

# Catalyst

A close-up photograph of a young child with dark hair and large, expressive eyes. The child's face is adorned with white, circular face paint or clay around the eyes and on the forehead. They are wearing a bright yellow short-sleeved shirt with intricate black and red geometric patterns. The child is being held by an adult, whose hand with pink nail polish is visible at the bottom. In the background, another person's face is partially visible, and a large black plastic bag hangs from above.

Cuso International's magazine on global volunteering Autumn 2019

*Leading by*  
**Example**





# lifeCHANGER

Vivekan Jeyagaran  
Volunteer Tourism Entrepreneurship Advisor, Laos

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Please send your comments, ideas and submissions to:  
[editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org)

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# Canada

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**On the cover:** May Chan and her daughter are living at a women's shelter in Myanmar. Read how our local partner is working to end gender-based violence.

Photo: Brian Atkinson



Team Cuso Challenge 2018 in Cusco, Peru.

## From the CEO

When I attended the Botswana alumni 50th reunion this past summer, I was struck by the connection our returned volunteers still have with their placements and with each other. What started as a small get-together quickly grew to 140 people and a weekend-long event (see photos on pages 24–25).

Dozens of Thailand alumni also reconnected this past summer to mark five decades since their volunteer placements. We have more on their reunion on page 22.

Staying connected—or reconnecting—with members of our alumni family is extremely important to us. There will be a number of alumni events across the country this fall and winter, so please keep an eye out for your invitation. And if you know of Cuso alumni who may not be on our list, please ask them to connect with us via

[alumni@cusointernational.org](mailto:alumni@cusointernational.org) or 1-888-434-2876 ext. 295.

We're also very excited to be participating in our third Cuso Challenge to Machu Picchu in March 2020. Last year's group had a truly exciting adventure. The highlight for them, though, wasn't reaching the summit; it was meeting the women who are benefitting from our partnership with Centro de Bartolome de las Casas. I hope you'll consider joining us on this bucket list adventure. You can find more information about the Cuso Challenge on page 23.

We've added a new first-person feature in *Catalyst* called Perspectives. If you have a story you'd like to share, please send it to [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org).

The stories in this issue are truly inspirational and I hope you connect with them as much as I did. Thank you for your continued connection to Cuso, and I hope you enjoy the read.



Glenn Mifflin  
CEO, Cuso International



# A system for success

Alumna instrumental in \$13M girls' education funding

Girls' access to education in Ethiopia is getting a \$13-million boost thanks in part to the support of Cuso International alumna Rebecca Gass. The new project, U-Girls 2, addresses barriers that impede adolescent girls' access to education and fosters community engagement and support.

"The beneficiaries of this program aren't just the girls who are enrolled but also the girls' families, community members, boys in their classes, their teachers and the school administration. All girls can reap the benefits from the girls who were in the program," says Rebecca. "The whole idea is focused around this sense of community. It's creating a support system for them to succeed."

The number of girls enrolled in primary school in Ethiopia has more than doubled in the past 20 years, but it still remains below 50 per cent. When



**Above:** Cuso International volunteer Rebecca Gass learns how to make coffee.

**Left:** A new program to increase girls' access to education in Ethiopia has received \$13 million in funding.

## The beneficiaries of this program aren't just the girls who are enrolled. They're the girls' families, community members, and boys in their classes.

it comes to secondary school, girls living in urban areas have an average education level of Grade 10. In rural communities, girls often drop out of school after Grade 8. Only 27 per cent of students at the post-secondary level are female.

"Oftentimes girls don't go to school because they need to help their families," says Rebecca. "Whether it's cooking, washing, cleaning—running a home is very time-consuming and challenging. I was able to witness that firsthand."

Rebecca volunteered as a Communications Advisor for the Regional Health Bureau in Benishangul-Gumuz Region. She worked on campaigns to vaccinate girls against HPV, to address and prevent sexual and gender-based violence and to increase girls' access to education. Her project work, which included research for the U-Girls 2 project, goes hand in hand with her passions, as her master's thesis focuses on female youth empowerment in visual music media.

"Everyone should have equal access and equal opportunity to learn," says Rebecca. "When people focus on

the education of young children, especially girls, they grow up having the drive and the self-assurance to stand up for themselves and each other."

The project, funded by the Government of Canada, will enhance academic,

social and soft skills for adolescent girls, including those with disabilities, and strengthen the capacity of teachers and schools to deliver quality and gender-sensitive education. Girls will receive academic resources, training and tutorials, and a financial stipend to allow them to focus on schoolwork.

"I've worked with the girls that could be the beneficiaries of this program. I met them, I've spoken to them," says Rebecca. "I truly believe that it will make a big impact in this region."

A young Ethiopian girl receives her HPV vaccine on the first day of a nation-wide rollout.



**Bottom:** Hundreds of girls learn how the HPV vaccine helps prevent cervical cancer, the country's second-highest type of cancer resulting in death.





# Perspectives: Stronger than a super typhoon

By Amanda Klassen  
Volunteer Business Development Specialist

As a designer, Vancouver's Amanda Klassen was excited to support a group of master weavers in the Philippines. Here is part of Amanda's story, as told from her perspective.



Cuso International volunteer Amanda Klassen (left) with traditional banig weavers in Philippines.





**Above:** The women of BANIG (Basey Association of Native Industry Growth) are now selling their tikog mats to people around the world.

It all started last year when I began my placement as a Business Development Specialist, working with a team of rural weavers in Basey, Samar, Philippines. My professional background is product design and I've helped clients internationally develop new product categories or improve existing products to grow their business.

