

Doing good at home and abroad



Business student and excellence award laureate Greg Overholt has combined his interest in business with his passion for helping others. Over the past three-and-a-half years, he's led the growth of SOS: Students Offering Support—a unique organization that raises money for sustainable educational projects in the developing world, which are then implemented by SOS volunteers.

In September 2004, Greg and some friends in the business and computing program at Laurier launched a fundraiser. They held a group tutoring session for a first-year economics class, asking students to pay \$15 each, which would then be donated to charity. Students who attended the “exam crams” did significantly better on their finals than those who did not participate, and word of mouth led to the growth of the program. Greg and his colleagues were soon adding more courses in business and calculus.

In that first year, they tutored 200 students and raised \$5,500. Since then, the program has grown exponentially: now with a second location at Trent University, SOS has tutored over 2,000 students and raised more than \$100,000.

For the first few years of the program, SOS donated its money to Free the Children and other organizations involved in community-building initiatives around the world. In 2007, the group decided to partner with an NGO to build a school in a developing country.

“In most volunteer positions, you’re either raising money for a good cause or you’re implementing a project,” says Greg. “You rarely get to see the full impact of your efforts. With SOS, all the money raised goes towards a development project that is carried out by SOS volunteers. This gives the volunteer tutors the opportunity to experience firsthand the impact of their efforts—to make the connection between the work they are doing in Canada and the difference they can make in the lives of others elsewhere in the world.”

In 2007, the group raised \$65,000 and partnered with an NGO in Belize. Twenty SOS volunteers travelled to the country in August to enhance facilities at a local school. “It was incredibly run down,” says Greg. “We brought in electricity and water, built a functional classroom, a washroom and a wash station.” (The group also just made it onto one of the last planes leaving the country before Hurricane Dean roared ashore—but that’s a whole other story!)

For the 2007-2008 academic year, SOS is partnering with Friends of Honduran Children to raise money for Fior Azul Farm School, a sustainable school that teaches children farming techniques and other vocational skills. SOS volunteers will travel to Fior Azul later this year to help build a greenhouse.

Greg has big plans for SOS and is working to expand the organization nationwide. He donated his last co-op term in the fall of 2007 to

putting in place the tools to grow SOS, including registering the group as a charitable organization, writing a business plan and marketing plan and developing extensive resource material. These elements will enable other student leaders across the country to create their own local SOS chapters.

“My goal is to raise \$70,000 in donor grants and to get seven SOS chapters running by next fall. Right now, I’m busy looking for passionate student leaders who can help take SOS to the next level of its growth.”

Although he originally envisioned himself working in a more traditional business environment, Greg couldn’t be happier. “I loved my co-op terms at RIM and Sympatico, but with something like this, you have a direct understanding of how your efforts can make a difference. We’re providing a viable service here in Canada that is helping to fund educational efforts elsewhere. It’s a business venture rooted in doing good.”

For more information about SOS, please visit www.canadaSOS.org.]•



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