

# Catalyst

Cuso International's magazine on global volunteering Autumn 2018

I am  
***Living  
Proof***



A photograph of a smiling man and woman, both wearing light blue t-shirts with the CUSO International logo. They are standing outdoors next to a vintage car with a prominent chrome hood ornament. The background is filled with lush green foliage. The overall mood is positive and adventurous.

# Hop into your next adventure Volunteer again

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Cuso International is a not-for-profit development organization that works to eradicate poverty and inequality through the efforts of highly skilled volunteers, collaborative partnerships and compassionate donors. Established in 1961, Cuso International is a registered charity in Canada and the United States. Funds raised have enabled more than 15,000 volunteer placements around the world.

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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:** Anene Merga has difficult decisions to make regarding her education. Read her story on page 12.





## Letter from the CEO

**IN ORDER FOR COMMUNITIES TO THRIVE**, women and men must enjoy the same human rights and be given the same opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives. That is a core belief at Cuso International and a focus of many of our programs.

When women and girls have the tools to succeed, they use them to not only lift themselves but to support and strengthen their families and communities. And you, our alumni and volunteers, are the catalysts for change.

Throughout these pages, you'll read the stories of amazing women and men working to bring change to their communities. There are midwives teaching others about respectful maternity care; female farmers taking charge of their education; and female students fighting to change system injustices from within.

I am extremely proud of this work, and I recently had the opportunity to witness it in action. During a visit to Nigeria, I met with many young women and men who are receiving the mentorship, skills and knowledge they need to access employment.

For 57 years, we've helped make a difference in the lives of people across the globe and with the launch of this fall's *Catalyst*, we're embracing our heritage while redefining it in a more contemporary way. We're still sharing stories about our alumni and volunteers, but we're telling these stories with a bolder, more captivating look.

We would love to hear what you think of your new *Catalyst* and look forward to continuing to tell your stories. Please send your feedback and story ideas to [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org).

And as ever, thank you for reading.



C. Glenn Mifflin  
CEO, Cuso International



# A Fruitful Exchange



Commercial horticulture expert Christia Roberts '17.

**A**gribusiness expert Christia Roberts learned as much as she taught during her placement as a sustainable development advisor in Ibagué, Colombia.

Experienced in commercial horticulture production, she wanted to help farmers in the developing world implement environmentally sustainable practices and generate more income for themselves and their families. When she retired, the grandmother of two signed on for a one-year placement with Fruandes, a Cuso International partner organization working with small farmers to grow and sell organic fair-trade produce.

“I have wanted to volunteer internationally for a long time,” said Christia, who lives in Vancouver. “I loved my career, loved commercial horticulture. That’s what I could do and what I had the skills to do.”

In 12 months, Christia helped 100 farm families transform their crop yields.

She developed experiments the farmers could easily conduct so they could see how small changes to their techniques would produce big outcomes.

For pitahaya farmers—dragon fruit in English—it’s important they control the flowering process to synchronize the harvest. “You don’t want to go out and pick two or three fruits every day. You want to be able to harvest a crop,” Christia said. “Here, they didn’t know how to initiate flowering in dragon fruit—but they do in Israel.”

**You don’t want to go out and pick two or three fruits every day. You want to be able to harvest a crop.**

She connected the farmers with scientists in Israel who explained how to make the plants flower concurrently. Since then, dragon fruit farmers have seen noticeable increases in the volume of harvest and their financial return, while information-sharing continues between the farmers and scientists from around the world.

The banana farmers were concerned with how much water and fertilizer their crops were using. Christia recognized the issue right away.



There were too many stems sucking up the nutrients and depriving the whole plant.

Because they looked healthy, the farmers were reluctant to prune until Christia showed them they didn't need the excess.

"Bananas, they multiply like grass on a lawn," she said. "The banana growers couldn't be happier. The quality and volume of the crops was dramatically affected in that one year."

German Betancourt, technology leader of organic development at Fruandes, said Christia really connected with the farmers and worked with them as partners.

"She brought methodologies about how to work in a more structured way and we applied it to the tropical crops here," he said. "She was loved, she was always available to give advice and she talked to everyone without judgment."

The experience was unlike anything Christia had in her professional life and she was able to learn a thing or two as well.

"It's not just 100 proprietors, but 100 families that often included three generations of people," she said. "What they do very well is cooperate with each other. They are not internally competitive. They are caring, and that's a powerful way to work."



Christia Roberts visits farmers in Ipiales, Colombia.



Farmers' children hold the hopes of their country.





After becoming a permanent Canadian resident, Cameroonian **Sandrine Messomo** joined Cuso International and returned to her home country as a volunteer. The experience helped her see Cameroon in a whole new light.

**Q: Tell us about your volunteer role in Cameroon:**

A: I had two mandates: first as a project manager with the Association Camerounaise des Femmes Juristes. This included supporting women's independence in three refugee camps, developing rural community radio stations to promote women's rights and organizing training seminars on gender equality.

My second goal focused on helping local partners better understand the national policy on gender and to teach them to consider women, girls and marginalized populations in their program development.

**Q: What was it like to return to your home country as a volunteer?**

A: Organizations assumed I would

have all the answers because I was from a developed country. My role was to help our partners understand they already hold the answers; real results come from the exchange of ideas, case studies, teamwork and collaboration. Local partners were very appreciative of this approach, which allowed them to own the processes that led to success.

