

Firefighters take up fight to eradicate Child Poverty

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By Louie Rosella

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A tragic form of symbolism arose yesterday as Captain Al Hills' eyes welled up when the teenager he was sponsoring in Peru popped up on a projector screen here via a live webcast.

The Mississauga firefighter's tears are an unfortunate reminder of what 15-year-old Melva Sanchez and more than 300,000 adults and children in the impoverished and water-starved community of Ventanilla, Peru, need more than anything --water.

Clean, fresh drinking water.

More than four million Peruvian children face disease, unsafe drinking water and poverty. Fifty out of every 1,000 die before their fifth birthday.

"Melva lives in a tiny home with her family -- smaller than my garage. The dirt floor turns into mud whenever it rains," said Hills. "Most people in Ventanilla live without the luxury of lights, a stove or refrigerator."

Hills and eight other firefighters have made two trips to Peru, using their own money, to provide first aid and other emergency training, equipment and support for the Ventanilla fire department.

But yesterday, the Mississauga fire department joined forces with the large disaster relief organization World Vision Canada and [WSI](#), an international leader in internet business solutions, in an effort to turn up \$300,000 that will allow a pipeline to be built into the town so clean drinking water can circulate.

Fire crews have already raised \$15,000, and yesterday, WSI staff donated another \$2,000 to the Water Project.

"When there is a fire in this community, they throw sand on it because there is no water around. They have no fire hydrants," said Hills. "They have an emergency number to call like our 9-1-1, but who has a phone to call?"

WSI Chief Executive Officer Dan Monaghan said he is confident that his company's involvement in the initiative to improve Ventanilla and other disadvantaged communities across the world will "make child poverty history."

WSI's website is ranked high on various search engines, including Google. It has one of the highest "internet search engine rankings" in the world, according to Monaghan. This means any organization linked to WSI through the website will come up earlier during searches.

Monaghan said any organization that donates to the Make Child Poverty History Campaign, which includes the firefighters' water project, will be linked to [WSI's](#) website.

"There is a way corporations can profit by donating to end child poverty," Monaghan told more than 300 people yesterday at an airport hotel. "This is going to *spread like wildfire.*"

Those interested in donating can visit www.makechildpovertyhistory.org

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