

SPRING 2008

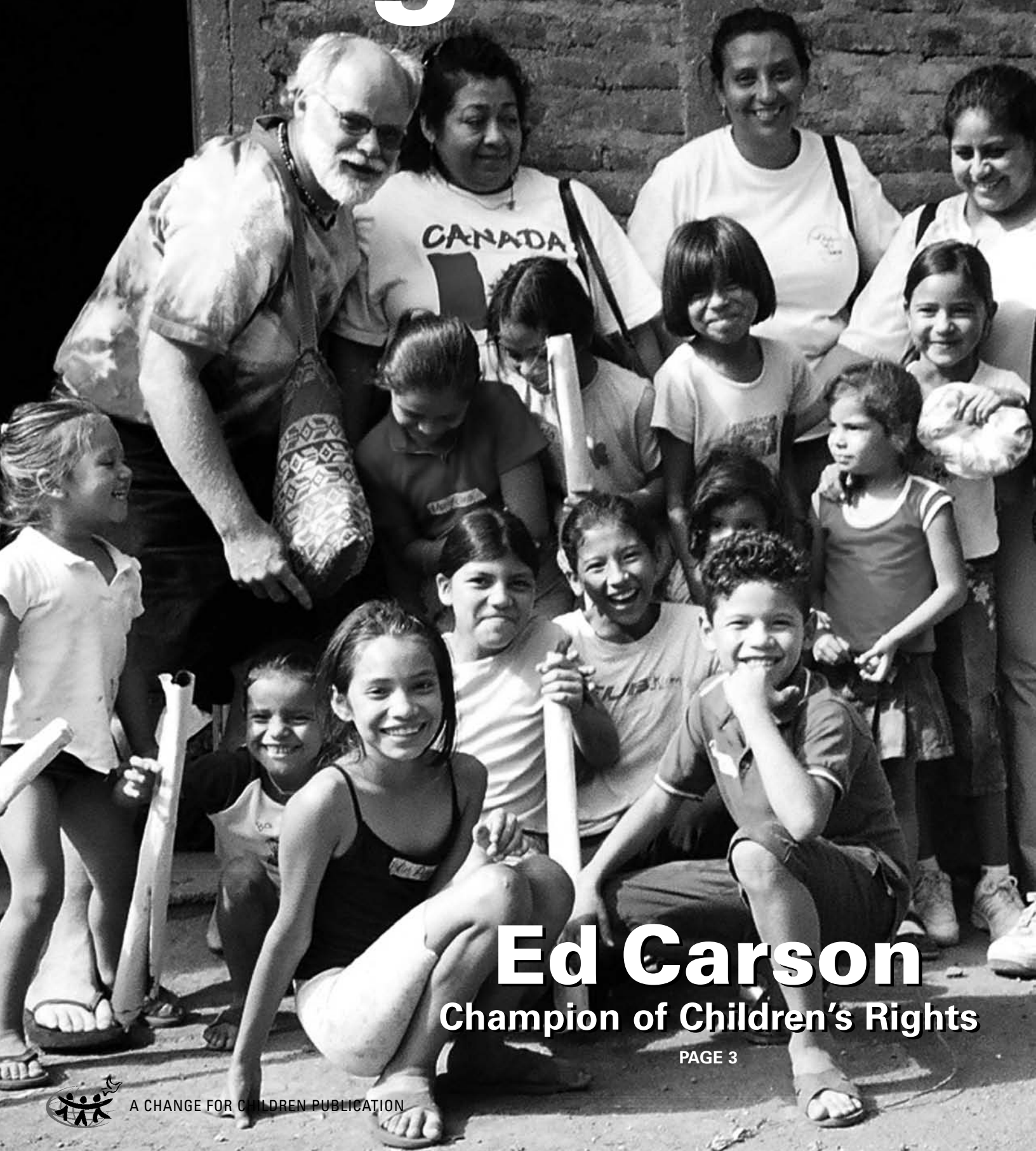
BUILDING

Bridges

INSIDE

Reports from the field

Youth shape their world



Ed Carson

Champion of Children's Rights

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A CHANGE FOR CHILDREN PUBLICATION