**Q: What did you find challenging?**

A: The work I did in the legal clinics. The violence Cameroonian women face is a harsh reality. I did develop a certain resilience in order to offer sound advice, but it did affect me.

**Q: What was the best part?**

A: We're not just there to give. We can learn greatly, which is a win-win.

I learned so much. The local partners told me how much I've given them, but I also reaped the benefits.

It really does help you grow and to see things differently. You may think you know a country; being a volunteer helps you see things in a whole new light.

**Q: Overall, how was your experience?**

A: While I set out to contribute to the country's development, I'm the one who took the most from it. Yes, you have to adapt initially and it's difficult. But seeing the gratitude from those I helped, knowing volunteers understood Cuso International's gender policy and seeing Cameroonian partners embrace social inclusion in their programming is why I signed up.





Legal advisor Katherine Chong '17 helps victims of gender-based violence in Myanmar.



# On a Mission

Advancing women's rights in Myanmar

A run-down colonial-style wooden building in the city of Dawei is hiding something special. Inside is the only safe house for women and girls fleeing forced prostitution and sexual and domestic violence in Myanmar's Tanintharyi Region. Opened in 2016 and operated by the Tavoyan Women's Union, the shelter provides survivors a place to live and assistance with food, counselling, referrals and support to pursue their cases in court.

"These women are on a mission to achieve equality," said Cuso International volunteer Katherine Chong, who served as a legal advisor with the union.

Last year, the safe house provided refuge to at least 17 women and girls fleeing violent situations, as well as free legal services to 49 women and girls for cases involving rape, domestic violence, human trafficking, kidnapping and runaways.

The union assists clients with legal services, such as the funding to hire lawyers and the cost of transportation

new abilities is giving the women a sense of independence, the skills to pursue employment and the tools to become leaders in their communities.

Lwin Lwin Hlaing is one of the many success stories. Now a women's rights program manager with ActionAid-Myanmar, she leads several projects, such as urban safety for women and campaigning to increase gender-responsible public services.

## Fighting a lack of inclusion

The construction of a major sea port and industrial zone in Dawei is posing serious issues for residents. There have been forced evictions with little or no compensation, pollution of the air, land and water, and little to no consultation with those who are affected, said Katherine.

"There is consistently a lack of women's participation in these processes," she said.

While men stand to benefit with increased employment opportunities, women are rarely considered for hard labour jobs and may suffer adverse effects, Aly explained. "Young women are at risk of being trafficked with the massive influx of foreign workers. There will be a lot of single men arriving in the area and there could be an increase in illegal sex work. Female farmers are also being displaced."

The Tavoyan Women's Union, however, is continuing to push for equal access to project information and to be included in discussions on community solutions throughout the negotiation process. It continues to encourage women to get involved in politics and lobby for legislative changes to include women's ideas and perspectives in all decision-making processes.

"It would be dangerous to underestimate the strength and will of these women," said Katherine. "They have a passion and commitment to protect their families and the rights of their Tavoyan sisters, mothers, daughters and children."

**Last year, the safe house provided free legal services to 49 women and girls.**

to and from court, said Aly Pang, Cuso International volunteer and gender advisor for the women's organization.

"Many women lack the resources to navigate the legal system," she said. "To even travel from their village to Dawei costs many women a week's salary."

During her 10-month placement, Aly analyzed legislation from a gender rights perspective and developed a program to teach shelter clients skills such as sewing and crafting.

"We found there were a lot of women and girls waiting for their court cases without much to do," she said. Learning



A photograph of a person standing in a forest. The person is wearing a dark coat and is holding a walking stick. The forest has many tall, thin trees with light-colored bark. The ground is covered in green ferns and other low-lying plants. The sky is visible through the trees, showing a blue sky with some clouds.

# The Drive to Succeed

Supporting students in the Northwest Territories

Following a teaching assistant placement in the Northwest Territories, recent Cuso International alumnus Nathan Burrows is going back to school himself. Having studied and worked in mechanical engineering for a while, it was time for a change.

“I was trying to think of a way I could use my degree to still do something I enjoyed, and I remembered my physics teacher in high school had a bachelor’s in mechanical engineering,” said Nathan. “I had a lot of really amazing teachers over the years, so if I could be that to someone else that would great.”

The 23-year-old Algonquin First Nations man will be attending the University of Ottawa this fall to get his teaching degree.

Preparing for his career change, Nathan remembered how Cuso International placements transformed the lives of his uncle and a family friend. Former executive fundraiser Julia Magnuson-Ford spent two years volunteering in Jamaica, where she continues to live six months a year. Nathan’s uncle, Dennis Tessier, lived and worked in Tanzania for 12 years following his placement. He co-founded ARTI Energy Ltd., a renewable energy social enterprise that serves clients in East Africa.

“Cuso International placements totally changed their lives,” said Nathan. So when he saw the placement for a teaching assistant up north, he didn’t hesitate.

He spent 10 months living in the small community of Fort McPherson—population 900—and worked as an in-class facilitator for high school students taking academic courses at Chief Julius School.

Nathan Burrows '18 makes a career change following his placement.



With less than 100 students in junior kindergarten to Grade 12, the school doesn't have the resources to staff university-required courses. Instead, students who need academic credits take online classes broadcast by teachers at the large school in Inuvik.

The four students Nathan worked with over the course of the school year were smart, capable and definitely going places, he said. "They just had the drive to succeed in an academic setting, and so we put them in a place where they would get the most reward out of their work."

