral excellence," O'Toole said.

He explained that the programme has received support from many persons, including 26 Sixth Form students from school who will be acting as volunteers and a local restaurant which will take on providing one meal a week for the children.

The programme will be offered on Tuesdays and Thursdays, from 3.30 to 4.30 pm, and will focus on Reading, Mathematics, Science, and Reasoning and Comprehension skills.

It will also focus on arts, sports and the promotion of

analytical thinking.

The programme will feature practical work in service and environmental projects.

"There is no charge for programme for persons living in the vicinity of the School of Nations at 41 New Market Street," the Director pointed out.

The school's new location was opened following several months of refurbishing of the previous Woodbine Hotel complex.

The new location offers more than twice the space the school had at its previous location.