Editor’s Note: As part of a new series on inclusion, profiling the perspectives of various Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) across the Bank Group, we caught up recently with the key members of the iconic Youth to Youth (Y2Y).

The World Bank Group continues to foster innovation with initiatives meant to turn novel ideas into action. These include the incredibly influential Development Marketplace, the new Open Data agenda, the Apps for Development competition, and many more.

The Youth Innovation Fund (YIF) is one such program. Launched in 2005, YIF provides World Bank staff under the age of 33 with the opportunity to pilot new ideas. Competition is intense. In 2011, 23 teams submitted proposals and only three were selected. Since its inception, the YIF has funded almost 70 projects in more than 40 countries, with total grants approaching $600,000.

YIF is an initiative of the Bank Group’s Youth to Youth (Y2Y) community, a volunteer organization of young staff. Founded in 2004 and supported by then president, Jim Wolfensohn, the group works to help solve development problems through innovation and agency and currently has more than 800 members.

“I think it’s so successful because it allows young people to design and implement their own projects,” said Nicole Goldstein, Y2Y’s Co-Secretary. “Ultimately, it gives young staff the opportunity to manage projects earlier in their careers than would otherwise be the case. And it demonstrates results.”

This year, WBI disbursed small grants of $10,000 to each of the three winning teams. The projects encouraged young entrepreneurs in Haiti, helped establish eco-friendly classrooms in Mexico, and supported local government in Sierra Leone.

“What’s emerging is a pattern of adding real value to the Bank’s core work,” said Maggie Tunning, who works in OPCS Reform Secretariat and is Y2Y’s former Communications Chair. “Young people are adding value. The YIF does it cheaply and efficiently.”

YIF is just one of Y2Y’s initiatives. An active mentoring program has entered its third year. “We pair young staff with senior managers outside of their VPUs,” explained EXTCC’s Mamata Pokharel, Y2Y’s former Mentorship Chair. “This helps young staff learn the Bank’s culture faster – it’s about knowledge and intergenerational learning. A by-product of this initiative is the reverse mentoring that the senior staff receive—learning first-hand the ideas and perspectives of the staff they mentor.”

In October 2011, Y2Y will host the 4th annual Global Youth Conference, following on last year’s successful event that convened more than 700 people in Washington. This year’s theme is youth employability—very relevant given the World Development Report on jobs and the Arab Spring.

“We’re working to make Y2Y more global and virtual, and extending the already dynamic conversations we’re having on SCOOP to our colleagues in Country Offices. We want to give more of a voice to all of our young Bank staff,” enthused Goldstein.

More on Y2Y:
http://www.worldbank.org/y2ycommunity
Y2Y on Facebook:
http://www.facebook.com/y2ywbg
In 1992, Ayse Akin-Karasapan experienced sudden hearing loss in her left ear: “It was an immune system problem, and just happened overnight,” said Akin-Karasapan, who joined the Bank Group in 1985 as an Economist in the Young Professionals Program. “It didn’t change my life so much. It was just an annoyance but I adjusted.”

Two years later, the unthinkable happened: “I had sudden hearing loss again—but with the other ear,” said Akin-Karasapan, who is currently the Director of Delivery and Results in OPCS. She found herself completely deaf. “I fell into a deep, deep silence. Initially, I thought everything was over in terms of a career. I struggled at home to re-establish myself as a mother,” she explained. “First, I was angry, and grappled with doubts that I wasn’t myself anymore. Work became my anchor and my managers’ support made a huge difference.”

By 2000, a novel technique called cochlear implant surgery was becoming much more widespread. It promised to restore a modicum of her hearing. “I wanted to talk to somebody who’d had this done and I found Jonathan Miller.”

A Parallel Journey
In the late 1990s, seven years into a promising Bank Group career, Jonathan Miller lost the hearing in his second ear—and became completely deaf. “I was supervising 10 people at the time. I couldn’t sign. I couldn’t lip read.”

