

## Support grows for Pencils for Kids

Hiba Kesebi, Special To The Beaver

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In Niger a pencil is more than just lead on paper.

It's a luxury. A privilege. A writing utensil shared by a class of 30 students.

For Grade 11 Abbey Park High School student Vivian Leung, it's a reason to help.

Leung, the school's Rotary Interact president, organized a school presentation, Oct. 3 to kick off Abbey Park's Wear a Pencil Campaign.

The campaign is to raise money for the Pencils for Kids charity.

"I attended a Rotary Interact conference in February 2008 and Robin Mednick (founder of Pencils For Kids) was there talking about how 30 students were sharing one pencil in Niger and it made me want to do something," said Leung.

That's why she organized a school campaign that saw students building sculptures out of pencils.

Mednick came from Thornhill to Abbey Park for the event.

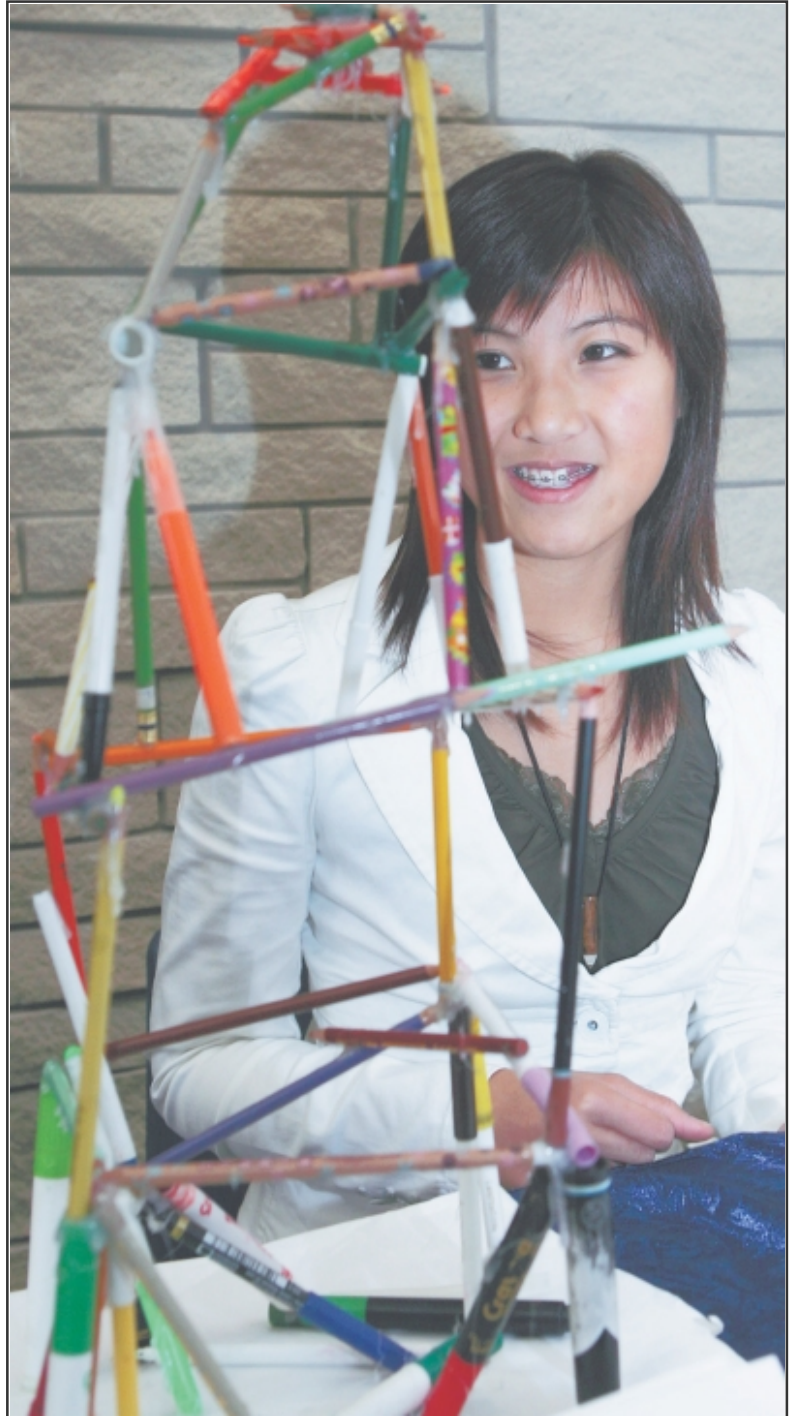
Like Leung, she heard about the situation in Niger and was motivated to act for a change.

In December 2005, she made a phone call to a friend who had returned from Niger.

To her surprise, he sounded depressed. Like any good friend, she asked the simple question: "What's going on with you? You sound dreadful."

The answer she got left her equally disheartened.

"He said 'Robin I can't get the images of the kids of Niger out of my mind .... I can't function.



**Support grows for Pencils for Kids. PENCILS FOR KIDS:** Abbey Park High School student Vivian Leung and her schoolmates recently held a Pencils for Kids fundraising campaign that featured pencil sculptures and the sale of pencil necklaces and pencils to raise money for school children in Niger. *MICHAEL IVANIN / SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER*

Thirty children in one class were sharing one pencil.”

“I was dumbfounded on the phone,” said Mednick, “and I was heartbroken and normally when ... things break your heart ... you read them, you hear them, you digest them and then you move on to the next stage of your life. This one stopped me in my tracks,” she continued, her eyes fixed at the crowd of high school students gathered in Abbey Park’s gymnasium.

Motivated to help, she called the Canadian Embassy in Niger and told them that she wanted to donate school supplies. They gave her the number of the country’s former minister of education.

Together they created a wish list of the supplies needed in Niger.

Mednick recalled rushing into a local Office Depot in Thornhill after the phone call.

“I walked into Office Depot and asked for the manager...I said ‘Look you don’t know me, but 30 kids are sharing one pencil, can you help me?’”

His answer had her smiling.

“He looked at me and he said ‘Robin, I decided this year it wasn’t going to be about me. I want to join your team.’

“I almost fell over. I mean who answers like that. It turns out that there are a lot of good people,” she said.

With her first mission almost complete, Mednick decided to call upon Molly Killingbeck, an old friend and a 1984-silver-medal Olympian.

Killingbeck said she thought of her nine-year-old son when Mednick first told her of the initiative and that motivated her to help.

“I see my now nine-year-old and all the wonderful opportunities that he had and I want to make sure that the kids in Niger and all the young children in the world have the opportunity to achieve their education goal,” said Killingbeck.

The Etobicoke Hall of Fame inductee said her son sold some of his toys recently, so he can raise money for the charity.

“You’re never too young to get it,” she said in tears. “My nine-year-old understands what we’re doing and he realizes how important it is to share with other children.”

With Killingbeck and the support of others, Mednick sent her first package to Liboré, Niger two years ago.

Today, Pencils for Kids has done more than just bring 2,000 pounds of supplies to the students of Liboré. It built a school and is in the process of building a library.

“It’s really inspired me and motivated me to get involved,” said Leung of the charity.

Leung’s campaign was a success. By the end of the effort, approximately 300 necklaces had been sold, raising \$1,530.

For more information, visit [www.pencilsforkids.com](http://www.pencilsforkids.com) .