

## Free the Children

Free the Children was founded in 1995 by Craig Kielburger. Craig was a 12-year old Canadian who saw a need and realized that you are never too young to make a difference.

Craig was reading the comics one day when he saw the front page of the newspaper, the *Toronto Star*. On the cover was a picture of a boy wearing a bright red vest with a fist held high. The headline read, "Boy, 12, murdered for speaking out against child labor." Craig's heart was stirred, especially since this boy was his same age. The murdered boy, named Iqbal was from Pakistan and had been sold into slavery at the age of four. He served as a carpet weaver to pay back a loan his parents had taken out. Iqbal was forced to work 12 hours a day six days a week.

Craig soon learned that there are 250 million children laboring in the world, half of them work full-time, and many are subject to hazardous conditions. Craig gathered together a group of friends, most of them his same age, and they founded the organization Free the Children.

The group developed goals including creating a greater awareness of child labor issues, making the protection and the education of children a priority, creating programs to help free children from exploitation, and working with children in developing countries and around the world. They began with some activities that quickly gained worldwide attention. The group developed a petition asking world leaders to help end child labor, began a letter-writing campaign and an education campaign, and organized fundraisers to provide poor families with other sources of income.

When Free the Children was only six months old, Craig received an invitation to speak before 2,000 people at a conference. He spoke for 15 minutes and \$150,000 was donated. This was used to build a rehabilitation and education center in India for freed children. In December of 1995, Craig and a 25-year-old friend took a seven-week trip to several countries to meet children who would benefit from his cause.

In the past seven years, Free the Children has spread to more than 35 countries and more than 100,000 youth are involved in its activities. More than 300 primary schools have been built, over 100,000 school and health kits have been shipped, and over \$2.5 million has been spent for medical supplies. The organization continues to raise money to provide alternative sources of income to poor families so that children will not be forced to work.

For more information on Free the Children, visit [www.freethechildren.org](http://www.freethechildren.org).