What Is Possible

Last week I had the opportunity to visit St. Angela's elementary school, in North East Edmonton. This is the school where Ed Carson has worked for many years. As soon as I walked in the door, I felt Ed's presence in the artwork, the sense of creativity, inclusiveness and compassion. For more than twenty years, Ed has been instru-

mental in changing the world for children and the communities they are a part of, both in Canada and internationally. He has incredible conviction for what is possible and works tirelessly towards that. Ed has worked for human rights for two decades and this long term commitment is what I have heard so many of our Nicaraguan partners express immense gratitude for.

This issue of *Bridges* is dedicated to Ed, to his family and to the incredible impact that his work has had on so many people, that has connected people.

In working on this issue of *Building Bridges*, I have really stopped to think about what the world would be like *without* people like Ed Carson, or through another perspective, look *what is possible*, look what the world *can* be like with people like Ed Carson. I invite everyone who reads this issue, whether you have met Ed or not, to carry on his work to help sustain the projects and partners that are achieving critical change in places where it is needed most.

Sincerely,
Fiona Cavanagh
Education Coordinator

CHANGE FOR CHILDREN ASSOCIATION (CFCA) is an Edmonton based non-governmental organization with a thirty-two year history of working for sustainable grassroots community development in Latin America and Africa and a vibrant Global Education Program in Canada.

Healthy Communities, Human Dignity, Global Justice

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Ed Carson: Champion of Children's Rights

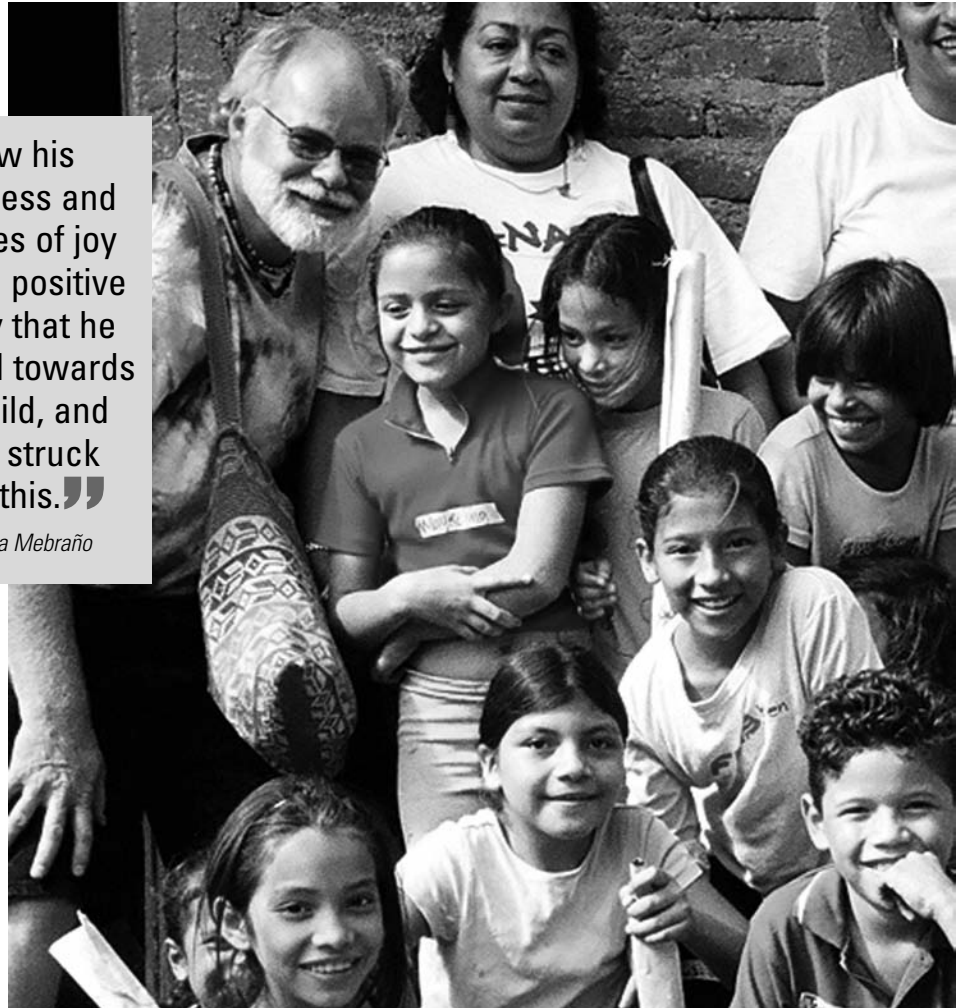
Though twenty years have passed since Vicenta Mebraño first met Ed Carson, the memory remains vivid in her mind.

