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Online Volunteers of the Year 2004**Beatriz Iglesias (Spain) – nominated by Shine a light - la red internacional pro niños de la calle (USA)**

Beatriz has contributed her professional translation skills as an online volunteer to several organizations – translating hundreds of pages on topics such as desertification, HIV/AIDS, and, above all, street children, from English to Spanish. She has been most involved with Shine a Light (SAL), a network of organizations providing knowledge resources about issues of street children in Latin America.

Numerous research reports and best practice studies are being written on issues of street children worldwide – but often they are published in English. Thus, valuable knowledge is not accessible to many people working with street children on the ground in Spanish speaking countries. Thanks to Beatriz, several studies are now translated and can be used for inspiration, learning and action by those fighting youth homelessness in cities like Bogota, Mexico

City or Caracas.

For example, an interactive CD ROM curriculum on social services for indigenous street children in Mexico, originally developed by a Mayan organization in Tsotsil, Tzetal and English, is now edited in a Spanish version. Beatriz has translated an entire English Master thesis on a successful project for street girls in Brazil, that is now available for download from the SAL website.

Beatriz's activities as an online volunteer started about a year ago: when the Iraq war was about to break out in March 2003, despite the opposition of civilians around the world, Beatriz felt empty, helpless, and the urge to do something good. At the time, she was busy finishing her Master's Degree and preparing a PhD. She decided to go for Online Volunteering, as she could combine it with her studies. Beatriz started with translation assignments for two UN agencies, giving a few hours per week. Once with SAL, her third assignment, time became less and less important to her. No matter how busy or tired she was, she had to give her best, motivated by the stories of street children and the impressive work being done to help them. Coming from a not too wealthy background herself, with parents who gave everything to still let her have a good education, Beatriz feels somehow connected to the children's lives. She would love to enhance their opportunities to decide their own future, giving them the same chances in life that she was fortunate enough to enjoy.

"On the one hand, volunteering has given me motivation, and also the strange feeling of giving my host organizations, in return, the enthusiasm and support to carry on, and making their task a little bit easier."

For more information about Shine a light, la red internacional pro niños de la calle, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

Biswajit Dash (India) - nominated by People with Disabilities Uganda

Before Biswajit, software developer from India, found his assignment with People with Disabilities Uganda (PWDU), he had always thought that computer science was not really the kind of career that provides opportunities to contribute professional expertise to a humanitarian cause. His online volunteer engagement with the Ugandan organization that provides services to help improve the situation of people living with disabilities in the country changed his mind.

Biswajit joined PWDU's large corps of online volunteers with the task to improve the organization's website in late 2001. He learnt soon that many online volunteers from various places in the world were creating content to be published in the site. Still, the site content was not updated regularly because the volunteers were facing technical difficulties in posting their articles, due to

lack of web development skills. Biswajit remedied this situation by entirely redesigning the PWDU website. He introduced different templates for each thematic section, so that other volunteers could easily upload their texts. Biswajit realized that by removing a technical barrier, his fellow volunteers had more time to concentrate on their actual assignments, not having to worry about formatting text and pictures into HTML – and so his expertise indeed added value to PWDU.

In 2003, Biswajit played a critical role in re-gaining PWDU's web presence. The organization's domain name ownership had lapsed and, before it could be renewed, had been taken over by a private company. This meant that PWDU was left without a website for some time. Biswajit arranged for a similar domain name and revived PWDU's web presence, relieving his host organization of great worries.

Biswajit selected PWDU as host organization, because helping children with disabilities in a relatively poor country like Uganda is a cause that he wholeheartedly supports. He is interested in humanitarian issues as well as history, arts, and the environment – software to him being “a means to get things done easily, rather than an end in itself.”

“Online Volunteering has been a wonderful experience to me. It has helped me in contributing my professional knowledge to society. I feel I am part of something good, something bigger.”

For more information about People with Disabilities Uganda, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

Blandina Musvoto (Zimbabwean – currently living in Denmark) - nominated by Mgbala Agwa Youth Forum (Nigeria)



Blandina applied with the Mgbala Agwa Youth Forum to research donors that would fund the establishment of a library on HIV/AIDS in a small Nigerian city (read about last year’s award winner attracting book donations for this same library). Since then, the Nigerian organization has been on her mind, inspiring her creativity, and accompanying her throughout her daily life.

