

ME to WE Movement

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The ME to WE movement is sparking a generation of young Canadians to become engaged and active citizens. As a thirtysomething this movement may have skipped my generation; however, I do recall as teen watching Oprah Winfrey interview its founder Canadian Craig Kielburger. I remember being in awe of his spirit and motivation. I also recall wondering how I could spark change for the better good.

History of the movement

At age 12 Craig Kielburger was inspired to become an advocate for ending child labor when he read an article about “Iqbal Masih, a 12-year-old former child slave in Pakistan, [who] had been murdered because he spoke up for human rights”. (WE Charity, n.d.) Inspired, he and his brother Marc, founded the charity *Free The Children*—its intention was to do exactly that, to free children through advocacy. As the brothers grew up, they realized poverty was more complication than this, and the focus of the organization shifted from helping children to looking at the community at large.

Movement today

With this shift, the organization was renamed the WE Charity, and they took on a community development model through their WE Villages program. WE Villages offers “an innovative, holistic approach to development that provides access to five key pillars—education, clean water and sanitation, health care, food security, and alternative income—and empowers a community to lift itself out of poverty.” (WE Charity, n.d.a)

Supporting this entity is ME to WE. ME to WE is described as “A social enterprise enabling people to do good through their everyday choices.” (ME to WE, n.d.a) The ME to WE enterprise includes international trips, camps, leadership programs and speaker bureau as well as an online shop featuring jewelry, clothing, chocolate and more. “ME to WE donates half its net profit to support WE Charity, while the other half is reinvested to grow the mission of the social enterprise.” (n.d.b) The distinction between WE Charity and ME to WE is

blurry, as the two entities are so interconnected. Within this mix is WE Day.

WE Day

Organizers describe WE Day as “the manifestation of the WE movement, an ocean of people coming together to create impact. Standing in a stadium full of change-makers will reaffirm your belief that a better world is possible” (WE, n.d.b). On November 20, 2015, I attended the Atlantic edition of WE DAY in Halifax at the Scotia Bank Centre with my then 16-year-old niece. The place was pack with young people, and at times I got goosebumps and was humbled. Chris Hatfield serenaded the crowd on his guitar and provided motivational remarks, and the unstoppable Spencer West inspired listeners as shared his journey as a leg amputee who climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and more.

WE Day aligns with We Schools, an “ educational program that challenges young people to lead with the conviction that together, we can transform lives locally and globally” To attend WE Day participants must “earn” their way to the event by taking part in one local and one global action through the WE Schools program (WE, n.d.a). Corporate sponsors are instrumental in offsetting the costs of hosting the event so youth can attend.

Conflicts surrounding the movement

The presence of cooperate support at a youth event may draw criticism. There also has been some conflict about the WE Charity model. Specifically, Norm Gould, president of the Manitoba Teachers Society questions if the “charity-model that it promotes results in the change needed to eliminate the need for charity.” (Stephenson, 2014, p. 14) He also highlights how the fundraising model to get to WE Day may cause a division of youth from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Specifically, youth who raise more donations to the We Charity get preferential seating, and youth from less affluent backgrounds do not have the same access to donors and fundraising opportunities. More recently the independent news website *Canadaland* posted a highly provoking article (Kerr, 2018). WE has since responded with a Notice of Libel (WE, n.d.c). Regardless, these conflicts made me reflect on my own experience as an adult at WE Day.

WE Day inspired and moved me; however, I was also struck with how well the day was designed for the intended audience: youth. Specifically, it met their short attention span—keynote speakers presented five-minute lightning talks or stories. Music energized the crowd who swayed to the music with their phones lighting up the stadium. Technically speaking, the lighting

and stage design with multilevel platforms, offered a seamless transition between the performers. Throughout the day live video closeups streamed closeups of the action on stage on screens throughout the stadium. It was captivating, but I was also struck with a disconnect between the event and action. What happens after WE Day is over? What's next?

Takeaway for YA Library Services

After a WE Day event, the places where youth gather—including schools and libraries—are vibrating with their energy and positivity. School libraries that are part of schools can access resources and tools provided by the WE maintain this momentum; however, it's a bit more complicated for public libraries to adopt the WE model. Specifically, this is because the WE Charity has created a product that they should be compensated for; secondly, the

References

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values of libraries and the WE Charity (and vice versa) should align. Perhaps they do, and if this is the case libraries and the WE Charity should explore this opportunity together. However, at this time I do not recommend public libraries using WE Charity resources without contacting them first.

The WE Day model points to a need for libraries to create experiences that speak to youth. These by no means need to be as lavish as WE Day, but they need to provide a personal, transcendental connection that inspires. WE Day speaks to a desire by youth to hear from individuals who have overcome adversity to do good. Every neighbourhood has its heroes that inspire. Youth hearing from them first hand at your library has the potential to be very powerful, influential and lasting experience.

[fight-child-labour-now-the-we-brand-promotes-products-made-by-children/](#)

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