



## Innovations in International Youth Volunteering

An analysis of 22 innovative youth volunteer programs from around the world

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Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) is very pleased to announce the results of our call to participate in the project ***Innovations in International Youth Volunteering***, an effort to identify and reward innovation in youth volunteering (and particularly youth-led volunteering) from around the world, as well as to analyze these experiences and make recommendations for fostering similar innovation in England and other countries. This project was commissioned by v (<http://www.wearev.com/>), a new charity based in England which is dedicated to motivating a million more youth to volunteer in their communities. For the purposes of the project, volunteering was defined as “any activity which involves spending time, unpaid, doing something which aims to benefit other people (other than, or in addition to, close relatives) or to benefit the environment.” These activities could include mutual aid or self-help, service to others, civic engagement, or advocacy and campaigning. We focused particularly on programs involving youth ages 16 to 25.

Out of 134 submissions, the ICP team and members of the project Expert Panel chose 22 projects to profile in the final report. These 22 projects represent 17 countries, including three cross-national programs, from Africa, the Middle East, Eastern and Western Europe, Latin America, and South Asia. Selection criteria included the degree to which the program serves an underserved population; the degree of innovation; the potential to be replicated and adapted; program sustainability; coherence between project objectives and activities; impact; and youth empowerment.

**[Here the Faça Parte Institute presents the volunteer program recognized in the ICP Award:](#)**

# Selo Escola Solidária

## Contact Information:

**Tel:** +55-11-3266-5477

**Email:** [conteudo@facaparte.org.br](mailto:conteudo@facaparte.org.br)

**Organisation:** Instituto Faça Parte

**Location:** Brazil, nation-wide

**Year Established:** 2002

**Website:** <http://www.facaparte.org.br>

## Programme Goals and Activities

Selo Escola Solidária (SELO) is a biannual service-learning certification process that encourages projects in schools to improve education and build a more socially just nation. SELO incorporates young volunteers on teams with parents, staff, teachers, coordinators, administrators, and members of the community to enhance the role of the school as a nucleus of community citizenship.

The SELO process begins every two years by identifying quality service-learning practices and inviting project proposals from schools throughout the country.

Proposals are evaluated according to specific criteria: the significance of the experience for participants and the people served, the coherence of activities with service learning goals, and their pedagogical and social impacts.

After projects are selected, certified, and run throughout the school year, experiences are analysed for content and methodologies and written into a report that is disseminated throughout the country. These results are used to encourage schools to develop more complex and numerous projects, raising the standards and criteria for the following certification round.

Since 2003, 18,193 Brazilian schools have been certified, engaging an estimated 546,000 young people from every state in service-learning projects. The average age of youth participants ranges from 15 to 20 years of age, and is balanced between the genders. Over 80% of participating schools are public, state, or municipal, which primarily serve lower and lower-middle class young people.

The most commonly involved academic subjects are environmental education, arts and culture, Portuguese, and mathematics. Projects concentrate in areas such as working to improve health, the environment, human rights, and gender relations; caring for seniors, children, disabled persons; and working with other schools and rural communities, among others.

## Innovation

SELO's approach is unique in its ability to reach national scope very rapidly. In addition to the certification programme, SELO presents, trains, and contributes to the national debate on service-learning to encourage schools to adopt the pedagogical practice. Faça Parte has organised talks in 12 states this year regarding the value of service-learning for both education and community improvement.

To support both SELO and other volunteering programmes it runs, Faça Parte has created strong partnerships with the National Council of Education Secretaries and the National Union of Municipal Education Directors. The Secretaries of these organisations appoint state coordinators who are trained by Faça Parte and participate in annual planning meetings. Faça Parte has also begun to share the successes of the SELO programme at the regional level, participating in international congresses in Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and Israel to date.

### Youth Focus

As each school determines the organisation of its specific projects, there is significant diversity in the roles young people take on. However, effective youth participation in the project is one of the most valued requirements for SELO certification.

Commonly held youth roles include: working to participate in and lead the project, writing up the experience, organising, serving as members of planning committees, and working to connect with diverse actors in the school community and the community that is served.

Through these roles, young people engage in values education on how to both improve the quality of learning and the quality of life of the community. Guided by educational professionals, young participants rethink their role in society when they start to act with, in, and for the community. Young people recognise that their own knowledge, skills, abilities, and actions can make a difference to improve the life of their community, and they feel more valued as students and as citizens.

### Youth Voice



**Name:** Flávia Boni

**Age:** 17

**Position:** High school student in a technical teacher's school, undertaking a teaching internship. She intends to pursue a degree and job in the education field.

*"Anyone who participates even for a day, ends up staying. What you do does not seem like much, but it actually is...[volunteering] is a professional as well as an emotional experience."*

*Flávia Boni*

During her 3-year stint at Cultura Solidária, one of the programmes certified by SELO in the city of São Paulo, Flavia has performed a myriad of activities. These include visiting retirement homes, where she organised activities for senior citizens; leading talks about subjects from AIDS to university education in community centres and public

schools; teaching remedial classes to public school students; and developing (along with other participants) group dynamics workshops to improve primary school students' social and life skills.

Due to her long “career” in the programme, Flavia says she has been able to actually see the impact of her work. “The kids, who at first were listless and unmotivated, soon became more active, inquisitive, and interested in being active in the community or in pursuing university degrees. Children who were barely literate improved their reading skills. Even the mothers of the participants, who just dropped off their children in the beginning, became interested and now stay for the whole duration of the classes and talks.”

Flavia says that she has always had a desire to be a volunteer and believes that “most of us share this desire yet do not carry it out because we do not know what exactly volunteering is.” Whenever a friend asks her what volunteering is, Flavia declines to explain and instead brings them along to one of her talks or classes. As she puts it, “anyone who participates even for a day, ends up staying. What you do does not seem like much, but it actually is...[volunteering] is a professional as well as an emotional experience.”

### **Programme Impact and Future Development**

In addition to certifying 18,206 schools during the first two SELO certification rounds, involving approximately 546,000 students, the programme has developed partnerships with the Ministry of Education, local educational organisations, private sector firms, national press organisations, and various UN agencies. These relationships testify to the level of national support the programme has generated in the five years since its inception.

SELO is currently working to create the online Solidarity Schools Network, which will allow for broader dissemination of information about service-learning projects. The free online database will be searchable by grade, discipline, areas of action, and location, thereby facilitating consultation and networking.

