

**Wellesley - Shayla Adams '08**

For the last two years, I have been working with Global Learning (GL), a not-for-profit dedicated to using education as a tool for peace and justice. Global Learning's two main goals inherent in its mission are (1) to improve public education in underserved communities and (2) provide opportunities for people to build friendship and understanding across boundaries of socioeconomic difference, nationality, race, culture, religion and gender. Global Learning's executive director, Jana Kiser (Wellesley '00), started Global Learning when she was nineteen years old and an undergraduate student. Youthful innovation, initiative, and cooperation are still at the core of the GL spirit. It is an organization whose impact far exceeds its financial resources. Global Learning serves approximately four thousand children annually in Mexico, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Over one hundred young adults from all over the world participate in Global Learning programs as volunteers every year. As a past volunteer in GL's flagship school-based education programs, I have become a student-centered teacher, while learning about community-directed development, grassroots nonprofit work, and the dynamics of international exchange. In 2007, Global Learning will celebrate its tenth year of operation. My proposed project for peace is a new Global Learning program that I would like to spearhead in Michoacán, Mexico in the summer of 2007.

**New Global Learning Summer Program** Up until now, Global Learning programs in Mexico have been primarily school-based, meaning that volunteers receive special permission from school supervisors and teachers to teach supplemental curricula to students during their normal school hours, on their school campuses. The program I am proposing is a summer program; it would occur during the month before schoolchildren start school and would provide an opportunity to deepen and enrich the experiences of volunteers and students alike.

The summer program will last for one month. In the first week of the program, volunteers will receive GL teacher training based on global best practices and then create "hands-on and minds-on" lessons in subjects requested by teachers. For the last three weeks of the program, volunteers will teach their curricula to children in small groups (volunteer to student ratio will be no larger than one to four) to ensure individual attention. Global Learning volunteers will teach subjects that are not available to their students (i.e. art, music, environmental education, human rights) and also supplement what students are already learning (i.e. science, math, and foreign language) by teaching in new ways and with new materials. GL volunteers will teach and learn with over one thousand students in this new summer program.

Using Global Learning's unique approach to education and community organizing as a model, I will lead the new GL summer program in a cluster of small towns near Santa Ana Maya, Michoacán with a partner from the local community named Rena Correa-Cruz. Approximately twenty volunteers will work on the summer program, half of whom will be from Mexico. These local GL volunteers from the host neighborhoods are crucial to the success of the new summer program. Their insight and guidance will help us tailor Global Learning's message, and to the unique communities we serve. With the support of experienced GL volunteers and our executive director, Rena will lead the recruitment and selection of Mexican volunteers. I will assist her in early June with program planning and organization. I will work with a committee of experienced Global Learning volunteers based in the United States to recruit and carefully select diverse volunteers from the global community. In the past foreign Global Learning volunteers have come from countries such as the United States, Peru, Malaysia, Iran, Romania, Taiwan, Zimbabwe, Belarus, Japan and Germany. I am dedicated to continuing Global Learning's tradition of providing opportunities to qualified volunteers from communities traditionally under-represented in international development. More than seventy-five percent of GL 2006 volunteers were people of color and I am committed to having just as many participating in the new GL summer Mexico program.

All Global Learning volunteers are role models. It is particularly important that children have access to Global Learning path-setters who look like them and come from similar socio-economic backgrounds. Many Global Learning volunteers are the first people in their families to attend a university. Government scholarships are available for students with financial need, but many students in economically poor communities are unaware that these scholarships are available. The information and encouragement offered by GL volunteers in the new summer program will provide an important, early link between underserved children and the resources that exist within their own communities. In order to ensure the participation of volunteers from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, the new Mexico summer program will be similar to other GL programs in that food, housing, ground transportation, school materials, and costs for group activities will be covered for all volunteers.