Principal Shirley Snowshoe-Peterson said Nathan fit in with the students, staff and community, describing him as a "great volunteer and someone who is quite happy with what he was doing."

When he wasn't working directly with the academic students, he helped teach math and music theory, and created an entire 3D printer course with handouts, tests and lesson plans to be used at schools throughout the Northwest Territories.

"The volunteers this year have been fantastic," said Will Logan, IT consultant for the school board and volunteer coordinator in Fort McPherson, Aklavik and Tuktoyaktuk. "I know the schools were very pleased."

### A different reality

Fort McPherson is a beautiful town and the residents are welcoming, Nathan said. He joined the special events committee, helping to raise funds for dances and feasts, and assisted with weekly Bingo.

"People are very hospitable up there. They want to see your face at community events," he said, adding one of the best parts of his placement was the opportunity to connect with the land.

"I remember one night we all went out, drove to the hills just outside of town, dead of winter. We dug a circle into the snow, had a little fire, and we just laid down on the ground and watched the northern lights overhead. The ability to just do that—that was something I'm very much going to miss."

But, he continued, the intergenerational trauma from residential schools is still incredibly fresh. The last residential school in the area, Grollier Hall, only closed in 1996.

"It's a different reality up there," he said. "Anybody in their 30s has spent a few years in residential schools. So there are those signs of trauma."

The historic injustices Indigenous peoples have suffered due to colonization has been and continues to be a barrier to their right to pursue development in a way that meets their needs. Working alongside Indigenous partners, Cuso International volunteers are helping to improve the education outcomes for Indigenous children and youth in Northern Canada.

"We're getting students to a place where their hard work is really going to give them the most opportunity," said Nathan.

"Education matters to them."







# Combating Violence Against Pregnant Women

Clinical neglect, monetary demands and physical and psychological violence are just some of the abuses pregnant women suffer at the hands of health professionals in DRC.

**V**iolence against pregnant women during labour and delivery is not an uncommon problem in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), says midwife Thethe Lukusa.

“The frequency of violence against pregnant women during labour or delivery is worrisome and is also one of the factors contributing to increased

are being trained in respectful maternity care as part of Midwives Save Lives. Prior to a program reform in 2013, midwives weren’t trained in respectful maternity care, yet were making major decisions about maternal, newborn and childhood health practices.

Thethe and members from the four partner midwifery associations

pregnant women, citing clinical neglect, monetary demands, discriminatory treatment, denial of traditional practices and verbal, physical and psychological abuses.

“The Congolese Society of Midwifery Practice is currently working very hard with all midwives to promote the rights of women to receive and expect respectful maternity care and it is working with the Ministry of Health to advocate for the addition of a respectful care approach in the training modules,” said Thethe, who is based in Kinshasa.

Now in its third year the MSL program is also teaching midwives how to perform maternal and neonatal emergency obstetrics for complications such as hemorrhaging, pre-eclampsia or eclampsia, obstructed labour, sepsis and anemia.

“The other professional health workers treat us with respect and

**The frequency of violence against pregnant women during labour or delivery is worrisome.**

stress in pregnant women,” said the professor and member of the Congolese Society of Midwifery Practice.

To combat the issue, midwives in DRC, Tanzania, Ethiopia and Benin

attended a Cuso International workshop on gender equality and social inclusion earlier this year.

Many attendees spoke of how doctors, nurses and midwives mistreat





Midwife, Thethe Lukusa

recognize us as experts in the field of obstetrics,” said Thethe. “Since training, I am motivated to work in maternity, to share with my colleagues, to put into practice what we learned and to save lives.”

*Learn more at [cusointernational.org/midwives-save-lives](http://cusointernational.org/midwives-save-lives).*

Nigerian poultry farmer Mercy Ushie feeds her flock.



## Young Entrepreneurs Soar with YouLead

**F**or many young entrepreneurs, a lack of technical expertise is keeping their start-ups from getting off the ground.

Poultry farmer Mercy Ushie was suffering significant livestock losses before her brother introduced her to YouLead. Now, thanks to business development and technical training classes, her farm is thriving.

“I learned how to breed birds, how to give them vaccines and many other things I didn’t know before,” said Mercy, who lives in Bekwarra, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Armed with the new information she bought 50 birds and only lost three. The young woman has been able to increase her flock and grow her income.

“I sold them all off at a profit,” Mercy said. “I then restocked with 100 birds, from which I lost just five.”

Mercy also learned environmentally responsive and profitable practices. Like many poultry farmers, she had problems with waste disposal. Now, she bags and sells the remnants to crop farmers to use as manure.

“Once I get enough money I plan to increase my pen,” she said. “I want it to have the capacity to house 500 birds or more by December.”

*Learn more at [cusointernational.org/youlead](http://cusointernational.org/youlead).*



# Living Proof

Female students at Madda Walabu University  
are leading the charge on gender equity



Volunteer Dr. Grace Puja '17,  
left, and student Anene Merga.



**A**nene Merga had nothing but the clothes she was wearing when she arrived at Madda Walabu University (MWU) last fall.

The 19-year-old knew the importance of having a post-secondary education. A degree in sports science would give her the skills required to land a job and support her younger siblings' schooling. She picked up odd jobs between classes, trying to earn enough money to pay for her dormitory bed and afford basic essentials. But it wasn't enough.

"I couldn't survive around here," she said.

