

MAKING CHANGE

Tips From an Underage Overachiever



BIOGRAPHY

Sixteen year-old Bilaal Rajan isn't your average young person. The Toronto-based children's and environmental activist is also a globally-recognized motivational speaker, published author, tireless fundraiser, and UNICEF Canada Ambassador. He founded an organization, Making Change Now (www.makingchangenow.com), to heighten awareness of youth issues and help kids in need all over the world.

"My main goal is to have one million young people take action, get involved in their communities and help protect our environment," says Bilaal, whose accomplishments became the content of his newly-published book, *Making Change: Tips from an Underage Overachiever* (www.makingchangenow.com, Orca Books). In it, Bilaal focuses on being creative, thinking big and being bold. He shows young people how possible - and how much fun - it really is to make a difference.

When Bilaal was only four years old, he sold Clementine oranges door-to-door to raise funds for the victims of the 2001 earthquake in Gujarat, India. It was a small start, but he later sold handmade acrylic plates to raise \$1,200 for HIV/AIDS orphans, helped build a school in Tanzania for HIV/AIDS orphans, sold cookie boxes to raise over \$6,000 and raised in-kind donations of over half a million dollars of goods for the affected people and children of Hurricane-devastated Haiti, as well as tens of thousands of dollars for the World Partnership Walk over the past decade, which goes directly to poverty relief.

In 2004, Bilaal issued a Canada Kids Earthquake Challenge, urging and challenging young people everywhere to get involved and make a difference in the lives of children devastated by the Tsunami in south-east Asia. To date, he has raised millions of dollars for children's programs around the world.

As a UNICEF children's ambassador, Bilaal has traveled to Malawi, Indonesia, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives to personally see how the funds he raised were making a difference. Three years ago, he volunteered in Tanzania, conducting HIV/AIDS workshops with young people, some of whom had lost mothers and fathers from the disease. In August 2008, he traveled to Ecuador help build schools.

In June 2009, Bilaal traveled to South Africa to meet personally with Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu to discuss his projects and new ways in which young people can become more active in changing the world. He also spoke at several schools and met with young students.

In August 2009, Bilaal went on a two-week scientific expedition of the Arctic called "Students on Ice," where 75 young people learned how increasing greenhouse gas emissions and climate change are affecting the Aboriginal peoples of the far North. He saw first-hand the destructive changes caused by global warming.

Bilaal started his most popular initiative, the Barefoot Challenge, in 2009. Every June 1st, International Children's Day, he lives life without shoes to raise awareness about child poverty in the developing world. Thousands of young people from more than a dozen countries around the world kick off their shoes to better understand the struggles faced by poor children everywhere, many of whom cannot afford shoes, let alone other basic necessities. "The Barefoot Challenge is an international call to action," says Bilaal. "And when people ask me why I don't have shoes, I tell them because millions of children throughout the world don't either."

Through his very busy speaking schedule, Bilaal is raising further awareness about the relationship between environmental harm and global poverty. "Further damage to our ecosystems will cause underprivileged children even greater hardship," he says. "We can't let global warming continue to threaten the waterways, agriculture and food security of millions of people in underdeveloped countries. We need action now."

Bilaal's motto is "Together, we can make a difference." He believes this isn't just a youthful dream, but our destiny.