**Bridging Divides and Building Understanding** The diversity of the team I will work with on the summer program will broaden the worldview of students, volunteers, and community members. Global Learning volunteers will work and live cooperatively together in the program. Local and foreign volunteers will share living space and communal chores for the duration of the program. They will teach in Spanish, but all planning meetings, trainings, team activities, and other conversations outside of the classroom will be bilingual. Global Learning is democratic; the

team will vote on all decisions from the important to the mundane. Volunteers will cooperatively create curricula, team-teach, and write organizational material to help subsequent teams. Global Learning volunteers will work long days and have minimal time alone, hardly any personal space, and limited free time. For the duration of the GL summer program, diverse volunteers from every sort of community will live equally. Collaborating as peers, we will cross divides of class, religion, race, culture, and nationality and create life-changing friendships with each other, children, and other community members.

**Unique Pedagogy** Global Learning's student-centered pedagogy will be a big part of the summer program's role in the communities it serves, as it offers a new model for current teachers, trains the next generation of parents and teachers as volunteers, and improves the education available to schoolchildren. Student-centered education is at the heart of current research on how children learn. GL student-centered lessons begin with what students' know and think. For instance, an opening to a Global Learning geography lesson could be as simple as putting a globe in front of a pupil and asking, "what do you notice?" instead of a closed ended question like "where is Mexico?" which has a right or wrong answer. Skilled Global Learning volunteers then use simple, but effective student-centered teaching techniques, which they have learned from GL executive director's Harvard research on global best practices, to build the lesson from there. GL lessons are content rich yet flexible and adaptive to students' learning needs. Global Learning lessons are informed by community members, to ensure that GL curricula are relevant to pupils' lives as we believe context is central to GL volunteers' teaching. GL lessons are hands-on and minds-on, meaning that lessons are interactive and students are building thinking skills and decision making abilities as they learn. Problem-solving, exploration, and creative critical thinking are crucial to student-centered education. Peer-to-peer teaching is common in Global Learning student-centered classrooms as students often teach each other. GL's pedagogy and curricula are also multicultural, in order to expand children's global perspective.

**Grassroots Community Organizing** Last year I was honored to work in a Global Learning school-based Mexico program and I had the privilege of working with GL in Costa Rica the year before. I will use the community organizing skills I learned in these programs (and the in-depth pre-program leadership training the organization offers) in the new Mexico summer program. For instance, last year in Mexico, I saw how visiting schools before the program started to invite students' participation and mobilize teachers' and parents' support was instrumental to its success. We will do this for the new summer program as well. Last year, we asked mothers and fathers in Mexico if they would be interested in a GL summer program for their children. The overwhelming response was "Yes!" Teacher, principals and even the local mayor are all very supportive of the new idea. With this sort of community support, the new program will surely be a success.

**Personal Motivation** I truly believe in the mission of Global Learning, to use education as a tool for justice in impoverished Latin American Communities. Our new summer program will help to promote ideals of peace in several ways. Firstly, in hiring a diverse group of volunteers we will be able to demonstrate to children and community members how young people from different cultures can work together for a common goal. As a Jamaican –American woman, I realize the limited view many people in other parts of the world have of Black Americans. This program is an opportunity to break stereotypes in small communities in Mexico and promote understanding amongst students, parents and volunteers. The diversity of our groups and our lessons allow program participants to learn something new about a culture not their own every single day. Martin Luther King stated once that "men hate each other because they fear each other, and they fear each other because they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they are often separated from each other." This program bridges the gap between cultures to find commonality and essentially promote peace throughout the world.

Additionally, I believe that our lessons promote peace in their unique structure. We attempt to prepare students for global citizenship by giving them a voice and a sense of agency in the classroom. Students vote in Global Learning, on everything from lessons, songs, games to crayon colors. We believe that by teaching students the life long value of voting in a non-traditional setting like the classroom, students will be empowered to advocate for themselves, their communities, and their world. I believe that this new summer program will allow more barriers to be broken and more lives to be changed. As a passionate advocate for peace and understanding though the education, I am prepared to lead a team of foreign and local volunteers on a journey to impact the lives of hundreds of school children through interactive and multicultural learning.