

Some kids will never shoot for the stars

By Mark Pavilons

I was uplifted by some inspirational words by guests speakers at a Guiding banquet a couple weeks back.

Caledon regional councillor Annette Groves, and King's own LCol (ret'd) Susan Beharriell, offered some encouragement to young women about overcoming obstacles and challenges, and really setting your sights as high as you can.

Both of these women overcame some big challenges to become the leaders they are today.

I don't know whether or not the girls fully appreciated the inroads made by both Beharriell and Groves. I appreciate it because their efforts helped further social norms for all of us.

Our dinner table conversation turned to my eldest daughter Lexie, who will soon embark on a week-long humanitarian mission to Guatemala. There, she will encounter girls and boys who simply can't shoot for the stars. And that's very sad.

For more, visit <https://www.gofundme.com/lexies-humanitarian-mission-trip>

In many parts of the world, people ? children and adults alike ? are stuck in a cycle of poverty and limited means. They are born into dire circumstances and they battle daily, just to survive.

It makes our petty complaints seem so silly.

From the comfort of our North American viewpoint, things are pretty good. We have decent health care, and now OHIP?is covering the cost of medication for our young adults. Our economy is thriving. Our kids can get a really good high school education and then jump into a host of post-secondary options. While cost can be somewhat limiting, our young minds do have a bright future.

This is simply not the case in other parts of the world today. And in some regions, the situation is getting worse on a daily basis.

In Yemen, children's education has been devastated by years of escalating conflict. Nearly half a million children have dropped out of school since the 2015 escalation of conflict in Yemen, bringing the total number of out-of-school children to 2 million, according to a UNICEF assessment. Almost three-quarters of public school teachers have not been paid their salaries in over a year, putting the education of an additional 4.5 million children at grave risk.

Children displaced because of the conflict in Taiz are facing a second year in a displacement camp in Aden city, Yemen.

?An entire generation of children in Yemen faces a bleak future because of limited or no access to education,? said Meritxell Relaño, UNICEF representative in Yemen. ?Even those who remain in school are not getting the quality education they need.?

According to ?If Not In School,? more than 2,500 schools are out of use, with two-thirds damaged by attacks; 27 per cent closed and 7 per cent used for military purposes or as shelters for displaced people.

?The journey to school has also become dangerous as children risk being killed en route. Fearing for their children's safety, many parents choose to keep their children at home. The lack of access to education has pushed children and families to dangerous alternatives, including early marriage, child labour and recruitment into the fighting.?

Up to 78 per cent of all Yemenis live in poverty: 80 per cent need some form of social protection support including cash assistance.

An estimated 1.8 million children under 5 years and 1.1 million pregnant or nursing women are acutely malnourished, representing a

128 per cent increase since late 2014.

And, 16 million Yemenis, including close to 8.2 million children, need humanitarian assistance to establish or maintain access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation.

The number of people needing help to access healthcare has more than tripled ? from 5 million before the war to 16 million today.

The solutions may seem rather simple from our end. End the conflict and allow the country to rebuild. Pay the teachers and resume classroom education. Secure basic necessities such as clean drinking water.

Of course, funding an education system is costly, there's no question. I'm not up on Yemen's economic stability, but I fear there's little in the way of money to pay for teachers, schools, books, etc.

In many struggling nations, families have to pay for their children to attend elementary school. For some, attending high school or any post-secondary institution is impossible.

Lexie spent three weeks in Kenya in 2016 and got to meet some really interesting people.

One young woman managed to scrape enough money together to attend university, but after two years, ran out of money to complete her program. Some compassionate and creative young people who joined Lexie in Kenya started a gofundme page and raised the money necessary in a matter of weeks! Lexie asked everyone in her circle to donate, instead of giving her birthday presents this year.

All that was needed for this young woman to complete the next two years was \$2,500. Her four-year program costs \$5,000.

Lexie's food plan at Western was more than that in her first year!

My daughter can't alter the cycle of poverty everywhere she goes. But she can make a difference, even it's only for a week, in the lives of men, women and children, who struggle to survive.

There's no shortage of need in this world. But in the case I?mentioned above, helping just one young person reach her goals can be amazing. You never know how this woman will change the world!

Every child deserves the chance to believe in themselves!