

# Change children's lives by donating to the Christie Lake envelope campaign

BY ROY BERGER

Can you imagine doing 138 push-ups in one minute?

How about 3,416 push-ups in one hour?

As a very young child, I never imagined myself amounting to much, let alone a two-time Guinness Book of World Record holder. However, at the tender age of 8.5 years I received a call that provided me with the opportunity to acquire the skill-set - and more importantly the mind-set - to believe I could succeed.

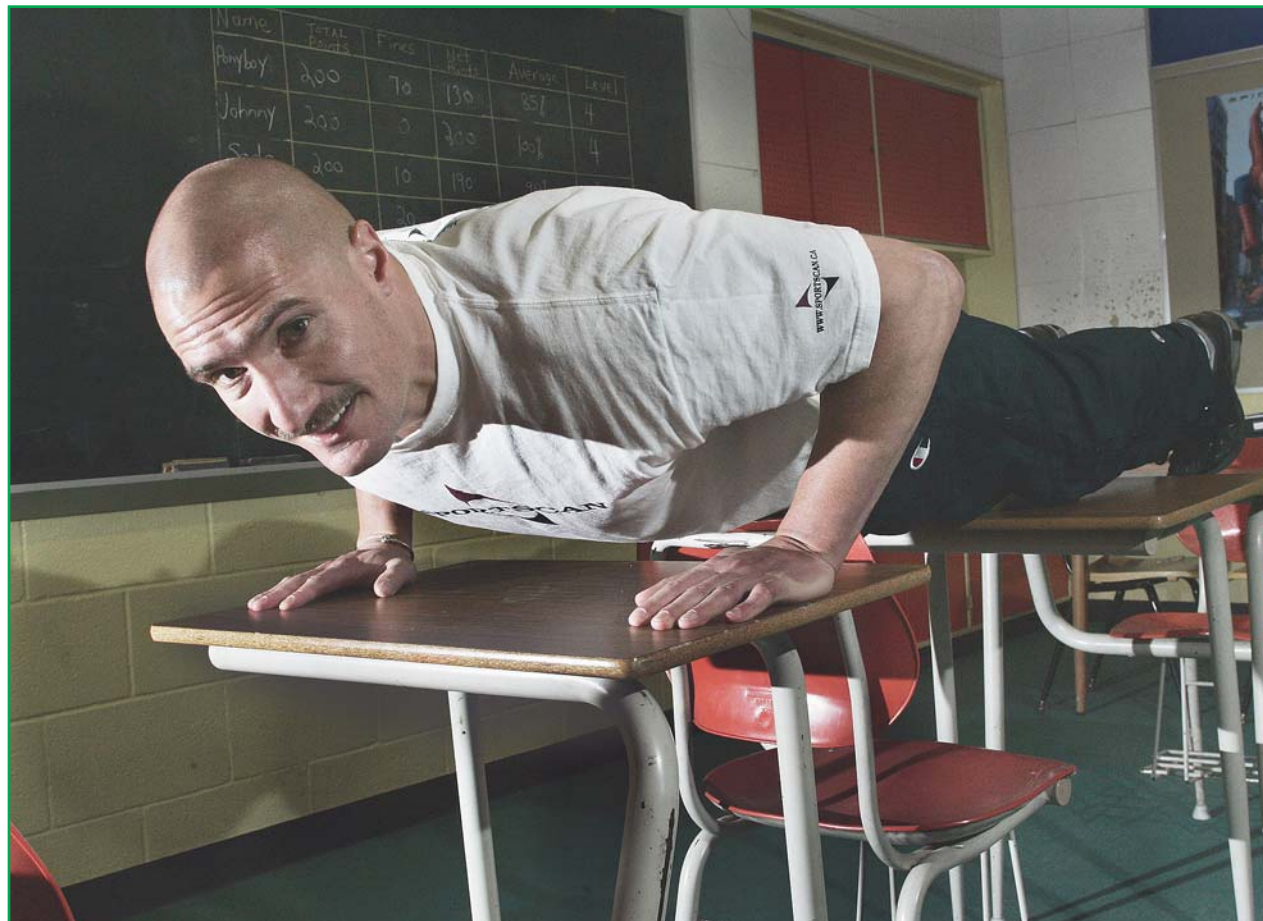
The call came from Christie Lake Kids (CLK), an organization dedicated to providing recreational opportunities for children and youth living in poverty. At the time, I had no idea how this organization, and the people connected to it, would so profoundly impact my life.