"It was a Wednesday and I arrived at Centro Rolando Carazo, the centre for abused and abandoned children, to drop off a girl from Esteli," she recalls. "And I was struck by the image of a white man - very tall - with huge thong sandals on. There he was, riding a donkey with a child on his lap. I said to myself, 'Only a *chele* would bring a donkey into a children's centre.' But I saw his happiness and his cries of joy and the positive energy that he directed towards the child, and I was struck by this. It was at that point that my empathy, love, admiration and friendship with Eduardo began. There are very few people like him on this earth."

Similar stories have become lore amongst Change for Children supporters fortunate enough to spend time with Ed, either in Canada or on one of his frequent trips to Nicaragua. Children streaming out of homes and alleys to run after Ed's truck, happily shrieking, "Eduardo! Eduardo!" as he drives the dusty roads of Managua's barrios. Ed feigning a broken leg, complete with full leg cast, on a flight to Nicaragua so he could bring a much-needed

“I saw his happiness and his cries of joy and the positive energy that he directed towards the child, and I was struck by this.”

— Vicenta Mebraño



wheelchair to the capital. Ed dancing feverishly, twisting a laughing child around at one of the many parties of the projects to which he dedicated his life.

They are snapshots that illustrate the infectious joy with which Ed, who is currently battling cancer in palliative care at the Grey Nuns Hospital, has approached his almost 30 years of international solidarity

work.

Ed first became involved with Change for Children in 1979. In 1985, through his connections in the Catholic School Board, he helped the fledgling organization find its first office, a free space in St. Michael's Elementary School. This was the organization's home for the next 18 years.

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A teacher with a focus on special education, he spent two years in Nigeria before traveling to Nicaragua in 1984, during the years of the Sandinista revolution and at the height of the Contra War. In Nicaragua, Ed made a connection that continues to this day with the people - especially the children - of the impoverished country.

He volunteered for eight years at Centro Rolando Carazo, working with marginalized youth and children with severe disabilities. It was there that he fell in love with one of the centre's educators, Maria Elena, whom he would eventually marry.

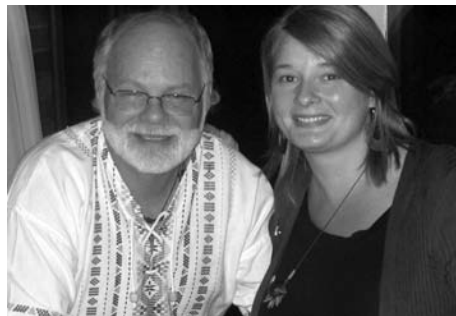
But Ed's involvement in Nicaragua went far beyond the walls of the centre. In the '80s Ed already recognized the importance of creating lasting, face-to-face relationships between the people of Nicaragua and the people of Canada, especially those from his home province of Alberta. He played host to delegations of church groups and other internationals who came to the country to offer assistance to the Sandinista government.

