WALLENBERG SUMMER TRAVEL AWARD PRESENTATIONS

2014

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The 2014 Wallenberg Summer Travel Award Presentations

While a student at the University of Michigan in the 1930s, Raoul Wallenberg traveled across North America to observe and learn from people of all kinds on their own terms. This experience helped him understand the human condition, and shaped his lifelong concern for human dignity and humanitarian values. His heroic efforts to rescue the surviving Jews of Budapest are an inspiring demonstration of how one individual can make a difference, even under the most dire circumstances.

Each year, a few students are selected to receive Wallenberg Summer Travel Awards. In the spirit of Raoul Wallenberg’s experience at Michigan, this award allows selected students to take part in a community service project or civic participation anywhere in the world. The award will support such experiences as volunteer work with a humanitarian organization such as a school, clinic or aid program, or the exploration of humanitarian issues not well understood in the U.S.

From South Africa to Turkey to the Philippines, these University of Michigan students explored the world this summer, working in communities to understand the human condition and engage in service there. Please enjoy learning about their experiences and how they help carry forward Raoul Wallenberg’s mission in the world today.

The University of Michigan Raoul Wallenberg Summer Travel Awards are sponsored by the Wallenberg Endowment and the Rackham Graduate School. The Wallenberg Executive Committee wishes to thank the hundreds of donors who have contributed to the Wallenberg Endowment since 1985.

Contributions to the Raoul Wallenberg Endowment can be made at wallenberg.umich.edu or by mail to:

Wallenberg Endowment
Rackham Graduate School
915 E. Washington St.
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1070
This past year, I was fortunate enough to extend my internship at International Relief in Development (IRD) in Amman, Jordan due to the Wallenberg Summer Travel Award. As part of my winter abroad semester studying in Amman, I interned with IRD and served on the “Cultivating Inclusive & Supportive Learning Environments” (CISLE) project. The CISLE project, a USAID funded project that partnered with Queen Rania Teacher Academy, aimed to strengthen the overall school community and school-community relationship through bi-weekly trainings in Arabic on fundraising, income-generation projects, parent engagement, events and community service. As a participant in the trainings, I witnessed the power created when community members join in solidarity to be part of the solution.

Thanks to the award, I stayed in Amman past the end of my academic semester and worked with CISLE to build community through an e-magazine implemented in twenty different Jordan government schools. The e-magazine was used as a tool by the school committee (made up of representatives from the community, faculty and student body) to showcase inclusive events or school-wide projects. In addition, it served as a space for all students to participate in an extra-curricular where they could also share personal writing or academic work.
My summer internship involved placement at CAPRISA (Centre for AIDS Programme Research in South Africa), Durban, South Africa from May through August. I was program coordinator for a research study designed to improve the health of adolescent girls by reducing HIV prevalence in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The rural community I worked in, Vulindlela, located 90km outside of Durban, suffers an adolescent unemployment rate exceeding 50%, an HIV prevalence rate as high as 65% for young girls and an annual income of less than $250. As project coordinator I was responsible for the design and implementation of household HIV testing and mobile medical unit employment to reach households not currently served by the public health centers. I coordinated local community-based teams, clinical/medical teams and health systems strengthening teams into a single concerted effort. The research study’s focus is to test ways to improve adolescent girls’ health, improve the South African health systems in a sustainable way and empower communities to improve general community health.