I was placed at Basey Association of Native Industry Growth (BANIG), a social enterprise supporting the livelihoods of rural women weavers. These expert women weavers became famous for making mats woven from *tikog* reeds, which are indigenous to the area and sustainably grown and harvested. *Banig* literally means mat in English and is a style of Filipino weaving that is considered a national treasure.

From the start, this placement felt like it was the ultimate win-win; an opportunity to contribute to the social good and for me to learn new sustainable techniques. But my preliminary research didn't prepare me for the harsh realities of poverty. The hardest aspect of the project was having to face this daily.

Many of the women only started to claim their rights and build financial independence after Typhoon Haiyan. One of the strongest tropical storms ever recorded, the 2013 typhoon killed more than 6,300 people in the Philippines, injured more than 27,000 and displaced more than four million. It also damaged or destroyed more than 1.1 million homes.

After the typhoon, women were the first to organize in response to the destruction. Seeing women take charge

and get results, many husbands began to trust their wives with much larger responsibilities. Now with more than five years of re-development experience, there's been a remarkable cultural shift.

The women of BANIG have fearlessly seized on the new opportunities. The president of the organization told me, "When we ask for help and someone says no, we just move on to the next person."

These rural women are agents of change and are some of the most adaptable women I've met. Every month the leaders are in seminars or teaching workshops. They're thirsty to learn and network. These are powerful leadership qualities that I believe can lead their organization into transformation.

### **Growth, sustainability and new beginnings**

Prior to my arrival in the Philippines I had many big ideas I wanted to pursue, and I was losing sleep with excitement. I quickly learned most of them were not possible. During my first weeks in placement, I tagged along on many of the team's regular activities and acted as a "fly on the wall," observing the cultural context in which exchanges were happening and noting the behaviours, actions, demographics, needs and pain-points. I found out why flexibility and adaptability are so important for a volunteer.

I had to rethink how to run a business, one that is primarily "off the grid." Cellular data is a luxury in Philippines. However, some weavers have basic smartphones and avidly use Facebook because it offers a data-free mode of communication. Together, we chose to launch





**Right:** The women weavers have created a full product catalogue.

BANIG's first online distribution channel using the social media platform.

Early discoveries like this reminded me to pause and be more open to learn where I really needed to start. So, I revised my work plan, and there became this fluidity to the project—I like to describe it as a current. I needed to flow with it or risk exhaustion trying to go against it.

BANIG now has a full product catalogue, as well as team images, for their recent media coverage and proposals. The sales inquiries that first day online led the women to the nearest post office to price out shipping options. Beautiful meditation mats have been sold and shipped to Vancouver and the organization has secured inter-



business. The first products on my site were beautiful woven mats from the women of BANIG. My goal is to have this small initiative inspire other meaningful and sustainable designs.

These women taught me more about building resilience and perseverance than ever before. It was truly a gift to experience their resourcefulness and vibrant attitudes. The experience opened my eyes to possibilities that I didn't see before. Now I truly believe nothing can stop me from moving forward, with the right attitude.

**These rural women are agents of change and are some of the most adaptable women I've met.**

national trade buyers who order custom work. Observing them grow and delegate new orders on their own was one of my proudest moments.

But these amazing women weren't the only ones who experienced growth. Soon after I returned home, I applied what the weavers taught me and launched my own small

*Perspectives is a new, regularly occurring feature as told by the author. If you have a story for consideration, please email [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org).*



# Q&A



Torontonian Lois Boody spent the past school year working with students in Fort Resolution, NT. The 25-year-old English language specialist, who is now pursuing a certificate in international development from the University of British Columbia, discusses her experience in the North and what it meant to see her students succeed.

**Q: What did your placement entail?**

A: I was a Distance Learning Monitor. Students took academic-level classes via a large screen connected to multiple communities. The principal teacher was based in another community in the Northwest Territories, so I served as a liaison between this teacher and my students. Courses I helped with included Grade 11 biology, and English for grades 10 to 12 students.

I also taught gym for kindergarten to Grade 9 students, helped with the breakfast program and offered one-on-one literacy and numeracy support

for grades 1 and 2 students. I loved doing extra activities too—I coached the outdoor soccer team, assisted the track and field team, and often helped students with homework after school. I also had the chance to chaperone students to various conferences and events in other communities.

**Q: Where were you living?**

A: My placement community was Fort Resolution, locally known as “Fort Res” or just “Res.” This is a small hamlet of about 500 people that sits on the shores of Great Slave Lake. It’s the site of the Deninu Kue First Nation and there is also a large Métis

population. There’s a small grocery store, a convenience store, one diner and one K–12 school. While I was there, they built a beautiful boardwalk that goes along the lake to a nearby site called Mission Island.

**Q: Why did you decide to volunteer?**

A: When I saw Cuso’s Canadian Program, I became intrigued. It’s a part of the country that most people don’t know much about, including myself at the time. Personally, I’m passionate about education and development and hope to eventually pursue a career in this field. I also



love learning about different cultures, I'm committed to doing my part to further reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples, and I love being in the outdoors.

Seeing there was a need for education assistants in the Northwest Territories sounded like the perfect opportunity to offer my skills while also learning and experiencing so much myself. For anyone who is interested in going up North to work in a similar position, go for it. It was such an incredible learning experience and I'm so grateful to Cuso for sending me.

**Q: What stands out as the most memorable experience from your placement?**

A: It's hard to decide what the most memorable experience was since there were so many—but one definite highlight was attending the three-day track and field competition in Hay River. It's one of the biggest school

sporting events in the territory and being there with our students, feeling their excitement and seeing their successes, was so amazing. I also enjoyed participating myself in two events, one of which I got to run with one of my high school students.

