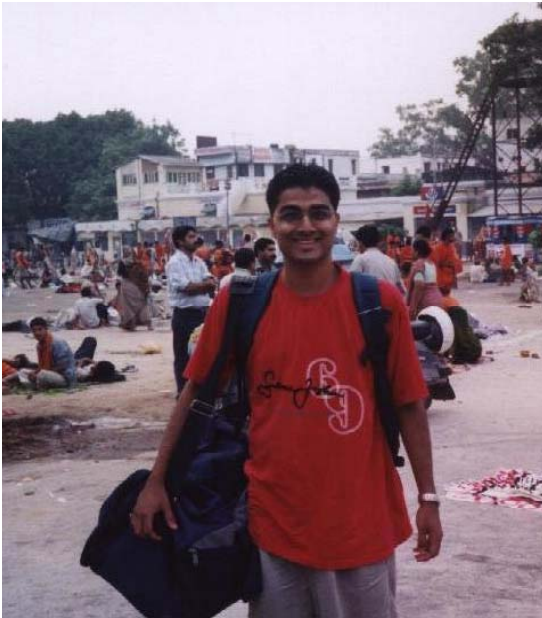


**ROHIT RAMCHANDANI**  
Guyana Alumni 2002

I spent five of the most memorable and eye opening weeks of my life living and working on a YCI project in three rural villages deep within the dense equatorial rainforests of the Rupununi Region of Guyana. It is an experience I will never forget and one that I am not sure I will know how to properly remember.

My time in Guyana was spent working on public health issues including HIV/AIDS awareness, malaria prevention, waterborne diseases, first aid education, youth skills summits, nutrition, dental hygiene, and helping set up a community health centre. The work we did was based on the principle of self-help. One does not have to look very far to find examples of organizations that believe solely in "us helping them", instead of "us working together to help them help themselves". YCI also involves youth as the backbone for their projects. Many young people are searching for ways in which they can harness their

considerable talent, energy, strengths and ideas to serve others and address pressing global issues. YCI harnesses that energy.

Living and working amongst the villagers of the communities was a key element to the success of the project. This allows for a more profound learning experience and a stronger foundation for successful health and development ventures. We were able to experience the lives of the villagers first hand and the bonds and friendships formed were that much stronger and real. There was a higher degree of cross-cultural collaboration and the learning opportunities were greatly enhanced.

From the pristine waterfalls and fast flowing rivers to the communities ravaged by HIV/AIDS and malaria, Guyana was indeed a life altering experience that helped change my outlook on the world. In the days before our return to Canada, many of us talked about how much more we would appreciate "the little things" once we were back. This was true; we did, but only for a short time. It is all too easy to fall back into old habits and the over consumptive lifestyles we lead here in Canada. Unfortunately, when not faced with that existence and the people living it on a daily basis, one can easily forget.

**Rohit did not forget that experience:** Following his return to his studies at the University of Waterloo in Health Studies and Gerontology, he founded the University of Waterloo International Health Development Association (UWIHDA). UWIHDA aims to educate Canadians on the health issues affecting people in developing countries. The following summer, Rohit led a team of volunteers to Hyderabad, India where the team worked at the LV Prasad Eye Institute. Rohit is currently an MPH student at Boston University's School of Public Health. He is currently studying for entrance into medical school and is the Canadian Director of Unite for Sight, a non-profit organization that empowers communities worldwide to improve eye health and eliminate preventable blindness.