

# MAKING CHANGE

Tips From an Underage Overachiever



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## **12 Year-Old Richmond Hill Activist Bilaal Rajan Wins Canada Day Youth Award**

At age twelve, Richmond Hill children's rights activist, fundraiser and UNICEF children's ambassador Bilaal Rajan is already a force to be reckoned with. An accomplished author, his book *Making Change: Tips from an Underage Overachiever* (160 pages, Orca Book Publishers) is an operating manual for making a difference, no matter what your age.

"From early on," says Rajan, "I could see that millions of other young people around the world didn't have it so good. I realized two specific things: that I had to get involved and make a difference, and that I would need a lot of help in order to make that change."

**Bilaal recently won the 2009 Canada Day Youth Award, which recognizes young people throughout the country each year for their contribution to the community.**

At 4, Rajan sold clementine oranges door-to-door in his neighbourhood, raising money for victims of the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, India. At 7, he began his own foundation ([www.bilaalrajan.com](http://www.bilaalrajan.com)) dedicated to heightening awareness of children's issues and fundraising for those in need. Since then, he has raised millions of dollars for various children's causes. In 2005, he was chosen as an official Child Ambassador for UNICEF Canada and traveled to central Africa to speak with children who lost parents to HIV/AIDS.

Bilaal recently completed his latest global initiative, the Barefoot Challenge, where he lived life without shoes for seven days during National Volunteer Week. Thousands of young people from more than 25 countries around the world kicked off their shoes to better understand the struggles faced by underprivileged children in the Global South, many of whom cannot afford shoes, let alone other basic necessities. Richmond Hill MPP Reza Moridi also participated and made a statement about the Barefoot Challenge at the Ontario Legislature.

Just last week, Bilaal traveled to South Africa to meet personally with Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. Bilaal also keeps a busy touring schedule and speaks to thousands of children at schools every year.

"My goal," says Rajan, "is to inspire one million kids to take action and help create a more peaceful and caring world. "Together, we can make a difference."

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