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600 take positive steps in Partnership Walk

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KITCHENER

What impact can a relatively small group of people have on a problem as daunting as global poverty?

Can 600 people in Kitchener really make a difference in the lives of those half a world away?

The answer, quite simply, is yes.

Those people laced up their shoes and loosened their wallets yesterday as the fight against international poverty hit the streets around Victoria Park.

They were taking part in the World Partnership Walk -- a fundraising event for the Aga Khan Foundation Canada that began in Vancouver in 1985. And from little movements can come big things.

The annual walk now takes place in nine cities and involves thousands of people. Since its inception, more than \$40 million has been raised. And 100 per cent of the funds raised by the walks go directly to development programs in Africa and Asia. Administrative costs are covered separately.

Organizers in Kitchener, hoping to raise \$75,000 at this year's walk, got a big boost with a cheque for \$25,000 from Toronto-based Ecclesiastical Insurance. This is the 16th time the walk has been held in Kitchener.

"We're lucky in Kitchener," said communications co-ordinator Basheer Habib.

"We have such a diverse community. People can relate to this event."

Walkers were joined by a host of politicians including Kitchener Centre MP Karen Redman and MPP John Milloy and Waterloo Mayor Bruce Halloran.

Events such as this remind Canadians of our prosperity and our responsibility to assist those less fortunate, Redman said.

Walk convenor Aleem Ramji told the crowd of his visit to a water supply project in Kenya, funded by the Aga Khan Foundation and the Canadian International Development Agency.

With piped water for the first time, incidents of waterborne disease in the village declined dramatically and children were healthy enough to attend school regularly. With a little financial help, communities like this are able to lift themselves out of poverty, Ramji said.

The Aga Khan Foundation's projects have helped nurses return to school to further their education and have seen 54,000 children enrolled in community-run preschools in three East African countries.



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They've let 3,600 people, primarily women, receive literacy training in Afghanistan and have helped isolated villages in northern Pakistan realize a 300 per cent increase in per capita income.

The foundation does not operate in China or Myanmar, where aid organizations are trying to help residents cope with natural disasters

"You are living proof that a better world truly is within walking distance," Ramji told those gathered.

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