



## INSPIRING LEADERS WITH GLOBAL SKILLS

How the Students for Development Program  
is shaping the careers of its alumni

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**For more SFD alumni profiles see: [www.aucc.ca/sfd](http://www.aucc.ca/sfd)**

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# INTRODUCTION

Jeannine Plamondon is a legal counsel who seeks justice for war crimes. Erin O'Brien is a United Nations worker helping to achieve food security in Africa. And Christopher Charles is a social entrepreneur and the inventor of a tool to combat anemia in Cambodia. These accomplished professionals are a few of the former participants in the Students for Development (SFD) program whose current careers and study paths have been profoundly shaped by their SFD internship experiences.

The SFD program was funded by the former Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), now Foreign Affairs Trade and Development Canada, and managed by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) in partnership with Canadian universities. The program provided development-oriented internship opportunities for senior Canadian university students.

Between 2005 and 2014, more than 1,500 students from over three-quarters of Canada's universities participated in SFD internships in developing and emerging countries. Lasting three to six months, these unique internships saw students working in collaboration with a wide range of host organizations—such as NGOs, research institutes and government agencies—on projects addressing CIDA's priorities.

But while the SFD program enabled students to make a meaningful contribution to Canada's international

development work, it also affected them individually and in significant ways.

Beyond the exposure to aid work, SFD's young Canadian participants gained valuable skills and experience. In a 2013 survey of over 300 SFD alumni, a majority of respondents said that they had enhanced their research, technical, and career-related skills, and had grown personally as a result of their time overseas. Furthermore, 81% of employed alumni said that their SFD internship was invaluable in helping them secure a job.

Today, SFD alumni work for private, public, not-for-profit and academic organizations in a range of areas including microfinance, consulting, public health, social services, and international development. Indeed, many SFD alumni have pursued careers where they can positively impact lives across Canada and around the world. Whether based in Charlottetown or Calgary, South Africa or Tanzania, SFD alumni are working to make a difference.

As the SFD program comes to a close, we've gathered the stories of several alumni. Here, they tell us how the program has inspired them to use their skills to become global leaders.



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## Erin O'Brien

2005 – SFD Intern, University of Pretoria, South Africa

2014 – **Monitoring and Evaluation Officer**, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
in Johannesburg, South Africa

*“I am fortunate to work  
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sub-region—and  
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cultural subtleties and  
world views constantly.”*



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# INCREASING RESILIENCE

When Erin O'Brien was pursuing a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) in policy studies and alternative dispute resolution at the University of New Brunswick, working for the United Nations seemed like a "far off dream."

But thanks in large part to the SFD program, that dream is a reality. As a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Erin is helping to achieve food security for all. Working across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, she monitors and reports on projects that aim to increase farmers' resilience to food insecurity that results from natural hazards, such as floods, droughts, cyclones and pests.

"My responsibilities are the development of monitoring and evaluation tools for sub-regional projects (i.e., projects that are implemented in multiple countries in the SADC region), implementation of these tools to further analyse and communicate data and information to the broader FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization] community, donors, agriculture, nutrition and food security stakeholders, member states and the general public. In addition, I provide technical support to countries in the region for their national programs and projects that address disaster risk reduction/management as it relates to food security/agriculture."

It's a journey that began almost 10 years ago, when Erin embarked on a 2005 SFD internship at the University of Pretoria focusing on local-level dispute resolution and land policy in rural South Africa:

"The SFD program was invaluable in my process to get where I am today... Every student and young professional seeking to enter the development sector and the international public service needs an opportunity to gain relevant experience and to develop a network of potential partners."

Since completing her internship, Erin has carried out independent consulting work for organizations like the World Bank and the New Partnership for African Development, as well as received a scholarship to attend an evaluation course at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Describing her work today, Erin says:

"I am fortunate to work with people from across the sub-region—and indeed the world—who teach me new approaches, cultural subtleties and world views constantly."