**Q: What was the most challenging aspect of your volunteer experience, and how did you overcome it?**

A: One of the most challenging things for me during my placement was trying to get more involved within the community. With such a small population, there are not a lot of formal opportunities or events to get to know people outside of the school setting. I was able to work on overcoming this when I found out about a Ladies Night that happened most weeks. When I started attending, I found I was able to make stronger connections with community members while also learning some

cool new skills like making jewelry.

There were also a lot more community activities in the warmer months of spring and summer. I met more people and participated in activities like a Traditional Race (a six-person relay of running, biking and canoeing) and axe-throwing.

**Q: Do you have a success story to share?**

A: One success story from my placement was organizing an "Around the World" event during the final week of classes with the other volunteer in Fort Resolution. Students from K–9 participated and high school students helped run it. Students were split into groups and had passports—they rotated between places in the school visiting different country stations.

Each station consisted of learning about the place and doing a simple activity to get their passport stamped. I taught salsa in the Colombia station, then there was brigadeiro-making in

Brazil, puzzles in Sweden, tea and soccer in England, writing names in Korea, and learning about international currencies in Bangladesh, among other activities. Everyone had lots of fun.



**Left:** Cuso International volunteer Lois Boody pulls children through the snow.

**Below:** Lois teaches students salsa during her school's Around the World event.





# Micro-entrepreneurs, big market gains

**W**alk into a D1 supermarket in Cali, Colombia and you can find beautiful necklaces, earrings and other accessories hand-crafted by Emily Delgado, a young micro-entrepreneur. Emily is one of 100 micro-business owners benefitting from a pilot project that helped small businesses become key vendors of large enterprises.

“It has been something extremely positive,” says Emily. “We successfully closed a deal with the D1 convenience stores. They were very kind. They made the payment process easier, the delivery system, everything. It was an absolutely unforgettable experience.”

Cuso International’s Sustainable Colombian Opportunities for Peacebuilding and Employment (SCOPE) project partnered with the Economic Development Secretary of the city of Cali and Fundación Carvajal for the six-month inclusive supply chain initiative.

An inclusive supply chain is a series of links that connect all the pieces involved in getting a product from creation to consumers—including producers, suppliers, transporters, processors, buyers, retailers, restaurants and supermarkets.

Of the 100 micro-entrepreneurs who participated, half had closed deals with large businesses by the end of the pilot in December 2018 and 540 jobs had been created. Management, accounting and technical skills were also increased among the participants.

“I didn’t know how to manage accounts and calculate the right price for each product. The initiative was key to strengthen my management and financial skills,” says Tomasa Quiñones, who runs her own basket weaving business.




**Above:** Deira Tomasa Quiñones participated in SCOPE's inclusive supply chain initiative.

Working as a Gender and Social Inclusion Advisor, Cuso volunteer Maria de Brigard closely collaborated with Fundación Carvajal to create a diversity and social inclusion policy. “Formalizing the policy aims to generate true and effective social inclusion for those people who historically have not had access to the same opportunities and benefits as others in society,” she says.

The next step is to replicate the project in other areas. The goal is to see more micro-entrepreneurs become competitive in the market, says Angélica Mayolo, Secretary of Economic Development of Cali. “If we keep working on these kinds of initiatives, we will be able to have an impact on more people.”

Cuso’s main objective in Colombia is to promote social inclusion through the sustainable economic development of communities in situations of poverty and vulnerability. To date, Cuso’s SCOPE project has benefited more than 8,000 people through its training and job placement initiatives.

 **Catalyst extra:** see video of the pilot at [youtu.be/syY5OixOybg](https://youtu.be/syY5OixOybg)

# Head to heart

Cuso, Randstad and HEART Trust are working to improve economic opportunities for youth in Jamaica

**T**here are approximately 1.2 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 around the world. Although youth account for 16 per cent of the global population, they are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults.

In Jamaica, the youth unemployment rate is nearly 40 per cent. The lack of work causes youth to find other ways to make money and survive, which can tempt them towards crime. To address these challenges, Cuso International and Randstad Canada partnered with Jamaica's HEART Trust to improve access to and quality of economic opportunities for young people.

Randstad employees Katelyn Schoen and Veronica Bloxam eagerly signed up to volunteer with HEART Trust, Jamaica's leading youth employment and training agency. Over a nine-month period, Katelyn and Veronica spent more than 1,800 hours working to develop recruitment strategies and programs.

As an employment advisor, Veronica used her expertise to help HEART Trust develop and update policies and

procedures. "All of the projects I worked on aligned quite well with the work I have done at home," she says. "I was able to use my knowledge from my career at Randstad to help with what I was doing in Jamaica. In terms of knowledge transfer, it aligned perfectly."

Katelyn worked on several business plan reviews, establishing what was working well, where improvements could be made and how to measure for success. She saw an opportunity for a local farm and grocer to expand in the next five years by adding attractions such as a farmers' market and farm tours.

"I can see the business reviews I made brought value for HEART Trust and the studies will be used long after my placement," says Katelyn. "My greatest satisfaction was how well I was able to integrate and the relationships I made."

Cuso and Randstad Canada have been partners for more than a decade. Dozens of Randstad staff from across Canada have volunteered abroad, using their professional skills to help local partners build capacity.



**Left:** Volunteer Katelyn Schoen (right) says the best thing about her placement was the friendships she made.

**Below:** Katelyn Schoen (left) and Veronica Bloxam (centre-right) with two of their colleagues.







## Spotlight: Stan Bunston

Ghana 1969–71

**F**or Stan Bunston, the opportunity to live and work in a country and culture vastly different from Canada is something he is grateful for, and an experience that shaped his life.

“The two years in Ghana with Cuso definitely stand out as life’s two most impactful and meaningful years,” he says. “What a gift to experience another way of living and working—of people being abundantly joyful in life with so little material abundance.”

