

Lara Tavares - FLARE Volunteer Awards speech

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you Rogers Media and Flare Magazine for your ongoing support of volunteers and your commitment to Canada's volunteer sector. The awareness you have generated has made it easier for me to achieve my goals and I deeply appreciate your support.

Thank you Terry Power and Sapphire Technologies Canada for nominating me and for your continued, invaluable support.

Thank you Hazel Picco, Martina Stritesky and the rest of the amazing FLARE team for the photo shoot yesterday.

This is a magical experience and I feel so lucky to be in the company of my fellow award winners.

When Hazel called to tell me I was one of the winners, I reached for the phone and called my brother Ramon right away. He was so proud of my nomination and he told me that the day of the Flare awards would be the proudest day of his life.

Well, here we are and this IS the proudest day of my life because I get to share this accomplishment with my family, friends and volunteers who have all encouraged me and supported me from the day I first dreamt up Sky's the Limit. Many of them are here today. Thank you for your guidance and support. You have truly made this organization your own and you are responsible for the impact we are making on the kids we serve.

I believe that each of us has a role to play and a chance for leadership if we choose to take it.

Do you want a connection with those you help? What are the unique gifts that you can bring?

Not just our money but our time is the enduring gift that we all have to give.

Do the thing you think you can't do. It will build courage, self-respect and strength!

There are many ways to address what I believe is our social obligation to take care of our fellow human beings. Be alert to suffering in your community. Don't turn away, but, rather, make an attempt, no matter how small to ease suffering. This is real power!

Sometimes the issues that confront us seem so huge, so remote, so foreign that it's hard to believe that we can make a difference.

You can think and act globally. You can think and act locally.

I visited an orphanage in Kenya last summer. I was part of a team that taught basic computer skills to 700 orphans ranging in age from 1 to 25. One day, a young girl ran in to the classroom in tears. She lost her pencil, her only pencil. Later on, some of the volunteers commented at how heart-broken they were to witness the girls absolute panic over losing her pencil. I remembered a student I tutored some years back in Toronto's Regent Park community who had worked his way down to the stub of his only pencil.

Sometimes it may be easier to focus on something as simple and direct as donating a bag of pencils. Or a computer.

Thousands of Canadian kids go home to do their homework without a computer and they are falling behind.

I believe that something should be done to address this disparity because the Internet is a major learning resource and it should be available to all.

Visits to deliver computers often take me and the Sky's the Limit volunteers to areas and homes that we are not accustomed to and the reality of life in these communities can be difficult to comprehend. When I feel overwhelmed by the injustices of it all, I let go of the need to try to save the world by remembering my personal mission statement - I will live a compassionate life devoted to bettering others in any way that I can without allowing the suffering of the world to alter my perception and appreciation of goodness.

Volunteer. It is good for your country, it is good for your planet and, most importantly, it is good for your soul.

Therein lies the power of changing not just one person's life but of impacting communities across Canada.

Thank you!