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Local Eighth-Grader Runs Nonprofit for Kids

By KARA BECKER

For the average 13-year-old, life generally consists of going to school, hanging out with friends and mastering the latest video games. But for New Hampshire eighth-grader Krishna "Dylan" Mahalingam, activities include taking advanced placement math courses at the local high school, running a global nonprofit for kids and meeting President Obama in the spring – all while helping build and maintain multiple Web sites to further the mission of eight different humanitarian efforts as part of the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals.



Krishna "Dylan" Mahalingam is the founder of Lil' MDGs, a nonprofit that seeks to further the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals through kid power.

But it's really not a big deal, Dylan says.

It all started in 2004 when Dylan was about 8 years old.

"I went on a trip to India to Chennai in Hyderabad," said Dylan, a resident of Derry. "It was the first time I witnessed what poverty really was. I saw animals wandering around on the street, people begging for money, children begging in alleyways instead of going to school. When I was 4 I used to waste the food on my plate, and my parents would tell me all the food I wasted could feed a whole family in India. I never understood until then."

After the trip, Dylan said he talked to his older sister, Ammu (who is now 18 and a junior at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore), who introduced him to the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals. As a result, Dylan founded Lil' MDGs, a nonprofit organization that works to leverage the power of the Internet to educate, inspire and empower youth all over the world to work together to meet the eight Millennium Development Goals. The ambitious goals were created by the United Nations at the Millennium Development Summit in 2000. They range from halving extreme poverty to stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS by the target date of 2015.

The Lil' MDGs organization has coordinated with 11 volunteers (seven of them are children under the age of 15) who work at least 20 hours a week regularly on different issues. Dylan – who founded the organization with the help of his sister and now serves as CEO – has helped mobilize over 1,300 children in 34 countries, all of whom work at least 10 hours a month on local issues, and has enlisted the help of thousands of other children who work on a per-project basis based on their individual interests. Lil' MDGs also has partnered at the local level with nonprofit Jayme's Fund for Social Justice, another Derry-based nonprofit dedicated to humanitarian work and run by 17-year-old Jayme Anne Lipkin-Moore.

"It's not just me working on [Lil' MDGs]," Dylan said. "There are a lot of other kids helping me out. I have a little cousin across the country who helps me and can take over when I'm older. I can help her when I'm older. This won't be my full-time career; that will probably be something in technology."

It is Dylan's interest and expertise in technology that has made the Lil' MDGs organization possible, he said.

"My favorite part is being able to interact with other people, because working with other people and helping others is rewarding. Doing this without actually meeting them is an amazing thing – to use technology [that way]. I love doing it," Dylan said.

Dylan also maintains that he doesn't think that kids today are as apathetic about issues like global poverty and gender equality as some people may think.

"I honestly don't think anyone would care less about these topics – either they don't know about them or don't know how to get involved," he said. "I think children are very empathetic about these causes. The mission behind the Lil' MDGs is to try to mobilize young children as a driving force behind the efforts to achieve the Millennium Goals."

The talented eighth-grader, along with other Lil' MDGs volunteers, will be given the opportunity to meet President Obama and officials from the Environmental Protection Agency in April to talk about climate change.



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"I'm curious to see what [the president] has to say about climate change, as I'm worried that it could be a factor for [achieving] the MDGs," Dylan said.

High achievement seems to run in the family. Dylan's father is a technology director and his sister is an advanced biomedical engineering student. The two siblings are incredibly close, and Dylan said they talk at least once a day. He's also helped found and set up Web sites for four different projects to educate kids on issues such as animal cruelty and tsunami relief awareness. He has been recognized for his humanitarian work numerous times, and has been invited to make several presentations on his activism. His family even maintains a professional Web site (www.dylan-m.us) to document his busy and very public lifestyle.

Dylan now is taking a 10th grade math class at Derry-based Pinkerton Academy, the largest independent academy in the United States. He said he can't wait to start school there next year as a freshman. He's also looking forward to being able to choose his own classes, and is planning on taking geometry, biology, Spanish and video production. The video/technology studies are is what really excites him, he said, and he plans on continuing to specialize in that field.

Dylan somehow also manages to find time for hobbies such as tennis, basketball, snowboarding and swimming. The renaissance wonder kid also plays multiple musical instruments including piano, saxophone, guitar, the Indian drum mrdanga and traditional Indian hand cymbals called kartals. On top of all that, he also has a brown belt in karate.

Despite the varied skills and many accomplishments, Dylan stays humble and insists that his accomplishments would not be possible without the hard work of others.

"I really want to make sure there's a line in the story saying that I would really like to thank the Derry School District, teachers, administrators, and children from all over the world who have worked with me on Lil' MDGs, Oracle Education Foundation, We are Family Foundation and TakingItGlobal for all their support with my work – both academic and non-academic," he wrote to an INDIA New England reporter in an e-mail. "I want to add an acknowledgment to the story because it seems like the right thing to do.

"To paraphrase Teddy Roosevelt: The world is not a good place for any of us if it's not a good place for all of us," said Dylan. "And I don't think the world is a good place for any of us right now; there's no equality around the world."

For more information about Lil' MDGs, visit www.lilmdgs.org.

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