

## Two Novartis Employees Help Bring Health Care Access to Rural Kenyan Communities <sup>[1]</sup>

Hope <sup>[2]</sup>

In March 2014, Denise Boyer and Valerie Gregory travelled across Kenya where they worked as volunteers for the Familia Nawiri program, a Novartis Social Responsibility Initiative. Now back from their trip, Boyer and Gregory are keen on sharing their enriching, educational, and humbling experience with their fellow colleagues and members of their communities.



In keeping with Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc.'s corporate social responsibility initiative, Boyer and Gregory visited Kenyan rural health care facilities and communities to inform them about high quality affordable health care access in their communities and personal and environmental hygienic measures for disease prevention.



Their experience was made even more poignant when they observed firsthand the impact Familia Nawiri has on the community. A community member invited them into his home to show off the ingenious creation of a hand washing station with a container and a stick, despite the lack of running water in the community. This idea came after a Familia Nawiri health education meeting he participated in, which discussed the importance of hand washing. Boyer remembers "the pride he had in showing us his invention was very impactful to me, and in turn

I was very proud to be part of an organization that brings this kind of awareness to remote areas." Gregory mentioned "the creativity that was displayed was a reminder of how we inhibit ourselves with the ease of access to basic needs such as water and electricity in a developed society." Moments like these have pushed the Gregory and Boyer to engage their colleagues by launching a contest to come up with the most innovative and creative ideas for accessing water in areas where running water is scarce.

Another astonishing experience was during a visit to a dispensary, or medical clinic, which serves 10 000 people in Muranga, Kenya. This clinic did not have any medications to dispense since June 2013 due to corruption at the government level. Boyer and Gregory participated with Familia Nawiri in providing access to health care by holding medical camps in these areas during their mission.

*"The first step to change is awareness. The second step is acceptance."*(Nathaniel Branden)

### **About the International Volunteer Program and Past Participants**

The International Volunteer Program is a Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc.-sponsored social responsibility program wherein Canadian associates have the opportunity to volunteer and help people and/or entire communities abroad. Through this program, Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. has been extending its local community commitment to other communities in need around the globe by selecting and sponsoring associates to contribute their expertise as a free resource to one of many global partnerships. The program started in 2009 when an associate, Mike Lazarovits, was chosen to participate in Novartis's "SMS for Life" program which provides greater access to life-saving malaria medicines for people in Tanzania. Since then, five others, have followed suit reaching communities on many continents.



In 2010, associate Lumina Fillion worked in Mumbai, India with three groups that, respectively, provide health care to 42 million of India's poorest citizens in rural areas, give access to a Novartis drug to those who cannot afford it (12,000 recipients to date), and provide reconstructive surgery to leprosy patients at a hospital in Mumbai. In describing her experience to her colleagues, she said, "I was very privileged to be involved in not one, but three Novartis projects and to see with my own eyes how Novartis provides access to medicine in India" and added that the program had been "one of the most enriching experiences of [her] life."

In 2011, another associate, Diane Hogan, also volunteered with the "SMS for Life" program in Tanzania.

In March 2013, both Jennifer Hansford and Sophie Parent were selected to participate in the 2012/1013 IVP. Jennifer Hansford travelled to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam where she worked as a volunteer for the Cùng S?ng Kh?e program, providing medical education on disease prevention to rural and remote communities. Sophie Parent flew to Argentina to lend her hand and expertise to the *Fundaciòn Tzedaka*, a foundation located in Buenos Aires that aims to battle poverty and provides aid to over ten thousand of Argentina's less fortunate.

While Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. is dedicated to giving back to the Montreal area and its local West Island community through initiatives such as Community Partnership Day and Ride for the Cure,. The program has been a tremendous success among employees and has seen more and more applicants each year.

### **About Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc.**

Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc., a leader in the healthcare field, is committed to the discovery, development, and marketing of innovative products to improve the well-being of all Canadians. In 2012, the company invested close to \$100 million in research and development in Canada. Novartis Pharmaceuticals Canada Inc. employs more than 600 people in Canada.

For further information, please consult [www.novartis.ca](http://www.novartis.ca) [3].

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