



## **NEWS RELEASE**

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## **MCW Wraps Up 15<sup>th</sup> Youth Leadership Retreat at New York University**

**NEW YORK, NY, July 19, 2012** – More than thirty teens from ten countries designed special projects dedicated to imagining how they could improve their own lives and lives in their communities at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont from July 11-19.

“It was one of the most powerful experiences of my life,” said Nancy Mannebach, an 18-year old New Jersey high school student. “I believe that the retreat proves that no matter what problems come our way, there is always a brighter tomorrow. It’s little steps like these that inspire the whole world to move forward, beginning with all of us.”

Nancy developed a project focusing on teen depression. “The mission of my project is to create a self-empowerment camp for young people that uses a wide range of educational resources to provide and facilitate peer-to-peer help.”

MCW (Miracle Corners of the World), an organization dedicated to empowering youth to become positive agents of change in their communities, held its fifteenth retreat from July 11-19 at Champlain College, as well as at New York University.

“Our aim is to offer a program that challenges young people to reflect on themselves and their community while trying to imagine how they can have a measurable impact,” said the 2012 retreat coordinator Hannah Lee. “We also want to offer a program that fosters a global support network and life-long friendships that will help them achieve their personal goals.”

The participants, 16 to 21, came from Armenia, Bahrain, Botswana, Israel, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, the Palestinian Territories, seven US states and two Indian reservations, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

### **The Program**

MCW’s annual Youth Leadership Retreat program offers participants an opportunity to prepare a “vision plan,” which identifies a specific challenge in a community and maps out an innovative solution to address that challenge.

Following the untimely death of a close high-school friend, Mallory Kundert, 16, and Bjorn Bjornson, 16, from Levittown, Long Island, had a vision of “seeing kids in Levittown, NY use their energy in a positive way.” In their plan, they designed a project dedicated to “building a skate park in their neighborhood that offers youth a safe place to hang out, reduce the use of

drugs and alcohol, and provide the younger generation a positive atmosphere that would help keep them off the streets.”

Tinotenda Chibebe, 17, from Zimbabwe, recognized that young people in Zimbabwe lack textbooks and basic computer skills. His plan aimed to “bring internet service providers and local governments together to form a partnership dedicated to granting less privileged schools access to the Internet.”

The 2012 program centered around the theme “Connections: Empowering Youth Around the World” and the notion that a leader must work with their community and peers to be successful. A range of speakers specializing in branding, media, corporate responsibility and social entrepreneurship shared their expertise with the young delegates. The speakers, alongside MCW board members, staff and volunteers, guide and support the delegates through the process of developing their vision plans.

Social media expert Roni Weiss kicked off the retreat with a workshop on how to connect with communities with social media. National Public Radio reporter Charlotte Albright then led a session on how to pitch a story to the media. Soundboard Consulting Group founder Richard Magid and senior consultant Jonathan Hakakian gave the delegates feedback on their vision plans in one-on-one sessions. KPMG’s Long Island Managing Partner, Anthony Dalessio, and Ben & Jerry’s Social Mission program director, Rob Michalak, spoke on corporate responsibility. Henry Schein, Inc.’s director of Team Schein Member Relations and Diversity John Simpkins spoke on leadership moments, and his colleague Steve Kess, who is Vice President for Global Professional Relations, spoke about branding. MCW Board Advisor Dr. Nancy Scanlon led a session on sustainability.

Delegates also participated in skills development workshops, including a session with time management expert Jane Bickford and public speaking specialist Karen Siff Exform. Entrepreneur Gary Kadi led a session on how to engage people in your vision and Lyndon State College librarian Graham Sherriff led a session on research skills. Nichole Voth, Doubletree’s Area Human Resources Director, led an interactive and relationships building activity called, “Get A Grip!” and educator Gregory Ricks facilitated the delegates’ favorite session called “Cross the Line,” a powerful interactive activity that aims to build diversity awareness within a group.

Sponsors of the event included *Ben and Jerry’s, Bourbon Coffee, Bruegger’s, Chipotle, Costco, Custom Coach & Limo, Domino’s Pizza, Green Mountain Coffee Roasters, Grey Dog, Maoz, Park Slope Restaurant, and Trader Joe’s*. Former retreat coordinator Yasmin Elachi also sponsored an evening meal for the mentors in New York.

### **Open Doors Ceremony and the Alumni Ventures Fund**

The retreat concluded with Open Doors—a celebratory evening program for the participants, their friends and parents. The event, which was held at New York University’s Kimmel Center on Thursday, July 19, included presentations on vision plans and cultural performances.

The event included a screening of a video by 2011 Alumni Ventures Fund recipient Chris Bashinelli, a 25 year-old from Brooklyn. Chris is the founder of Bridge the Gap TV, which fosters cross-cultural understanding. With support from the MCW fund, which provides micro grants to retreat graduates who want to turn their vision plans into concrete projects, Chris filmed a series of episodes on the Pine Ridge Sioux reservation in South Dakota.

MCW presented the 2012 MCW Mentor Awards to two mentors: Perparim Kryeziu, 18, from Kosovo and Tala Qaddoura, 20, from Ramallah in the Palestinian Territories. Meerbek Kudaibergenov, 21, from Kyrgyzstan and Mallory Rothstein, 18, from New Jersey received the 2012 MCW Mentee awards.

“These awards are given to individuals who inspire the youth delegates in their work in creating and developing vision plans,” said MCW Director of Operations, Khalid Elachi.

To view pictures of the event, visit <http://flic.kr/s/aHsjATd2WG>.



*Photo courtesy of Khalid Elachi*

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### **About MCW (Miracle Corners of the World)**

MCW (Miracle Corners of the World) is a non-profit organization founded in 1999 with the vision of Local Change through Global Exchange<sup>®</sup>. Our mission is to empower youth to become positive agents of change in their communities. Based in New York with affiliates in Africa, MCW offers the following programs: Leadership Training, Community Centers and Oral Healthcare Improvement, as well as Partner Initiatives (MCW Jacqueline’s Human Rights Corner and the Container Project). For more information visit [www.mcwglobal.org](http://www.mcwglobal.org).