Anene prepared to drop out.

Like Anene, about 1,200 of the 13,000 students at Madda Walabu University are classified as vulnerable due to disability and economic status. The majority are young women.

"Because many of the female students who enrol in MWU come from poor rural backgrounds, they are vulnerable to being abused sexually in exchange for money and better grades," said gender expert and Cuso International volunteer Dr. Grace Puja. "These challenges require the participation of all members of society, men and women, to address all forms of inequalities based on gender, poverty and ability."

The 70-year-old Torontonion is working with the university's Gender Directorate Office, sharing her knowledge and experience in the field of gender mainstreaming.

Having previously studied and worked on gender issues at the universities of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania and Makerere in Uganda, she has seen how gender-based discrimination, violence and sexual harassment are pervasive problems.

At Madda Walabu University, marginalized students can request financial aid from the Gender Office. But due to the large number of those requiring support, beneficiaries are chosen through a random lottery. About 300 female and male students received assistance, amounting to less than \$10 CAD a month, during the previous school year. Students who aren't selected must find other ways to support their education or drop out.

"The fact that they don't have cash to support themselves or to buy school accessories, may lead some to engage in prostitution so they can sustain themselves," said Gishu Adere, Director of the Gender Office. "We try to stop that but there is a gap and they need the money. That's the challenge they face."

Fasika Tamrat and Saron Buche, fourth-year law students and co-presidents of the university's Women's Association, said female students who want a post-secondary education often feel as if they have no choice. Many can't afford to purchase a notebook and pen—let alone necessities like sanitary pads and soap—and don't have the same education levels as their male peers.

Fourth-year law students Fasika Tamrat, left, and Saron Buche are changing the social narrative at their university.







Gender expert Dr. Grace Puja, right, is helping an Ethiopian university bring gender mainstreaming to its campus.

“The women, especially from our community, they’re not allowed to focus on their education as much as the men. When they come to the university, they don’t come with equal levels of knowledge,” said Fasika. “And almost all the female students come with financial problems. They need support at every level.”

The Women’s Association helps female students with campus integration and connects them to student services, hosts workshops on gender issues and lobbies for gender mainstreaming on campus. Members are working on a fundraising model to support more students.

Fasika remembers when she met Anene for the first time in the women’s dormitory. “She just came with her clothes. She didn’t have a mattress. No comforts, no sheets to sleep with. She was just sleeping without anything at all.”

Anene was eight-years-old when her parents placed her in foster care. They couldn’t afford the cost of sending their five children to school, but the government would pay for the education of children in foster care up to age 18. Her siblings remained at home.

Although Anene’s schooling was at no charge, it didn’t come free. “Life at the foster house was extremely difficult,



Anene Merga, left, and Gender Office Director Gishu Adere.

I was the one doing all the house work and caring for the small children. My foster family gave me food and clothing and they used to send me to school, but I never got any cash. I would have saved it for now,” she said.

“That’s one of the reasons I work during my spare time at the construction sites and washing clothes for students, I don’t use that money for myself. I send it home so my parents will keep sending my younger siblings to school. I want them to continue their education and I feel responsible.”





Clothes dry on a line outside the female dormitory at Madda Walabu University.

Unable to support her family and her education, Anene made the difficult decision to halt her education. That is, until Fasika and the Women's Association stepped in. They were able to bypass the Gender Directorate's financial assistance lottery and Anene now receives 200 birr—or \$9.42 CAD—a month for her education and necessities.

"The Gender Directorate Office changed my life," said Anene. "They were kind to me and they were so welcom-

meet to discuss gender issues, health and protection, and other problems students are facing. Teachers are being rewarded for giving free tutoring sessions to their female students. Staff are being trained on how to reduce gender-based violence and what to do if it occurs. The university is also implementing an anti-sexual harassment law to hold teachers accountable for their actions.

And it's in large part due to women like Gishu, Fasika,

Grace and Anene who refuse to accept the status quo and continue to work to improve the lives of women and girls.

"As law students, we understand the law.

As students, we under-

stand the magnitude of the problem here," said Fasika, who wants to be a lawyer or judge when she graduates. "We believe that with our law education and background, and with our passion for the students, we can solve these problems."

And when Anene graduates and returns home in three years' time, she will focus her efforts on supporting her siblings and educating the youth in her community on women's rights and gender issues.

"I will take that responsibility. I will teach them from my life and from my experience. I will tell them hardship should never stop you," she said.

"I am living proof."

## Women, especially from our community, they're not allowed to focus on their education as much as the men.

ing. They supported me with so many things. If it wasn't for them, I would have gone home."

Anene's story is one among countless others, and the challenges don't stop upon graduation. Women continue to face discrimination throughout their careers, said Gishu. Out of 45 director positions at Madda Walabu University, only three are held by women.

"Women want the positions, but they don't get the opportunities men do," she said. "Since I was a student, I have seen how women are underprivileged and discriminated against. I want to change that. It's personal to me."

Some of that change is already visible.

Every week the Women's Association and its members





# New Ideas

Helping Philippine farmers thrive

Farmer Jocelyn Chaba, 64, is an original member of the Pecuaría cooperative.



**V**olunteer Mandy Borja is putting his vast experience in agriculture, engineering and development to work in his home country. The Filipino-Canadian, a retired environmental and agricultural engineer, is volunteering as a knowledge management advisor with Trias-Southeast Asia.

