

# Canadian teenager gives poor children ACCESS to a dream

For most high school students, a trip to the Dominican Republic would have resulted possibly in some pleasant memories of a Caribbean vacation. For a few, there might be a deeper understanding of the struggles of children in the developing world. It would be the rare student who returned from the trip with a burning desire to help improve their lives. Daniel Francavilla, then a 15-year-old student at Brampton's St. Marguerite d'Youville Secondary School, was that rare student. The year after his trip, he set up ACCESS (Allowing Children a Chance at Education), a non-profit organization that assists children in developing countries by providing them school supplies. Confidence Bound asked Daniel, now 18, what it was that drove him to do what he did.

## What inspired the launch of ACCESS?

It was the kind and welcoming, underprivileged and unschooled children I met through the high-school Exposure Trip that I was privileged to have participated in as a grade 10 student. ACCESS was inspired by a need to make a difference, sprouting from these personal requests for the simplest things, like pencils and paper, candies, and ultimately school uniforms, so that they could attend school.

## How did you pinpoint 'school supplies' as the real need for deserving children in developing countries?

We based this focus on the fact that education is a basic human right. Unfortunately, nearly 120 million children are out of school around the world today. School supplies are not the only need for these children; however items like school uniforms, classroom supplies, and transportation are all key in providing a child with the opportunity for an education. In many cases, schools exist,



Helping hand... Daniel in the Dominican Republic

but they may be inadequate sizes, inaccessible for some communities, or low on supplies. There have been direct requests for these items from the countries in which we serve.

## Since ACCESS' launch in 2006, how much has

## the organization raised – in cash and kind?

In total we have raised over \$20,000 in addition to the thousands of donated school supplies we have collected.

## How are funds raised or donations collected? Who's involved?

At our various fundraisers, school speaking engagements and informational booths, we accept monetary donations. We accept supplies at our Annual School Supply Drive in August. Some funds are raised through selling Fair Trade Certified products, such as Cocoa Camino chocolates and sugar, which benefit the labourers in impoverished countries directly. We have also sold Starbucks Fair Trade coffee very successfully in schools. The ACCESS team members are involved in collecting donations, whether it is at an official ACCESS event or through their own schools.

## Who have been the beneficiaries? Is there a process in place to identify the beneficiaries?

The beneficiaries have been the hundreds of students living on the *bateyes* (sugar workers' towns) in the Dominican Republic who have received school uniforms; the community in Itagui, Antioquia, who benefited from the safe outdoor area we added to their school in Colombia; the school of over 2,000 students in Honduras to which collected supplies were shipped. In most cases ACCESS works directly through established organizations on the ground, such as the Grey Sisters of the Immaculate Conception in Consuelo, Dominican Republic.

## What have been the most rewarding and challenging aspects of your work?

The most rewarding aspect of my work is in knowing that through ACCESS and our donors, I have been able to help deserving individuals around the world. Another very rewarding aspect is the realization that the ACCESS team can make a difference.

There are challenges with every project and initiative: guaranteeing that donors will continue to respond well, maintaining contacts in the developing world, finding sponsors, developing fundraisers, and finding the time to arrange presentations are all challenges that myself and the members of ACCESS face.

• For more information on the charity and how you can contribute, visit [www.accesscharity.ca](http://www.accesscharity.ca).

