

MEMBER PROFILE



CARMELLE BARNABÉ, CPA, CA

SENIOR FINANCE SPECIALIST

THE GLOBAL FUND TO FIGHT AIDS, TUBERCULOSIS AND MALARIA

Carmelle Barnabé, CPA, CA grew up in Saint Jean Baptiste, Manitoba, a quaint community 10 minutes south of Morris along Highway 75. It was her family home that she left at age 18 to attend the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg.

“It was my first move. I moved to Winnipeg during my second year of university after commuting my first year,” Barnabé explained.

Like many people, she wasn’t sure what career path was right for her.

“I toyed with the idea of teaching. I looked at many different options. I decided that I couldn’t go wrong with a background in business so I focused my attention on the human resources and marketing route. The one thing I knew I didn’t want to do when I started business school however was accounting,” she recalled.

In 2003, Barnabé graduated with a double major in accounting and finance from the Asper School of Business.

“I know, I know,” she said with a laugh. “After my first few courses I realized I excelled in accounting and finance. I didn’t choose it, it chose me.”

Although it would have been impossible to know then, that decision would eventually set the stage for what was to come: an international career based in another continent that focused on some of the world’s biggest challenges.

“I articulated at Ernst and Young and received my accounting designation in 2007. Thereafter, I worked at Manitoba Hydro for just over three years. I was also a sessional lecturer at the Asper School of Business during that time which I really enjoyed.”

Between 2009 and 2010, a few circumstances changed in Barnabé’s life, including the sudden loss of a beloved family member.

“I realized that I only had one life to live, and one thing I always wanted to do was live in Europe.”

Around the same time, she was browsing what is now the CPA Manitoba Career Network and found a posting at the United



Nations based in Budapest, Hungary.

“I applied and three days later I had an interview. Within two weeks they had offered me the position. I was astonished.”

By January 2011, Barnabé had a flat in Budapest and was working with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees implementing International

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Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) on a one-year term.

“They extended my contract by another year after my first year was complete, but a few months into my term I received an offer to work at the World Health Organization.”

Barnabé was on the move again. Her new role was based in Geneva, Switzerland.

“My first year with the WHO was focused around my expertise in IPSAS. I helped the organization convert to

international accounting standards. After that, they asked me to take on the role of Head of Country Support and I was in that role for three years," she said.

As Head of Country Support, she was a point of contact for the organization's regional and country offices for topics such as financial and cash management, reporting, monitoring of financial policies and more.

"It was a busy time. There was a lot to do given the WHO has a presence in 150 countries. There are also a lot of travel opportunities in this type of role," she added.

Barnabé has accumulated a lot of travelling stories over her

“ Sometimes instead of an invoice you'd get a receipt on a handwritten napkin. ”

career so far. She has been to over 40 countries for work or leisure, some great, like her trip to Iceland, and others a bit more challenging, like her trip to Cairo, Egypt.

"I went to our Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office in Cairo in 2013 to help with a range of financial issues. A week into my stay major clashes between the security forces and protesters erupted as a result of a coup d'état."

"The hotel I was staying at was in the middle of the clashes. It was incredibly stressful and heart breaking. There was a lot of uncertainty as to what the next hours and days would bring, and whether the clashes would continue to escalate. The country was under a state of emergency and a curfew was imposed. I was sequestered in my room for several days until the decision was made to evacuate me."

Other trips proved rewarding.

"In 2014 I was sent to our African Regional Office in Brazzaville, Congo to provide support on the Ebola crisis. I was there to assist with the financial challenges that arose from the outbreak and provide back-up support where needed. Countries impacted by Ebola experienced exponential inflation for basic commodities. A bottle of bleach went up 400 to 500 percent as an example. Many of the affected areas didn't have access to regular financial systems making payments for services and goods difficult, and making cash the only means of payment, which brings with it its own set of risks and challenges. Sometimes instead of an invoice you'd get a receipt on a handwritten napkin. Other times you wouldn't get anything at all."

After the outbreak, Barnabé worked on writing financial policies and best practices based on her firsthand account of the financial challenges that a large-scale crisis can have. These policies could be instrumental in improving aid and

providing an even better response should another large-scale crisis happen in the future.

After four years with the WHO, Barnabé became a Senior Finance Specialist at the Global Fund. Still based in Switzerland, Barnabé works on the Fund's largest portfolio which is valued at approximately 1.1 billion dollars.

"The primary objective is to provide financial and programmatic assistance to countries dealing with three diseases: malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS. We work with a country's own systems, like the Ministry of Health and local NGOs, to help support a more robust health care system. We fund programs that range from access to medicine and treatment, to distribution, to education and capacity building."

It's a demanding, multi-faceted job.

"It's the biggest challenge of my career so far. I work with a country team with diverse technical backgrounds, and along with national and local governments and our implementing partners, we make important decisions on a daily basis which have both programmatic and financial implications.

“ ...apply for the job you want and go for it, because you never know where it might take you. ”

Will we fund this program? Is this activity value for money? What will achieve maximum impact? And of course at the end of the day, health care for millions of people can be impacted by these decisions. At the same time, donors are watching—the global community is watching."

Although her career can be intense and the work seemingly never-ending, Barnabé credits her accounting designation for helping her get to this point—along with advice she's followed over the years.

"CPAs are very versatile professionals. We are really good at adapting to challenging situations and we have the knowledge and expertise to problem solve. I'd like to say I've managed my career but sometimes it manages you. I didn't take the safe route and I'm happy I didn't. I always say, apply for the job you want and go for it, because you never know where it might take you."

As Barnabé proved, it can certainly take you from a small rural town in Manitoba to Geneva, Switzerland to help tackle some of the world's most important issues.