

Hello my name is Oksana Kishchuk. When I was in grade seven, I was part of the leadership committee in my elementary school, and as a member I was given a ticket to go and listen to Craig Kielburger speak. Craig talked about how youth around the world was making changes with Free The Children. While listening to Craig I was inspired by his words; that I could make a difference in the world too.

On my way out of the event, I took a pamphlet that advertised trips to Kenya to build a school. When I got home I told my family that I was going to travel to Kenya. My parents were a little shocked at first. They did not know what to think. However, I have wonderful parents, and they agreed to let me go to Kenya on a few conditions.

The first condition was that I had to raise half of the money myself, so I saved everything, and asked for money instead of a birthday, or Christmas gift. The second condition was that I had to find someone to travel with me. I could not go alone. So, I asked my aunt who travels a lot, if she would be willing to travel with me and she said yes.

Finally in the summer of 2011 after I had finished grade nine, I had finally raised enough money to travel to Kenya. I packed my bags and I was on my adventure! While I was in Kenya, I was able to build a school, play with local children, learn how the women in the villages carried water, train as a Maasai Warrior, meet some very kind people, and kiss a giraffe!

But there was one event that has stuck with me since I have returned home. While in Kenya, I was told of this exchange with a young boy who was studying at one of the Free The Children primary schools:

“What are you going to do when you graduate?”

“I will go to Kisaruni [All Girls] Secondary School.”

“But you know that Kisaruni is for girls – right? And you are a boy.”

“I know – but I also know that Free The Children won’t forget about the boys”.

This story inspired me and those on my trip to try and raise \$1.2 million to build a boys secondary school in Kenya. We call ourselves the Bogani Family Coalition.

With the support of the Bogani Family Coalition, I have organized four events, two fundraiser dinners called Perogies for Good, and two benefit concerts, called Sounds of Hope. We were even able to have the Kenyan Boys Choir perform at a concert! Through these events and other, my friends and I have been able to raise over \$150 000 for the school.

So why do I do all of this? What has volunteer work given me? And why should you consider getting involved?

I have learnt many public speaking skills from speaking to small groups and 15,000 youth at We Day Saskatchewan. I was asked to speak at We Day to let youth know how anyone can make a difference. This has helped me in school presentations and gain confidence in the work I am doing. Before starting to fundraise I was very, very shy and something like talking to you today would be impossible. But with the support of the organization I have gained the ability to have confidence in what I do, and learn how to speak publicly.

I have learnt to be more organized, not only in my volunteer work, but how to organize my schoolwork and the rest of my life. Surprisingly, all of the extra work I have done has given me skills like learning how to write better, and plan out my school week as well as learning to plan for after high school.

I have gained many connections that have been helpful for university applications, as well as connections in the career I would like in the future. I have met CEO of PotashCorp, William Doyle, Marc and Craig Kielburger, and many people that will be able to help me in my career in the future.

I have also met many of my best friends on many of the trips I have been involved in since 2011. These people live all over the world and I have learnt so much from them all. They have taught me that having a network of inspiring friends is so helpful in reaching for my dreams.

I have also learnt about who I am, and what I would like to do in the future. I have learnt what my values in life are, and the type of university degree and career that I want, working in international development, and with youth around the world.

So now what? How do you do all of this? It may seem overwhelming but it is really simple.

Find something that you are passionate about. I once heard a quote that describes this perfectly. Love + Anger = Passion. Find something that you love so much that it makes you angry to see it not being treated right. The combination of the two means you have found your passion.

Dream Big. Make a plan about how you can tackle this problem, it can be big or small but don't set limits, you never know what you are capable of.

Follow through. This step can be the hardest, but only if you make it hard. There are so many friends, mentors, and strangers that will be willing to help you along the way. Build a strong support group for you so that your plan will be easy to carry out.

Thank you for listening to me speak. All of you have everything you need to change the world! I am sure that you will find your passion, and I hope to hear how your dreams are working out!