A former CEDA consultant, agriculturist for the Philippine government and project manager for the Worldwide Fund for Nature-Philippines, the 62-year-old's decades of experience in the field made him a perfect fit to assist farming organizations with updating and streamlining their practices.

"It's like our minds are being opened to new ideas," said Gerald Prila, internal control system inspector at Pecuaría Development Cooperative Inc. PDCI, located in the municipality of Bula in Camarines Sur, Philippines, has more than 400 farmers who grow organic rice and muscovado sugarcane.

Officially established in 1991 during the country's agrarian land reforms, and following conflicts between competing farm groups, 426 households received 1.7 hectares each

for farming and an additional 600 square-metres where they could build a home.

Jocelyn Chaba, 64, is one of the original members of the cooperative and remembers the move to organic farming was difficult.

"Of course it was hard," said the mother of 10. "We hadn't tried it before. So we just tried and tried. And then later on, as we became familiar with the process, it became easier. You learn."

According to a 2017 report by the International Land Coalition, the cooperative "has emerged as a driving force for innovation in the rural development sector and the stable demand for its products brings increasing income to producers."

For Jocelyn, organic farming produces sweeter rice and a larger yield, while also cutting her farming expenses and freeing up more time to spend on other pursuits.

"We no longer need to buy fertilizer," she said. "We no longer need to cut the grass before we can plant."

With the money she saved, Jocelyn

was able to purchase items "here and there" for her family and use her free time to plant sweet potato, bananas and vegetables.

### A simple dream

Mandy, who lives in Toronto, worked with Pecuaría's farmers to document their techniques. "Starting from their planting, on how they take care of it, how they dry their rice grains and then on how they plan to market it," he said. "I was able to see what they had and what I could still improve on."

With the farmers' help, Mandy created an instruction guide to

## The cooperative has emerged as a driving force for innovation.

improve their systems, increase production and offer their produce to a wider audience.

The assistance has been extremely helpful and the cooperative is now looking at how it can develop further and help its farmers grow other specialized projects, Gerald said.

For Mandy, it's all about ensuring the right processes are in place to help farmers succeed and thrive.


"I can see changes with the farmers' attitudes, their concern for environmental protection and sustainability of agriculture production. They are now very interested to learn and use the appropriate technologies," he said.

"I just have a simple dream for them—that they can sustain their farming operations and improve their technology, so their way of living can improve as well."



Volunteer Mandy Borja '18, right, in Camarines Sur.



A photograph of three women, identified as Honduran activists, smiling and holding a white banner. The woman on the left wears a white shirt, a green and yellow striped scarf, and a green cap. The woman in the middle has long dark hair and is wearing a black top. The woman on the right wears a blue long-sleeved shirt and a blue cap. They are standing in front of a colorful mural. A banner they are holding has the text "When Once isn't Enough" on it. Another banner in the background has the word "no" written on it. The text at the top of the page reads: "From left, Honduran activists Grecia Lozano, Ana Lucia Armijo, Regina Fonseca and Mayki Graff advocate for women's rights."

From left, Honduran activists Grecia Lozano, Ana Lucia Armijo, Regina Fonseca and Mayki Graff advocate for women's rights.

# When Once isn't Enough

A six-month volunteer placement with a women's advocacy organization in Honduras turned into a two-year stay for Cuso International volunteer and communications expert Kristjanna Grimmelt. As she became increasingly involved in her work with the Centro de Derechos de Mujeres, she decided Tegucigalpa was where she needed to be.

"I realized that some efforts, especially in the area of human rights, take time to achieve," said Kristjanna. "Extending my placement was important to me. It allowed me to see important projects through and build stronger relationships."

The Albertan worked with local gender analyst Neesa Medina to prepare strategic plans, fundraising proposals and communications campaigns on labour rights, sexual and reproductive health and the elimination of violence against women.

One of the longest-standing feminist organizations in Honduras, the women's rights centre has spent more than 25 years advocating for women and led the creation of the country's first domestic violence law in 1997.

More than two decades later, the organization continues to demand changes.

According to the centre's research, a woman is murdered every 16 hours in Honduras. In 2015, approximately 2,200 women and girls reported being sexually assaulted. The following year, 775 girls between the ages of 10 and 14 gave birth after being sexually assaulted—the majority by family members.

These victims rarely see justice.

A 2015 report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights cites an impunity rate of 95 per cent for crimes against women. And despite high rates of sexual violence, abortion in any circumstance remains a crime.





The morning after pill, a non-abortive contraceptive endorsed by the World Health Organization, is also banned.

To advocate for change, Kristjanna helped establish the centre's *Somos Muchas* (We Are Many) collective. With a roster of diverse activists—religious leaders, feminists and human rights groups—the collective is calling for the decriminalization of abortion under exceptional circumstances such as sexual assault or risk to the mother's health.

"As Honduras is a very religious country, this is an extremely sensitive topic," said Kristjanna. "The collective approached it with facts. For example, young girls are at five-times the risk of dying during childbirth."

The collective's activism generated a national debate covered by media outlets throughout the country. Support from prominent experts, including the president of the national association for gynecologists and obstetricians,



Cuso International volunteers Claudia Molina '17 and Kristjanna Grimmelt '17 with local volunteer and student Nahomi Fernandez.

In 2015, approximately 2,200 women and girls reported being sexually assaulted.

came pouring in. Their advocacy efforts weren't enough to see abortion decriminalized before Kristjanna returned home, but it remains a top priority for the organization.

