

Can we all help to save the world?

Mark Pavilons



Recent events have shown just how altruistic people can be.

Canadians are known for their generosity and desperate times call for desperate measures to be sure. We are rising to the challenges ahead to help our fellow men, women and children.

That's how it should be.

The current Syrian 'refugee crisis' is a case in point. Individuals, community groups and government agencies are coming together to welcome thousands of new Canadians in the coming weeks. I caught a glimpse of some of these newcomers on various TV programs over the weekend.

These are families, some broken apart by conflict. These are teens and children. These are able-bodied men and women.

One father proclaimed his love for Canada, and also his love of his homeland. I get it.

In King, we have our own King for Refugees, a group of volunteers, church groups and individuals who are eager to help and pitch in. Undoubtedly, these efforts will result in a great show of support for some of these new residents.

Canada welcomes hundreds of thousands of immigrants each year and many settle within the GTA. We are all immigrants -- most of us the result of a massive post-war boom. My parents left their war-torn European homelands for this wonderful land. I remember them talking about arriving in Toronto via Quebec in the early 1950s and settling in the Roncesvalles area. This was the most vibrant, cultural mix ever seen. It was a community where everyone, from dozens of countries, lived and worked and socialized. My mom didn't speak English when she arrived, but learned quickly and went to work right away in a factory that made blue jeans. It was a marvellously uncomplicated time, when many rose from chaos to build their dreams in Canada.

Undoubtedly, my parents, like millions of others, received a great deal of help and support along the way. Grocers ran tabs; landlords were lenient; neighbours pitched in. They did this without a second thought. They did this because they all came from chaos and had respect for one another and all human life.

Isn't that how it should be today?

For those who band together to help the current influx of displaced families, they are making a difference. These people will be integrated into our very colourful multicultural mosaic. They will learn, excel and contribute. They will give back.

That's the important lesson in all of this. It's like 'paying it forward.' We can all contribute, in our own way, to boosting the human condition and making a difference.

There are always naysayers and opponents. I'm not going to get into the arguments and political policy debates here.

There are 'strangers' in our communities. We don't know their stories or their backgrounds. We don't ask. If they need help, we're there for them. It's as simple as that.

When I see the hope in the eyes of these newcomers, I am humbled. If they lived through such adversity and arrive here with determination, there is nothing they can't do.

Just think, there could be a few Einsteins, Mother Teresas, Ghandis and Mandelas in this group of immigrants. ?Our human compassion binds us the one to the other ??not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future,??Mandela once said.

That's it in a nutshell really.

My 17-year-old daughter Lexie is on a mission to make the world a better place.

This January, she'll be heading to the Dominican Republic for the fourth year in a row, helping Haitian sugar cane workers. Their situation is beyond desperate. After four years, and helping hundreds of souls, I?have to wonder if the need will ever end.

But I?would never tell Lexie to stop. She can, and does, make a difference in the lives of others, even if it's for a day, week or month. I?wouldn't dare curb her enthusiasm and I?often wished I could join her. This year, my son Liam is going, too. There's no question he will return with a different perspective.

Lexie is also going to Kenya in July 2016, on a three-week volunteer mission through Me to We. She'll be helping at a girls' school, pitch in to build irrigation and water systems and even dig latrines! She'll be staying in a barracks-style facility with only a generator for electricity and no running water. She's there to help empower the local population to aspire and see the goodness in others.

That's a very special thing. How many of us could do this?

Lexie is led by her heart. This African experience is quite costly and we are not in a position to help her at the moment. She's trying to raise money and secure some sponsors.

I?mention this because these are qualities we hope to see in our young people. If our future is in the hands of such youth (and there are thousands like Lexie out there), I think they will change the world.

Lexie asked Santa this year for ?world peace??and she meant it!

Maybe we should all ask for that same thing, and really mean it!

I?applaud everyone to gives of themselves to help another human being. I?praise everyone who turns words into actions to affect change.

Keep up the fight, and don't let anyone tell you it's impossible.