

Jr. Citizen nominee makes a difference

By Simon Martin

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When you first meet her, Isha Verma comes across as softspoken and gentle.

The Grade 6 student at Unionville Meadows Public School can't wait to participate in an exhilarating game of manhunt just like the next girl.

There is, however, more to her than her passion for having fun with friends.

Underneath the calm demeanor is the spirit of a tiger ready to pounce on any opportunity to do good work.

"She has a soft voice, but there is a fire burning inside her to be that change she wants to see in the world," said Isha's former teacher Julie Lovatsis.

Isha was a nominee for the Ontario Junior Citizen of the Year Awards.

Over the past three years, she has raised more than \$500 for the World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) through bake sales and a lemonade stand.

The idea of fundraising for the WWF came from a project she did at school called a nobody project.

Isha and her partner chose the teetering on extinction panda as their nobody and made their quest to make it into a somebody through increased awareness and fundraising.

"I have always loved animals," said Isha.

She was able to convince some of her friends to help with her bake sales.

"Cupcakes were the favourite," she said.

Ms Lovatsis said Isha has the characteristics of a true leader.

"She's more of a shared leadership kind," she said. "[Students] look at her as a role model. She's well liked by others but is also a person they can seek help from."

This genuine helpful nature can be heard when Isha talks about her dreams.

"I want to be a doctor," she said. Isha's mother, Romila, said her daughter often talks about being a veterinarian as well.

When Isha is not at school you might see her walking her dog Mango, hanging out with her younger sisters and friends, playing guitar or reading.

Ms Lovatsis said it's inspiring when students like Isha come along not only with dreams but the drive to make them happen.

"She took on the [fundraising] initiative on her own and was able to develop a plan. It wasn't a classroom based project," she said.

The 12 young finalists in the Ontario Junior Citizen Awards will be recognized next weekend at the Ontario Community Newspaper Association banquet taking place at the Fairmount Royal York Hotel.

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