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## Bobby Thomas Cameron

2008 – SFD Intern, Farmers Helping Farmers in Meru, Kenya

2014 – Settlement Worker, PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada in Charlottetown, Canada



*“When working with clients who come from the Global South, I am better able to connect with them as I have an idea about their background and experience.”*

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# BECOMING AN ENGAGED GLOBAL CITIZEN

In the summer of 2008, Bobby Thomas Cameron completed an internship with Farmers Helping Farmers in Meru, a rural town in Kenya. There, he worked with a women's business cooperative, helping its members with their accounting and training them to use related software. It's an experience the University of Prince Edward Island graduate describes as both challenging and rewarding:

"Further, while in Kenya I had the opportunity to attend a two-day workshop on district elections training where local Kenyans were trained by the government on how to organize and deliver democratic elections."

Since then, Bobby has completed a Bachelor of History and Political Studies, a master's in Public Policy and Administration, and has begun a PhD in Immigration policy at Ryerson University. He has also received a Dan MacIntyre Human Rights Award from Ryerson University and a Red Cross Young Humanitarian Award (recognitions he received partly because of his time in Kenya), and in 2013 was an Ambassador for the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation.

Currently, Bobby is a Settlement Worker at the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada. As for how the SFD experience affected his future path, he says:

"SFD in 2008 placed me on the path to becoming an engaged global citizen. It broadened my horizons and immediately provided me with more interests and pathways to consider. I became more interested in international issues, particularly migration. It also provided me with more experience and knowledge to base my graduate studies upon."

Overall, he says the experience has made him more empathetic and knowledgeable about international issues:

"When working with clients who come from the Global South, I am better able to connect with them as I have an idea about their background and experience."

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**"The PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada values global experience as it allows settlement workers to better connect with our international client base. Bobby's experience through SFD has been a great asset to our Settlement Team."**

*Erin Mahar, Settlement Programs Coordinator, PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada*

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## Kara Pecknold

2008 – SFD Intern, COVAGA in Kibungo, Rwanda

2014 – Senior Design Researcher, frog design, in Munich, Germany



*“The benefit of SFD is you have your own epiphanies about the way the world works and the way that development works.”*





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# A GAME CHANGER

As a graduate student pursuing her master's degree in Design at Emily Carr University, Kara Pecknold undertook an SFD internship in rural Rwanda. There, she worked with COVAGA, a women's cooperative of weavers who extract the water hyacinth—an invasive species—and turn it into a weaving fibre to make baskets and other products.

During an almost four-month internship in 2008, Kara worked with the weavers to develop creative solutions to help improve COVAGA's market presence. This included designing a website for the cooperative, but also collaborating with the women to co-design a COVAGA logo. Based on the image of the water hyacinth and translated onto a rubber stamp, the logo proved to be a low-cost, sustainable means of identifying COVAGA's products. In a community without electricity or computers, it enabled the cooperative to enhance its market presence, without relying on technology or others to do so. As Kara explains:

“The benefit of SFD is you have your own epiphanies about the way the world works and the way that development works.”

But Kara's internship also served as the catalyst for further research on cross-cultural design process. Upon returning to Canada, she began to explore:

“How do we do more human-centered design in contexts that are unfamiliar? Or that get at solutions and meet needs in a more direct way?”

She subsequently developed a toolkit to help facilitate communication around design. Consisting of a field bag and various tools to photograph, draw, and communicate visually, the kit enables designers to have a “visual conversation” with individuals who don't share the same language or technology, and thus to understand them better and meet their needs. Her work was included as a case study in IDEO's Human-Centered Design Toolkit, a resource used by organizations worldwide.

Now a Senior Design Researcher at a company named frog design in Munich, Kara continues to take a community-engaged approach to her work. Describing herself as part journalist, part ethnographer, and part designer, she is grateful for the way the internship allowed her to apply the design discipline differently in an international context:

“The experience has definitely been a game changer for me on how I do design, how I view design process, and how I view international development. It affected me on multiple levels and opened up doors for further experiences.”

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## Oksana Kovalenko

2010 – SFD Intern, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in New Delhi, India

2014 – Aga Khan Foundation Fellow, First MicroCredit Company in Osh, Kyrgyzstan



*“It was in India that I discovered microfinance. Something within me clicked. With microfinance, I realized it was possible to merge business and development.”*



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# FINDING HER NICHE

In her third year at Acadia University, Oksana Kovalenko knew that she wanted to pursue international development work. But as a student of business administration, she had little knowledge of human rights, global politics, and the field of development. Thanks to the SFD program, that changed. Interning as a researcher in 2010 with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in New Delhi, India gave Oksana exposure to the work of an international development and advocacy organization. Just as important, however, the experience helped her find her niche:

“It was in India that I discovered microfinance. Something within me clicked. With microfinance, I realized it was possible to merge business and development.”

