

Good evening. My name is Simon. Am a junior doctor in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and I also **coordinate** the work of a local charity called RSVP.

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I am honored to be part of your Prize Giving Ceremony today.

And I am very grateful for this opportunity to congratulate winners and all those who contributed to this year's achievements.

We know, don't we, taking part is a key element in team sport or school activity; but winning is what makes us push ourselves in order to achieve our full potential.

Not every athlete taking part in London Olympics will go home with a gold medal. Absolutely not. Only those who push themselves will get glory.

Life out there too is like the Olympics: many take part; but very few get top prizes.

So, I am impressed and in awe of you whose efforts will be rewarded today. And these winners, ladies and gentleman, represent the true spirit of Harlaw Academy whose aim is to produce happy and SUCCESSFUL young people.

In this short speech, what I would like to do is to address two types of winners: Easy winners and those who won against the odds.

Firstly, Easy winners.

Some of you, because of your privileged backgrounds and circumstances simply managed to obtain prizes almost effortlessly. No hassle, no effort and absolutely no sacrifice.

For example, in terms of your course work, what your highly qualified parents didn't help you with, a privately paid teacher did! So, you obtained this prize without any need to push yourself.

My message to you and your parents is, you might well have won this prize with ease, but please make no mistake, tougher tests, which will require resolve, hard work and determination might lie ahead!

Secondly, winners against the odds

Some of you on the other hand, or to put it better, some of us including myself, must overcome perilous and indescribable adversities to win anything.

You may be aware Harlaw Academy is sponsoring 5 secondary school Rwandan children. Their names are Jean Pierre Ntakirutimana, Gisele Zawadi, Esther Niyitanga, Emmanuel Nshimiyimana and Jeremiah Ngendahimana.

Just like me, for those children to win the prize that only about 6% of school leavers get, they did not rely on their parents to help them with course work. Their parents can't read or write.

Just like me, they had to study on empty stomach. Just like me, they had to do house work before school and field work after school.

Remember, not every athlete taking part in London Olympics will go home with a gold medal. Only Olympians who push themselves will get glory.

But such children can't push themselves: Because of lack of electricity, they can't do more revision at home; and petrol is too expensive for the hand held lamp.

To win anything, such children rely instead on the dedication and sacrificial support of their teachers.

Although these teachers earn a meager salary of about £20/month (bread costs £1), they sacrificially go extra mile. For example, they offer free after school and holiday extra tuition to struggling pupils.

Mr Murray, the head teacher might agree teacher's salary is not a problem at Harlaw, is it?

On a serious note, hunger is not a problem at Harlaw. None of these boys and girls misses homework because of electricity blackouts.

But there must be, here today, prize winners who had to overcome incredible adversities. Rather than breaking down due to adversities, these winners are instead breaking records today.

Ladies & gentlemen, boys and girls, tonight I congratulate every winner, of course I do and we all do. But as a boy raised in poverty, I can't help it but especially congratulate boys and girls who, won their prizes against the odds.

Not every athlete taking part in London Olympics will go home with a gold medal. And life out there too is like the Olympics: many take part but very few get top prizes.

So, for those of you who will return here next year, let today's winners, and the spirit of Olympics, inspire you to push yourselves. Let this winning spirit inspire you to achieve your full potential.

And for those of you leaving Harlaw Academy this year to go out into the world, being it university or jobs, whether you won with ease or against the odds, or whether you didn't win anything at all, please keep this winning spirit.

Unlike me or the five students sponsored by Harlaw Academy, the barrier to achieving your full potential, boys and girls, is not lack of opportunities. Instead, the barrier to your success is lack of aspiration and application.

So, in the spirit of the London Olympics and inspiration from today's winners, let us, boys and girls, push ourselves. Let us work hard. Let us strive for gold.

You know, if you want, you can be the happiest and most successful young people in history of this Academy.

Boys & Girls, it's all in hands. Thank you.

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♠ **A £3500 cheque** was received on the day (26 June 2012). The money will go toward the £160 000 building project (Phase 1).

♠ **Partnership with Harlaw Academy:** More news to follow, but clearly this is proving to be a very exciting opportunity for Harlaw and Bugarama young people.

♠ **Why does aid not work?** Please see Simon's book choice HERE.