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Community Page

Student to help vaccinate kids in Ecuador

By **STEPHANIE THIESSEN**
The Champion

For someone living in a remote village in Ecuador, getting a vaccine isn't a routine occurrence. With no transportation to the cities where these shots are available, villagers often do without.

As a result, people — especially children — are dying of easily preventable illnesses, namely typhoid fever.

But next month, some of those villagers will be visited by a potentially life-saving group. The townsfolk will be able to have their children vaccinated against typhoid fever, and receive education about such things as safe drinking water.

It's a mission Miltonian Amy Prisniak is proud to be a part of. The third year Queens University student — who'll turn 22 while in Ecuador — will leave April 27 and spend a month there with 20 teammates, most from Queens.

"This is something I've wanted to do my entire life," Ms Prisniak said.

She's travelling as part of Volunteer Abroad, a not-for-profit group owned by the Canadian Federation of Students. The group will be teaming up and working with Red Cross officials.

Volunteer Abroad has travelled around the world building shelters and developing health programs, but this upcoming trip is a pilot project that Ms Prisniak hopes will take off.

"This is the first time we're making a connection with people who are harder to reach," she said, adding, "They've (Volunteer Abroad) done vaccinations in other places, and it's been well received."

After undergoing training on how to give needles as well as learning about the Ecuadorians' attitudes toward health, Ms Prisniak will be part of a travelling clinic that will stop at various communities where they'll give typhoid vaccinations to kids under 10.

It's the younger kids who are most susceptible to the illness.

"The older ones have a better chance of surviving because their immune systems increase with time," Ms Prisniak explained.

As well as a lack of transportation, Ms Prisniak said people in remote villages don't understand the importance of vaccinations or how typhoid is spread — mainly through food and water. That's one of the reasons education will be a big part of their visits.

The vaccinations last just three to five years, so Ms Prisniak said the idea is to have a group return every several years to continue the work her group has started.

Although her family is fully backing her, Ms Prisniak admitted when she first told them about the trip, they were surprised — to say the least.

"They looked at me like I had two heads," she said. "But I said if I don't do this, I'll wonder 'What if' for the rest of my life."

Mother proud, but concerned

Her mom, Fran, said the family's slowly getting used to the idea. She made no qualms about the fact she first wondered why her daughter couldn't just stay in Milton.

"It's out of our hands — it's so far away," Fran said, not covering the apprehension in her voice. "But she's excited, so we're excited."

She added it's not out of character for her daughter to embark on such an adventure.

"It's not really shocking that she'd do something like this," Fran said, explaining her daughter has always been one to help others.

As her departure date looms, Ms Prisniak said she's feeling a mix of nerves and excitement.

"There's such power and excitement among the group," she said. "We're getting each other all fired up."

Although she's always had a heart for people less fortunate than herself, Ms Prisniak said this is her first time taking part in an international project.

Years ago, when she was a student at Holy Rosary Catholic School, Ms Prisniak said she was inspired by the parish priest who returned from Guatemala and prepared a slide show for the students who had helped raise money.

"He said, 'Here are the faces of people you've helped.' I just thought it was such a great thing for me to see where some of my efforts were going."

When she returns, Ms Prisniak said she wants to do a similar presentation for the students at Holy Rosary and hopefully inspire them.

Although she can try to imagine what the journey will hold, Ms Prisniak said she knows she's probably way off. One thing she said there's no doubt about is change is in store.

"Everyone I've talked to who've done initiatives like this have said they've come back completely changed."

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Photo by ASHLEA WESSEL

Amy Prisniak looks at a map of South America as her upcoming volunteer trip to Ecuador draws near.

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Programming Schedule — Tuesday, March 29 - Monday, April 4, 2005

Tuesday, March 29	Wednesday, March 30	Thursday, March 31	Friday, April 1	Saturday, April 2	Sunday, April 3	Monday, April 4
5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm Osler Health Connection 6:30pm Optimist TV Bingo 7:30pm Simply Halton 8:00pm Halton Hills Awards & Council - Mar 21 11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	4:00pm - 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm Simply Halton 6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA 7:00pm Swap Talk (Live) 8:00pm Auto Experts (Live) 9:00pm Milton Council Mar 29 11:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	3:00pm - 6:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm Simply Halton 6:30pm Osler Health Connection 7:00pm Living Healthy - Bladder Matters 8:00pm Halton Region Council Mar 30 10:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	3:00pm - 4:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 6:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA 8:00am - 4:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am-4:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 4:00pm TVCogeco Sports OFSAA Girls Volleyball - Teams TBA 7:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	10:30am TVCogeco Sports OFSAA Girls Volleyball - Teams TBA 1:30pm - 5:00pm Plugged In! EXTRA 5:00pm Living Healthy: Bladder Matters 6:00pm Osler Health Connection 6:30pm Plugged In! EXTRA 7:30pm Simply Halton 8:00pm - Midnight Plugged In! EXTRA	8:00am - 11:00am Plugged In! EXTRA 11:00am Osler Health Connection 11:30am Living Healthy: Bladder Matters 12:30pm Simply Halton