Upon returning to Canada, Oksana embarked on an honours thesis that explored best practices for leveraging the impacts of microfinance through more effective business development services. Before graduating, she was named the recipient of a prestigious Sobey Award for excellence in business studies.

Today, Oksana continues to bridge the worlds of international development and business, and works to help reduce the vulnerability of poor populations. Currently on a nine-month International Microfinance and Microenterprise Fellowship with the Aga Khan Foundation Canada, she is serving as a research

and product development coordinator at the First MicroCredit Company in Osh, Kyrgyzstan.

Oksana says that the SFD program “helped me discover my career dreams and pave the way to achieving them.” After completing her current fellowship, she plans to extend her contract through the Canadian Development Exchange Professionals Program (CADEX) and stay in Kyrgyzstan for another year. Once she has acquired enough practical experience in the field of microfinance, her next goal will be pursuing a master’s in development finance.

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**“I had the pleasure of working with Oksana Kovalenko as a professor at Acadia University. Wise beyond her years due to international experience gained during her SFD internship in India, Oksana pursued honours research in poverty alleviation through microfinance. She continues to work internationally as an Aga Khan fellow. I have no doubt that she is making significant contributions to her field.”**

*Dr. Kelly Dye, F.C. Manning Chair in Business Administration, Acadia University*

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## Christopher Charles

2008 – SFD Intern, Resource Development International Cambodia in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

2014 – MD Candidate, Chief Technical Officer and Inventor, Lucky Iron Fish Project. Based in Hamilton, Canada



*“The internship confirmed my passion for global public health and that it is what I should be doing.”*



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# FINDING INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

During his 2008 SFD internship in Cambodia, University of Guelph graduate Christopher Charles made an unexpected discovery. Working in cooperation with Resource Development International Cambodia (RDIC), he undertook a project to study the problem of anemia among rural Cambodian villagers. The results were surprising. Analysis of blood samples showed that 90 percent of women tested were anemic—almost double the estimates. Anemia can lead to a number of health problems, from dizziness and weakness to hemorrhaging during childbirth and higher child mortality rates.

He originally intended to return to Canada at the end of his internship and embark on a master's in neuroscience, but those findings prompted Christopher to take a risk and change his plans:

"I contacted my adviser-to-be and said, I'm not quite done here yet. We've identified a huge problem and something needs to be done about it. It's one thing to collect the data, but it's important to try to brainstorm ways to solve the problem."

With his adviser's encouragement to refocus his master's project, Christopher stayed in Cambodia where everything, he says, blossomed from there. Indeed, the SFD experience proved to be the foundation for a subsequent discovery: the Lucky Iron Fish. Seeing

that women were reluctant to place an ordinary chunk of iron in their cooking pots—a means of releasing iron nutrients into food and combatting anemia—Christopher designed a piece of iron shaped like a native fish thought to be lucky. Local women embraced the invention and rates of anemia decreased accordingly.

Today, the Lucky Iron Fish Project is a successful social enterprise. While serving as its Chief Technical Officer, Christopher also completed his PhD in Biomedical Science and Epidemiology. He recently returned to Canada, to enrol in his first year of medical school at McMaster University. For Christopher, the SFD internship was the launching point for everything:

"My whole experience in Cambodia and everything that has come from that. The internship confirmed my passion for global public health and that it is what I should be doing."

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## Jeannine Plamondon

2009 – SFD Intern, United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania

2014 – Counsel, Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Section, Department of Justice in Ottawa, Canada



*“It is the most memorable experience I have had. It has taught me how to better understand other cultures and societies.”*

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# FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE

Jeannine Plamondon, a graduate of McGill University's law school, spent three months in the summer of 2009 working as an SFD intern with the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda based in Arusha, Tanzania. She says that she was motivated to apply for an SFD internship because:

"I knew that in order to get into my field of interest—international human rights law—I needed to have hands-on and field experience. I was also interested in expanding my horizons personally. The SFD funding allowed me to spend a summer living and working internationally, as otherwise I would not have been able to afford it."