Based in Akosombo, site of the dam and hydroelectric Volta River Project, Stan worked on the Resettlement Program with fellow Cuso International volunteers Jack Pierpoint, Bob Clement and Wayne Tebb. Stan and his colleagues visited approximately 50 resettlement villages to meet with chiefs and elders, hire workers and roughly survey designated agricultural land into plots for those who needed to be resettled.

In 1971, he returned to Toronto to get a Master of Business at the University of Toronto and went on to a

career in public accountancy, where he remained until retiring as partner in 2005. Stan returned to school for a Master of Divinity and was ordained by the United Church in 2009. He was a minister in Hanover, Ont. until he retired in 2012.


“I had a clear sense that, however I was to finish my life, it was not to continue in accounting but to address the deeper issues of values and meaning for myself and others,” he says.

Stan volunteers with several community organizations in Guelph, Ont., enjoys running and triathlon, and has participated in 23 Boston Marathons. In fall 2018, he attended an alumni reunion for those who volunteered in Ghana from 1969 to 71. The group is looking at holding another reunion in summer 2021.

*Want to be featured in an upcoming Spotlight? Tell us what you’ve been up to since your placement. Email details to [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org).*

# Breaking tradition

How an Indigenous women's organization is shaping the future of Myanmar



A young mother sits on the floor of a small bedroom with her daughter in her lap. There is no bed, just a rolled up sleeping mat in the corner and a mosquito net suspended from the ceiling. It's the only private room in the one-storey, three-room women's shelter.

There are more than a dozen women, youth and children living in the safehouse, where May Chan\* arrived two years ago. "A friend connected me to the organization. At the time, I didn't have any place I could go," says the 29-year-old. "So I just came here."

The safehouse is one of dozens of programs operated by the Jeepyah Civil Society Development Organization

(JCSDO) in Mon State. Jeepyah works with the Indigenous Mon population, a marginalized group living mostly in southeastern Myanmar.

Ma Cherry, Jeepyah's Founder and Director of Women Empowerment and Child Rights, opened the women's shelter after field interviews repeatedly turned up cases of domestic and sexual violence and the sexual assault of children.

Women in rural Mon communities have little access to information about their rights and options. The cost to access the legal system is out of reach for most. And when the rare report of gender-based violence is made, it often goes ignored.



Inside the Jeepyah women's shelter in Mon State, Myanmar.



Even today, May Chan has difficulty talking about what led her to the safehouse. Other girls and women, some as young as 14, are survivors of human trafficking and sexual assault. A young transgender man is living at the shelter after escaping an arranged marriage and abusive living situation.

The Jeepyah organization offers survivors safety, shelter, access to legal counselling and support with navigating the court system. Ma Cherry estimates that more than 100 women, youth and children have come through the doors since the safehouse opened two years ago.

“We still have a need for basic rights for women and children. We have a lot of gender discrimination deeply embedded in our culture,” she says. “The tradition is your family problems are your business and not to intervene. We’re breaking that tradition.”

The Mon word *jeepyah* translates to “leading the way by example,” and that’s exactly what JCSDO is doing. Founded in 2012, Jeepyah works to strengthen understanding about gender equality, democracy and rule of law; to build skills and knowledge among youth through access to education and training; and to empower women

to understand and advocate for their rights by increasing leadership opportunities and supporting survivors of gender-based violence.

“Women feel they can’t participate in leadership and decision-making roles—they believe they are second-class people,” says Ma Cherry. “To solve these problems, we need representation by women. We need to empower them

**The tradition is your family  
problems are your business.  
We’re breaking that tradition.**

to feel more confident and educate them on their rights.”

Cuso volunteer Mary Thompson is championing this effort. Working with Jeepyah as an Organizational Development Advisor for two years, she’s been instrumental in securing new funding partnerships for community outreach initiatives.

One of those projects includes piloting a sexual and reproductive health hotline. Jeepyah staff will be able to

Cuso International volunteer Mary Thompson.



A young transgender man at the safehouse.



share information about contraception, safe sex and abusive relationships without upsetting conservative communities. “It’s a really good way to reach youth. It’s a way to reach people who are far away,” says Mary.

“In our safehouse, these women come from three hours north and four or five hours south. It’s the tip of the iceberg because they are the ones who come forward. Others keep it secret because they don’t know what to do or how to get justice. This is why we need this hotline.”

The 31-year-old from Bayfield, Ont. is passionate about gender justice work. With an election planned for 2020, she and Ma Cherry have drafted a call to action for political candidates. Jeepyah will track which candidates commit to championing gender equality and the rights of women and children, and those who ignore the request.

“They’re not separate issues. They’re very, very intertwined. In order to help end gender-based violence, there has to be more women leaders and more leaders tackling women’s rights,” says Mary.


The barriers women face when entering politics—or any workplace—are numerous. More than 30 women members of parliament in Mon and Karen states and Tanintharyi Region shared personal anecdotes about the hurdles they had to overcome to even get a foot in the

door, and those they continue to face. Mary then worked with a local artist who took their stories and turned them into art.

Jeepyah published the drawings, along with Mon, Burmese and English translations, in a book and hosted a gallery-style viewing and launch party. “People were really, really excited to see them and engage with them,” Mary says. “The idea was to take these difficult concepts and turn them into something that any person, even if they’re not really able to read or write, can look at and understand.”

In one of the drawings, a group of blue birds can be seen painting a mural with the same colour green. In the second panel, blue and pink birds are painting a mural using different colours and techniques. The message is simple: including women’s voices creates fuller conversations and offers diverse perspectives.

“When women are empowered, when they are educated, when they are in leadership, they can help us build a more peaceful, developed and sustained democratic society for all people,” says Ma Cherry. “This is our future. Women are the key.”

