

Celebrities & Their Causes

Whether inspired by tragedy or by the urge to make life better for those less fortunate, these Hollywood heroes find ways to make a big difference



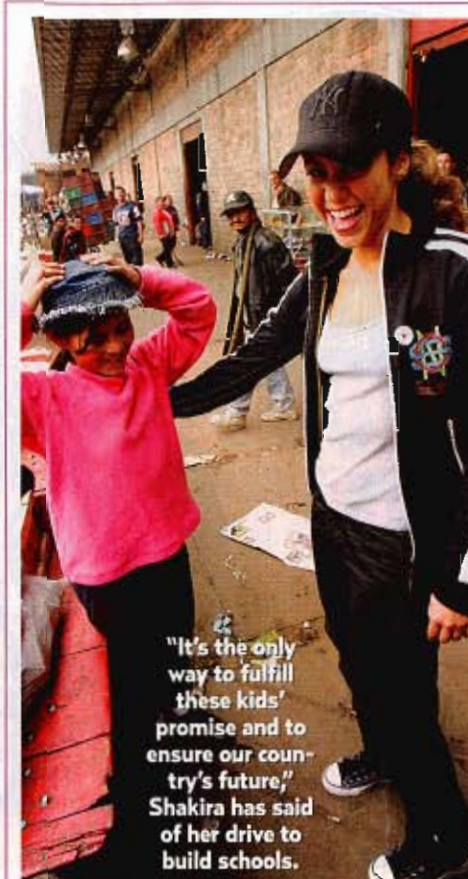
"When we ask them if they're still afraid, most of them are," says Nemcova (in Sri Lanka) of children affected by the tsunami.

Petra Nemcova

Her cause The Happy Hearts Fund (happyheartsfund.org), which helps children affected by economic, health-related or natural disasters.

Gift of life Nemcova, 27, survived the 2004 Asian tsunami that killed tens of thousands by clinging to a tree for hours, after watching boyfriend Simon Atlee get swept away. Since then, the model has used her own money, donations and funds she raised to build schools and medical centers in the devastated area. She returns several times a year to check the progress. Her reward? "To see that the children are getting better, that they're happy."

Why she won't stop "Two years after, people still live in shelters," the Czech-born model says of tsunami victims who are also victims of political unrest. "They cannot get the building materials."



"It's the only way to fulfill these kids' promise and to ensure our country's future," Shakira has said of her drive to build schools.

Shakira

Her cause Fundación Pies Descalzos (fundacionpiesdescalzos.com), which serves children displaced by the civil war in Colombia.

Hometown girl The "Hips Don't Lie" singer, 29, donated the proceeds from a November 15 concert in Barranquilla, the city where she grew up, to help build a school to educate 1,800 children in the poor suburb of La Playa. "There's so much talent, ability and hope in Latin America's children," she has said, "but without a way to help them nurture it, they'll have no future." Since starting Pies Descalzos (Spanish for "bare feet"), the foundation has opened five schools and benefited 12,000 children throughout Colombia. "Education is not a luxury, it is a right everyone should have," the singer, who taught reading to young kids as a teenager, has said.

BIG star The day of her homecoming concert, fans unveiled a 15-foot iron statue of Shakira, donated by a German sculptor, in the Caribbean port city.

FROM LEFT: KEVIN MAZUR/RETNA; KEVIN MAZUR/RETNA; KEVIN MAZUR/RETNA