

## WE Charity takes a stand.

We grew up in Thornhill Ontario. We were taught by our family, like countless young people being taught by their families, that life's simple purpose is to do good for others.

Craig was 12-years-old when he heard how a young child slave in Pakistan was killed in trying to end child labour. It was a tragic lesson that life is precious, good is fragile and those in positions of power can easily hurt others for their own benefit.

When we started a Canadian charity 25 years ago we were just two teenagers wanting to do good.

And once we launched Free The Children, now WE Charity, we found millions of Canadian kids who also just wanted to do good. To help to make the world a little bit better.

The charity's mission statement is simple: WE makes doing good, doable. For the last nine months we have sought to be measured in our comments as the good of a children's charity has been destroyed by political crossfire. Today we are taking a stand.

We have been disappointed in the conduct of all political parties in this matter. Because what was accomplished by educators and students in 7,000 Canadian schools is remarkable, it deserves to be protected.

- It has been 25-years of helping to build 1,500 schools and schoolhouses around the world.
- Educating 200,000 children.
- Improving access to health care and clean water for one million people.

And here in Canada:

- Running the nation's largest annual one-day collection for foodbanks.
- Creating mental health curriculum for Canadian students.
- Through WE Schools and WE Day, supporting more than 5,000 charities in communities across Canada, and logging 70 million hours of volunteer service.

Committee members will likely pay lip service to these achievements. They may claim not to be attacking these good works. But their political games have cancelled many of these impacts and they are jeopardizing the rest.

In the drive to do good – to do better – we confronted outdated models and prohibitions. Canada's charitable sector is in a crisis. A 30-year steady decline in the percentage of Canadians who give. Yet federal law restricts how a charity earns income. In response we incorporated ME to WE Social Enterprise to create empowering jobs in poor communities overseas *and* generate revenue that then gets donated to WE Charity.

It's the same model as Newman's Own, the salad dressing and food company that donates 100 percent of after-tax profits totalling hundreds of millions to the Newman's Own Charitable Foundation. The company was owned by Paul Newman until his death. Until recent politics, ME to WE Social Enterprise

was celebrated as a new model of how to do good. Since its founding, 100 percent of all profits have been donated to WE Charity or reinvested to grow the social mission.

Craig and I started young. We grew. We learned along the way. Doing good is not simple. Not just teenagers, but anyone of any age who builds things, who does differently, who tries to innovate for good, is going to make mistakes. We have made our share. We have apologized. In future we will surely make more mistakes and we will apologize again.

We heard the American journalist Mr. Reed Cowan speak here two weeks ago. The death of a child is beyond words and our heart goes out to him. Fifteen years ago, he said he wanted to help children in Kenya, and he did. He directly raised about seventy-thousand US dollars. Those donations supported four schoolhouses in Kenya. Two had plaques honouring his son, one plaque was removed. Mr. Cowan is right to be upset and no words are sufficient to erase the grief that this error compounded.

Last month when I first learned of the mistake, Craig called Mr. Cowan to apologize on behalf of the charity, and they spoke for 90 minutes. We immediately mounted the second plaque honouring his son Wesley. We are checking records as a second donor to the same Kenyan village at around the same time 15 years ago also had a problem with a plaque.

We again immediately apologized and are working to properly recognize her generous support.

Working in developing countries is challenging. Ending generations of extreme poverty is not simple. The African proverb is true it takes a village to raise a child. That village requires schools, water projects, medical care and more.

We fundraise more than the cost of building a schoolhouse because our education programs also include teacher training, school lunches and student vaccines.

We fundraise more than the actual cost of simply drilling a borehole. Because our water and sanitation programs also include piping, distribution, and fuel, and repairs to keep community water projects running for years.

WE Charity, and most charities, provide catalogues of goats, schoolhouses and wells that show representative uses of funds to help donors visualize the impacts in a community. WE Charity, and most charities, clearly explain that if more funds are collected than needed for a particular catalogue item those funds will be redirected to similar activities to help end poverty. This is to ensure that all essential programs receive necessary support. WE Charity, like most global development groups, pool funds to help the entire village. Our notice about pooling funds for the village and directing funds to greatest need is clear and transparent.

Hundreds of donors have shared with us they understand this model and they agree that this is the responsible approach to community development. Donors give because our model is proven to end poverty in villages and all the money goes to help children. However perhaps for lack of experience in giving to charity we are bewildered that one member of this committee irresponsibly compared this near-universal charitable practice to fraud.

Certain members of this committee have also advanced a false narrative that WE Charity was trying to avoid answering questions. The truth is that months earlier we had confirmed our willingness to come voluntarily to this committee and answer all questions. This was in addition to voluntary testimony

before the Finance Committee on the same issues for a record four hours — more time than anyone for example testified about COVID.

A week prior to our agreed appearance Mr. Angus wrote on Member of Parliament letterhead to demand police and income tax investigations of WE Charity. Clearly showing the political purposes of his action he announces this on twitter and his letter was immediately leaked to the media to generate headlines. Imagine the NDP calling-in the police for clearly political purposes on a children's charity.

Craig and I wanted nothing more than to come here to tell you, prove to you, that such allegations are wrong. If this were about us as individuals, we would have come to committee right away to refute some of the very personal attacks to our integrity. But it is not that simple. The charity is more important than us and the charity's work must be carefully protected.

