

2017

Western University Community Events - Book Drive

Western Heads East

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Western
International

Western Heads East

Organisational Background

Western Heads East is a collaboration between Western staff, students, faculty and African partners using probiotic foods to contribute to health and sustainable development. Largely through probiotic yoghurt social enterprises, the program is established in highly underserved areas of Sub-Saharan Africa to address HIV/AIDS, health, empowerment of women, and economic development.

The probiotic yoghurt is based on the research of **Dr. Gregor Reid**, Scientist at Lawson Health Research Institute and Professor of Microbiology and Immunology and Surgery, Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at Western University. Probiotics are live microorganisms otherwise known as "good bacteria" that deliver health benefits to their host. Dr. Reid collaborated with **Dr. Sharareh Hekmat** of Western's Brescia University College and developed a probiotic yoghurt strain to address the HIV/AIDS symptoms in Africa by:

- Alleviating a risk factor for HIV infection in women
- Developing lower mortality and morbidity rates from diarrhea in patients with AIDS
- Building stronger immune systems
- Treating urogenital infections & bacterial vaginosis

The first site was initiated in Mwanza, Tanzania with the 'Tukwamuane' Women's Group has become a licensed NGO, and plays a vital role in the community by providing nutritional guidance, informal counseling and assistance with school lunch programs while producing probiotic yoghurt. The group has been joined by nine other community kitchens in Mwanza and three in Kenya.

The community kitchens are owned and operated by the local women and youth groups. The project's African teams are comprised of local women's groups ('Yoghurt Mamas'), research institutes, hospitals, universities and NGOs. The yoghurt kitchens also act as community hubs for counselling, centres for disease awareness and as hubs for social support and entrepreneurship. Some kitchens provide the probiotic yoghurt free of charge to people living with AIDS and are seeking subsidy to pay for the yoghurt for those who cannot afford to buy it.

Western Heads East (WHE) continues to work with local partners to establish probiotic yoghurt kitchens in Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Malawi. Since the project began, more than 70 student interns and African partners have conducted research, examined health benefits, quality control, etc., to continue improving the social enterprises.

Our Book Drive Event

Dr. Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization, stated that “education and health are a mutually-reinforcing sisterhood. They go hand-in-hand in the drive to lift people out of poverty and give them an opportunity to develop their full human potential.”

Western Heads East is partnering with student groups and community organisations to organize a book drive on campus to acquire resources requested by our three university partners in Tanzania and Kenya with the aim of emphasizing the importance and power of education. Namely, the universities are St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) and the Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (CUHAS) in Tanzania, and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in Kenya.

The goal is to effectively raise awareness about the importance of educational resources in a learning environment, and will focus on encouraging students, faculty members, and publishers to donate their textbooks at easily accessible locations across campus. Furthermore, funds raised will be used to send more Western University student interns through the Western Heads East program to work in improving social enterprises and conducting research with our affiliate universities. **We are hoping that this grassroots program developed at Western University will allow students the complete transparency of knowing where their textbooks are being donated, as well as directly benefiting our students in participating in various internship and volunteering opportunities offered by Western Heads East.**

This year the target textbook categories include, but are not limited to:

- Nursing
- Nutrition
- Medical Sciences
- Health Sciences
- Public Health
- Business Management

The aim then is to organize and document the books received, and send them to our partner universities where they can be used as resources to students where textbooks are expensive and not accessible. Books with less demand will be auctioned to raise funds to help reduce the cost of the WHE internship program and send more students abroad.

Our hope is to raise awareness of the social injustice where students in the West have resources and access to excellent libraries and online resources while our colleagues in the Global South do not share the same privilege. **We are hoping to be successful in collecting and shipping more than 500 books to our partner institutions.** In doing so, these books will contribute to the education and well-being of students in Tanzania and Kenya. We are very passionate about the belief that education is a powerful tool that can influence positive changes in one's community.

Previous Results

WHE Internship Program

The WHE internship program provides an exciting and challenging opportunity for students at Western to work with African partners on program goals and research. Western Heads East interns have been from all faculties at Western including health science, science, social sciences, food and nutrition, nursing, medicine, business, and education, among others. While contributing to local goals, the internship provides practical hands-on experience and a challenging opportunity for students and faculty to grow.

The goal of the internship program has also been for students and faculty to return and promote education about the program, health and social justice issues in Africa, their personal learning and development, and to help raise awareness and funds for the specific program needs in Africa. Our interns have developed relationships with communities in East Africa leading to:

- Establishment of a health program based on cow milk and yoghurt production
- Establishment of groundwork for probiotics research
- Promotion of awareness in Western University's community about the health and social justice issues in Africa and the impact of HIV/AIDS

The project holds promise and considerable benefits for all those involved, such as:

- Improving the health and economic status in communities
- Improving maternal health and general nutrition
- Providing campus awareness of, and involvement in, collaborative international efforts and research
- Developing ethical and civic responsibilities with students
- Providing experiential learning opportunities
- Increasing globalization of Western activities
- Cross-discipline collaboration

Current Partnerships

The project's Canadian team collaborates with African partners on research, knowledge sharing, fundraising, assisting communities with the initial set up of yoghurt kitchens, best practices for probiotic yoghurt production, quality control procedures and sustainable business education.

Canadian Partnerships

- Western University
- Brescia University College
- Lawson Health and Research Institute
- Tecumseh Public School and Clarke Road Secondary School (Twinning Project)
- Bread and Roses Books, London Ontario

Kenyan Partners

- Aga Khan University
- Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)
- Kenya Medical Research Institute
- Rachuonyo District Hospital
- Various Women's Groups (Oygusis, Orande, Nyanam, Baraka, Besigre)

Rwandan Partners

- The University of Rwanda
- JKUAT Rwanda Campus

Tanzania

- Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (CUHAS)
- JKUAT Tanzania Campus
- St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT)
- National Institute for Medical Research
- The City of Mwanza
- Kivulini Women's Right Organization

For more information about our partnerships please visit our website at <http://international.uwo.ca/whe/>