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Derry teen going green Derry teen determined to change the world

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DERRY — Dylan Mahalingam wants to make a difference.

The 13-year-old is the founder of a nonprofit group, Lil' MDGs, that conducts projects around the world, a member of an environmental organization at his school, and he has recently begun advocating against animal cruelty. SCIBLast week, Dylan was one of three local students who traveled to Washington, D.C., to accept a President's Environmental Youth Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for his work with Green Your Lives, the educational organization he works with at Gilbert H. Hood Middle School. The project was one of 10 selected across the country for the award. Nisha Naik, Hillary Hughes and their teacher Kristin Yeaton also accepted the award in Washington.

"I feel happy that there is a difference being made," he said.

The group created a Web site and videos to help other children reduce energy use and recycle. So far, they have helped their Derry school convert to using 100 percent recycled paper and decrease paper use by 30 percent.

Other projects include public service announcements, educational posters and videos for schools across the country. SCIBThey also have created a model of a solar-powered car and although Dylan can't drive, he'd like to apply the technology to a real car.

"We're thinking it could be a possibility for the future," he said.

EPA administrator Lisa Jackson said their project paves the way for a brighter future for the planet.

Winning projects were selected by the EPA's New England office based on their long-term environmental benefits, impact on local communities and the group's accomplishments. SCIBYeaton said Green Your Lives has inspired students as far away as Concord to show their movies and make videos at their schools.

"They're really getting students involved in learning more about going green," Yeaton said.

Environmental issues are important to Dylan, but most of his work has been with poor and hungry children around the globe. Through the Internet, he has worked with children in about 30 states and 30 countries around the world doing projects such as building a dormitory for a school in Tibet and a computer center, library and hospital in India.

A few years ago, Dylan sent backpacks filled with donated school supplies and hygiene products to children in poor countries.

But his latest project will take place in his hometown. He's putting together a human rights-themed play, "Speak Truth to Power," that will raise money for Lil' MDGs' projects.

But even though Dylan has his hand in all these different projects, he said it's rewarding knowing he is making the world a better place to live. He regularly talks with people across the globe through an Internet-based telephone program, Skype.