

World Health Day - April 7, 2003
Written Statement by Ryan Hreljac
Ryan's Well Foundation

As fast as you can snap your fingers people are dying because they don't have clean water. Every eight seconds another person dies in the world because they have dirty water or no water at all. That makes me very sad.

I was six years old when I decided to build a well. I was six years old and we were talking about children who didn't have toys or Nintendo or even clean water at school one day. Then I heard Mrs. Prest say that \$70 was for a well. My teacher told us that people were dying because they didn't have clean water.

I went home and asked my Mom and Dad for the money. I begged and begged them. They told me that I couldn't have the money but I could do extra chores to earn it. I did lots of chores like vacuuming, washing windows, picking up brush from the big ice storm we had. After four months I saved \$70. Then, I found out that my well was going to cost \$2,000! So I said I would just do more chores!

I saved on my own at the start but with lots and lots of help from other people, we have helped raise over \$750,000 Canadian. There is even a foundation now called the Ryan's Well Foundation. Teachers and other volunteers are helping me to spread the world about how children can help adults to make a difference whether it's helping with clean water or with something else. I know I am lucky because I was born in a country that has lots of clean water. People in other countries are not as lucky.

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In July 2000 I got to go and see my very first well. I went all the way to Angolo Primary School in northern Uganda. It was awesome. I even drank from my well. It tasted great!

People ask me if I'm sad because my friends in Africa are poor. They want to know if I am sad because I live in a brick house and they live in mud and grass houses. They might be poor because they don't have much money but in other ways they are not poor at all. In Africa they say, "Water is Life." Now I really understand what they mean.

There are lots of great kids in the world. I know that lots of them are working to make the world a better place. I just met 130 of these amazing kids at the Children's World Water Forum in Japan a few weeks ago! But every child needs certain things if they are going to be healthy and happy. Children need clean water and sanitation, they need enough food to eat, they need to be able to go to school, and they need a chance to play and have fun. If we help kids all around the world to get these things then maybe someday we will all make a difference. In my house, I take seven steps and I have it – clean water right at my tap! Other kids have to walk for hours just to get a drink. That's not fair. No one should have to live like that. I dream of the day when everyone in the world has clean water. That's a big dream. But

I learned that you can do anything but only if you really try hard and you really want to.

The world needs kids but they need grownups too. Adults like Nelson Mandela are doing great things to make the world a better place. He is like a big old oak tree and kids like us are like little seedlings. But with lots of water, sun and love maybe we will grow up to be big old oak trees too.

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I found out where my puzzle piece fits in the world and that is with water. I just hope every one of you finds out where your puzzle piece fits too. Who knows? If all the kids and adults work together and they never give up then maybe someday there will be peace and clean water for everyone on earth.

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