Executive director of the women's rights centre, Gilda Rivera, wants to see more young women take up activism and continue to enjoy their lives as they do it. She said that happiness, like so many of the issues she fights for, is a right. Kristjanna agrees.

"Seeing the situation faced by women in a country with a very different context than Canada makes me realize what we have," she said. "And this is still a struggle for women around the world."

To read more about Kristjanna's experience, visit her blog at [tegusblog.wordpress.com](http://tegusblog.wordpress.com).



# Alumnotes

Share and connect

## David and Inga Chapman

Zambia 1966–68

My wife Inga and I were Cuso International volunteers in Zambia in 1966. I taught math and sciences at Canisius College. Inga taught art and supervised student teachers at the neighbouring Charles Lwanga Teachers College. We stayed with the program for 2.5 years and had our first child in Zambia. As a result, I was offered a position at the newly opened University of Zambia. We stayed another three years and had our second child.

A meeting at the university directed me towards a mentor at the University of Michigan who became my PhD advisor. An academic offer in Salt Lake at the University of Utah followed and I just retired from a 38-year career.

Our girls both attended UBC at the undergrad level, and then medical school. They are now practicing physicians and live close to us with their families. Our Cuso International experience was life-changing, although not entirely predictable when we signed up.

## Jim French

Tanzania 1967–69

My wife Marlyn and I served with Cuso International in Southern Tanzania from 1967 to 1969. I've written a memoir of those years, titled *A Stone in the Road: Two Years in Southern Tanzania*. It's published by Tellwell Talent and available through Amazon

and Indigo. Other Cuso International volunteers may find this an interesting account.

## Claudia Serray

Colombia

1971–73

An interesting fact about the long-term effects of Cuso International: my daughter, born after I returned home, developed a keen interest in newcomers and now is the therapist for new arrivals at Red River College. She speaks four languages, Spanish being one of them. She also lived and worked abroad.

Perhaps she was influenced by the frequent calls and visits by the Chilean refugees at our home when she was just a little girl. Not a common occurrence in south-end Winnipeg. I am very thankful for my Colombian experience.

## Gabrielle Henry

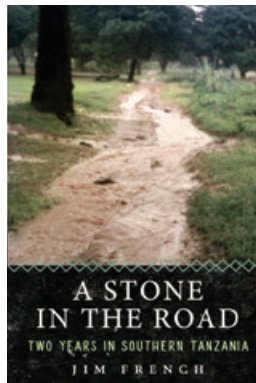
Tanzania 1970–73

I am currently writing a memoir and the Tanzanian years feature prominently. My mother saved all my letters, full of my impressions and information.

## Jennifer Watts

Nicaragua 1985–87

Jennifer Watts is the new Chief Executive Officer for ISANS following her success in the role of Director



of Settlement and Integration.

A former municipal councillor on Halifax Regional Council for eight years, Jennifer has a background in community development, urban and rural planning and municipal issues. She has lived overseas in Central America and the Middle East,

and her family has been involved in supporting refugees through private sponsorships and university refugee programs.

## Dennis Tessier

Tanzania 2006–09

Following his Cuso International placement, Dennis Tessier co-founded the non-profit company Appropriate Rural Technology Institute Tanzania (ARTITZ). This led to the creation of two other companies—ARTI Energy in 2011 and Charcoal Briquettes Tanzania Limited (CBTL).

His team has trained over 3,000 youth to become renewable energy entrepreneurs, distributed over 30,000 solar lights across East Africa, and in 2014 was the No. 1 distributor of Envirofit improved cooking stoves, issuing 23,000 units.

## Stephanie Boyd

Peru 1997–99; 2002; 2010; 2011–12; 2017–present

Volunteer Stephanie Boyd is distributing the book *Karuara, People of the River*, for classroom use. The book





## Spotlight

### Judy Mill

Zambia 1972–74

Malawi 1974–76

Dr. Judy Mill was a young nurse when she joined Cuso International and travelled to Zambia in 1972. She credits her volunteer experience there, followed by another placement in Malawi, for motivating her to expand her nursing education and focus on public health.

“Public health is more than just the absence of disease,” said Judy. “Social factors, cultural beliefs and economics influence health too. Working overseas really helped me understand that.”

Future trips to Africa, where she worked with women with HIV, cemented her desire to pursue a doctorate. She concentrated her research on the experience of marginalized populations, including Indigenous peoples in Canada, living with HIV.

“My work with Cuso International overseas impacted my choice to work with vulnerable populations and to focus on global health,” she said. “Being a global citizen and making the world a better place is critical.”

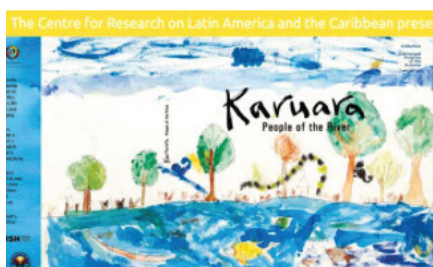
As the Associate Dean for Global Health at the University of Alberta in the mid-2000s, Judy developed innovative learning opportunities for Canadian and international nursing students interested in global health.

She was awarded the Andrew Johnson Award for Exceptional Contribution to HIV/AIDS Nursing by the Canadian Association of Nurses in HIV/AIDS Care in 2012.

