



Remembering Joe Opatowski
April 19, 1983 - October 29, 2004

JOE'S DREAM SCHOLARSHIP FUND

WELCOME

Welcome to Joe's Dream Scholarship Fund. We're so excited that you're joining us on a ME to WE experience this year—we can't wait to combine our creative energies to make our world a better place!

APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications will be accepted until **March 1, 2016**, and must include the following:

- A letter of motivation describing your level of interest in going on a ME to WE experience
- Your completed application form
- Your completed fundraising calculator



JOE'S SPARK

This scholarship was created in memory of Joe Opatowski, a humble and passionate leader who dedicated his life to empowering young people to change the world.

Joe learned about the power of young people through his own experiences. Growing up, Joe's home-life was full of challenges, from violence to addiction, abuse and fear. But Joe always tried to make things better for the people around him, and so it came naturally that he never stopped working to create peace in his family. He even extended his peaceful philosophy to help end the street and school violence so common in his neighbourhood in Scarborough, Ontario.

When he was just 17-years-old, the problems at home forced Joe to move out of his house. He worked many jobs just to pay for rent and groceries, yet he still made time to hang out with his high school friends. Even at this young age, Joe's determination to confront each of life's challenges was clear.

Joe's family situation remained difficult, so Children and Youth Services occasionally helped by sending him and his two younger brothers to summer camp. At one of these camps, when he was still a teenager, Joe met a boy named Jordan who tried to get him interested in a leadership camp he was planning to attend. Joe, however, only heard two words: leadership and camp. Camp was fun, but leadership? "Boring!" he thought. But then he heard that some young people even got to fly to other cities and countries to give motivational speeches. And Joe loved to talk! Then Jordan told him that there were also lots of girls at the camp. And Joe loved girls! Free flights, talking and girls? Joe was sold.

Soon after, Joe attended his first Free The Children international conference, which eventually became Take Action Camp. From the moment Joe walked into the room and saw so many young people who wanted to change the world, he knew this was the place for him. It wasn't long before he was interested in more than just the girls—he was quickly enthralled by the lectures and workshops. There was nothing boring about this place! Soon he was consumed with the idea that young people truly did have a big part to play in the global community, and that they could do this by spreading peace and compassion, regardless of who they were or where they came from.

After the conference, Joe remained committed to changing the world. He found an opportunity to be sponsored to join a group of young people in Jamaica to volunteer with a community living in a garbage dump. While playing with the children there, Joe learned that they spent their days rifling through heaps of garbage, just to afford something to eat. Suddenly, all of the problems that Joe was facing in his own life in Canada didn't seem as bad. When he met kids who had to share their only pair of shoes with their brothers and sisters, he knew that he had a lot more to give to the world than he had ever thought. He knew that he could give love.

Joe's trip to Jamaica taught him that we all have the ability to take positive action in our lives and that not having money should never stop us from acting. He learned that love is the essence of change and that the great thing about love is everyone has it to share.

JOE'S SPARK (CONT.)

Joe joined ME to WE and Free the Children as a staff member in 2001, where he was an outstanding facilitator, public speaker and motivator. He always had hope for a brighter tomorrow, and he always believed in the power of one person to change the world, regardless of his or her life circumstances. Between 2002 and 2004, Joe went on speaking tours with Leaders Today (now ME to WE) where he had the opportunity to address audiences all over North America. At one point, Joe chose to be silent for a week in a "vow of silence" to raise money for youth without the economic means to participate in Leaders Today programs. Today, Free The Children runs a We Are Silent campaign for youth to effect change—a testament to what young people are able to accomplish.

In 2004, Joe began another speaking tour for ME to WE—a philosophy and a movement largely based on Joe's own feelings about how to change the world and how the small, selfless actions of one person can be truly transformative.

On October 29, 2004, Joe was on his way home from a week of speeches in New York. But something tragic and unexpected happened along the way: Joe was killed in a car accident. He was only 21-years-old.

To honour Joe, and to carry on a legacy that he would be proud of, his family at ME to WE and Free the Children decided to make one of Joe's dreams a reality. Ever since his trip to Jamaica, Joe dreamed of creating a scholarship fund that would give young people without the financial means the chance to develop their gifts in a positive learning environment. Joe knew that his trip to Jamaica and his time at Take Action Camp had changed his life, and he wanted to give other young people like him the same opportunity. Joe never let go of this dream. He spoke of it to anyone who would listen, and he believed in the power it would have to change the world.

This scholarship is Joe's dream. It is proof that one person can make a world of difference and can achieve their goals and dreams if they are passionate and positive. Joe's Dream Scholarship Fund gives young people without the financial means the chance to embark on a ME to WE Trip or attend Take Action Camp. With ME to WE, you will experience the world in a whole new way and truly understand that we are the generation we have been waiting for!

Thank you for helping to make Joe's dream a reality by applying for this scholarship.