During her internship she did legal research and drafting on appeals in the Office of the Prosecutor at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Currently, Jeannine is working as Counsel for the Department of Justice Canada in the Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes Section.

"My internship was invaluable in helping me to get this position and was directly relevant to the work I now do on a daily basis, which is seeking justice for crimes against humanity and war crimes. It also gave me good legal experience generally. I believe it has opened many doors for me professionally and put me on the otherwise unattainable career path towards my dream job."

Jeannine says that living, working, and traveling in Africa has had an enormous impact on her personal life:

"It is the most memorable experience I have had. It has taught me how to better understand other cultures and societies. It has also given me a renewed desire to fight for justice and development."

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## Bobby Samuel

2010 – SFD Intern, Ainembabazi Children’s Project in Mbarara, Uganda

2014 – Analyst, Framework Partners Inc. in Calgary, Canada



*“In consulting, you need people who are inherently curious and willing to work hard to have a positive impact.”*





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# CONFIDENCE AND CURIOSITY

During his undergraduate studies at the University of Alberta, Bobby Samuel welcomed the chance to do an SFD internship in 2010. He already had an interest in economic and business development in developing countries and the SFD program enabled him to work with the Ainembabazi Children's Project in Uganda. As the organization's Sewing Cooperative Coordinator, Bobby was responsible for helping to get the cooperative started, working on market analysis, and providing business skills training to its members.

After completing his master's in Economics at Queen's University, Bobby returned to Uganda in 2012—this time as a Pathy Family Foundation (PFF) Community Leadership Fellow. The PFF Fellowship, which funds social entrepreneurs to work in developing countries, allowed Bobby to build on his SFD experience and reunite with the Ainembabazi Children's Project. Running a program called Educational Empowerment (in partnership with SFD alumnus Laksh Puri), Bobby taught business skills to microcredit recipients. He says that having the SFD experience led to considerable success with the PFF Fellowship project:

“With any international project you always start off slow. You are trying to adjust to the culture and environment, and understand who the people you need to talk

to are. But this time around it was much easier. I knew the culture, the people and the pace.”

Bobby continues to volunteer with the Ainembabazi Children's Project in an advisory role. This is in addition to his work as an analyst with Framework Partners Inc., a consulting company in Calgary, Alberta. He says his international development experience serves him well as a consultant:

“In consulting, you need people who are inherently curious and willing to work hard to have a positive impact. Those are things that are also embodied in development work.”

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**“Bobby is an exceptional young man. One of the primary qualities that made him stand out in our hiring process was his well roundedness, and that he had tangibly demonstrated what we believe to be vital: a well-rounded and engaged person is a great team member. Bobby's experiences clearly add value in our project engagements.”**

*Alec Milne MBA CMC, Principal, Framework Partners Inc.*

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## Joanna Shackleton

2009 – SFD Intern, Handicap International in Meru, Kenya

2014 – Manager, Kilombero Community Charitable Trust in Kidatu, Tanzania



*“That kind of career planning and mentorship, I probably wouldn’t have had if it weren’t for the SFD program.”*

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# CAREER ADVICE AND MENTORSHIP

As an SFD intern with Handicap International in 2009, Joanna Shackleton undertook a self-directed internship to research HIV awareness in the Kenyan Deaf community. But the SFD experience also gave her valuable insight into the operations—from policy and programming to IT and finance—of an NGO with a multinational presence. As a student pursuing her master's of International Development and Global Studies at the University of Ottawa, Joanna says:

“Getting an appreciation of the diversity of roles that are needed to make these international organizations tick was very insightful.”

A meeting with an adviser from Handicap International's human resources department helped Joanna decide how best to achieve her goal of a career in overseas development work. She was encouraged to continue acquiring practical experience, to get out in the field, and to consider living in a developing country for a longer period:

“That kind of career planning and mentorship, I probably wouldn't have had if it weren't for the SFD program.”

