



# MAKE A CONNECTION

## THE CHALLENGE

In today's fast changing and multi-faceted world, a traditional education many times falls short of providing young people with the basic skills they need in order to succeed in life. Just as important as reading, writing and math abilities are life skills—a set of cognitive, social and emotional competencies young people need to realize their potential at home, at school, in the workplace and in their communities. Skills, such as how to think critically, communicate effectively, work with others, and resolve conflicts, are the fundamental building blocks of positive youth development. These skills enable young people to be engaged, responsible, and caring citizens. Research shows there is meaningful association between life skills and positive and healthy behaviors in young people.

## THE INITIATIVE

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) and Nokia recognize the power and potential in young people and the compelling need for greater investment in programs which develop their core life skills. As a result, they launched **Make a Connection** in 2000, as a global multi-year, multi-country youth engagement initiative. The program provides opportunities for young people to make “connections” on multiple levels—to themselves, their peers and families and to their communities—while placing an emphasis on nurturing and supporting the development of twelve essential life skills:

**Creative thinking**

**Self-confidence**

**Cooperation**

**Empathy**

**Critical thinking**

**Communication**

**Managing emotions**

**Respect**

**Decision making**

**Conflict management**

**Civic values**

**Responsibility**

The program has operated in 24 countries throughout the world and is currently active in 22: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Mexico, Netherlands, Nigeria, Peru, Poland, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States and Venezuela. Country projects are implemented by non-governmental organizations (usually IYF partner organizations) and designed to be locally relevant to meet the individual needs of young people. To date, Nokia has invested a total of US\$25 million to support country projects and global activities.

Some examples of projects include strengthening volunteerism, promoting creative self-expression, preparing youth for employment, encouraging social entrepreneurship and leadership, and developing curricula and teacher training modules for in-school life skills development.

- **BRAZIL:** *Mudando a História* is a project where young people from all socioeconomic backgrounds in São Paulo and Manaus volunteer as reading mediators and as trainers of mediators. The reading mediators reach out to disadvantaged children and teach them the joys and rewards of reading. The project encourages a love of reading as a way to improve access to education, provide greater access to books, increase cultural understanding and tolerance, improve relationships among youth and their communities, and strengthen the image of youth as agents of positive social change. To date, the project has reached more than 36,856 direct youth beneficiaries.
- **RUSSIA:** This program targets youth ages 15-25 to increase their commitment to volunteerism. Youth implement volunteer projects that benefit communities in five regions of the country. They are supported by Regional Volunteer Centers where they receive training to develop their life, leadership and project management skills. To date, more than 3,500 young people have actively participated in the project.



- **TURKEY:** This arts-based initiative is designed to enhance the life skills and civic responsibility of older youth while at the same time providing younger children in disadvantaged areas of the country with improved non-formal education opportunities that strengthen their creativity and personal development. To date, 522 volunteers have been trained and more than 19,000 children have been reached through 14 Dreams Workshops.
- **THAILAND:** The Empowerment of Thai Youth with Life Skills and Social Connections program has provided nearly 2,500 children and youth with the skills necessary to overcome the challenges they face growing up in Thai society, including exploitation and threats to their health and well-being. A life skills curriculum—emphasizing self confidence, judgment, leadership, critical thinking and decision-making skills—has been designed and piloted in three northeastern provinces of the country. The program continues to work with the Thai government to ensure that this curriculum is mainstreamed into the national curriculum.

Make a Connection projects are implemented in formal, non-formal and community-based settings. Many target disadvantaged youth who otherwise would not have access to skills development. The general age range of youth participants is 15-25, although some projects do target youth who are younger and older.

## RESULTS TO DATE

Since 2000, the program has directly reached upwards of 280,000 young people. These young people were actively involved in project activities at the country level. In addition, hundreds of thousands of peers, adults, and community members have indirectly benefited from program's activities.

## EXPECTED OUTCOMES

IYF and Nokia are committed to measuring the benefits and impact of this program on youth participants. A global evaluation is being conducted in 15 countries by Brandeis University's Heller School, Center for Youth and Communities. The evaluation focuses on measuring outcomes in individual youth beneficiaries, related to life skills development and their life situations (for example in areas of education, employment and civic engagement). The evaluation will assess outcomes using a combination of retrospective, prospective and in-depth studies. Comprehensive results are expected in mid-2006.

## PARTNERSHIPS

**Donor:** Nokia

**Implementing Partners:** The Make a Connection program is implemented through the IYF Global Partner Network, comprised of indigenous national-level civil society organizations which are recognized leaders in the youth development field.



**NOKIA**  
Connecting People

## IYF CONTACTS

**ALAN WILLIAMS**, Vice President for Leadership and Engagement  
E-mail: alan@iyfnet.org

**AMI THAKKAR**, Program Director, Make a Connection  
E-mail: athakkar@iyfnet.org