



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Media Statement – WE Charity

Toronto (July 3, 2020) – Today, WE co-founders Craig Kielburger and Marc Kielburger made the following statement:

In recent days, there has been enormous interest in the creation of the Canada Student Service Grant (CSSG). The program was conceived by the federal government for post-secondary students to take part in service activities supporting communities during the era of COVID-19. It was designed to meet a critical need by enabling post-secondary students to earn necessary funds for tuition and other expenses during a time of limited employment options. The goal was to involve tens of thousands of students in communities across the country during these summer months in return for a one-time payment of between \$1,000 and \$5,000, depending upon the duration of their service.

To facilitate and operationalize an initiative of this scale, and within such a heavily compressed timeline, the federal government sought an external partner and WE Charity was approached in late April by officials at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) to possibly lend its support and expertise. Our experience working with 130+ school districts and agencies in Canada providing service-learning programs made WE Charity a logical candidate to help support the government's ambitions and we quickly agreed to take part.

It is worth pausing on the enormous undertaking such a program represents, built from scratch in a matter of mere weeks. Recruiting and engaging priority populations was a program imperative, which required the program provide a robust support program for participant accessibility and success. Infrastructure had to be built to facilitate the processing of tens of thousands of applications. A coalition of community and not-for-profit partners was created to offer tens of thousands of turn-key service positions that met physical distance criteria. Hundreds of staff were recruited to mentor students to successfully navigate the program, address diversity imperatives and ensure accessibility to priority populations. Training, coaching and onboarding programs – for both students and service recipient not-for-profit organizations – had to be put in place and then executed. Payment terms and infrastructure, insurance and waiver systems, policy criteria, contracting and countless other administrative functions had to be established or adapted from existing structures. All of this had to be done in record time and in a manner that could meet the public interest, ensure administrative efficacy and deliver value for money to the government. It was – and is – a daunting operational project.

In the week since the program was launched, the following are its success metrics:

- More than 35,000 student applicants – including every province and all three territories
- Wide diversity of applicants with 64% visible minority and 10% LGBTQ2+
- An average of 3,000 new applications per day



- A coalition of 83 not-for-profit partners offering over 24,000 service placements to-date and rapidly increasing

A successful program design and launch offers an opportunity to pause and reflect on the program's next steps.

Even as CSSG take-up has been very strong, the program has also been enmeshed in controversy from the moment of its announcement. Questions have been asked about the program's origin, about the concept of outsourcing the program's operations, about the choice of WE Charity as the government's partner, and the underlying merit of paid service. These are all valid questions and the government has provided explanations for each. However, controversy has not abated.

Our concern is that to continue in this way, the program itself will begin to suffer – and as a consequence, opportunities for students might be negatively affected. Not only would that be unwelcome, it is unnecessary. The program has now been launched with a level of operational functionality and a critical mass of engagement that permits it to be otherwise administered.

Having achieved a successful launch and with systems in place for operation, WE Charity and ESDC have mutually agreed that the operational responsibility will be passed to the Government of Canada. WE Charity has offered to support this transition in any way possible. With the systems and structures largely built, we are confident that the program will continue to deliver its important mission to students and not-for-profit organizations. The student applicants and the not-for-profit partners will all be secure in existing positions.

In addition, in order to remove any question whatsoever concerning WE Charity's motivation for becoming involved in this initiative, WE Charity waives all costs associated with the creation and administration of the program. To be clear, any funds earmarked for WE Charity staff or WE Charity administration will be returned in full to the government.

As an element of the program's design WE Charity was asked to provide a certain number of service opportunities at WE Charity to be available in order to help anchor the program at launch. However, response to the program in these first few days has been so strong that we can now confidently say that such a guarantee is no longer necessary. As no service positions at WE Charity have been currently filled, and with over 24,000 available service placements currently in the system, in order to avoid any perceived undue benefit, the WE Charity service positions will no longer be offered.

We take this decision reluctantly. WE Charity is proud of the CSSG and believe its early momentum demonstrates the virtue of the concept and the incredible energy, generosity and goodwill of Canadian students. Moreover, we are proud of the work done by our team and what they have built while working long hours, often from home, during a time of great uncertainty and challenge. We wish to thank ESDC for the opportunity to be involved in the CSSG's creation and wish the program all the best of continued success.