Bill Howe, an engineer who travelled to Nicaragua to volunteer in 1988 and was later the president of Change for Children, recalls what it was like traveling in Managua with Ed.

"I couldn't get over Ed's lifestyle. Someone would stop him in the street and he was caught up in a conversation for an hour. He would take the truck in to get fixed and the next thing I knew, the 'plans' were off and we were invited over for dinner with the mechanic's family. Little did I know then that the plans were almost always a lower priority. Somehow, by

“Whether it was hundreds that needed help or just one individual, Ed always managed to find time and resources.”

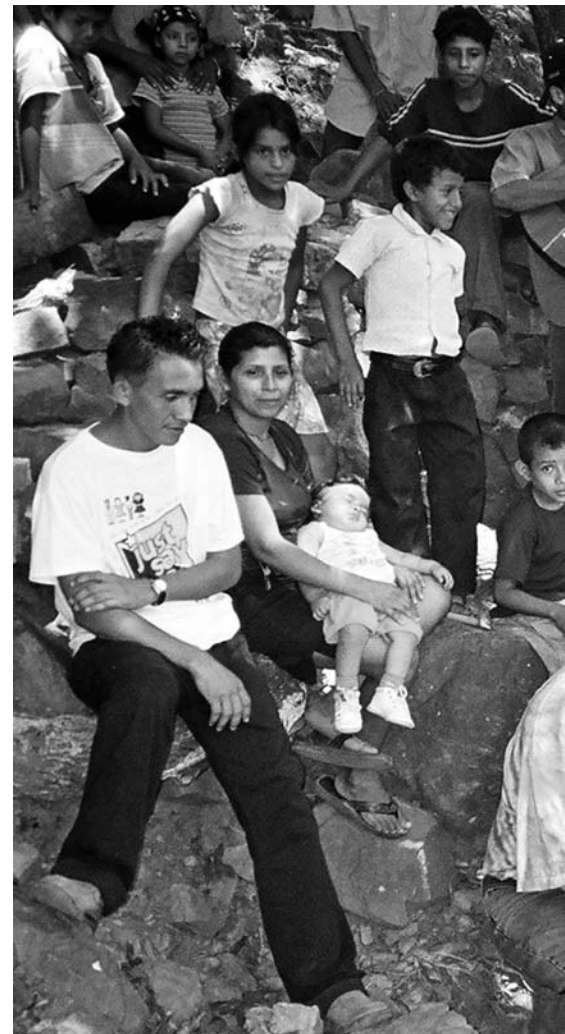
— Bill Howe, CFCA Past President



putting people first Ed always managed to get things done, often quicker,” he remembers. “Whether it was hundreds that needed help or just one individual, Ed always managed to find time and resources.”

Following the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections, the UNO government decimated many of the progressive social programs that had been put in place during the '80s, forcing many projects to reinvent themselves as non-profit organizations to continue their critical work.

One such organization that emerged was INPRHU, the Institute



for Human Promotion, which was formed in 1990. Ed was involved from the beginning, and his connections to the organization would later lead to the creation of one of Change for Children's most long-lasting partnerships.

“Ed made a huge impact on the work of INPRHU,” explains the organization's director Fanny Acevedo. “He was the most recognized person in Managua - not only amongst the children but also amongst the shop owners, bus drivers, all of the people in the markets that made up the environment of the children. He was so loving towards



the children that others would see this love and be inspired to be better people themselves, to treat children with respect and love as Eduardo did.

"As Nicaraguans dedicated to social justice work it was a pleasure to walk at his side through a market because he absolutely embodied the work that we do so well - to care for the children with the children - at their sides and in their communities. Ed became the very heart and soul of so many of the INPRHU communities."

After returning to Edmonton with Maria Elena and their young daughter Quetzala in the early '90s,

his work in solidarity with Nicaragua continued. Working as a special needs teacher at St. Angela's Elementary School, he inspired students and faculty alike to raise funds for groups in Nicaragua like Pajarito Azul (Blue Bird Centre), an orphanage for children with severe disabilities in Managua, as well as for organizations in Canada working in solidarity with the Global South.

