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END HUNGER



UNIVERSAL EDUCATION



GENDER EQUITY



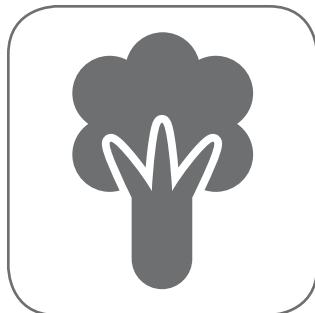
CHILD HEALTH



MATERNAL HEALTH



COMBAT HIV/AIDS



ENVIRONMENTAL
SUSTAINABILITY



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GLOBAL VOICES

LEADERS IN DEVELOPMENT



**ASTRID GIRLESA
URIBE MARTÍNEZ**

Although it was only a few short years ago that Astrid Girlesa Uribe Martínez began her university studies, she is already teaching 180 high school students each year in her neighbourhood in Medellín, Colombia. How did she come so far so fast? The answer lies in Astrid's determination and community spirit.

Twenty-four-year-old Astrid became an expert on youth leadership at a young age in Comuna 13, a disadvantaged neighbourhood in Medellín. In the 1980s, the conflict taking place in the city became

more visible and many youth have grown up in a climate of fear. But political instability and economic hardships have not stopped Astrid from being a role model at her local YMCA, a partner of the YMCA of Greater Toronto.

Now in her sixth semester at the University of Antioquia, Astrid is studying for a career in library science. Not so long ago, young people from Comuna 13 never even dreamed of attending university.

Although fees for public university are geared towards income level in Colombia, many high school students from Comuna 13 face barriers in passing the competitive entrance exam. Many need to work to support their families.

This changed in 2006 when the YMCA of Medellín funded 15 students, including Astrid, to attend a private preparatory class. Astrid and her peers were inspired to share what they had learned and developed a free

course, open to everyone. Since then, 110 youth from Comuna 13 have passed the university entrance exam and are studying at the University of Antioquia. This by-youth, for-youth program is just one example of the many youth leadership programs in Medellín that Astrid is a part of.

Astrid shows others that going to university is not just for the rich, but for everybody. Some of her friends say she is lucky. It's not luck, she says, because there is work behind it. With four other students, she leads another program that teaches Comuna 13 youth about democratic citizen participation and encourages them to be active citizens in their community. She believes that youth working together will achieve peace in her city.

"Peace is coming if we try to have love in our hearts, if we start to think of the needs of others, and if we help others," she says.

PROMOTING YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP

The Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC) is a coalition of organizations working globally for social justice.

OCIC coordinates arts and technology-based activities to support youth in learning about global issues and to help them become agents of social change.

We believe that individuals, organizations, institutions and governments must involve youth not only as fundraisers and audiences, but as global citizens with a stake in building sustainable societies.

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