Hea Jun Oh
Nursing

This summer I was given the opportunity to go to the Philippines and provide the children there with basic health education. I worked with University of Bohol Grade School and Sandingan Shema Children Center and the students ranged from preschoolers to middle schoolers. The lessons I provided were about human body systems, disease prevention and health promotion. Bohol Island and Sandingan Island were places that were affected by last year’s typhoon and earthquake and they were still under the process of reconstruction. People that I met there, however, were so strong and loving and it was an extremely inspirational experience for me to live among them for a period of time. Besides providing health education, I also had a chance to accompany a medical mission team to Eastern Samar. Through the medical mission trip I was able to gain a more realistic view of the field of global health. The trip was not long, but by proactively walking out of my comfort zone and engaging with people in a foreign environment, I was able to gain a much broader worldview and courage to continue pursuing a deeper understanding of the different people in this world.
Last summer, I spent five weeks in southern India with Rural Innovations in Medical Engineering (RIME). I founded RIME at the beginning of my sophomore year with the mission to empower rural healthcare providers through the design of affordable, financially sustainable medical devices. Our first product was a device that would help diagnose respiratory infections and jaundice. Rudimentary alpha-prototype in hand, I traveled to India with two other teammates to understand the disparity from the perspective of all stakeholders. Our goal was to both validate the need for our device and identify other potential interventions. We immersed ourselves in the system - shadowing physicians and nurses, interviewing patients, and visiting the villages from which many traveled. We also initiated important collaborations with local academic institutions. We gained insight about the systemic barriers driving the disparity, and developed skills to navigate cross-cultural barriers inherent to student humanitarianism. Despite realizing our product would not have the impact we desired, the cultural immersion was critical to our understanding of the environment, and provided a realistic view of where we could intervene. I am tremendously proud of the resiliency of our team and am excited by the potential for entrepreneurial solutions to transform affordable healthcare. I remain an active leader of RIME as we continue to improve our understanding of healthcare in underserved communities.

More information regarding the Summer Travel Awards and other programs at the University of Michigan honoring the legacy of Raoul Wallenberg can be found at www.wallenberg.umich.edu.
This summer I interned at the Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma in Heidelberg, Germany, which currently is the only museum in the world specifically dedicated to remembering the victims of the Nazi-led genocide against the Roma (known as the “Porajmos”). As an intern, I helped develop and complete a number of projects related to the Roma Genocide and the more recent Roma Civil Rights Movement in Europe. These projects included creating handouts on Roma Genocide-related topics for English-speaking museum patrons, maintaining a database of documents and photos from Porajmos survivors, and conducting research on the documentation of the Roma Genocide in American newspapers (1933-1945). In August I had an opportunity to participate in the Roma Genocide Remembrance Initiative Conference in Krakow, Poland, where I helped lead a series of workshops on the German Roma (Sinti) Civil Rights Movement. This event was by far the highlight of my summer.

Today, we remember Raoul Wallenberg for his efforts to save Jews in Nazi-occupied Hungary. Wallenberg’s unfailing commitment to human rights and dignity—for which he gave his life—still inspires University of Michigan students to support those who are marginalized and persecuted across the globe. Wallenberg’s willingness to help those with whom he had no ethnic, religious, or geographic relationship, proves that our differences should not inhibit our empathy. I am not Roma, but I wish to be an ally in their fight for equality in Europe. Raoul Wallenberg truly showed how this is possible.
This summer, through the Wallenberg program and others, we launched QUWA, a self-defense and trauma therapy program for Syrian women refugees in Turkey. QUWA seeks to build peace by focusing on both inner and outer safety and security. Our participants are women who have had stability taken from them, and QUWA’s goal is to give every woman the tools with which to protect herself physically and emotionally, as well as the confidence for self-sufficiency. Short-term, we hope that each of these women are able to use the self-care and reflection strategies we learned in the healing circle and the physical self-defense techniques, and practice them to gain more control and contentment in their lives, as well as pass it on to other women. Long-term, we hope that QUWA can work with more Arab women to address violence in different contexts, and that it will grow to be a self-sustaining entity that can consistently help communities of women find peace.

Working on QUWA has been beneficial in more ways than one. Because we participated in the project’s activities, it has brought us as organizers as much healing and peace as it has to our participants. It has taught us about real resilience and knowing oneself, and about the importance of community support. QUWA has also given us the experience of large-scale project organizing and programming, and the opportunities to meet and work with phenomenal Arab women with whom we have formed lasting relationships.