

Australia's Youth Ambassadors – teaching and learning

Another group of young Australian volunteers has left home to become the newest Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development. Their destinations are different but they have a common goal – to improve the lives of people in developing countries.

PRIYA POWELL

When Priya Powell first heard about the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program, she knew she had found a unique opportunity to help improve living conditions in a developing country.

With the support of her employer, Sydney's Burwood Council, she is now working on an urban development and low income housing project in Sri Lanka.

Priya, 27, will spend three months in Anuradhapura, assisting in the preparation of a community development program aimed at gaining more grass roots participation in the resourcing, delivery and management of urban infrastructure.

Her decision to become an AYA follows a family tradition that saw her father leave Australia as a volunteer with Community Aid Abroad 30 years ago and meet and marry her mother in India.

'I think the strength of the AYA program is that it not only makes a contribution to developing countries, but also gives young people the chance to grow at a personal and professional level,' she said.

'I'm really looking forward to working with experts in development communication and using our combined skills to create a strategy which can improve the quality of life for people in Sri Lanka.'

Born in Kenya, Priya grew up in Papua New Guinea and the Philippines before coming to Australia to attend university.

'I've spent most of my life in developing countries and have enjoyed every minute of it. There is so much to learn and appreciate in the way people deal with development



Senator Kay Patterson, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs farewells Australian Youth Ambassadors Angela Kerry (left) and Nikii Nguyen, before their departure on postings overseas. The function, held at Parliament House, was hosted by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Alexander Downer.

issues. I expect this assignment to be a humbling experience and a valuable one.'

Before leaving Australia, Priya was a public relations officer at Burwood Council. She has an Honours degree in History and a Masters in Communication Management. The council is a partner in the AYA program and will sponsor Priya's assignment.

MICHAEL WYATT

Bean counting in the Maldives was not the job Michael Wyatt imagined when he started his accounting degree seven years ago.

But in March, Michael left Australia to travel abroad for the first time as part of

the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program.

An accountant with Stanton Partners, Michael is working with the Maldives Audit Office.

'I am becoming familiar with local accounting and auditing requirements and will be involved in training the staff on risk, controls and materiality assessment as well as audit documentation and evidence,' Michael said.

'In addition, I'm helping streamline field work procedures like compliance and substantive testing and reporting'

Michael's assignment follows the conclusion of a 20-month capacity building

project Stanton Partners completed with the Audit Office last year.

'My boss thought it was ideal to follow on from our previous work as it would build on our efforts to enhance the auditing and management skills of local staff,' Michael said.

'In the Maldives, the public accounting system is manual and single entry and there is little by way of accounting or legal framework to control public finances,' Michael said.

'This makes effective auditing in the Maldives an onerous undertaking.'

ALEXANDRA MURRAY

Armed with a Bachelor of Rural Science degree Alexandra Murray is tackling the environmental problems of remote island communities on the North Huvadho Atoll of the Maldives.

As an agronomist instructor, Alex is working with the Kanduhulhudho Island Development Society developing environmental management plans for the islands and teaching basic agronomic skills to the local people.

'I will be working alongside local people with diminished capital means, a lack of

agronomic knowledge and a poor resource base,' Alex said.

The northern half of the giant Huvadho Atoll, where Alex is based, is one of the largest true coral atolls in the world. It has a population of 7295 people across 10 islands, with another 83 islands uninhabited.

An ice plant, fish packing works and major fishing enterprises make up most of the atoll's industry, and islanders are famous for their textile weaving and coir rope making. The atoll has some productive agriculture, with 644 acres of arable land.

'That isn't a lot of land to feed so many people so the agriculture needs to be as efficient as possible and I'm determined to make a contribution towards this,' Alexandra said.

ANGELA KERRY

Australian Youth Ambassador for Development Angela Kerry is assisting in the preservation of the Philippines' cultural heritage.

She is spending six months on the island of Bohol, assisting the Centre for Culture and Arts Development to implement their cultural heritage and tourism strategy.

Angela has a Master of Arts and

specialised in legal issues in the arts and artists' rights.

She has worked at the Ian Potter Art Conservation Centre at the University of Melbourne as a research and administrative officer since 1995. The Centre and AusHeritage are sponsoring her assignment.

NIKII NGUYEN

Being a Vietnamese-born Australian, it has always been Nikii Nguyen's dream to enhance the relationship between Australia and Vietnam.

The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program provided the 24-year-old along with 28 other Australians with the opportunity of going on assignment in Vietnam.

One of 14 children, Nikii arrived in Australia at the age of 12. The program has sent her back to Vietnam to work at the National Economics University (NEU) in Hanoi, where she is assisting in the development of better administrative procedures for student enrolment and selection. She is sponsored by Swinburne University which works in partnership with the NEU. — KP ■

WHY BECOME AN AUSTRALIAN YOUTH AMBASSADOR?

Are you between 18 and 30 years of age, keen to share your skills and learn about other countries? Maybe you could be an Australian Youth Ambassador.

The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development Program (AYAD) is a Commonwealth Government initiative, funded through AusAID, the Australian Agency for International Development. The program identifies and places skilled young Australians on development assignments throughout the Asia Pacific region.

As an Australian Youth Ambassador, you will have the opportunity to use your skills to assist developing countries while building long-term goodwill and understanding between Australia and our neighbours.

The program recruits people who have a specific skill such as a trade, profession or other qualification, for suitable assignments.

Youth Ambassador assignments may be with government, local business, community, education, health, environmental or agricultural organisations. Placements could be located in a business district, an industrial zone or a remote rural area.

A unique feature of the program is the opportunity for Australian organisations from the business, community education and government sectors to nominate young Australians to undertake specific assignments. Through these 'partnerships', the AYAD program encourages the development of linkages and networks between organisations in Australia and

those in developing countries.

The Program provides:

- The opportunity to make a positive contribution to the development of our neighbours
- An invaluable opportunity to broaden your experience and increase your understanding of the cultural diversity and development needs of countries in our region
- return airfare, insurance, medical preparation, a living and accommodation allowance, a pre-departure training program and in-country support.

Telephone 1800 000 656 for an information kit, or visit the AYAD website at www.ausaid.gov.au/youtham/index.html