

Nepean teen joins others to Free the Children

BY STEPH WILLEMS
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EMC News - When you're 15 years old, it is sometimes hard to see beyond the walls of your high school. With so many immediate social and educational challenges to tackle, the problems of kids half a world away often don't warrant a second thought.

Anisha Dhalla isn't one of those people. The Centrepointe teen recently returned from a trip to India where she worked as a volunteer for Free the Children, helping to construct a primary school for children whose most pressing needs include food and literacy.

It wasn't the first time Anisha has gone overseas to perform humanitarian work. In the summer of 2009, the Elmwood School student accompanied her older sister Sophia on another Free the Children trip to construct a school in Kenya.

Both sisters are deeply involved in what they do. Sophia was head of the Amnesty International Club at the school, and Anisha - who has always been interested in charity work - took on a humanitarian role following a Free the Children presentation at Elmwood.



Anisha Dhalla, 15, is seen in rural India with children she helped during a Free the Children trip this summer. The group helped construct a school to spread literacy to local children.

"I attended a workshop in Grade 9, and afterwards gave them my e-mail," she said. "I then decided to go on the trip to Kenya in the summer of '09."

Because she wanted to deliver money to sustain the school in India, Anisha began actively fundraising, ultimately surpassing her goal of \$2,500.

The group of 20 who traveled to Kenya and the 12 who went to India came

mainly from the Vancouver and Toronto areas. Being confronted with such a different geographical and cultural landscape was a learning experience, however, the similarities between those cultures and hers quickly became obvious to Anisha.

"Kids are the same everywhere - they want to have a good time, and be loved," she said. "They were so thankful for the opportu-

nity to be educated."

Before Free the Children constructed a school in the small Indian village located high in the mountains, nearly all of the kids in the area were illiterate. To bridge the language barrier, the volunteers were given Hindi lessons every day for the two and a half weeks they were in India.

The volunteers were mainly youth in their mid to late teens, who were quick-

ly put to work constructing the schools - hauling bricks, breaking rocks, digging the foundation. All the while the group interacted with the kids, who sometimes offered to help build the classroom that they would soon be learning in.

"It teaches them leadership," said Anisha's mother, Sahira Charania. "They form a bond with the kids, seeing how they lived and their homes. In these villages people are lucky to have one light bulb in their hut, but everyone smiles, everyone's happy."

Ms. Charania came to Canada as a Ugandan refugee in 1972, her husband from Tanzania. Together they worked their way up to provide their children with opportunities that so many kids in their home countries don't have access to. Both realized the importance of allowing their daughters to go to Kenya and India and work amongst children in need.

"One night after a day of hard work the group was taken to a restaurant and split into three groups - high, middle and low," explained Ms. Charania. "The high group was given plates and plates of food; the middle group was given [modest] portions. She was in the low group...and had

to sit on the floor and watch everyone else eat and drink. Afterwards, they were given one plate of leftovers to share amongst them and eat with their hands. She told me that food had never tasted so good."

Exercises like that, coupled with the experience of working amongst locals, gave the Canadian kids a taste of what living in those regions is like. Those experiences led Anisha and three friends to form a Free the Children Club at Elmwood School; their first meeting was held on Monday.

On Sept. 30, Anisha traveled to Toronto, where she served as a 'crowd pumper' for 18,000 kids gathering for Me to We Day, a Free the Children gathering featuring singers and speakers, including founder Craig Kielburger.

The lasting friendships gained from the two trips has compelled Anisha to look into other volunteer trips. Ecuador and China are two destinations she would like visit.

Her education might allow her to do more good work in the future - she is considering pursuing medical training following high school, and, if successful in becoming a doctor, plans to put her skills to good use in developing countries.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 25 IS VOTING DAY

You can also vote in advance!

- **Advance Voting Days**
October 2 (10-5 pm)
October 14 (10-8 pm)
- **Voting Day**
October 25 (10-8 pm)

Watch for your voter notice in the mail

If you are a qualified voter and your name is on the Voters' List, you will receive a voter notice in late September, which lists:

- your ward
- your school board designation
- where you can vote on voting day and advance voting days

Is your name on Voters' List?

If you have not received your notice by September 30, find out if your name is on the Voters' List. Check online at ottawa.ca/vote or contact the Elections Office, any Client Service Centre, or City Hall at 3-1-1.

If your name does not appear or is wrong, you can obtain an Application to Add or Amend My Name on the Voters' List form (from the Elections Office, any Client Service Centre or downloadable online at ottawa.ca/vote) and bring the completed form to your voting place.

Unable to vote in advance votes or on Voting Day?

To have a friend or family member (a voting proxy) appointed to vote for you, complete an Appointment of Voting Proxy form (available as of September 10 after 2 p.m. at the Elections Office or any Client Service Centre). To be certified, the person voting on your behalf must bring the completed form to the

Elections Office or any Client Service Centre during regular business hours or on one of the advance voting days from noon to 5 p.m. Deadline for certification is 4:30 p.m. October 25.

Bring ID when you come **NEW!**

To vote in the 2010 municipal election you will be required to show identification. One piece of ID that shows your name, signature and Ottawa address, or two pieces, one with your name and signature and a second showing your name and address, will be necessary. All acceptable pieces of ID are listed online at ottawa.ca/vote and also in a brochure that accompanies the voter notice mailed to your home.

Remember, to vote, you must be:

- A resident of the city of Ottawa, an owner or tenant of land in the city, or the spouse of such an owner or tenant
- A Canadian citizen
- At least 18 years old
- Not prohibited from voting by law

You are entitled to vote only once in the municipal election. Your voting location is determined by your permanent place of residence if you live in the city of Ottawa, or qualifying address if you are a non-resident.

More information

Elections Office
1221 Cyrville Rd, Unit B
Ottawa ON K1J 7S8
Phone: 613-580-2660
(TTY: 613-580-2401)
Fax: 613-580-2661
elections@ottawa.ca

Client Service Centres

- City Hall, 110 Laurier Avenue West
- Orléans, 255 Centrum Boulevard
- Kanata, 580 Terry Fox Drive
- Ben Franklin Place, 101 Centrepointe Drive
- Metcalfe, 8243 Victoria Street
- North Gower, 2155 Roger Stevens Drive
- Kinburn, 5670 Carp Road