He also reestablished himself as a pillar of the Change for Children community in Canada, devoting endless hours to presentations in churches and schools, fundraisers

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“Ed was so loving towards the children that others would see this love and be inspired to be better people themselves.”

— Fanny Acevedo, Institute for Human Promotion (INPRHU), Nicaragua



Continuing the Work

Change for Children hopes to continue the work of Ed Carson into the future.

Please consider a donation in honour and celebration of Ed's relentless contribution to social justice education, his passionate advocacy for the rights of all children, and to ensure that his important work continues.

We encourage you to work with your own community of friends, colleagues, and family to ensure that we are able to raise an amount that is significant in keeping with the contribution that Ed has made to this work over his lifetime.

Endowment gifts of \$10,000 or more can also be arranged. For information about gifting to these projects contact Shelaine at CFCA office.

“Ed’s passion for social justice is highly contagious and has greatly impacted me, my life choices and general life path.”

— Laura Roberts, former Youth Tour participant

and acting as a mentor and advisor for staff and volunteers in Canada.

Ed was the driving force behind the numerous adult and youth tours that travelled to Nicaragua from 1997 to 2002, and he played host and friend to bewildered and overwhelmed participants as he took them through the barrios and projects to help them come to terms with the realities of Nicaragua. He even drove one group from Edmonton to Managua in a school bus that he then donated to a project in Nicaragua.

These tours exposed dozens of Albertans to life in Nicaragua, and fundamentally changed the direction of many of the tour participants' lives and careers. Laura Roberts visited Nicaragua on the 1997 youth tour and, like many others, was transformed by the experience.

“I went to Nicaragua and worked with CFCA's project partners in the



barrio, lived with a host family in Las Torres and saw firsthand the social inequalities that exist in Nicaragua,” Roberts recalls. “Since I came home I have been forever changed, working for social justice in a variety of different ways. Ed has greatly influenced who I am today. His passion for social justice is highly contagious and

has greatly impacted me, my life choices and general life path.”

Ed also recognized the importance of global education in Canada: in addition to his many presentations across the province, he was actively involved in the tour of the Nicaraguan youth band Lights of the Future when they visited Alberta in 1998, as well as the 2000 Painting Peace project.

Over the years, Ed has demonstrated a singular ability to inspire and involve people of all ages on issues of social justice, and this year his daughter Quetzala, who is now 15, became an active participant in Change for Children's Rural Roots Youth Action Project.

The results of Ed's love for the people of Nicaragua and years of efforts continue to this day, evidenced by the long-term partnerships that have been fostered between Alberta and Nicaragua.

“You at Change for Children know the impact of Ed's work as well as we do,” says INPHRU's Fanny Acevedo. “All of the youth tours, and cooperants, and the people who came on the bus, and the people who keep coming year after year in brigades of dentists and construction teams - these people all come because of their connection to Eduardo.”

“He makes everybody feel like they can do something to help - like they should do something to help. And they do it.” ■

Children's Rights Mural Projects

To celebrate and continue the incredible work of Ed Carson, Change for Children will create two public art murals over the next six months. Three mural painters from our Nicaraguan partner organizations INPRHU and FUNARTE will join us in Edmonton to work with local artists to create a mural on the second floor wall of St. Angela's school in Edmonton. A similar mural will be painted in Managua in September as part of our Children's Rights Project.

Mural panels are \$500; please contact Change for Children if you would like to support this project or for more information.

Four Countries, One Commitment

Over the past several months, I've had the very special opportunity to meet many of the young people participating in Change for Children's various projects throughout Latin America. These are youth and children who come to CFCA's partners from households living in poverty, from street corners, from struggling schools, from communities facing serious violence, from risky jobs they work out of necessity, from places where, through my eyes, the future may not look too promising.