When choosing the assignment to search for donors for Mgbala Agwa, she thought it was a good fit, as she could make use of her network of contacts around the world that she had created by living in various places. Her application was accepted within two days, and she got started immediately.

Blandina started telling her friends about her new involvement with Mgbala Agwa – and was surprised to encounter a lot of prejudice. Why of all places had she picked to support Nigeria, they commented, where so many Email-scams have their origin, and where corruption is so prevalent? She realized that if people around her had their doubts about the value of investing time in a small Nigerian organization, it would be most difficult to convince donors to invest money.

A website would be a good place to refer donors to and would add credibility and transparency to the organization, Blandina thought. She contacted IT companies to find one that would be interested in donating a website to Mgbala Agwa. Without success, Blandina did not get discouraged – she started talking to anyone she knew about her website idea, until eventually, through a friend of a friend of a friend, she found someone to configure Mgbala Agwa’s website, and host the domain for one year for free.

The website was soon followed by more projects that Blandina came up with in support of Mgbala Agwa. Currently, she is writing a self-help manual for new online volunteers to the organization, based on her own experience and that of the other online volunteers – who are in regular contact with each other via email and online forums. Blandina also knits hats for sale to generate some money for the library directly herself.

Blandina enjoys spending her free time in support of Mgbala Agwa. She has happily reduced her time watching TV or surfing the Internet. After the first free year, she now also donates the hosting fees for Mgbala Agwa’s domain – “I’m paying it because I gave up one of my bad habits of having Caffelatte each Wednesday. I now save that money for my organization.”

“When I signed in, it was 5 hours a week, but with time I realized that you can’t really put time to anything but just do the work and try to make a difference.”

For more information about Mgbala Agwa Youth Forum, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

Claire Suzanne Holland (USA) - nominated by Bureau for Reconstruction and Development (Afghanistan)



Claire has contributed her professional expertise in law, training and organizational consulting as an online volunteer to the recently founded Bureau for Reconstruction and Development (BRD). The mission of the new Afghan non-governmental organization (NGO) is to facilitate community development, as part of reconstructing Afghanistan after over 20 years of devastating conflict.

Back in the USA after working on a Rule of Law project in Central Asia, Claire was looking into opportunities to go back into international fieldwork. She applied with the UN Volunteers programme to go to a development project as a law and training specialist. While processing her application, she found out about UNV’s Online Volunteering service, immediately discovered an assignment that matched her professional background, and so opted for volunteering online. BRD was looking for an online volunteer to help prepare training material for local Afghan NGOs, a kind of task Claire had gained a lot of experience in during her job in Central Asia. Moreover, as an American, she felt that she wanted to make a personal contribution to the people of Afghanistan.

Apart from creating NGO training material on subjects such as human rights, peace education, conflict resolution, non-violence, civil society and civic education, Claire has advised the organization on a variety of issues. Within five months of online consultancy on a daily basis, she has shared substantial knowledge with BRD, and has further developed its capacity. For instance when revising proposals together via email, Claire brought up issues of financial management and governance standards, and discussed with Khan Dawoodzai, BRD director, how the organization could enhance accountability and transparency vis-à-vis international donors.

Inspired by her former research on post conflict countries, she had the idea that BRD could be a well-suited organization to coordinate a “conflict mapping” exercise for Afghanistan. Also aware of donor

organizations interested in sponsoring such programmes in the country, she prepared the BRD to propose its services to conduct a "conflict mapping" activity.

Claire not only provided her experience as online volunteer with BRD, but she also developed her own skills, motivated by the needs of the organization. BRD wanted to have its own website, and Khan Dawoodzai asked Claire if she wanted to contribute to this project. Claire took the opportunity, taught herself basic web development skills, and created a simple website, both for BRD, and now that she had the skills, also for herself.

"From my perspective a world away, and from the comparative ease of my life as compared to the workers in BRD and its constituents, the question becomes not one of why I have helped, but a question of how one could do otherwise. I have learnt much about Afghanistan. I have been given the gift of viewing the circumstances of the Afghan people removed from nationalistic consideration, and absent its politics."