*Know someone who should be featured in a future Flashback? Email details to [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org).*

includes myths and legends from Peru’s Amazon region. The book and animated film, which Stephanie is currently working on, are part of a campaign to protect the Amazon and Indigenous cultures.

The book is a collection of legends



and stories narrated by Kukama elders from Peru’s Amazon and illustrated by their grandchildren.

### Nella Patricia Chams Sanmartin

Nicaragua 2017–18

When Cuso International offered me the option of going to Nicaragua as a south-south volunteer from Colombia, I felt uncertain and a little anxious because I never thought of going there. I worked as an Advisor in Organizational Strengthening, supporting cocoa producing cooperatives through a partner organization.

During my stay in Nicaragua I was able to support the people I worked with, appreciate beautiful landscapes, meet wonderful people, live in absolute tranquility and hear different



perspectives. I also had to overcome challenges such as the cultural shock, and learning different work habits and processes. Another challenge I had to deal with was street harassment—a subject of great concern.

My experience as a south-south volunteer was a gift. It gave me life to continue my personal and professional growth. I learned the success of it depends, in large part, on the attitude we have when dealing with challenges.

I hope people will be encouraged to be international volunteers, to broaden their horizons, learn new things and contribute to the development of other communities. As the saying goes, “The world is too big to stay in one place.”



Cuso International alumni and staff were ‘books’ in a human library hosted by Global Affairs Canada.



# Lives Lived

## Suzanne Labelle

Sierra Leone 1974–76

Suzanne Labelle, former Cuso International volunteer, passed away on July 5, 2018, in Montreal after a long battle with cancer. An art teacher who travelled widely after her Cuso International experience, most often to Nepal, she made many endearing friendships and did much charitable work with her husband, George Vandrish. Videos of her travels can be found on YouTube, the most recent being a wonderful 68th birthday party held for her in June of this year in Montreal.

## Harry Baglole

Uganda 1966–68

Harry Prentice Baglole, of Bonshaw, PEI, died on May 29, 2018, at age



76. He will be missed by his loving sons, and their mother, Harry's life-long friend Susan Hornby. His loss will be keenly felt by many friends and colleagues throughout PEI and around the world.

## Richard Denham

Tanzania 1967–69

Aid worker and civil engineer Harold Richard Denham died on April 19, 2018, at age 73. Known to all as Rich, he was regarded as a person of integrity with the highest professionalism, and a trusted friend and colleague. From 1967 to 1969, Rich and his wife, Donna, spent two years in Tanzania engaged in public works, health and teaching assignments. In 2014, after his retirement, Rich published *Once Upon a Time in Africa*, a book describing their work and travels based upon Donna's letters and memoirs.

The Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario awarded Richard its Citizenship Award in 1992 in recognition of his humanitarian works. The award citation also recognized his creation of environments where women could realize their potential and contribute meaningfully to engineering.

## Charles Williams

Board of Directors 1970–79; 1982–84

Western Canadian agriculture is mourning the loss of Charles Melville Williams. Known as Red, he passed away March 26, 2018 at the age of 93. During a career that spanned eight decades at the University of Saskatchewan, Charles was also a respected public policy adviser at the provincial and federal levels.

He played an instrumental role in the formation of the Canadian Council on Animal Care, was involved in numerous international research and development projects and led many organizations, local and national, including Cuso International and the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra. He was named teacher of the year at the School of Agriculture, a member of the Order of Canada, a fellow of the Agricultural Institute of Canada and an honorary life member of the Canadian Society of Extension. Charles was inducted into the Saskatchewan Agricultural Hall of Fame in 1996.

## Ian Stewart

Board of Directors 1997–2008  
Community Volunteer

Ian Affleck Stewart, of Ottawa, passed away October 24, 2014. In his youth, Ian lived on Toronto's Centre Island, where he paddled and competed for the Island Canoe Club. He attended the University of Toronto before studying economics at Queen's University. He subsequently attended Oxford and Cornell and received his PhD. He taught at Dartmouth College before returning to Canada to work at the Bank of Canada.

Called to public service he served as Economic Advisor to the Prime Minister, as Deputy Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, and as Deputy Minister of Finance. He served on the boards of Cuso Inter-



national and the Social Research and Development Corporation and chaired the boards of the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and the Centre for the Study of Living Standards.

### Jane Burke-Robertson

Jamaica 1992

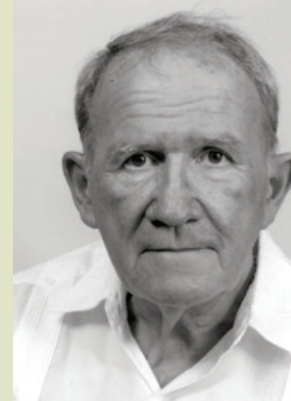
Jane Burke-Robertson passed away at home on May 4, 2013, surrounded by her loving husband, children and family after a three-year struggle with cancer. Called to the Bar of Ontario in 1987, Jane had an extraordinarily distinguished and unique legal career spanning nearly three decades. Her practice was devoted exclusively to the charities and not-for-profit sector in which she became a nationally recognized leader.

In 2011, she received the AMS John Hodgson Award in recognition of her leadership and service in the charitable arena. In 2012, Jane was selected by industry publications as the Best Lawyer in Ottawa in her field. Jane received the Queen's Jubilee Medal and was twice invested by the Governor General of Canada, first as a Serving Sister and later as a Commander of the Order of St. John Ambulance. In 2010, Jane was selected as the Volunteer of the Year by the Thinking in Pictures Educational Society.