But overwhelmingly, the young people that I've met through visits to CFCA projects in Bolivia, Chile, Peru and Nicaragua are looking past the obstacles that they face and envisioning brighter futures. They speak eloquently about the skills they are developing, the problems they are overcoming, the ways they are learning to work together and the visions that they have for themselves, their families and their communities. In their eyes shine the potential that Change for Children and its vibrant community have long recognized and long worked to nurture.

Chile

In Chile, a 16 year old girl from Legua de la Emergencia, a rough barrio in downtown Santiago notorious throughout the city for drugs and related gang violence, told me that her years of involvement with



CFCA's partner, La Caleta, have allowed her "to forget where I come from and just be who I am." Who she is, is Carmela a natural leader with a beautiful laugh. She has become a youth educator within CFCA's child rights and leadership project inspiring children from her neighbourhood to stay in school, to avoid gang membership and to participate in making child rights a reality in Chile.

Bolivia

In Bolivia, I met a group of teenage girls and boys about to begin technical education programs as a part of CFCA's rights and vocational education project with our partner,

Centro de la Promocion Minera (CEPROMIN). They told me about how their fathers and grandfathers and great grandfathers had lived and died for the silver and mineral mines of Potosi. How their mothers and grandmothers and great grandmothers had worked around the mines and about how they and their siblings were expected to do the same. They told me about how among poor communities in Potosi most see no other path but that to the mine. And then they told me about how now they, with the support of CEPROMIN, envisioned a different future, having researched the markets for bakers, welders, carpenters and

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Pamkawas | Nicaragua



I was completely taken aback by visiting the Pamkawas school during a recent visit to Bosawas, Nicaragua. The school was completed in 2007 by the joint efforts of Kindness in Action, Wildrose Foundation and several generous donors. Hoards of giggling children lead me up the hill from the river to see the **bright orange primary school - literally beaming from atop of the jungle hill where it sits.** Inside is radiant –posters of powerful positive messages in Miskito and Spanish proudly hung along the walls. I wish all our supporters could experience humble pride I felt knowing that by working for CFCA I was involved in this beautiful school and the bright future it creates for all its eager students. ■

Four Countries, One Commitment

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

child-care workers in their communities. They told me about how much they look forward to their courses and they thanked us, in Canada, for believing in them.

Nicaragua

In Nicaragua, I met with old friends whom I met years ago, thanks to Change for Children, when a friend and I were looking to volunteer in Latin America. As they were doing when we arrived there in 2002, CFCA partners FUNARTE and INPHRU are still changing young people's lives through art. By teaching rights, leadership and life skills through music, muralism and circus, these organizations aren't just teaching young people the power of

art, they're teaching them about their own power. They are giving them the tools to create change. This I know, because they did the same for me.

Peru

In Peru, Paty and Amparo, coordinators at Manos Libres, CFCA's partner, told me about all they learn from the young women with whom they work. All the teenage women in CFCA's project in the sprawling neighbourhood of Via El Salvador in Lima's outskirts are mothers, struggling with under employment, truncated education and, often, difficult family situations. Nonetheless, they are determined to raise their children with confidence and love. Through the radio dramas they write, act and



Water Project | Nicaragua

My experience monitoring the Rural Community Water Project in Nicaragua this March made an impression so strong it has inspired the focus of my Masters thesis! I knew from CFCA Project Committee Reports that our implementing partner, Centro Humboldt, was a very effective and those communities were getting access to potable water. However I did not realize until I was there that the project was so holistic - addressing community capacity, sanitation in a broad sense and offering simple solutions to health and environmental challenges. These issues are intertwined and cannot be addressed in isolation – this I will take with me into my studies! ■



produce, they share their stories with other young people in their community, promoting sexual health and growing as leaders and mothers. 'They're the ones who teach us,' said Amparo, 'not the other way around.'