 **Catalyst extra:** see the artwork at [bit.ly/30B24mk](https://bit.ly/30B24mk)





Some of the 112 children who received glasses showing off their new specs in Kingston, Jamaica.

# Seeing clearly

For Jayquan, access to education came in the form of eyeglasses

**E**ight-year-old Jayquan didn't like to read. In school, he always sat at the back of the classroom where he would inevitably fall asleep. Instead of doing his homework, he would opt to watch TV. But when the television was on,

his mother noticed he would stand very close to the screen.

"Jayquan complained about headaches whenever he was supposed to do his homework," says Kimberly Black, Jayquan's mother. Concerned about her son's behaviour, she didn't

know where to turn to find out what was going on. "When he wasn't sleeping, he was getting into trouble. As a single mother, I had no help."

The root of Jayquan's troubles, it turned out, was his vision. He needed glasses.

According to the Canadian Association of Optometrists, nearly 25 per cent of school-age children have vision problems severe enough to affect their learning.

Research shows that correcting poor vision with properly prescribed glasses results in a greater impact on academic performance than any other health intervention.

Without access to appropriate eye care, Jayquan would be at a higher risk of engaging in dangerous activities as he got older, because he wouldn't be pursuing his education.

"The best way to eradicate the most troublesome issues in Jamaica is by increasing access to education. It allows children to think for themselves," says Cuso International volunteer Emilie Denis. She worked with Kimberly at the Rose Town Foundation, an NGO in the inner city of Kingston, Jamaica for eight months

as a Human Resource Advisor.

When Kimberly shared some of the struggles she was experiencing with her son, a lightbulb went off for Emilie.

Emilie organized a partnership

from donated frames, which were then modified for a perfect fit.

"This was a big project for us," says Emilie. "The glasses help them do better in school so they can learn."


No one is a better example of the

## The best way to eradicate the most troublesome issues in Jamaica is by increasing access to education.

between Rose Town Foundation and See Better, Learn Better, a collaborative project that provides vision screening to school children. "There is a cost to attend school and not all can afford it, but glasses are a really good first step," says Emilie.

Over three days, 112 children between the ages of five and 15 were examined by eye doctors. Those requiring glasses were able to choose

difference this initiative made than Jayquan. Six months after receiving his glasses, he enjoys doing his homework and gets high grades in class. "He has even received academic awards," says Kimberly. "He is the best reader in his class and was named 'Top Boy.' I am so proud of him."

 **Catalyst extra:** see video of the day at [youtu.be/S8A4uvzFKbU](https://youtu.be/S8A4uvzFKbU)

Cuso International volunteer Emilie Denis (bottom, centre) with children who had their vision tested through See Better, Learn Better.





# Big changes

In DRC, parents and practitioners have seen noticeable impacts in maternal care

By Ruby Pratka  
MSL Volunteer Communications Advisor



A midwife shares information with a new mother.



**W**alking into the maternity ward at a hospital in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Bénédicte Lekulanyai could tell things were different.

“When I came to give birth the first time two years ago, I wasn’t treated with a lot of affection. This time, there have been big changes,” says the mother of two. “They take care of us now and tell us to eat when we’re



Midwives in DRC participate in International Day of the Midwife activities, held May 5.

hungry. The washrooms are even cleaner. We really admire the efforts they're making."

Since the beginning of the Midwives Save Lives (MSL) project in 2016, more than 250 midwives in the greater Kinshasa area have participated in respectful maternity care training.

Co-developed by Cuso International, the Canadian Association of Midwives, Ministry of Health of the DRC and the Société Congolaise de la Pratique Sage-Femme, the three-day workshop addresses compassionate care and patients' rights.

Midwife Agnes Bitshilualua has delivered countless babies over her two-decade career. A mother to eight children herself, she's seen a noticeable shift in the attitudes

of medical professionals. "In the past, our rights as mothers weren't always respected. If you asked for something, the midwives would ignore you," she says. "This training gave us the idea that women who give birth have rights that we need to respect. Every time I do something, I have to ask for the mother's opinion. And if she refuses, I stop."

Dr. Mamisa Kachelewa, who works at the Clinique Mère-Enfant de Bahumbu in the Matete health zone, says this rights-based approach has had a direct effect on patient care. "We are really feeling the impact of this training," she says. "The midwives are much more patient when they're caring for the mothers."

As she speaks, a midwife tracks down an interpreter to explain hemorrhage prevention to an English-speaking



Nigerian immigrant mother, while another sets up a privacy screen for a patient and a third perches on an empty bed for a chat with a wide-eyed 18-year-old holding her first child. The mothers share stories of attentive, caring midwives. The result is an increase in the number of mothers who are choosing hospital births.

“When I went to give birth to my first child eight years ago, the midwives scolded the women and didn’t allow my relatives to come into the ward with food,” says Noëlla Gbangwa. “This time, I was well received. There was always someone next to me saying, ‘You can do what you want.’ If I have more children, it will be here.”

And it’s not only moms and babies who are benefiting. Fathers, too, are taking more active roles. “We used to say that if the father was there, the mother’s labour would take longer, and so we should just leave her in peace to deliver,” says Dally Ngyama, a nurse and health advisor.

When his wife became pregnant with their second child, he decided to become more involved. He attended appointments, listened to the doctors and joined his wife for the delivery. The experience transformed Dally’s approach to prenatal care.

“It wasn’t easy, but everyone was telling me not to be scared. I was there talking to my wife the whole time. I loved being able to do that. And then they delivered a beautiful baby boy and we saw him,” he says. “Ever since, I’ve started to tell fathers that it’s important to approach pregnancy and birth together, starting with the first prenatal care appointment. It’s in their interest to know what is going to happen and how to prepare.”

