

2,500 pairs of Stouffville shoes on the ground in Kenya

Stouffville District Secondary School student Imran Bagha launched Stomp Out Poverty, a community shoe drive, last year.

We had only collected about 100 or so shoes before a story about the drive ran in The Sun-Tribune last spring.

After that, people got to know about the drive and donations started pouring in. We received donations from York Regional Police – they gave their old boots

– who also transported shoes in their van. There were so many donations at one point, they even had to bring in a truck to transport the shoes.

By the end of the drive, we netted more than 2,500 pairs of shoes. People as far as Markham and Beeton were participating in the drive.

Some even bought brand-new pairs of shoes and flip-flops, just for the drive.

We put the shoes in a storage unit in a plaza at Major Mackenzie Drive and Hwy. 48 in Markham,

where my dad, Riaz Bagha, works.

He arranged with the landlord for us to borrow a whole empty unit. Through the summer, four student volunteers worked for hours and hours, sorting the shoes.

First, we had to get the actual pairs! Because people just threw in shoes in donation boxes, matches were often hard to find and the majority of the time volunteers spent was just in hunting for matching pairs of shoes.

We then arranged the pairs in rows and sanitized them.

Keep in mind, each of these steps literally took days because of the great amount of shoes we had to

take care of.

After that, we bought big boxes from the nearby Home Depot – they gave us 50 per cent off because it was for charity.

We then sorted all the pairs by size, style and gender. This took many days, as well.

We then bagged each pair individually, writing the size and gender on the bag. After that, we boxed all the shoes, with approximately 40 in each box. We used about 55 boxes through the whole process.

After the shoes were ready in their boxes, my parents and I started searching for a shipping company. After finding one, we partnered with a registered charitable organization so we wouldn't be charged customs once the shoes reached Africa.

The shoes went by ship in a container, taking about three months to reach their destination – Mombasa, Kenya in East Africa. They arrived last December.

Once there, customs officials started giving us problems – they wanted a bribe to release the shoes. It took another couple of weeks to release the shoes.

We arranged to have the shoes distributed through Mambrai Welfare Group, a charitable organization in Mombasa. I could not make the trip to Africa, as planned, because of school.

The welfare group went to several rural schools and an orphanage to distribute the shoes. People in Kenya are so poor they often have to decide between having a meal each day or suitable clothes.

The lack of shoes contributes to many diseases contracted through the foot.

Many people work manual labour and the majority of poor villagers don't have shoes.

Footwear is greatly appreciated by these people and literally makes a difference in many a life.

This shoe drive was a great way to recycle footwear and I thought it was a win-win situation.

We could get rid of old shoes we were no longer using.

They'll go many miles more on the feet of Kenyans who cannot afford to buy them.

For more information on the shoe drive, e-mail stomp.out.poverty@gmail.com



Imran Bagha
Guest Column



Young Kenyans show off their new flip-flops, shipped from Stouffville.



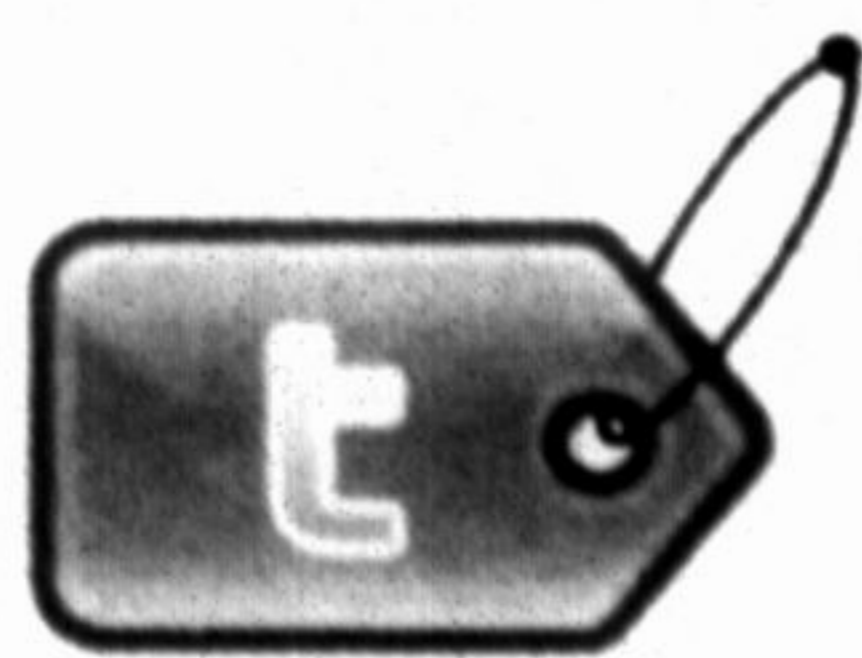
Young people in the East African nation spell out their thanks for the Stouffville shoe drive.

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