For me, CLK provided me with hope - and a belief that I could rise above life in poverty and achieve anything I set my mind to.

It was 1974; I was living with my mother, my twin sister and younger brother in a publicly supported housing complex in a very tough neighbourhood. Growing up poor is not a lot of fun. I was an angry kid, with a huge chip on my shoulder, because, from my perspective, I had very little and other people had everything.

My neighbourhood was a very scary place, where crime was a way of life. Only a few of us made it to and through high school. I know for a fact that had I not connected with CLK and been hooked into camp, I would have ended up in prison or dead. The positive role models that I was exposed to through my involvement with CLK changed my life.

As a very shy and scrawny kid my first visit to camp was incredible. It was my first exposure to high quality skill-building programs. The cornerstone of this



—Rod MacIvor, Ottawa Citizen

**Grateful to CLK:** Ottawa teacher Roy Berger is a Guinness World Record Holder for push-ups, and credits his time at Christie Lake Camp for his motivation and belief in himself.

summer program is the teaching and evaluation of skills in four award areas, namely swimming, canoeing, naturelore and campcraft. One of the many unique things about CLK is that everyone participates; there is no “sitting this one out”.

The staff was welcoming, very supportive and always made me feel good about myself. In 1977, with Brian Gerrard, now the camp director, as my counselor, I was selected “best camper”. This was a significant highlight for me. It solidified in my mind that I could achieve almost anything. Receiving recognition as best camper was a trigger for me. It demonstrated to me that I could be just like everyone else.

Camp was the first

place and time that I experienced success. I learned about setting goals, hard work and getting results. I know that this work ethic and my desire to prove myself led me to attain my Pro Canoeing certification and to set several Guinness World Records, several which stand to this day.

Once camp was over, I dreaded summer because it was so unstructured, no money, no opportunities. I was bored. Drugs and crime were very tempting. After a couple of years at camp I knew I wanted to

return some day as a counselor, this was the first time I started thinking long term. I had to behave in order to be able to come back as a staff member.

It was at camp, where I had many conversations with Dr. Dan Offord about my career choices, that I realized that I wanted to work with disadvantaged children. I completed the Child Care Worker Program at Algonquin College, my Honours Degree in Recreation/Leisure Studies at the University of Ottawa and obtained my teachers certificate from the Faculty of Education at Queen's University.

I have worked as a youth counselor and community development worker in the field of recreation. Today I

am a special education teacher at the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, where as a teacher I work to enrich the life quality of the children with whom I come in contact.

The kids in my class have been formally identified with behaviour exceptionalities. They learn behaviour that gets them out of school, out of structure, because it's too risky for them. My camp life has allowed me to relate to these kids. Because I have “been there and done that”, they know I know what I am talking about. I am living proof that they can succeed if they set goals, stay focused and work hard.

I am proud of my work as a teacher and I am grateful to have the opportunity to positively impact the lives of children and youth at risk, just like CLK did for me.

I attended Christie Lake as a camper for seven summers and I was a staff member for 13. In the winter months I participated in the inner-city program, now known as the STAR (Skills Through Activity and Recreation) program. This program provided me with the opportunity to have year round contact with the staff. I firmly believe that it is the connection over time, year after year, and the high quality skill-building programs that makes CLK so successful.

To this day I still volunteer up at camp. I believe the act of doing good should never stop. There is always someone who needs help.

I am who I am today because of my experience at camp.

*Roy Berger is a Special Education Teacher with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board.*

You can help give the gift of camp to an economically disadvantaged child by calling 613-742-6922 to make a donation, or by using the special Christie Lake Kids envelope in this Wednesday's Citizen.



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