Meeting the partner organizations behind some of CFCA's projects and spending time with the children and youth who bring the projects to life has been a moving and incredible experience. The opportunity has made crystal clear something that the people of Change for Children have long advocated: that poverty doesn't close young people's eyes or blur their power to dream. That, with the support of the amazing and capable organizations partnered with CFCA, they can build the

skills and confidence to create new opportunities and to build paths towards those dreams.

I think this issue of Building Bridges brings home how lucky we all are to be part of the Change for Children community, mutually inspiring and guiding. People like Ed Carson who has, for years, believed in the potential of this organization, young leaders from the South, like Carmela; her counterparts here in Canada who annually bring their enthusiasm and commitment to CFCA's Rural Roots program; partners like Paty and Amparo whose skills and vision create rich opportunities where it may seem there are none. ■

Shape Your World

Rural Roots Conference seeds social and environmental consciousness

"Different things matter to you afterwards," says Lacy Senio, grade 11 student from Calmar and one of the keynote speakers at this year's Rural Roots Conference. As Senio attests, the annual conference has garnered an impressive reputation for its ability to seed social and environmental consciousness – not to mention a healthy dose of critical thinking – in the minds of its participants.

"You don't change as a person, but your way of thinking changes," she says. "If you open your eyes, the world is as big as you make it. I don't have to be from Calmar, Alberta. I can be Lacy Senio, citizen of the world."

The theme of this year's conference was "Shape Your World." Rather than meekly accepting social and environmental injustices, the conference emphasized the power of youth to define their own world. Over ninety students from across Alberta travelled to Gull Lake over the March 14th weekend for the event. And, despite the conference's eponymous commitment to rural youth, it was also invaluable opportunity for urban youth to find like-minded peers.

"Normal discussions with my peers are lacking," says Becky Smith-Mandin, a grade 11 student from Edmonton who attended her first Rural Roots conference this year. She readily admits that the major appeal of going to Rural Roots was the



opportunity to meet other youth who, like her, are media literate and globally engaged.

"A lot of kids are afraid of having opinions. Kids at Rural Roots aren't. At school, when a controversial subject comes up, a lot of kids automatically steer away from it because they're uncomfortable. At Rural Roots, kids are really up for discussion and debate." The atmosphere of acceptance and intelligent debate remains her favourite part of the weekend.

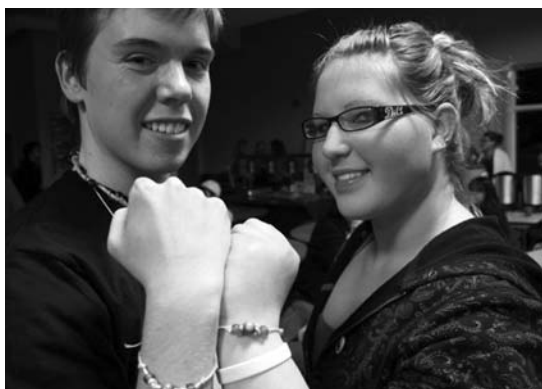
"It's not like school where kids will mock you because they think it's uncool to take a stand," she continues. "And ultimately, in high school, everyone's concerned with being

cool because it's high school."

"It's nice to have adults treating us like intelligent humans instead of trouble makers."

Change Your Lens

Perceiving the intelligence and creativity capacity of today's youth is the idea behind the Rural Roots "Change Your Lens" training that Jaro Malanowski's facilitated. A four-day primer on creating media within one's own community that took place in February, the workshop presented its creations at this year's conference. The eight youth hailed from diverse parts of Alberta, from Eaglesham and Goodfish Lake Reserve to Lethbridge, Calgary, and



