

Published: May 07, 2009

Hood student makes an impact on the world

By Julie Huss

[jhuss@derrynews.com](mailto:jhuss@derrynews.com)



DERRY — He's a young man looking to make a difference in the world.

For all the causes 13-year-old Dylan Mahalingam believes in these days, not one seems more important or valuable than any other.

That's why the Gilbert H. Hood Middle School eighth-grader gives of himself to issues and needs, and is being honored with a World Youth Summit Award, given within the framework of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society.

The award showcases young designers, technologists, and online creators who work to contribute on a global scale to address poverty, the environment, or just to share knowledge and empower young people around the world.

In Mahalingam's case, it's his work creating the organization Lil' MDGs and using the power of digital media and the Internet to empower children around the globe to meet the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.

He was chosen from more than 600 applicants hailing from over 100 countries.

"It is indeed an honor," Mahalingam said of his award, but added it's not he alone that makes the difference. It's the hard work of many youth joined together under Lil' MDGs and inspiring others to make a difference.

It all started for him as a young child, traveling in India and seeing the poverty up close in many areas.

"It made it a lot more tangible," he said.

Forming his Lil' MDGs initiative gave him a chance to reach out and do something about the hunger and poverty facing so many around the world.

Lil' MDGs now has an official branch in Japan, Mahalingam said. The program is also working with a school district in Argentina to set up a similar network.

"I view this recognition as not an honor to me, but as an honor to just about every youth who has ever worked for and with Lil' MDGs," he said. "Through this visibility, I am confident that Lil' MDGs will further grow by inspiring more youth to get involved."

To date, Mahalingam said Lil' MDGs has mobilized children from 31 states in America and 34 countries, doing such work as helping report \$780,000 for tsunami relief and more than \$10 million for hurricane relief efforts.

While collaborating with children in 12 countries and working with the United Nations Development Program, children also helped raise funds to build a dormitory for a Tibetan school and a computer center and mobile hospital in India, to name a few. And the list is long. Add in work with AIDS' orphans in Uganda and an effort to help send supplies to schoolchildren in Iraq, and it's a collaborative effort using the Internet and technology giving Lil' MDGs an upper hand in the fight to help others.

Mahalingam added Lil' MDGs collected more than 9,000 books to send to help disadvantaged youth in Washington, D.C. and also sent backpack kits, hygiene kits, and sports equipment to help needy children in many countries. Mahalingam credits his sister, Ammu, as a strong inspiration for his desire to help others. She took on many challenges and causes, too, he said, and gave him the drive to get Lil' MDGs started.

"She always used to do so many things to make a difference," he said.

Mahalingam and other World Youth Summit Award winners will head to Monterrey, Mexico in June for the United Nations Global Forum on ICT and Development and will showcase their projects and hard work to government and business leaders and the international community.