You see even as WE Charity winds down its Canadian activity because of politics it continues to operate life-saving humanitarian programs. Such as a hospital in Kenya that is the only safe space for women to give birth for miles.

By requesting a law enforcement investigation for political reasons of WE Charity in the middle of these proceedings before even hearing our side, Mr. Angus knew he would get headlines while making it hard for the charity to defend itself. Let us be clear, this hearing is a trial and a public one at that. This forum does not give WE Charity or us the legal protections guaranteed to Canadians. Politicians are not impartial. Without recognizing our right to present our own evidence, this Committee is trying WE Charity in the court of public opinion and forcing testimony.

One MP Mr. Poilievre even threatened us with imprisonment before a summons was even issued. Members of Parliament often speak of their "privileges". So that all Canadians understand the legal term "absolute privilege" means MPs can say anything they want no matter how malicious and false. Canadians are powerless to hold MPs accountable for falsehoods, and then social media and conventional media share these false statements. Over the past nine months many falsehoods have circulated about WE Charity and those associated with it.

Lies and inuendo have been spread about me, my brother and our families. Not even our 80-year-old parents have been spared.

To try to respond to this tsunami of misinformation, leading Canadian forensic auditors were asked to conduct a thorough review to determine if there was anything improper arising from the relationship between us, our families, or ME to WE Social Enterprise. To be clear no one asked us to do this, and again we welcomed this inquiry from non political experts. We provided everything the auditor asked for, from our personal finances, to real estate.

The Forensic accountants concluded, *"We did not identify any concerns in relation to interactions between WE Charity and ME to WE Social Enterprise"* and *"we found no evidence of improper transactions which benefited the Kielburgers personally."*

MPs have now demanded or initiated nine different "enquiries" relating to WE Charity.

- Standing Committee on Finance
- Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

- Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics
- The Commissioner of Official Languages
- The Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner
- The Privacy Commissioner
- The Commissioner of Lobbying

And thanks to Mr. Angus, now potentially the RCMP and the CRA.

WE Charity believes in fairness and practices transparency and accountability. It works with and will work with any non-political agency investigating legal matters. But to Canadians who are watching, I say, if partisan politicians use their powers irresponsibly, then they can do it to any organization or business.

Consider what the politicians did to a Canadian-owned small business named Speakers' Spotlight, which has been part of these proceedings. They pressured the owners to break privacy laws. When that failed, they mounted a public relations campaign against the small business. A reckless, mean-spirited attack that resulted in doxing, online hate, harassment and threats of violence. The Conservatives, the party of small business and free enterprise initiated that. To this day, no Conservative MP has ever apologized for the hate or for the harm they caused. When your sole talking point is that *"you've got the power"*, you betray indifference to using it responsibly.

At the request of the WE Charity Board of Directors, joining us today is Will McDowell, a former Associate Deputy Minister of Justice who served under both Paul Martin and Stephen Harper. The charity is entitled to fairness and respect for its rights. If Mr. Angus had not changed the rules at the last-minute, Craig and I would be here on our own as originally planned. Mr. McDowell is here to protect the interests of the charity and ours because of Mr. Angus' actions.

Although politics has cancelled WE Charity in Canada, in countries like Kenya the endowment that will be set up will continue to help children for generations. It will help operate Baraka Hospital where in December 158 babies were safely born. It will help run secondary schools delivering education that helps hundreds of girls, many avoiding the slavery of early childhood marriage. Many good people are delivering these projects. They do not deserve to be political pawns.

The stated mandate of this committee is to investigate pandemic spending. Here is the simple fact: Given a chance to do good for 100,000 students and other charities during the pandemic, WE Charity agreed to help. That's what charities do; they help where there is need. We didn't advise the Prime Minister and Mr. Morneau not to recuse themselves. We never prorogued Parliament. We were not involved in the decision to filibuster this committee last fall. This is a political scandal for the Government, not for WE Charity.

The Government hid behind a children's charity by letting it take the fall for their political decisions and the Opposition allowed them. Not a single MP spoke up for the millions of children in Canada and around the world who had benefited from this organization.

As MPs you have power to allege what you please, damage whom you please, and summon as you please. So let me ask you, after a year of political games what is the result? What have you accomplished? March is the one-year anniversary of the WHO declaring a pandemic, hundreds of

thousands of Canadian youth will once again need employment this summer. Where is the replacement program for youth opportunity? Who among you have developed has a better plan to match non-profits with the volunteer help they so desperately need? How has any of this made Canadian youth more likely to serve or more likely to one day go into politics?

It is easy to tear down irresponsibly. It is, however, difficult to build. More difficult still to replace what you destroy. WE Charity was not perfect, but Canadian youth were better off because of it.

Winston Churchill warned that, *“some people’s idea of [free speech] is that they are free to say what they like but if anyone else says anything back that is an outrage.”*

Just as Churchill predicted some of you may be outraged that we point out the politics at the root of this. If today is anything like our committee appearance nine months ago, you will make your speeches, denounce us, ask your questions, and ignore our answers.

As you do, we will think of the remaining dedicated staff pouring heart and soul into doing good like operating the hospital and secondary schools in Kenya. Today will be another day of bombardment from you and tomorrow we will return to the work of helping children.

Thank you.