For more information about Bureau for Reconstruction and Development, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

Flavia Trevisani (Italian – currently living in the Netherlands) - nominated by Lawyers Without Borders (USA)



Flavia's enthusiasm about volunteering online with Lawyers Without Borders (LWOB) has made her volunteer assistant to the director and manager of more than 100 online volunteers, within just two months. LWOB engages lawyers from around the world to create a global network and clearinghouse for the delivery of quality pro bono legal service.

When Flavia turned 25, she decided to make a positive impact somehow and somewhere in the world during the year. Online Volunteering was an easily accessible way to give it a try. As a graduate in law and international relations with work experience in human rights-oriented NGOs, Flavia selected an assignment with LWOB, as it fitted her background.

The assignment Flavia applied for initially was to research the Internet for vacancies in the law area to be posted on the job section of LWOB's website.

From the beginning, Flavia identified with her host organization, which encouraged her to take the initiative to streamline the work of the online volunteer research team that she was part of. Excited about the organization's work and particularly about having the opportunity to contribute to it, she asked for more responsibilities.

Christina Storm, LWOB's director, offered her the assignment of director's assistant, managing LWOB's large corps of online volunteers around the world. Flavia was both thrilled and honored about the opportunity and happily accepted. Within only three months more, Flavia has significantly improved relationships and working environment of LWOB's online volunteers. She implemented a system of volunteer recognition, as well as an online volunteer registration, a log for hours, and a volunteer management tool. Currently, she is writing a volunteer manual and a volunteer operations manual specifically for the organization. Flavia oversees all new volunteer registrations, and introduces new volunteers to the organization. She is particularly concerned to make online volunteers feel at home at LWOB, even if – or rather because – they all never see each other face-to-face. She plans to soon launch a newsletter geared towards volunteer recognition, including photos and profiles of LWOB's online volunteers.

As Flavia found out that several of LWOB's online volunteers were also based in the Netherlands, she started organizing regular dinners for the volunteers to meet on-site and discuss their online experience.

Thanks to Flavia, the LWOB's group of online volunteers has already grown and their quality of contributions has significantly improved.

"I did not know that I was able to take considerable initiative and that communication with people having the same objective could produce such a positive impact in my life."

"If I have to say how many hours I spent working with LWOB it would be hard. Time flies when you enjoy what you are doing!"

For more information about Lawyers Without Borders, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

George Okello Gopal (Kenya) - nominated by Centre for Research in Women's Health (Canada)



George has produced a research report analyzing Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers of four Sub-Saharan African countries (Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Cameroon) in view of gender and health issues. His study contributes to a larger research paper on "Globalization, Gender and Health" that the Centre for Research in Women's Health (CRWH) will publish later this year.

George submitted his application to volunteer with CRWH only a few months ago.

Getting to know better the objective of his assignment, he found that if formulated differently, the assignment could actually produce a more effective contribution to CRWH's research and would be more suitable for an online volunteer. Suzanne Sicchia, Research Associate and George's counterpart at CRWH, was new to Online Volunteering and gratefully accepted George's

constructive input.

Before connecting with CRWH as an online volunteer, George had been looking for volunteer opportunities for a while, without success. He had encountered organizations that restricted eligibility for international volunteer opportunities to nationals of a particular country – so he being Kenyan couldn't participate, or that required a fee in order to volunteer.

Apart from his desk study for CRWH, George also researches various news media and summarizes articles on corruption and economic crimes in his region for the US based Fordham Institute for Ethics and Economic Policy.

George chose his research assignments because they are relevant to his educational background, interests and ambitions on the one hand, and he also finds them useful contributions to society on the other. And, they provide a stimulating break from his regular paid job.

"When I felt that my routine work was limited, often not able to fully exploit my potentials, I craved a new challenge – something that each working day would be different and challenging, something worthwhile, a source of pride. I therefore decided to get involved in Online Volunteering, something in which I am able to exploit my numerous skills, potentials and interests."

