



March 22, 2011

MEDIA ADVISORY

**FROM WOLFVILLE, NOVA SCOTIA TO BANFF, ALBERTA THOUSAND OF CHILDREN ACROSS CANADA
WALK FOR WATER IN SOLIDARITY WITH CHILDREN IN INDIA.**

On World Water Day, SOPAR with the support of *Canada Water Week*, is coordinating dozens of walks across Canada in which 4000 students are taken part of 21 schools spread over 8 provinces: Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta! Simultaneously in India, 14 000 people will walk representing 22 schools and their communities. In all, 18 000 Canadians and Indians united for water want to raise awareness that millions of people still don't have access to water and that this "issue unites Canadians and Indians in different ways: *We happily waste fresh water while in India, women and often little girls walk 6 hours to get their families rare and doubtful drinking water*" explains André Gingras, Sopar's co-founder. To see location and videos of the walks, go to www.sopar.ca

WHAT: "Walk for Water: Canada & India Unite for Water"

WHO: SOPAR with the support of Canada Water week and 21 Canadian schools in 8 different provinces

WHEN: Today on World Water Day

WHY: To raise awareness that millions of people still don't have access to water

WHERE: Corner Brook (NF), Wolfville (NS), Miramichi (NB), Campbellton (NB), St. Regis (QC), Gatineau (QC), Saint-Adelme (QC), Senneville (QC), Mascouche (QC), Havre-Saint-Pierre (QC), Pointe-Claire (QC), Dolbeau-Mistassini (QC), Cornwall (ON), Shoal Lake (MB), Davidson (SK), Zenon Park (SK) and Banff (AB).

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SOPAR - Society for Partnership is a non-profit organization dedicated to international cooperation since 1977. Our mission is to support community development in India and to promote cooperation in Canada. Our approach is to help people help themselves, by using the assets and resources of communities to effect lasting change. We work in close collaboration with Bala Vikasa, a recognized Indian NGO. After 34 years of effort and with the help of thousands of Canadians, SOPAR has contributed towards the construction of more than 4,500 manually operated Bore Wells, 400 overhead Water Tanks and 100 Water Purification Systems which have benefited over one million people.

Our water program and Water Walks have been possible in part by **Children Changing the World** educational program, which offers thousands of young Canadians experience in international cooperation. It teaches them about the concepts of international solidarity and sustainable development while developing their leadership capabilities. In India, in addition to providing drinking water for some 200 people per well, SOPAR encourages the community to become more involved in its development.

Canada Water Week is a celebration of water from March 14 until World Water Day on March 22, 2011. Individuals, organizations and governments have organized events across the country to raise the profile of water and its importance to Canada's prosperity. canadawaterweek.com

Contact: Laura Avalos, Communication Officer, SOPAR 1-866-443-3616 laura@sopar.ca for interviews with teachers and students before and after the walk.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In rural India, low-income families spend about 6 hours collecting water and walk on average 9km per day. This lack of access leads women and children to fetch water to the closest source regardless of the quality of the water. Faced with this crisis, SOPAR has developed a program of civic engagement for youth entitled *Children Changing the World (CCW)* which enrolls an average of 100 schools every year across Canada. Within 12 years, this project has involved 250 000 Canadian students and helped build more than 1,000 wells in India. Thanks to *CCW*, more than 165 000 Indians have now access to drinkable water near their homes. This year, *CCW* goes further by launching the “*Walk for Water: Canada & India Unite for Water*” campaign as a means to raise awareness but also to allow student live the experience of walking and carrying the weight of water and take a moment to reflect upon the privileged access many of us have and more than often take for granted.

Walk for Water is being held in collaboration with schools enrolled in the *CCW* project which many teachers believe is a meaningful way to get their students involved in international cooperation and have a direct impact in people’s lives. “*I’m always amazed by the positive energy from our CCW schools, they initially commit to raise funds for one well and more than often they raise enough money for a second one*” says Laura Avalos, Sopar’s Communication Officer. “*If they are able to make a difference in the lives of people that are so far away, we all can*” believes Avalos.

“*Walk for Water: Canada & India Unite for Water*” calls for Canadians to unite and bring water to thousands of people who still don’t have access to this basic necessity. To support the campaign, visit www.sopar.ca. You will also find the list of participating schools, promo video, Facebook page and link to Canada Water Week. You can also call toll free at 1-866-443-3616.

HIGHLIGHTS OF SEVERAL PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

Saint-Georges High School in Montreal has committed every year since 2007 to provide a village in India with a manually operated bore well. This year they were so confident from their past successes, they committed to double their fundraising and allow more families have access to water. Behind the students is Mr. Bruce Herbert, a counsellor at tree schools in Montreal whom has favored the *CCW* project as a tool to foster youth leadership. With them, they will have raised 6300\$ towards the construction of seven Wells in India. Two of his schools will *Walk for Water*: St. Georges High School in Senneville and Félix-Leclerc High School in Pointe-Claire.

Ms. Tracy Webb and her students at **Horton High School in Wolfville, Nova Scotia** will raise this year enough funds to built 3 wells which will give access to drinkable water to about 600 people. Her school is so enthusiastic about the cause all 1000 students there will join the *Walk for Water* on March 22nd.

Another Sopar role model is Mr. Tyson Theriault, teacher at **James M. Hill Memorial High School in Miramichi, New Brunswick**. His school has committed to support the long term development of Malakapalli village and its surrounding area (Warangal District, AP). In partnership with the communities, they are working together towards Water Access, Women Health and Orphan Education. In less than 2 years, they will have raised 7000\$ for the construction of 5 wells, 5 family toilets and the education of 10 orphan children which includes their uniform, school supplies accommodation and food for 1 year. Right after the *Walk for Water* they will start preparing to host a delegation from India to arrive in May 2011 in their maritime community.

Teacher Sylvie Parent and students at **École Apollo XI in Campbellton, New Brunswick** are very involved with us since 2009. They have built 2 wells in India and even got articles about their project in the local newspaper last May. They are so enthusiastic about hosting a delegation from India in May 2011. Ms. Parent and her students are available for interviews.

Teacher Gerene O'Dell and students at the **C.C. Loughlin School in Corner Brook, New Foundland** have raised 8 200\$ since 2008 which has financed the construction of 5 wells and provided a rural school with quality desks and chairs. Ms. O'Dell and her students are available for interviews.

Teachers Al Bathia & Tina Morin of **Gladstone Public School in Cornwall, Ontario** from a solid team. Together with their students, they have raised 2130\$ since 2009 and have 2 wells in India with their school’s name.

We would like to congratulate Teacher Paul Stinson of **Davidson School in Davidson, Saskatchewan** (1hr of Saskatoon) because in his first year in the *Children Changing the World* program, he committed his class to *Walk for Water* and build a well in India. Mr. Stinson and his students are available for interviews. We also congratulate Teacher Kate Rive and **Banff Elementary School in Banff, Alberta** for also joining us for the first time this year. They will *Walk for Water* on March 22nd and give the chance for a better life for a new community in India with no previous access to water.