## 'He was a risk-taker'

### Remembering Bill McNeill



**B**ill McNeill, former Cuso International volunteer and senior staff member, was a pioneer in the Canadian international development sector. He died on March 25, 2018, at 81 years of age.

Friends and former colleagues remembered Bill as a leader who was unafraid of risks. Fellow alumni Barbara (Geddes) Hoffman, who delivered his eulogy, said Bill flourished with Cuso International.

"He developed what became his signature ability—finding ways to help people discover their abilities by putting them in challenging jobs," she said. "He matched people to jobs often not really knowing whether they could do them, but then supporting them to the full."

Bill believed strongly in treating people equally and with respect, a pioneer not just in international development but also around gender equality. "Bill was ahead of his time in placing women in positions of high responsibility," Barbara said.

Born in Manitou, Manitoba in 1936, Bill's rise in international development began when he joined Cuso International in 1963. He volunteered in Nigeria, teaching at Santa Crux Secondary School in Umuahia. He was hired as the organization's first full-time staff officer in the country in 1965.

Two years later, Bill was promoted to Director, West Africa and later Director of Canadian Operations. He would eventually become the Executive Director of the World University Service of Canada—a role he held for close to two decades. He was awarded the Order of Merit from the Peruvian government for securing funds to install water services in Lima.

"How was it possible for a young man from rural Manitoba, who had not the chance to go to high school, achieve such a high-profile role? There are two reasons in my view. One, he was a risk-taker. And two, he was keenly interested in humanity," said Barbara, who volunteered in Sarawak from 1964-66 and in Kuala Lumpur in 1971 with her husband Peter.

The ability to make personal connections—both at home and abroad—defined Bill's character and filled his life, Barbara said, adding it wasn't out of the ordinary for him to host 50 or 60 people for dinner.

"Bill was not a flamboyant person but he had style, especially in entertaining, and a great sense of humour," said Barbara. "Bill loved to surround himself with the people he loved. The more the merrier and at all times."

Bill is survived by his long-time partner Robert Sterling and his siblings Arlene Southern and Don McNeill.



## Flashback



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

Please email us at [editor@cusointernational.org](mailto:editor@cusointernational.org) or send us a tweet at [@CusolIntl](https://twitter.com/CusolIntl) using the hashtag [#flashback](https://twitter.com/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 about this photo.

"I was surprised to find myself in the Alumni Flashback photo in the spring 2018 issue of *Catalyst*. This photo was taken at the Cuso International Inter-Regional Meeting, held at the Canadian Emergency Pre-paredness College in Arnprior the week of Dec. 8, 1980."

- Kerrie Strathy, Fiji 1996-98;  
Board of Directors 1999-2005 &  
2007-08; Community Volunteer

Read the full account and other submissions at [cusointernational.org/alumni](https://cusointernational.org/alumni)





# Why I Give

Pamela Thompson, registered psychologist and certified Hakomi therapist, believes in the importance of skill-sharing. In 2004, she signed on with Cuso International to volunteer at the Women and Children's Protection Centre in Cebu City, Philippines.

"I volunteered to help women and children who were victims of violence while advocating for the rights of those at-risk of exploitation, specifically disadvantaged children and youth," said Pamela, who is based in Edmonton, Alberta. "I worked with fellow psychologists Chingay Olasiman and Rose Gonato, who were eager to learn and help their community. At the time, I was taken aback by the lack of professional resources available to support them and their clients. Tools and information we take for granted here in Canada. At that point, I was all in."

And Pamela has remained all in since returning from her placement in 2006.

"For me, there's no choice but to support the developing areas of the world where access to the latest information and resources in professional fields are not a given. Cuso International is doing that in a tangible way," she said. "I was quite motivated to stay connected with Cuso International and to financially support it. My experience far exceeded what I could have expected, and now I'm completely sold on the idea of what we are doing in the countries where we work."

Pamela Thompson, Philippines '06

To learn more about how you too can continue to play an integral role in Cuso International's mission by becoming a monthly donor, please contact Shobi Sivaraj, Advisor, Annual Fund.

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**Phone** (toll-free): +1.888.434.2876 x224 | **Email:** [shobi.sivaraj@cusointernational.org](mailto:shobi.sivaraj@cusointernational.org)



# Getting Social



Peru



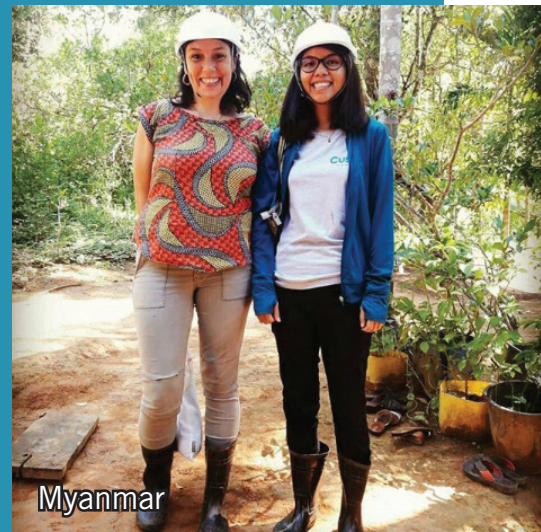
Honduras



Nigeria



Bolivia



Myanmar

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