For more information about Centre for Research in Women's Health, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

Ian Foster (Australia) - nominated by Gwalior Children's Hospital Charity (UK)



Ian has been successfully campaigning to attract interest, volunteers and donations to the Gwalior Children's Hospital Charity for the last eight months. The UK-based organization provides education and medical services to poor and marginalized people of Gwalior in Central India, especially to children and people with disabilities.

Volunteering online to support children with disabilities in India is not just any assignment for Ian; it is in some way connected to his life. Over 20 years ago, Ian injured his spine in a factory accident and since then has been severely disabled, using a wheelchair. He is also caring for his wife who is suffering from a neuromuscular disease. Being familiar with the hardships that people with disabilities have to go through, even in a Western culture like Australia, he felt that a disability must make life even so much more difficult in a developing

country, and especially for the very poor population.

Without any formal qualifications at the time of his accident, Ian spent the following 16 years finishing several academic degrees in Journalism, Communications and Public Relations. Although the kind of jobs he trained for demand the brain rather than the body, he still was not too successful in finding employment due to his disability. When his wife's health situation deteriorated, and he became her principal caregiver, his time available for working on his professional career greatly reduced. He is now working a few hours per week in a PR job – from home in the morning hours.

As an online volunteer campaign manager for the Gwalior Children's Hospital Charity, Ian is eventually able to apply all the skills that he has studied for. He is enthusiastically engaging in getting the word out about the destitute children of Gwalior and how support to his host organization can help them. Ian has taken the initiative to edit and publish a newsletter for the organization, issued every three months. He plans to soon develop it into a monthly publication. He has registered his host organization as a charity in Australia, so that people in his country can make tax-exempt donations. Thanks to Ian's outreach particularly in Australia, the number of Australian and New Zealand medical and educational professionals going to Gwalior as on-site volunteers to train local staff and provide expert advice to communities has significantly increased.

"I am able to use my training and skills I studied for, and am able to use them in a way that makes me feel useful to society and feel that somebody else I may never meet will gain benefit from whatever I can do to assist the cause working on their behalf."

"... the usefulness and self-worth you may gather is a tremendous boost to your own self-belief, and can also be of tremendous benefit to those whom you are striving to assist."

For more information about Gwalior Children's Hospital Charity, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

Kalyani Suresh (India) - nominated by Professional Education Organization International (PEOI)



Kalyani has written a complete online course on Mass Communications to be offered free of charge to anyone in the world with the interest to study the topic. Her host organization PEOI, a non-profit educational organization based in the US, offers free online courses to provide learning resources to anyone, particularly to those who cannot afford a traditional professional education.

Kalyani enjoyed a good education, and had the opportunities to study as much and whatever she wanted. Eventually she graduated with an M Phil degree in Mass Communication from the University of Madras, India. Afterwards, she took on a teaching job at the University, teaching Mass Communications to students at the post-graduate level – a good job in principle. But she felt that she was sharing her skills with the privileged ones only, those that were lucky enough to have been born into similar favoring environments as she herself.

Kalyani felt restless to give back to the less fortunate, to those that lacked the opportunities that she has enjoyed in life. At that point, a friend recommended the Online Volunteering service to her.

The online volunteering assignment with PEOI to develop a free course on Mass Communications provided her with exactly the chance to do what she was looking for. Kalyani so far had not been familiar with the area of e-learning. Shortly after getting acquainted with the medium she realized how many possibilities the Internet offered for interactive learning, and got more and more enthusiastic. "I ended up devoting so much time on-line that my husband actually thought I was suffering from net-addiction", she reports. Kalyani finished her complete course including examples, pictures, references and assignments within six months – and the first students enrolled already shortly after.

"All I can say at this point of my life is that PEOI has given me a new sense of purpose, something good to look forward to each day, and a feeling that as one of the members of the PEOI family, I have contributed in making the life of some person, somewhere, more fulfilling. In a sense I have given back what I have taken and I am grateful for it."

For more information about PEOI, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

Maria Yvette Reyes (Philippines – currently living in Israel/Palestine) - nominated by Mmanze Centre for Rural Development and Training (Uganda)



Yvette developed a proposal for the Mmanze Centre for Rural Development and Training (MACERUDET) that was accepted for funding by the Global Fund for Women. The mobilized resources will allow 1500 children in the Ugandan rural community of Mmanze, many of whom are HIV/AIDS orphans, to go to primary school. 300 single mothers will be engaged in a rural savings and credit scheme as a way to enhance the financial securities of their families.

