

# OYE el Cambio

Hear the Change...

*“One of my favorite things about OYE is having a place to go where people are concerned about me.”*

**-Gerald Velasquez,  
OYE Scholar**



## OYE – Organization on Fire

2012 is prophesied as a year of positive transformation for all of humanity. While we at OYE aren't sure how large this transformation will be, we have seen the stars align in several positive ways for OYE youth in Honduras.

This year, OYE has been lucky to partner with the [Seattle International Foundation \(SIF\)](#), which has awarded OYE with a grant of \$25,000. Additionally, SIF named OYE to be the host organization of a Central American conference on youth empowerment, establishing OYE as a leading actor not only in Honduras, but also in the region. Further, OYE has won a grant from [TakingITGlobal's Adobe Youth Voices initiative](#) to promote communications and skills development, which will begin in June.

OYE was delighted to welcome a volunteer group from [Columbia University](#) that helped paint OYE's new youth art gallery space. OYE also hosted other incredible volunteers, including filmmaker [Richard Lakin](#), who launched [OYE's Social Media Project](#). Two social work interns from [Mary Baldwin College](#) also assisted with OYE's capacity building program, which trains youth on a weekly basis.

OYE is on fire...but as always we rely on the generosity of others to keep our flame alive. OYE uses each fortuitous opportunity that comes its way to promote the free expression of socially conscious youth who will emerge as the agents of positive change in a country in need of transformation. We, along with the youth we work with, believe that we can change the trends in educational dropout rates, violence, and poverty one educated student and one impacted community at a time. Thank you for your continued interest in our mission, as you are what helps keep the OYE spirit burning.

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### Did you know?

San Pedro Sula, Honduras was recently named the most dangerous city in the world?

## From New York to Honduras: A Volunteer's Journey



When I saw a service trip to Honduras being organized at Columbia University, I rather impulsively signed up. I didn't know anyone who was going. Besides briefly meeting the trip organizer, Justin, I knew nothing. To be honest, I showed up at JFK without knowing what city I was even flying to.

My ten days in Honduras were just what I needed to regain purpose. We spent most of our time in El Progreso, a mid-sized city where OYE is located. Time in El Progreso included visits to orphanages and schools, a painting project at the OYE office, and plenty of dinners at local families' homes. Justin knew El Progreso inside and out, and we appreciated his local insight, even if that meant eating *baleadas* everyday.

I was deliriously happy walking around the streets of El Progreso. It reminded me of my time as a Peace Corps volunteer in Cameroon. The energy, the smells, the traffic, the cheap Chinese merchandises, the loud (Latin) music blaring, and people calling me "Chinese" made me feel alive and different. As an Asian-American in the developing world, even just walking down the street and greeting vendors is a form of cultural exchange.

On our site visits, I was moved to see how happy the children seemed despite the less than stellar conditions. When we met students from OYE's scholarship program and heard how their lives had changed, I was reminded how it takes only one person to run with one idea and to start one organization that can change many people's lives. Being in Honduras reminded me how much there is to be done in this world and that we have a responsibility as global citizens to contribute.

Suddenly, all of my "first world problems" felt horribly insignificant. I felt almost embarrassed by the amount of energy I had spent on being upset and confused over personal feelings, a quarter-life crisis, the stress of school, etc. There is an entire world outside of our "first world bubble", where people worry about sending their kids to school and having food on the table. While it's easy to get sucked back into this bubble, I'm doing my best to hold onto those empowered feelings I had in Honduras.

Wendy Lee is a graduate student at SIPA, Columbia University. Visit her website at: <http://www.asianpolyglot.com>.

## Capacity Building in Full Swing



OYE youth engage in a debate on gender diversity with OYE staff serving as judges.

OYE's 4-month capacity building program is in full swing. With the objective of strengthening the leadership skills of young Hondurans so that they become the agents of change in their communities, OYE youth meet once a week for specialized classes on a variety of topics that are not covered in their formal educations. Topics for the capacity building courses were chosen through special focus groups that staff held with youth. This year, the topics cover themes such as personal goals, family disintegration, youth leadership, the Honduran reality, gender diversity (including gender identity and sexual orientation), sexuality, self-esteem, and ecology, among other topics.

This is the first year that older OYE scholars are providing some capacity building classes to younger scholars, with two medicine students educating the others on the topic of sexuality. This was one of the main goals of the capacity building program at its inception – youth educating, empowering, and leading other youth.

## The Ethics of Storytelling: Documenting Change in Honduran Youth

It's no secret that NGOs require successful business strategies to survive. With most NGOs relying on the generosity of individuals, foundations, and businesses to keep their operations afloat, they must master the art of appealing to their supporters. One way of doing this is through the timeless practice of storytelling.

In light of the "**Kony 2012**" saga -- the story of a valiant white hero who was ready to take down Central Africa's Lord's Resistance Army... until a mental breakdown of the naked variety brought about his tragic downfall -- more NGOs are contemplating the ethics of utilizing social and digital media to promote their causes.

Cue Richard Lakin. Lakin is a freelance digital producer and co-founder of **18 rabbits digital media**. While Lakin has spent his career filming things like professional sports events and short films for the education industry, he has carried out his most rewarding work in the developing world.

Lakin, a 60-year-old with a graying mustache and eyebrows that are etched in a perpetual V, arrived to Honduras with a clunky camera bag in one hand and his tripod in another. He had been to Honduras six years earlier to work with OYE, and he knew what to expect -- perpetual heat, 24/7 sweatiness, and inevitable sunburn.