Not long after completing her studies, Joanna returned to Africa, first working as a resource mobilizer for a Botswana hospice, and then serving as the New Business Development Adviser for Stepping Stones Interna-

tional. Along the way, she honed her skills in strategic planning, sustainability planning, public relations, managing donor budgets, and networking. All this and the experience she acquired as an SFD intern should serve her well in her new position as the Manager of Kilombero Community Charitable Trust, an organization working to build the capacity of cane sugar farmers and improve the livelihoods of the local communities in Kidatu, Tanzania.

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**“In considering Joanna for the role as Trust Manager, I felt her experience in Kenya demonstrated she was culturally aware, and that made her suitable for this environment. Her previous experience gained during the internship demonstrated she was aware of the challenges associated with community development work and capable of handling them with professionalism.”**

*Mark Bainbridge, Managing Director of Kilombero Sugar Company and Chairperson of the Kilombero Community Charitable Trust*

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## Shivani Singh

2009 – SFD Intern, Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA) in Mumbai, India

2014 – PhD Candidate and Teaching Fellow at the Institute for Global Health, University College London in London, UK



*“It brought to life the issues I had been reading about. I learned a lot about these communities from the people who lived there, and in the process more about myself.”*





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# A NEW-FOUND DIRECTION

In 2009, Shivani Singh undertook an SFD internship with the Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA), a non-profit organization that addresses maternal and child health in the slums of Mumbai, India. During that time, the University of Waterloo graduate did background research for a paper on the causes of stillbirths and neonatal deaths amongst disadvantaged families. Her work entailed reading and categorizing verbal autopsies gathered by SNEHA staff who had interviewed families after the death of a newborn or of a mother due to childbirth complications.

Shivani says that prior to her internship she hadn't had the chance to do field work:

"Through the SFD program I had the opportunity to meet experienced researchers in Mumbai who were able to teach me a lot about the process of conducting interviews and analyzing data."

The experience also gave her a new-found direction:

"I had always intended on doing a PhD; however, participating in the SFD program shaped my choice in a university and the field of study. The program offers students a way to gain hands-on experience in a field they are interested in, but may not have been able to access

in the regular course of their studies. I've now stayed within the field of academia and would hope my own students would have access to such opportunities."

Today, Shivani is completing a doctorate at the Institute for Child Health (UCL) in London. Her research examines the experiences of female migrants living in the slums of East Mumbai around issues of autonomy and decision-making. Currently in the final stages of writing, she also holds a full-time post at UCL as a Teaching Fellow.

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## Erin Kaipainen

2005 – SFD Intern, Programa Rosario Habitat in Rosario, Argentina

2014 – Manager, Leadership and Student Engagement, University of Calgary, Canada



*“My passion for this work stems back to my studies in social justice as well as my internship with the Students for Development program”*

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# COMING FULL CIRCLE

In 2005 Erin Kaipainen did an SFD internship with the Programa Rosario Habitat, a program focused on improving a neighbourhood in the shantytown settlements of Rosario, Argentina. Since then she has acquired a master's degree in Social Justice and Equity Studies from Brock University, and embarked on a career in the field of student affairs.

As the founding director of the Centre for Community-Engaged Learning at the University of Calgary, Erin helped develop the foundations for a series of experiential learning programs in Calgary and overseas. In her current role as the Manager of the university's Leadership and Student Engagement Office, she continues to oversee these programs, while also managing leadership development and orientation initiatives. Describing her work today, Erin says:

"I've attempted to build our international programs on principles of reciprocity and ethical international engagement, and I enjoy having these discussions with my colleagues and students. My passion for this work stems back to my studies in social justice as well as my internship with the Students for Development program, and my interactions with community members in the villages, and with my colleagues with the Municipality of Rosario."

Erin adds:

"I find it incredibly rewarding to see students grapple with this work and am proud to see our introductory service-learning experiences prepare them to be ethical global citizens, as well as prepare them for more challenging, independent experiences such as Students for Development. In the last few years, I've referred several students to SFD programs in Ghana and Uganda. In that sense, it feels like my work in this area has really come full circle."

For Erin, the SFD experience solidified her interest in international education and international development:

"I think my internship, combined with my other international learning experiences, led me to work in the areas of international education, partnership development (local and international), and student development."

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Established in 1911, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada is the voice of Canadian universities. AUCC represents 97 Canadian public and private not-for-profit universities and university-degree level colleges.