In early 2003, Yvette was taking a sabbatical from her work in a humanitarian organization in the Philippines, and was studying non-profit management at the University of California in Los Angeles. Her class schedule left her with some extra time, which she used to volunteer in the HIV/AIDS unit of the LA County Hospital, listening and talking to patients. Moved by their stories of struggle and hope, Yvette decided to extend her assistance to people affected by HIV/AIDS who do not have access to a good support system as in LA.

The online volunteering assignment with MACERUDET combined this desire with the need for her professional expertise in community and organizational development – a perfect match. Her task was to write a proposal that would generate funding to provide HIV/AIDS orphans in Mmanze with primary education. Yvette dedicated all her energy and expertise to ensure that the proposal would be professional and attractive, so that it would warrant consideration by a donor. She started with researching and identifying a most promising donor so an effectively targeted proposal could be prepared. A lot of research about Uganda, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, and of course the situation in Mmanze itself went into writing the proposal. Yvette consulted approved proposals available on the Internet in order to apply some best practices and lessons learnt. Halfway through writing the proposal, she decided to enroll in a class in Proposal Writing at her university to be even better prepared to finish and submit it.

Yvette also took care of putting the organization in a good position to present itself to an international donor, and to be ready to receive the funds. In close contact with MACERUDET programme manager Mulindwa William throughout the proposal development process, she provided guidance on improving the organization's financial and organizational structure.

Yvette was deeply touched by the harsh situation in Mmanze. She learnt that Mulindwa William was the only surviving one of 10 MACERUDET founding members who had not died of HIV/AIDS. At the same time she was inspired by the joy and warmth she received back from the community, especially when the proposal got approved, and so she is currently in Uganda, visiting the children of Mmanze.

"I believe that by establishing trust and friendship online, Mr. Mulindwa and his community realized that there are other avenues where solidarity, mutual respect and professionalism can be harnessed, developed and shared. An agricultural community in central Uganda has found a way to become part of the world, and I think this is a huge leap for them."

For more information about Mmanze Centre for Rural Development and Training, please visit their [Group Profile](#).

Will R. Wallace (USA) - nominated by RESPECT International (Canada)



Will deals with everything in some way related to Information Technology support for RESPECT International as an online volunteer. RESPECT, or Refugee Education Sponsorship Program: Enhancing Communities Together, raises awareness about refugee issues, and connects refugee and non-refugee students around the world through pen-pal exchange for mutual learning from each other. The Canada-based organization operates through a global network of online volunteers.

Will's original assignment with RESPECT was to create websites for some of its partner schools. Marc Schaeffer, founder of the organization, then asked him if he would be interested in maintaining the organization's overall website. Will was happy to take on more responsibilities, and got increasingly involved with the growing organization. He took the initiative to add several improvements to the website, like a directory for refugee schools, a database of refugee awareness education materials, and a volunteer resources center. He also made the site accessible for people using assistive technologies. An editor and designer was needed for RESPECT's email newsletter, and Will jumped on the task. He now produces the newsletter with stories and info about refugee issues every other week.

Will had worked in education and training in IT for several years before he became a full-time website developer. Through his participation in RESPECT, he can combine his love for education with his enjoyment of creating web pages. He truly believes in the organization and feels responsible for it to grow and succeed. Will has become an important and integral part of RESPECT, being its webmaster, server administrator, newsletter editor, database administrator, designer, a recent board member – and consultant on anything that comes up and that he is knowledgeable about.

In addition to his technical skills, Will has contributed his experience from the education and business world and has advised the rather new and growing civil society organization on establishing appropriate

organizational structures and policies. Through his good cooperation with RESPECT's other online volunteers around the world, Will is "serving as a glue for our organization", as Marc Schaeffer puts it.

"As an online volunteer, you get to work with some of the best people you will never meet. Together you will make a difference in the world. And your skills, no matter what they are, are just the ones someone has been looking for."

For more information about RESPECT International, please visit their [Group Profile](#).