

**THEY ROCKED AND ROARED  
WE DAY CROWD MOVES TO THE BEAT OF MUSIC, INSPIRATION TO CREATE  
PHILANTHROPIC PANDEMONIUM**

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Can 18,000 children be inspired to change the world by an 81-year-old Russian great-grandfather speaking through a translator, a man whose greatness came before any of them was born?

As they say at We Day, "Yes, we can."

Work for peace -- only in a peaceful world can great change be achieved, former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev implored 18,000 Manitoba children Tuesday morning at the MTS Centre.

And they responded, with standing ovation after standing ovation. "We need to move to a world without nuclear weapons," said the Nobel Peace Prize laureate at the second We Day Manitoba. "You should also work for freedom, so people can decide for themselves."

The kids from 396 schools earned a trip to We Day because they've committed to changing the world through supporting global projects for social justice and projects in their own backyards.

"I like you guys -- I love you!" he said to thunderous applause.

And at times, you could feel the entire arena shuddering as dread ran rampant.

"During the Cold War, about 100,000 nuclear weapons were produced. Each one of those warheads had the power to destroy a city like Winnipeg," said Gorbachev.

Introducing Gorbachev, Winnipeg Free Press editor Paul Samyn said, "President Gorbachev's widespread reforms changed the course of humanity."

Full-time pep rally, frenetic and beyond loud, dazzling light show; We Day is four hours of motivational speakers both renowned and ordinary, peppered with plenty of top music performers such as Lights, Shawn Desman and Victoria Duffield.

Singer Lights talked about growing up in a missionary family in the Philippines, where water is plentiful, but pitifully little of it is fit to drink. We Day's clean water campaign's brilliance is how easy it is to achieve, she said.

University of Manitoba medical student Tito Daodu returns to her native Nigeria to provide pediatric oxygen services to children -- who face the terrifying reality that 200,000 kids under the age of five die of pneumonia every year.

Blind bullying victim Molly Burke had the entire arena near tears -- especially when her guide dog Gypsy joined her onstage.

The Kielburger brothers, Marc and Craig, took the kids back in time to worlds where contemporary life here was not taken for granted -- Mahatma Gandhi standing up to an empire, little children integrating a school in Little Rock, Ark., Nellie McClung leading the movement to win women the vote.

"Everyone, not just the women, owes Nellie McClung a huge show of gratitude," said Marc Kielburger. And with social media, students have tools of which Gandhi and McClung never dreamed, he said: "Today, you have the means to change the world faster than at any point in human history."

Manitoba Children and Youth Opportunities Minister Kevin Chief gave a huge shoutout to young people in Shamattawa, who are making the only safe place in the community available to kids.

"These youth volunteer four nights a week to make sure the gym stays open," he said.

Chief Justice Murray Sinclair said he wants a world in which his granddaughter can grow up with respect.

Too many schools still teach that aboriginal children are inferior, said Sinclair, head of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schools.

"They were told they were savages and heathens," Sinclair said.

Craig Kielburger said there was considerable thought given to a campaign urging Canadian students to help build schools on First Nations, but, "The costs were prohibitive."

Instead, in discussions with people such as national chief and Free the Children patron Shawn Atleo, they opted to break down barriers and promote a national aboriginal awareness month in schools.

"It starts with an understanding, breaking down prejudices" and the lack of knowledge, Kielburger said. Through former prime minister Paul Martin's work with aboriginal education, Free the Children is making aboriginal awareness curricula available to all schools.

Meanwhile, Free the Children provides the resources for Sacred Circle, in which young aboriginal leaders work with aboriginal communities to tackle issues they've identified together.

Premier Greg Selinger saluted We Day sponsors Hartley Richardson, Mark Chipman and Bob Silver. "I call them the three wise men, because it was their idea to bring We Day to Manitoba," said the premier.

Selinger gave an impassioned plea for all 18,000 kids to reach out to kids being bullied: the child sitting alone, the kid who dresses a little differently, the new student who can't speak English.

"Can we reach out to them? Yes, we can," Selinger said.

"Yes, we can," echoed 18,000 voices, rivalling the noise with which any Jets crowd has ever rocked the arena.

But how silent can 18,000 kids be? Beyond deep space silent, when Spencer West described climbing Mount Kilimanjaro, though he lost his legs when he was five.

A few minutes from the top, his friends were collapsing on the slopes of the African summit this summer, West told We Day. "Sometimes, it's the people you don't think need help, need it the most," he said.

Climbing hand over hand, West urged his friends to make it to the top.

And they did.