

Changing the World with a Giving Heart

By Artour, Grade 11

Growing up in a fairly well-off family in a Russian suburb, I had, at a very young age, developed a desire to help people less fortunate than me. Whenever I saw a poor man or woman walking down the street lugging bags full of their few belongings, I felt guilty that my fate was better than theirs. I would tell my parents this, and they would usually tell me that it was their own fault they ended up on the street. The world seemed like a very harsh place from the view of a young boy, and about three years ago, I started viewing it in a completely different way. I saw around me every day little things that I, at my young age, could do to make our world a better place, because I realized I was someone, just like every other person alive today.

I moved to Canada at the age of seven. I was greatly made fun of, being the newest foreigner at a school mostly filled with born-Canadian students. I took their teases and wedgies for a year, before moving to a different town, happily switching schools. I felt accepted at my new school, and I was. From previous experience, when innocent victims of self-righteous bullies were being attacked, I made sure I had done something to help, and in that case, it was to tell a teacher. Surprisingly for most, that actually proved to be effective, boosting my self-esteem, as well as the feelings of the bullies' victims. Even a small step like that can make a big difference.

Two years ago I moved to Victoria. It is here where I discovered and began to understand problems beyond bullying. Climate change, homelessness, and issues involving social justice stuck out to me the most. At school, I joined clubs and groups working to achieve goals around those areas. I joined clubs like ESCAPE, which centers around the environment and peace, and Interact, which works around social justice. I immediately started helping out with events and projects, because I still had that feeling from elementary school that the smallest things could make the biggest difference. It is through these clubs that I had also become most engaged in my community. Whether it was a food drive, a seniors' night, gift or money collecting, I was there to pitch in, because I knew that my small deed could go a very long way.

In the last little while, I've also tried to focus on making a difference on my own. I've joined the United Way of Greater Victoria's Youth Advisory Council, a council which promotes community leadership, volunteerism, and philanthropy among youth. This experience has opened many doors for me, and helps me continue doing what I do. In a great land like Canada, I couldn't bare seeing homeless people on the streets of Victoria. I find it hard to rid peoples' stereotypes of them, when really they are human beings just like ourselves. I have volunteered for Al Tysick, a man well-known in our community for advocating for the homeless. There are many opportunities for people of all ages and interests in our community, long-term and short-term, to volunteer and dedicate time, and that again is something small that goes a long way.

Most importantly, there is nothing like the feeling of goodness after you know you've done something useful and good. You know that you've made a difference, whether you know it or not, a difference that may go a long way. So next time you walk by a homeless person, throw a quarter in their jar or say "hi". Put the stereotypes aside, and believe me, that is one small thing that will definitely go a long way. Go ahead: try it. I challenge you.