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Starting on the right foot, with pencils in hand

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METRO CANADA
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Most entrepreneurs are at least old enough to drive, but 13-year-old Divya Shah is proof that helping people has no age requirement. The Grade 8 student from Markham, Ont. recently started her own local chapter of Pencils For Kids (P4K), a charity that focuses on putting learning materials, especially pencils, into the hands of fledgling students in the West African country of Niger.



RAFAEL BRUSILOV/METRO CANADA

Divya Shah, right, with Pencils For Kids co-founder Robin Mednick.

Divya has volunteered before at Toronto camps for preschoolers but decided to take the next step after hearing about the terrible lack of resources young students in Niger faced, often sharing a single pencil between 30 of their classmates.

"I've always wanted to help people, I just didn't know how. When I found out that 30 kids shared one pencil in Niger, I looked at Pencils For Kids and thought, 'This is something unique, I really want to be a part of this,'" Divya said.

Within days of getting involved, Divya contacted recycled paper product company Ecojot and convinced them to donate \$15,000 worth of notebooks and 45 kg of paper to students in Niger as well as tie P4K into the company's own campaign to donate one notebook to kids in need for each journal and sketchbook it sells. For her efforts, Markham mayor Frank Scarpitti gave Divya the Mayor's Youth Award on May 2.

A passionate student, Divya wants to ensure other kids have the same opportunities to learn and succeed that she does.

"Education is a priority for me – it determines you whole life and with it you are able to achieve so many things. Many children don't have the gift of education so Pencils For Kids reaches out to those kids and I wanted to help however I could," Divya said.

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26-May-10 09:40

Great Example for Everyone

I work with the Young Social Entrepreneurs of Canada, a non-profit here in Toronto, and I'm always excited to see young people with inspired ideas taking action to improve local and global communities. We are all connected after all, and technology has enabled us to get even closer. I would love to see more stories like Divya's published.

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