Midwives Save Lives is a four-year initiative in Benin, DRC, Ethiopia and Tanzania. Led by Cuso International in partnership with the Canadian Association of Midwives and local midwifery associations, MSL is contributing to the reduction of maternal and newborn mortality by improving the supply and demand of health services and strengthening the work of midwives’ associations. MSL is funded by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada.



A mother adds twins to her family of nine.



**Right:** Midwives practice neonatal resuscitation at a training workshop.

# Alumnotes

Share and connect

## Hans-Henning Mündel

India 1966–69



Dear family and friends, near and far: many of you helped support the fund-raising for a tribal hospital among the Paniyas, and indeed, purchased my 2007 book about my life there in 1966–67. Now the funds have been raised and the hospital is built and outfitted. Thus I updated the book, “My

Life Among the Paniyas of the Nilgiri Hills” in 2019 with my 2011 and 2017 visits. Find it at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

## Tim Babcock

Malaysia 1967–69

I was a Cuso volunteer (high school teacher) in Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia for 28 months in 1967–69. I note that recent Alumnotes in the *Catalyst* focus on reunions of former volunteers. I would like to hear more about reunions between former volunteers and the local colleagues/students they worked and lived with during their



placements. What percentage of alumni, I wonder, have maintained contact and even visited with their former colleagues over the years?

In my case, I have just returned from a visit with some 25 of my former students in Malaysia, who will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of their high school graduation this year. The relationships developed 50 years ago remain strong in many cases, and I was delighted during my recent trip to notice how easily we could take up conversations we started many years, even decades, ago.

## Danielle (Dani) Lyndersay, nee Moquette

Nigeria 1968–72

I was a Cuso volunteer in 1968, in the first crop that went to Nigeria at the end of the Biafran war. I was sent to the University of Ibadan School of Drama where I met my Trinidadian husband-to-be. We married there three years later with some 200-plus children as our grooms and bridesmaids, all students of my children's theatre classes.

My heart is still very much in Nigeria; great years and amazing experiences. I am still in touch with many old colleagues and former students from across the country. I will eternally be grateful for the opportunities Cuso first gave me and how my life,

research, teaching and friendships will always be a result of that move way back in 1968.



## Nancy Edwards

Sierra Leone 1978–81

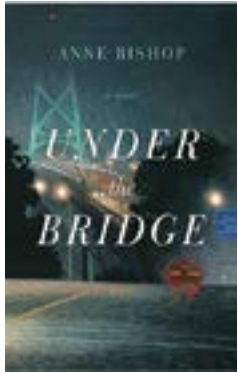
I would like to connect with other cooperants who have written, are currently writing, or thinking about writing a memoir about their Cuso experiences. Please contact me at [Nancy.Edwards@uottawa.ca](mailto:Nancy.Edwards@uottawa.ca).

## James McRae

Botswana 1982–84; Ottawa 2010–11

My Cuso involvement goes back to the '60s, not long after Cuso was founded. The Spring 2019 Alumnotes made mention of my book, “The Africa Diaries.” I want also to let you know about the first book I wrote, “On Evolution: Charles Darwin and the Russian Prince, First Nations and Twelve Step Societies.” Both books can be found at [amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca), under the pseudonym “James G. Duncan.”





### Anne Bishop

Staff 1984–87

Anne Bishop has been an activist for four decades in organizations dedicated to local, international, environmental, food, fiber and LGBT justice. She recently published her third book, “Under the Bridge.” Find it at [fernwoodpublishing.ca](http://fernwoodpublishing.ca).

### Lucille Proulx

Thailand 2004–07

I was invited to the Centre for the Protection of Children’s Rights in Thailand to be honoured for the work I did and for establishing an art therapy training program during my Cuso collaboration. The recognition



ceremony at CPCRC was amazing. I have returned to Thailand several times since the end of my placement in 2007 to teach and to lecture.

Cuso sent me to Thailand when I was 72 years old, and I had to end the placement at 75 for insurance reasons. Now I am 87 and I do not envision returning to Thailand, so this was my goodbye visit. Thank you Cuso for giving me this wonderful opportunity, it has filled my life.

*Share your stories by emailing [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org).*

# Thai volunteers reunite

More than two dozen Cuso Thai alumni gathered at the home of Mike and Silwan Miles in Wesport, Ont. on July 6 to celebrate their 50th reunion. Nearly half the group of 30 volunteers extended their stay in Thailand, a testament to the need and impact of their work during that time.

Cuso alumni

Candace Anderson had this to say: “The group who descended upon Thailand in 1969 were seeking adventure and wanting to help a developing country in some perceivable manner. We bonded easily. The bonds remain today, long after returning home and pursuing our separate paths. We remember Thailand as a high point in our lives.”



From left, Si (Silwan) Miles, Candace Anderson, Jerry Vink, Lorna Wright, Paul McGinnis.

From left, Jim Giesbrecht, Fern Tsai (Hilliard), Alison Norman, Paul McGinnis, Terry Anderson, Mike Miles.



# Cuso Ghana Reunion

‘May the grass never grow on the path between our houses’

## Jack Pearpoint

Ghana 1968–70; Nigeria 1970–72

We were asked to reflect on the impact of our time in Ghana (and for me, add Nigeria). Like almost all who gathered for the Cuso Ghana Reunion 2018, it was profound. It shaped me for life. I learned to think, listen, observe, enjoy and endure differently.

My respect for human capacity exploded. Coming from the white, privileged West, I arrived with almost no awareness of how lucky I was to have been born in Canada.