Lakin was unsurprised that so little had changed since his last visit. A military coup may have ousted the country's president in 2009, but he found that the politically restored Honduras was still struggling. The country has the highest homicide rate in the world at **82 people per 100,000** (compared to New York City's 7 people per 100,000) and is plagued by gangs, drug trafficking, and corruption. In March 360 inmates burned to death in a prison in Comayagua where nearly half of the prisoners had never been brought to trial.

Yet Lakin wanted to come back to Honduras to work in El Progreso, Honduras's third largest city, which sits in the shadow of San Pedro Sula, the world's most dangerous city.



"I wanted to work with OYE again," Lakin said. "OYE is the most effective NGO I have seen in operation -- and believe me, I've worked with a lot of them."

Lakin's journey brought him to the home of **Rosa Sevilla**, a 19-year-old with a Snow White spirit and parents who nearly had to choose between sending either Rosa or her brother to school. Then he met **Gerald Velasquez** -- a 19-year-old artist whose mother nearly forced him to drop out of school so he could work to support his family instead. Later, Lakin found himself on a bumpy, 1.5-hour ride through the banana plantations to the home of **Neris Avila**, a 4'8" high school student who has transformed from "the quiet girl" into a star on OYE's online radio program.

"I'm focusing on the positive stories... stories of transformation," Richard shares. "I don't want to be one of those people who uses suffering children in the developing world to elicit funding."

Now that Lakin has completed filming, he has begun editing the footage for the creation of several short videos and one longer documentary that OYE can use to share its work in youth empowerment with a more global audience. He also hopes to create a template for other small organizations to use by chronicling his process with OYE.

"These kids are going to be some impressive and very formidable leaders," Lakin comments. "Some of the young women especially. They are going to have a huge impact on the future of this country. I hope I can come back to document it in ten years."



*Michael Solis is an OYE staff member. A version of this article appeared in Huffington Post on 4/2/12.*

## Universos Diversos: A Dialogue on Gender



With the clear intention of breaking the cultural codes of our society today, women artists in Honduras are contributing to the great struggle for equality between genders. This time, these voices have come from a project that advances the topic -- Universos Diversos (Diverse Universes) -- which places women and their artwork in the spotlight.

Universos Diversos emerges as a project that is more of a pragmatic process rather than something ephemeral. Sexual and reproductive rights of women are the central themes, which are covered in artistic work and a series of workshops that address these and other issues that affect women.

From the points of view of individual participants in the formulation of collective concepts, up to the creation of artwork, the project is a fascinating and multidisciplinary process that reveals the diversity of feminist thought.

The project generates a process for developing awareness of the creativity of women in the art world. Until true equality materializes, however, these efforts alone will not suffice.

I do not mean to discredit Universos Diversos. I believe it is a noble initiative, raising awareness about the problem of violence against women and femicide, revealing the atrocious conditions that many women live through, always respecting their anonymity.

My question is whether art is a necessary tool to raise awareness. In actuality it is only the starting point. What these artists hope will happen in society cannot be accomplished by women's efforts alone. This is when men too need to stand up and take part in the movement, advocating for gender equality.



From the debate that Universos Diversos has generated, it has become evident that humanity's machismo has blinded us for thousands of years. That is why we are still debating the topic of gender equality to this day.

But for how much longer will we need to debate? When will we as humans finally get it right?



*Martín Calix wrote this piece following the artistic exhibition by the Center for Women's Rights (Centro de los Derechos de la Mujer, CDM) at OYE. Visit Martín's blog at: <http://martincalix.blogspot.com>.*



### Scholar Spotlight: Oriel Eunice Diaz

In light of the death of her mother, Oriel Eunice Diaz, 16, suddenly finds herself having to be the matriarch of her family of seven. It is a role she never imagined having to assume so early, but it is one she juggles successfully thanks to what she has learned at OYE.

“The role I play in my family is one of enormous responsibility,” says Oriel. “I have had to show a lot of strength to my younger siblings and to know how to guide them during the good times and the bad. I hardly have any time for myself anymore because I have to give it all to them.

“From what I've learned at OYE, what I will always instill in my siblings is self-esteem. That no one will make them feel like they are less. That no one will reject them. That they won't get intimidated by others. That they will feel secure in themselves. That they will fight to realize their dreams and their goals. That they will carry out their projects and that they won't let anyone impede them or stop them from becoming what they want to be in life.

“I think I need to be more balanced and more responsible,” she adds. “I have to be a good role model so they can say that Oriel taught us well – that Oriel helped lead us on the right path.”

*For more information or to see Oriel speak about this issue, please visit the OYE Social Media Project at:*

<http://oyehonduras.wordpress.com>

# Join the OYE Family...Make a Change!

When OYE first opened, we only had the resources to provide 5 scholarships a year. But thanks to people who believed in the untapped potential of the youth of El Progreso, we have grown into a multi-faceted youth development organization that empowers hundreds of youth per year.

By making a gift to OYE, you can have a tremendous impact on our ability to offer more scholarships and enhance our leadership development programs for Honduran youth.

Your support is only the beginning. Each scholarship liberates OYE youth from the path of gang involvement, violence, and drugs and allows them to focus on their education and development. The challenges that Honduran youth face today are not new, nor are they easily solved. However, OYE is helping develop a generation of leaders who are equipped with the tools and education necessary for making a difference. **We invite you to become part of the change!**



Check donations can be made out to "Organization for Youth Empowerment" and sent to:

Organization for Youth Empowerment  
3351 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Washington, DC 20010

You can also make secure online payments on our webpage at [www.oyehonduras.org](http://www.oyehonduras.org).

OYE extends a special thank you to the **Seattle International Foundation** for supporting OYE with a \$25,000 grant and to **TakingITGlobal** for welcoming OYE to the **Adobe Youth Voices** program.

