

IslandLife

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IT'S THE WAY I LOVE TO GIVE

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Photo: Stewart

Children at nutrition centre in Nediyanadu, Batticaloa, on the east coast of Sri Lanka.

The moment that changed everything

Eden McDonald helps poverty-stricken in Sri Lanka

By MICHELLE HOPKINS
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There is a moment in time where your life changes forever.

For 22-year-old Eden McDonald, that moment was on a beach in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka.

"I was swimming and this tiny boy, he was maybe 12 years old, with no hands or feet, kept wanting to swim with me," recalls McDonald of that day in August 2004. "The heartbreaking part was he drew a heart shape in the sand with his stump and pointed to me."

McDonald later burst into tears — the little boy lost his leg when he stepped on a land mine.

Initially, the 2001 graduate of Richmond Christian School went to Sri Lanka to visit a childhood friend's family for six weeks.

"I fell in love with the beautiful island country and its gracious and hospitable people," says McDonald.

But that day on the beach sidestepped any thought of heading to France to become a nanny.

Both repelled by the abject poverty and engaged by the spirit of the people, McDonald came back to Canada a changed person.

Within months, she returned to help the Sri Lankans.

"I was compelled to go back and see what I could do," says McDonald, a nutritionist.

On a shoestring and with no idea how to start up a nonprofit organization, the young woman founded AIM, an acronym for Assistance In Motion, a year ago.

"In March 2005 I travelled back to Sri Lanka to research a project (for the newly created AIM) and that is when I found 80 children in Batticaloa that were in need of proper nutrition and hygiene, education and sturdy buildings."

Two decades of civil war and the recent tsunami ravaged the area, throwing many of its inhabitants into deeper poverty.

"Everyone has a horrific story to tell, whether rich or poor, and yet they just keep pushing forward," says McDonald. "Currently we are assisting two nutrition centres in the villages of Nediyanadu, Unithichai in Batticaloa on the east coast of Sri Lanka."

"Between 30 and 50 children attend each nutrition centre all between the ages of three and five."

The buildings that are supposed to be day-care centres for the children are inadequate and run down. They often submit on little more than tea and a cookie all day, adds



As An Division For women News

Eden McDonald will bring nutrition books and donations to Sri Lanka in February.

McDonald. The things we take for granted such as running water, toilet facilities, access to education, food or medicine, children in Sri Lanka often go without.

Her organization, of which she is the executive director, now has seven members. AIM has partnered with the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka as well as the Bible Fellowship Missionary Society in Surrey for assistance and donations.

"The Richmond firefighters are collecting toys and clothes for the children to be brought with them when they go in February and March with Habitat for Humanity," says McDonald. "We have also been in contact

with Builders Without Borders to possibly help with the construction of the nutrition centres."

McDonald returns to Sri Lanka in February for two to three months, armed with nutrition manuals, dried fruit and soups and anything else that is donated to her for the children.

"This is my life mission and one day I would love to see AIM affiliated with the United Nations," says McDonald. "If someone told me how dramatically my life has changed in the course of two years I wouldn't have believed it."

For more information, visit www.aimis.org.