

WE Are Stronger Together—how WE strives to bring together youth, educators, and the entire non-profit sector in a spirit of cooperation

By Carrie Patterson, Chief Operations Director for WE Charity

Competition lies at the heart of business. But it shouldn't be a driver of non-profits, since we all have the same goal of bettering the world. Why would we work against each other? That's why I'm so pleased to work for an organization that isn't trying to grab the biggest slice, but rather actively working to make the whole pie bigger, elevating all causes to create maximum social impact.

We call it cause agnosticism—the idea that youth can bring any cause to us and we'll help them find a way to support it. This is the founding idea behind WE Schools and WE Day. Our team will provide them with coaching, mentorship, and support to fundraise for any cause or organization. And we'll even celebrate their efforts.

From its inception in 2007, our WE Day events welcomed all causes to the stage. Kids earn their entrance to WE Day by volunteering and fundraising for at least one local and one global cause—not just for WE, but for any issue they are passionate about. And when they get to WE Day, students are exposed to many more. On our stage, actor Seth Rogan has promoted his charity, Hilarity for Charity, to fund Alzheimer's research. Prince Harry called on youth to participate in the Queen's Commonwealth Trust. Hundreds of local kids and hometown heroes each promote a cause that is close to their heart. A personal highlight, in a moment that had everyone in tears, singer Gord Downie and the Wenjack family launched the Secret Path project to raise awareness about the history of residential schools, and to promote Indigenous reconciliation in Canada. It's Downie's legacy project. He knew he'd be gone before he could see it all through, and he was calling on the next generation to keep up the effort.

Through WE Day and the WE Schools program, youth in North America and the UK raised over \$69 million for more than 5,000 different causes over the past four years. An estimated 78 per cent of funds raised by WE youth during that time went directly non-WE organizations like UNICEF, the Terry Fox Foundation, the Red Cross, The Rotary Club, the SPCA, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Ronald McDonald House, Sick Kids Canada and Plan Canada. We're proud to give students the resources to raise funds and campaign ideas to dedicate their time to such worthy causes.

The success of WE Schools is measured in far more than dollars raised. In fact, 70 of WE campaigns are focused on student service rather than fundraising. It's about, discovering a social cause and donating time and effort to the greater good. We help inspire youth to pick a cause they care about and to take action in multiple ways—through advocacy, in-kind donations and volunteering.

And they have a huge impact. Here's a testimonial from the Food Bank of Hamilton, Ontario, about the contribution made by one school during the WE Scare Hunger campaign, a Halloween-themed food drive:

"Through this tremendous school initiative, the student-led campaign at St. Thomas More [High School] is one of the largest contributors to our food bank. Since 1999, 967,959 pounds of food has been raised by the students, amounting to approximately \$2,428,274 worth of goods. Through St. Thomas More's campaign, our food bank has received a consistent supply of non-perishable basic essentials to help close to 1,200 families with food support each month."

And that's *just one school!* Congratulations St. Thomas More High School! In 2017-2018 alone, participating youth collected more than 3.5 million pounds of food for local food banks across North America and in the UK.

Education and awareness are the core components of WE Schools campaigns. These initiatives dovetail with our service learning program to bring real world issues into the classroom and to engage youth in social issues as they learn valuable life skills. Take WE Scare Hunger. The campaign not only raised millions of pounds of food last year, but youth also learned about global food security, as well as hunger in their own communities. Using WE Schools resources, they held classroom discussions, produced and distributed information materials in their communities, and visited local homeless shelters and food banks to see the challenges first hand. In a survey of educators involved in WE campaigns, 91 percent agreed that, after participating in WE Scare Hunger, their students felt more connected to their community. The trend of civic engagement continues after graduation—our alumni are 1.3 per cent more likely to vote consistently throughout their lives than their peers.

We're grateful to support incredible non-profits, and thankful for their kind words. This is what Martha McClew, Ontario Provincial Director of The Terry Fox Foundation, has to say:

"Over the past 25 years WE has been a leader in inspiring the next generation of Canadians leaders to act on their passions and bring their energy and idealism to a world that needs them desperately. No matter the cause, whether it be fundraising for clean water in Africa, hosting a Terry Fox Run or collecting canned goods for food drives, WE has given the youth of today permission to be bold, brave and act with purpose, just like Terry Fox did."

The driving goal of WE is to inspire youth to find the issues and causes they are most passionate about, and to take action in numerous ways—all 4 million participating youth giving back in their own ways. That's a big impact. We don't want to compete with other non-profits. We want to connect them with inspired and motivated young people who can help all of us build a better world.

Because we are stronger together.



Carrie Patterson

Executive responsible for WE Schools