

## **How to Help**

*By Karen Fanning*

When Iqbal Masih was just 4 years old, his parents sold him into slavery to pay off a \$12 debt. For six years, the small boy spent his days crouched over a loom, weaving handmade carpets. Finally, when Iqbal was 10, he escaped.

Free at last, Iqbal began traveling around his native Pakistan speaking out against child labor. He visited the U.S., and asked students from Broad Meadows Middle School in Quincy, Massachusetts, for their help. Just five months later, however, Iqbal was murdered—many believe because of his campaign against child labor.

Determined not to let Iqbal's dream die, students at Broad Meadows created a Web site to educate Americans about child labor. Through their Web site, they collected more than \$100,000 in donations to help build a school for Iqbal in Punjab, Pakistan. Today, 280 children attend class there.

"These kids were working up to 16 hours a day tying tiny knots in carpets, sewing soccer balls, picking cotton in the fields, and carrying heavy bricks on their heads," says 6th-grader Laura Bloomer. "Now, they have the chance to get an education. They are learning to read and write so they can get good jobs to support themselves."

Laura and her classmates insist they are just getting started. Today, they're working tirelessly to raise funds to build another school in a village near Punjab.

"Kids are our future," says Mary Bloomer, 14. "If they aren't educated and are working all their lives, the cycle is going to keep going on and on. Education is key to stopping child labor."

## **Reading for Ruchika**

On the West Coast, students at the Mirman School in Los Angeles, California, have joined Broad Meadows in the fight against child labor. Their weapon? Books.

Fourth-graders at Mirman are burying their noses in mountains of books morning, noon, and night, to raise money for child laborers in India.

"I want to read a lot because it's a great experience to help these children," says Michael Attanasio, 9, who's plowed through 3,881 pages. "I read in the car, in class, and in bed."

For every book students read, sponsors donate money. Those donations are used to fund the Ruchika schools located on train platforms along the eastern coast of India.

Thanks to students at Mirman, Indian children who hawk newspapers, sweep trash, and shine shoes just to survive now have a chance to study science, math, history, and language.

Last year, Mirman's read-a-thon raised more than \$12,000. This year, students hope to top that amount. After finishing off a whopping 2,464 books, their chances look good.

"The money we raise will help children in the platform schools to have books and educated teachers to provide them with a good education," says 9-year-old Hunter Spinks. "We are shaping the future of children by helping them to be educated."