My respect for formal education was not eliminated, but rather overwhelmed by my new and deeper respect for wisdom gleaned over

centuries, conveyed by deep cultural traditions rich in complexity greater than I had ever imagined. Quickly, my inborn western arrogance faded, and a deeper and richer respect for my privileged experience emerged as I relished in the op-

portunity to learn from life experts. I delighted in the tsunami of cultural wealth, not only seeing, but even experiencing the true meaning of community, extended family and relationships.

The core of my reflection is that we are the privileged few who have had the remarkable life experience to taste, smell, hear and see the depth of relationships that are possible when heritage is nurtured through generations. And so we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to work in our culture, to remind each other that there are still people who understand the deep nature of caring and community. If we are willing to listen and collaborate, we too can learn, relearn and hopefully heal some of the discord and strife that is consuming our western cultures.



Ghana reunion 2018

## Trek for good. Join the Cuso Challenge.



Take the route less travelled. Join us at the top of Machu Picchu in March 2020.

[cusointernational.org/cusochallenge](https://cusointernational.org/cusochallenge)





# CUSOBOTs come together



Some 140 Cuso Botswana alumni came together in Ottawa on a weekend in July to celebrate their life-changing experience as volunteers 50 years ago. They hugged, reminisced, laughed and sang. The CUSOBOT reunion was one for the ages. It was a day filled with discussion and recollections.

**A**llan Culham, alumnus and Global Affairs Canada Special Advisor on Venezuela, and one of the event organizers, summed it up best. “Botswana was a young country, being only 10 years old when we arrived. It was an island of peace in the middle of a region full of great conflict. I spent all my 20s in Botswana. Coming at such an

impressionable time in our lives, it had such a big impact on everything that followed.”

The CUSOBOT website, created by Kevin Shipley ’78, has captured

memories, reflections and bios. To see more photos, watch the 2019 reunion video and read the trove of magnificent stories, visit [cusobot.weebly.com](http://cusobot.weebly.com).



From left, Parker Duchemin and Doug Creba.







Victor Cumming and Lulama Tobo.



CUSOBOT reunion on July 6.



From left, Lynda Muir, Sue Creba, Carol Shepard and Linda Lehr.

## A defining moment —the egg

By Susan Smith, Gaborone '77  
Public Health Nursing Instructor

A group of women, all new mothers seated on low stools in raggedy rows outside, were watching a nutrition demonstration being taught by an eager nursing student.

One mother, her face looking older than her actual years, smoothed her worn yellow dress and listened intently while the student explained the need for protein in a young child's weaning diet. She watched as a small spoonful of peanut butter was added to a bowl of boiled greens.

When the student held up an egg and remarked that eggs were also a valuable addition to a child's diet, the mother sighed and said for all to hear, "Don't you think that if I had an egg, I would give it to my child?"

In that moment, sitting to one side of the demonstration, I suddenly understood something important. In fact, her question was a game changer for me. I had assumed that being poor meant needing "health education."

Despite my years at university, I had not fully grasped that poverty had root causes, that economic poverty had social and political determinants, and didn't know how to do a structural, critical analysis of poverty in a given place. In a real practical way, this mother certainly understood all that. This brief moment changed how I acted in the world, gradually developing ability to read context. See more great stories on the reunion website at [cusobot.weebly.com](http://cusobot.weebly.com).



From left, Tim Greenhow, Steve Seaborn and Sue Smith in a baobab tree, 1978.



# Lives Lived

## Lucy Pickard, nee Codd

Nigeria 1976–78; 1981–83

On the morning of July 29, in her 98th year, Lucy passed away. Lucy taught in Port Credit, Ottawa, Mount Forest, Nigeria, Lesotho, and Bolivia. Lucy was a feisty lady—an independent-minded, intelligent, generous person. She was an active member of All Saints' Anglican Church in Waterloo, Ont. and of the Church of the Ascension in Hamilton. She was an avid and skilled Scrabble player, who won her last game three days before she died.



## Murray Thomson

Staff 1970–76

Murray Thomson died on May 2 at the Ottawa Civic Hospital. Former Cuso staff Clyde Sanger writes:

Born in Honan province of western China where his father was a Presbyterian missionary, Murray never lost his love of Asia. After serving in the RCAF and attending university, he spent the early 1960s



working in adult education in Saskatchewan. He headed to India with the American Friends Service Committee, where he met his Thai wife, Suteera. Murray led Cuso in Thailand during the Vietnam War and became executive director of Cuso. He then took a leading role in working to help refugees and foster peace. In his last month he was still publishing his online bulletin and hosting a meeting of Trinity Anglican church members who sponsored a Syrian refugee family. He was, in short, a wonderful man.

## Paul Fraser

Board of directors 2014–17

Paul Fraser, B.C.'s conflict of interest commissioner died on March 29 after a brief illness. He was 78. Paul chaired two federal commissions. During his legal career, he served as president of the Canadian Bar Association, the Commonwealth Lawyers Association and the Canadian Section of the International Commission of Jurists. Paul was special counsel to Lloyd Axworthy when he was federal minister of foreign affairs.

## Dwight Watson

Malaysia 1975–77

Dwight Jan Watson passed away on the morning of March 20 in Calgary, Alta. He was 68. His career spanned more than 35 years in international consulting, focused on coastal

resource management in developing countries. Dwight's early research studies took him abroad to Sarawak, Malaysia where he met Mary. The only thing Dwight cared for more than his work was his family. He will be remembered for his compassion, generosity, and humour.

## Jean-Denis Garceau

Ghana 1971–74

In Montreal on March 13, Jean-Denis Garceau passed away at the age of 70. He is survived by his sister Hélène, his brother-in-law André, his nephews Jérôme and Charles-Antoine as well as family and friends. Expressions of sympathy can take the form of a donation in his memory to Cuso International.