Throughout 21 years at the Bank, Miller has experienced two constants. First, technology has continuously transformed his job managing production in GSD’s printing, graphic, and map design unit. Second, collaboration with colleagues—particularly verbal communication to quality-check the production workflow—has been essential to his job.

Newly deaf, would he be able to do his work? Some co-workers expected Miller to go on disability. But in 1990, the U.S. Congress had signed into law the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibits discrimination in the workplace based on disability.

As a result, Miller found more support than he might have have 10 or 20 years previously: “What really made a difference was my managers,” said Miller, “and the people I worked with, my peers, were extremely supportive.”

A cochlear implant is an electronic device that gives the sense of sound to someone who is severely deaf. Worldwide, nearly 200,000 people have had the surgery.

For Akin-Karasapan, the surgery changed her life. “It improved my quality of life immensely,” she beamed. “It made me more independent in many ways and more capable of having one-on-one conversations with people.”

Miller had experienced a similar transformation, but as with Akin-Karasapan, the results depend on the person he’s talking with and the setting: “Once I had the operation for implants, it helped me go from being completely deaf to being hard of hearing,” said Miller. “In some cases, I even have almost regular hearing in a quiet setting.”

When communication breaks down, Miller may have people write things down: “It can be really frustrating for me when I don’t understand what’s being said,” he allowed.

“I have to communicate really well with people what I need.”

Akin-Karasapan has also learned to be more proactive. “I had to be very vocal to reach out for support—I can’t hear. I need help’—and everyone responded positively,” she said. “You have to make yourself a bit vulnerable to get the support you need. That openness is the best survival mechanism.”

From Sound to Sight
While Akin-Karasapan and Miller were dealing with severe hearing loss, continued on page 3
Out of Personal Tragedy, Opportunity

Andres McAlister endured a comparable personal tragedy—with his sight.

“It was 1994. I was in Africa on mission and started seeing dark spots,” explained McAlister, who joined the Bank Group in 1973, and has worked predominantly in ISG communications, as well as library and archives.

The diagnosis: macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. It was a side effect of his diabetes, and was only getting worse. Within months, he was legally blind.

“I was really scared,” McAlister said. “At that time, I had two young kids. I couldn’t even see my computer screen, but I was hiding it at first. I thought I was going to be left in the street. When you start looking at your computer screen one inch away, you hit a desperation point.”

Fortunately, the Bank Group provided exactly the support McAlister needed. First, he received some hardware: a Telesensory video magnifier, which magnifies documents, newspapers, or photos and reflects them on an adjustable screen. Second, a new software application, Zoomtext, let McAlister zoom into his computer monitor at up to 14-times resolution—which revolutionized his work life.

An Opportunity to Inspire

All three staffers voice a common refrain: gratitude for support they received from managers and peers but especially from an institution that has steadily improved its policies and resources to support persons with disabilities. Our working motto is “What We Can Do, Not What We Can’t.”

For example, Akin-Karasapan has a special assistant who accompanies her to all meetings and takes verbatim notes so Akin-Karasapan doesn’t miss any part of the conversation. The institutional Disabilities Accommodation Fund (DAF) covers the costs, so she’s not at a competitive disadvantage when applying for jobs in new units.

“It makes you a different person. But it was misfortune turning into opportunity for me,” said Akin-Karasapan. “As a manager, I feel that it’s made me much more accommodating, more empathetic. And I was happy to be part of the institutional changes at that time to improve our disability policy and support mechanisms. Since then more than 50 staff experiencing disabilities have come to consult with me.”

Now a retiree and consultant, McAlister has undergone multiple eye surgeries. Benefiting from changes in lifestyle and diet, he has recovered his eyesight substantially and is no longer legally blind: “The people and the Bank’s mission are what make me tick,” he smiled. “I enjoy working at this institution like no other.”

For more, type “disability” in your browser.