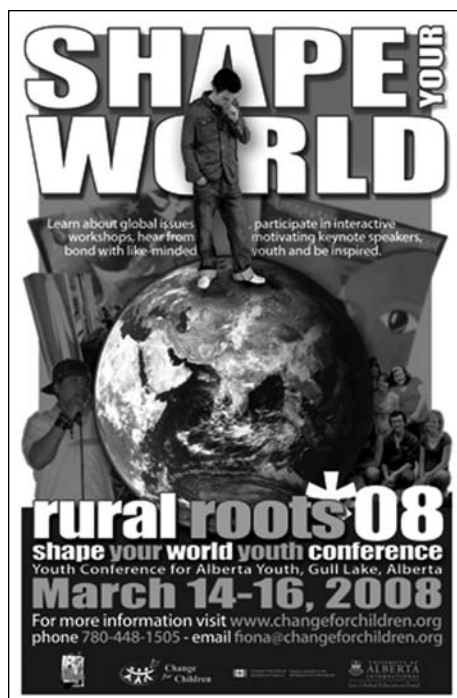
**“If you open your eyes,
the world is as big as
you make it.”**

– *Lace Senio, Calmar*

Edmonton, and thoroughly impressed the inveterate filmmaker.

Malanowski says that the youth, mostly between grades eight and eleven were "pretty young but totally amazing... I might just hire them down the road for other productions." During "Shape Your World," Malanowski and his participants showed the two films they made in the workshop, both of which considered environmental issues.

"We're in a really interesting time right now because there's a huge number of specialty channels. In an eight-hundred-channel universe, with content twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, there are so many more



venues for young people to have their stories made, at a quality that can be shared internationally." Malanowski hopes that the films made in this year's Change Your Lens will be sent to international film festivals.

Local Empowerment

While Malanowski's work directs youth toward the possibility of international audiences, Teresa Bryanton, a social studies teacher living in Innisfail, raves about how Rural Roots also empowers youth at the local level.

In her community – like many – Bryanton says, "To care about [social justice and environmental issues] is not the norm. The norm is to play

guitar hero, to play sports, not to look outside the box."

The effect of Rural Roots on her students, according to Bryanton, is astounding. "It was pretty amazing to see the difference in them. ... I understand what it's like to be a black sheep and care about different things than other kids in the school. It was really nice for the kids to be around others ... who are passionate about the same things."

Immediately after returning from the conference, the students made an appointment with the principal of their school to implement changes. "They asked if they could put milk jugs in the toilets at school in order to save water," says Bryanton. They also distributed stickers reminding students about Earth Hour, the event on the 28th of March that aimed to eliminate energy usage for one hour. "They also got permission from the principal to turn off the lights all day on the 27th, and most of the teachers agreed to do it."

The students are also brainstorming holding a concert that will benefit an as-yet-undetermined charity, and intend to host the members of the Walk for Darfur as they march their way through the province.

"It's just so good to see. I'm the gung-ho activist teacher. But after they come back from the conference, they realise I'm not the crazy one, that it's for real." ■



*A Change for Children Fundraiser
celebrating the commitment
and community shared between
Alberta and Nicaragua*

Friday June 6, 2008
Ukrainian Hall (11018-97 St)

COMMUNITY FIESTA COMMUNITARIA

Doors at 7pm, Program 8pm – midnight

Highlights: Nicaraguan guests,
Child Rights Mural Project info,
and Gallo Pinto Kitchen

Performances by Bill Bourne, Le Fuzz,
Andrea House, Quetzala Carson,
Cunningham Family Band, and more!

Tix \$20 adult, \$10 youth/low income Available at CFCA office (can call with credit card)



CFC EVENTS

Mural Launch

Friday, June 20, 2008

2:00 pm at St. Angela's Elementary
School (13430-132A Street)

With refreshments, celebration,
speakers and music.

Annual General Meeting

Saturday, June 21, 2008

11:00 am at St. Angela's Elementary
School (13430-132A Street)

Bylaws will be amended and voted
on at the AGM. Proposed changes
are on the website or available by
contacting Change for Children.

Special General Meeting

August 14, 2008

7:00 pm at the Change for Children
Association office

For approval of the audited
financial statements.

Change for Children Association

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