Role Model

Supermodel Ryan Findlay helps New York City kids

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Oddly, it isn't the chiseled, slightly lived-in face that first attracts, but rather his voice: Whisper-soft, macho-deep and all-knowing -- sexy doesn't begin to cover it.

Ryan Findlay is a hugely successful model who's been paid lots of money to look desirable in blockbuster campaigns for Gianni Versace, Ralph Lauren, Pepe Jeans and Tommy Hilfiger. But being well-known and well-paid isn't nearly enough for this 25-year-old South African transplant and Manhattan resident. Findlay organized a recent benefit for Kids In Need in which Überphotographers Herb Ritts, Ellen Von Unwerth, Bruce Weber and others donated portraits of children to raise funds for The Door, a New York City-based youth center where HIV positive children as well as troubled or abused kids can go hang out and be themselves.

"Society just writes these kids off as if they were damaged goods," says Findlay. "It's disgusting. The truth is that these kids are amazing. They have dreams, they have ideas about the future. Someone has to show them that this world is a beautiful place. Someone has to show them that this world is worth fighting for."

Unlike other aesthetically blessed people, Findlay does know how good he has it. He also knows he wants to keep fighting for kids who don't have the same opportunities he enjoys.

"Why can't kids who test HIV positive just be told to keep going and take care of themselves?" says an exasperated Findlay. "Why are these wonderful kids forced to deal with their own mortality so young? These kids have so much to give the world; they have so much to live for. And anyone who tells them differently -- and I mean *anyone* -- should be shot."

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