Just In – The New WBG-WHO Global Disability Report

A new study released jointly by the World Bank Group and the World Health Organization in June states that the issue of disability is “complex, dynamic, multi-dimensional and contested” around the world as numbers continue to increase.

The Report’s definition of disability is more expansive than a generation ago. It includes a child born with a congenital condition, the soldier who loses a leg to a land mine, or the older person with dementia. More than a billion people, the Report states, live with some form of disability—about 15 percent of the world’s population. Most face adversity and must surmount barriers that stand in their way of full social and economic participation. Childhood disability (birth to age 14) is estimated to be 95 million, of which 13 million have a “severe disability.”

In her speech at the launch of the Report, VP for Human Development, Tamar Manuelyan Atinc, said that “...governments, supported by their development partners, must ensure that people with disabilities have access to all mainstream services, should invest in disability-specific programs when needed, and adopt a national disability strategy and plan of action.” She added that a guidance note to WBG staff is being prepared to ensure accessibility concerns are adequately addressed in civil works, information and communication technologies, and other relevant activities financed by Bank projects.

Oxfam International is encouraging development agencies to support poor countries in learning about and adapting approaches in rich countries, rather than starting from scratch. E-Junction will report on future developments.
Profiles in D&I Leadership

One in a series profiling the recipients of the D&I Leadership Awards.

Jack Stein, Sector Director, Sustainable Development, South Asia

When he won a 2011 Diversity & Inclusion Leadership Award, Sector Director Jack Stein’s nomination read, “Since Jack became Sector Director for the South Asia Sustainable Development Department in February 2009, he has worked tirelessly for a more diverse staff profile in the department. He believes deeply in diversity and has created a work environment in the department (both at HQ and in COs) that is respectful, supportive and very attractive for less represented groups (women, people of SSA/CR descent, etc.) to move his department forward.”

Stein leads an extended team of about 300 staff covering infrastructure, rural, urban, agriculture, social development, and disaster management—or about 80 percent of South Asia’s business. It is perhaps the pinnacle of a 30-year Bank Group career during which Stein served most recently as Senior Manager in the Front Office of Sustainable Development for the Africa Region as well as Sector Manager for Urban in Latin America and the Caribbean.

“When I joined the Bank in 1982, I think my first sense of the lack of diversity was the male-dominated culture. Female managers were the exception rather than the norm,” said Stein. “It was probably Jim Wolfensohn who really launched the most significant efforts. My first reaction was that this was long overdue. And now President Zoellick is taking it in a more forceful way, looking for parity at the senior level.”

“This shows you need to have a more managed approach. If you rely on the market, you’re not going to get the diverse labor force you’re looking for. If you actually want diversity, you have to make an effort.”

Stein works with the managers of his department as a team, putting a lot of effort into encouraging colleagues to coordinate across silos: “I function better in teams. I can get better results when I’m part of a dynamic group. I always thought that when I’m in a broad group, the sum is greater than the parts.”

After almost three decades in the Bank Group, Stein has developed a management approach that works: “First, I believe that most people want to do the right thing, but sometimes don’t know what the right thing is. Second, I believe you have to model what you expect others to do. What you do is as important as what you say. If you want to have an inclusive environment, you have to act inclusively. Third, it’s important to consciously build on people’s strengths—and I think that really works.”

Practically, that means ensuring that teams are well balanced. “There was a moment in the Bank Group that we went very strongly to the TTL concept. And we had a lot of projects with one strong leader. We don’t do that any longer. We have groups of people from various disciplines, highly decentralized, working together.”

Another way that the Bank Group is more open and inclusive is the extent of its collaboration with partner organizations. “In some of our countries, for example Afghanistan and Pakistan, much of our work is done by partner organizations, since we can’t get to insecure areas,” explained Stein. “Because of that, we may have a stronger inclination to work with a group approach.”

“I’m fortunate to be working at the World Bank. I’ve gotten a lot out it. It’s a pleasure leading a committed group of colleagues.”

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