

``I'm just one person. What can I do?"

International humanitarian Hugh Evans is asked this question regularly, and more often from eager students.

The Bethlehem Tertiary Institute brought the 26-year-old Australian to Tauranga to share his vision to eradicate poverty and advocate for humanitarian aid. This week he spoke to Bethlehem College students as well as business and community leaders.

Mr Evans, who has travelled to more than 30 countries, founded the Oaktree Foundation, Australia's youth-run and youth-driven aid and development agency and the Global Poverty Project, which launches in the middle of this year. The project seeks to be a catalyst for the international movement to end extreme poverty through a 90-minute feature slideshow that communicates poverty's challenges and ways to take action.

Mr Evans has traipsed through the slums of the Philippines and India, and worked in an orphanage in the KwaZulu-Natal province near Durban, the worst HIV/Aids affected region in the world. He also been behind high-profile marketing campaigns in Australia that call for people to do their bit to end poverty.

Mr Evans' message to teenagers was that they didn't have to go overseas to make a difference or become a ``hero". Instead, the local community could band together _ something that would be successful in the long term.

He praised the efforts of Bethlehem College students who for some years have been staunch supporters of World Vision. In 2008, students raised \$29,000. They are currently working with World Vision to identify an area development programme they can become involved in. Every year for five-years the school has also participated in service programmes, working in schools in Samoa, Tonga, the Solomon Islands, and from this year, the Philippines. Students have also travelled to Kenya. Mr Evans described their efforts as ``extraordinary". He said the most powerful thing about today's youth was that they had the power to educate themselves and were increasingly doing so. They don't need to leave the country to understand world issues.

He urged students that the first step to understanding poverty was to research and read about five things: aid, trade, the history of debt relief, interaction between climate change and poverty, and governance and corruption. His message is that no young person should be restricted by age, that youth should dream bigger, and that they can and will change the world.

At just 26, Mr Evans himself has held the title of Young Australian of the Year, Junior Chamber of Commerce Young Person of the World, and inaugural World Vision Youth Ambassador. He met Bono during the Make Poverty History campaign, and has also met Oprah, the Queen and Hugh Jackman.

Living in New Zealand is a far cry from the world Mr Evans knows exists for third world countries, with one billion people still living on just \$1 a day.

For students listening to Mr Evans speak, the issues weren't too far out of their realm to appreciate. Christina Waldon, 16, Bethlehem College missions captain, described Mr Evans as ``crazily inspirational" and endorsed his aim of creating a culture which was selfless. Ricki Lindsay, 17, also a missions captain at Bethlehem, said Mr Evans had shown students it was important not to limit yourself. ``It's good to work in your own community, but also to go even wider," he said. Mr Evans agreed, urging students to always ``look beyond ourselves and out into the amazing, amazing world we live in."