## Lily & Nap Himbeault

Botswana 1970–72; Tanzania 1978–80

On March 1, Mrs. Lily Alberta Chollet Himbeault of Oliver, Nfld. passed away peacefully at Mariposa Gardens at the age of 100 years. She will be fondly remembered by her loving family and friends. She is predeceased by her husband, Napoleon (Nap) Himbeault '80, who died in 2007.

## Dorothea Moerer

Ecuador 1973–79

Dorothea died peacefully in her sleep on Feb. 18. She will be deeply missed by dear friends in Canada and family

in Germany. Highlights of her long nursing career include cardiac surgery at the University of Alberta Hospital, a teaching role with Cuso International in Colombia and a policy analyst with Alberta's Ministry of Health. Dorothea was passionate about human rights and for years she wrote letters to international governments to stop human rights abuses.



### **Garth Holloway**

Nigeria 1974–76

Peacefully at his home in Cobourg, Ont. on May 2, 2017, at 68 years of age. Garth was a retired teacher with more than 20 years at Earl Haig Collegiate in Toronto. He was the long-time treasurer for the Northumberland Players and for Community Power Northumberland. He will be missed by his many family and friends.

### **Paul Harrison**

Ghana 1965–67

Paul J. Harrison, who died in 2016, was a mentor to many. His love of learning, spending time in nature, travel and adventure shone through in both his career and personal life. He was a Professor Emeritus at the University of British Columbia, an outstanding international scientist and a tremendous supporter of his academic colleagues.

He met his lifelong companion, Victoria Harman at the University of Toronto and after three months of marriage they headed to Ghana on a two-year teaching contract with Cuso. Paul won several awards for his research and teaching, including being elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada. He will be greatly missed.

### **Bairu Sium**

Tanzania 2011–13

Bairu Sium was born in Eritrea, in the horn of Africa and died in 2015. Having migrated in 1976, Bairu was one of the earliest Eritreans to settle in Tor-

onto. While serving as a secondary school teacher for 29 years, Bairu became a community activist, mentor and friend to many. He tirelessly pursued his lifelong passion for education, continuing his teaching career in Tanzania after retirement from the Toronto Board of Education. As a loving father, committed friend, and community educator, Bairu Sium will be loved and missed by many.

## **A life well lived**

### **Remembering Dr. Anita Foley** **Tanzania 1966–68**

Role model, mentor, teacher, doctor; these are just a few of the words used to describe Dr. Anita Foley, who served the community as a family physician for over four decades. Dr. Foley passed away on May 25, 2019.

Dr. Foley came to Guysborough, N.S. to practice medicine as a recent graduate of the Dalhousie Medical School in 1976. But medicine wasn't her first calling; she had initially pursued a career in nutrition and spent two years teaching in Tanzania with Cuso.

Since Dr. Foley's passing, there has been much reflection on her impact on the lives of those in this region. She was trusted and respected by both colleagues and patients and was a tireless advocate for health care in Guysborough County. Most people who have lived in the Guysborough area have a story to tell about Dr. Foley; the way she'd call you dear when she met you on the street, her dry humour, and most of all the times she saved or comforted those in pain, death and grief.

Many accolades and honours were presented to Dr. Foley over her long career but perhaps none were more meaningful than the naming of the new wing of the Guysborough Memorial Hospital as the Dr. Anita Foley Health Services Centre.

Words cannot fully describe what Dr. Foley meant to the people of Guysborough. She devoted her life to this corner of Nova Scotia and will forever be remembered along these shores.





## Flashback



Who do you recognize? Help us dust off this memory by sharing your stories or identifying those in the photo.

Email us at [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org) or send us a tweet at [@CusoIntl](https://twitter.com/CusoIntl) using the hashtag **#flashback**. Submissions will be shared via the next edition of *Catalyst*.



### Did you recognize anyone in the photo?

We asked our readers to send in their best guesses. Here's what we received.

"This photo was taken on a farmer exchange trip to Bolivia in 1979 with Cuso International. From left are Darryl MacLaughlin, Jean Burgess DesMarches, Euclide Chiasson, Patrick Riordon, Cajetan Duperé, Yvon Daigle and Gérald Thériault. Unfortunately, I do not have the names of the Bolivian children seen at the front of the photo.

"Many, many fond memories from the trip! Several Bolivians who took part on the exchange came to my farm in New Brunswick and stayed at my home for a few nights."

Patrick Riordon, Bolivia '79



# MOTIVATED TO GIVE

## ‘Cuso uses resources very effectively, which is really important’

“After completing my Cuso International volunteer placement I went immediately to medical school. My experience in Ghana with the Ministry of Health certainly influenced what I did and how I practiced medicine as a remote pediatrician in Canada.”

Dr. Leigh Wincott, who marked his 30th anniversary as a Cuso alumnus in 2018, is impressed with how Cuso has evolved over time. He’s motivated by the organization’s continued commitment to empower the most marginalized in ways that are sustainable.

“Cuso has done so many things right and continues to do things right. The fact that Cuso uses local resources, and that includes people as powerful resources, is what makes it effective.”

A passionate supporter of Cuso, Leigh sees his gifts as a continuation of his volunteer placement and career. He encourages others to continue making an impact through monthly donations and by arranging to leave a gift in their Will.

“I give on a monthly basis, which is what I can do now. It’s

only natural to make a last gift at the end of my life. Cuso uses its resources very effectively, better than many, which I think is really important.”



Dr. Leigh Wincott, Ghana '88

To learn more about how you too can continue to play an integral role in Cuso International’s mission by becoming a donor, please contact Meghan Maack, Manager, Major Gifts and Legacy Giving.



Phone (toll-free): +1.888.434.2876 x205 | Email: [meghan.maack@cusointernational.org](mailto:meghan.maack@cusointernational.org)



# Getting Social



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