

# THE HOME FRONT

**A Canadian aid worker found he needed to come home to change the world.**

Daniel Germain's mission to help the world's children began almost two decades ago on a mountain of garbage in Mexico City that stretched almost as far as he could see.

He watched in horror as kids scrambled from flimsy cardboard homes tucked amid the stinking trash toward trucks unloading yet more garbage.

"They were jumping on the back of the trucks and they started digging as quickly as they could," Germain remembers. The image of the young people frantically unearthing scraps to eat and other castoffs "really shook me...It's unbelievable that as a society we let those things happen."

What he saw that day in 1989 at the age of 26 transformed Germain, a Montreal native who was in Mexico helping aid groups there.

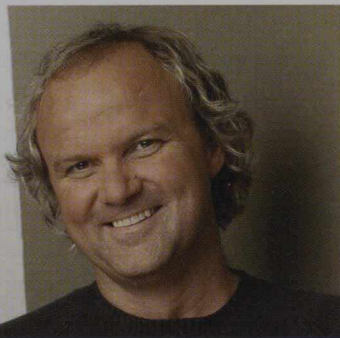
"I always had from that point on a sense of destiny," he says. "I wanted to change the world of children."

Germain brought that determination back to Canada, where he founded an organization to provide hot breakfasts to underprivileged schoolchildren in Quebec. He's now working to expand his successful formula across the country and out into the world.

The accomplishments are all the more amazing given Germain's own childhood. He spent years in foster care and was often in trouble as a teen, culminating with getting arrested for bringing drugs into the United States in his early 20s.

The time in Mexico represented the start of Germain's search for a more meaningful life. He spent several

photo: courtesy of Club des petits déjeuners du Québec



Seeing the condition of poor children abroad prompted Daniel Germain to start the organization providing hot breakfasts to underprivileged schoolchildren in Quebec.

years working with non-governmental organizations there and in Haiti and had every intention of continuing his overseas work when a question from a development worker stopped him in his tracks. She applauded his efforts abroad, but urged him to describe what he was doing in his own country.

Initially insulted, Germain gradually came to see her point. "It was impossible to have a vision for the world if you don't have a vision for your home."

He started the Club des petits déjeuners du Québec (Quebec Breakfast Club) in 1994 in one primary school. Today, the group operates in almost 200 schools, feeding and working to boost the self-esteem of 14,000 children in the province. It has also attracted private sponsors such as the National Bank of Canada and the Couche-Tard chain of stores. Germain recently established Breakfast Clubs of Canada to bring together and expand the 2,400 different



photo: Marie-Reine Mittera

school meal programs across the country. One million Canadian kids arrive at school with empty bellies but only a quarter of them receive food there, he says.

The Quebec club's success has caught the eye of the World Food Programme (WFP), which feeds 16 million schoolchildren in some 50 countries. Arlene Mitchell, a director of the WFP in Rome, says the United Nations agency has spoken with Germain about collaborating to help more of the world's 300 million hungry children, and worked with his club last year on a charity walk to fight hunger.

"The club is doing some things that are somewhat unique and we sought to learn ... whether they might be applicable to programs elsewhere," Mitchell says.

The WFP is particularly interested in the fact that the group gets much of its funding from private contributions, while most programs worldwide rely on government sources, Mitchell says. As well, it is the only program she knows of that has activities aimed at building self-esteem. ♣

**Find out more about the Club des petits déjeuners du Québec at [www.clubdejeuners.org](http://www.clubdejeuners.org).**

Nourishing young minds: A student at École Ste-Claire de Brossard in Montreal has breakfast provided by the Club des petits déjeuners du Québec.