

Cynthia: Hi, my name is Cynthia Kersey and I'd like to welcome you to the Unstoppable Giving Challenge. Our mission is to build a minimum of 40 schools in Africa and we are well on our way. And today's interview is really special to me because you're going to meet one of the founders of our in-country partner Free the Children. And get an update on what your generous contribution is really doing to impact children and communities around the world. So, I want you to know that the in-country partners that we select are of the highest caliber and integrity and are really delivering already your donation.

So the gentleman you are about to meet is, in my opinion, one of the most extraordinary people on the planet. And yet he's 20 years -- 26 years old. That's the same age as my son and I remembered interviewing Craig Kielburger for my first book back in 1997 when Free the Children was a young organization. And I have been so impressed with him that I have been following his work now for 13 years and actually attended Craig's conference in Toronto last October, where over 6,000 young people came together to stand for the elimination of poverty in their lifetime. I have to tell you it was one of the most amazing events in my life. I left with so much hope of today's generation and what you are going to be doing. So, Craig in my estimation really represent a new generation of leaders who is really helping this planet address some of the most crucial social issues of our times. So I'm deeply honored to have Craig on this call. I have to take just another minute to give you some more information about him. Craig is, like I said, extraordinary. He's an accomplished child rights activist. He's a New York Times best-selling author. He has an amazing book that I recommend to everybody. He's the founder of Free the Children. Free the Children is the world's largest network of children helping children through education. And under Craig's leadership, Free the Children has reached more than 1 million young people through its domestic and international program. The organization has built -- get this -- more than 500 schools in Asia, Africa and Latin America, providing daily education to more than 50,000 children. And through the Children's latest initiative is a joint project with none other than Oprah Winfrey, her Angel network, called the O Ambassador. And it's an unprecedented program designed to educate and inspire over 1 million young people across North America to become socially engaged and take action to help their under-privileged peers overseas. Craig also the co-founder of Me to We, and the goal of Me to We is to encourage ethical living and social responsibility, which also help Free the Children achieve a financial sustainability. I could probably spend an hour just talking about how great you are, Craig. But it is really my honor to welcome the unstoppable Craig Kielburger to our call today. Welcome Craig.

Craig: Thank you for the very kind word. Very much appreciate it. And of course thank you for the support of the Unstoppable Foundation with the school project in Africa. That is what we are especially deeply appreciative for.

Cynthia: Well I hear you and we are excited about that. And I want to just take a moment for anyone who maybe unfamiliar with your story. I told your story all the time when I'm speaking but just

take a moment to let our listeners know how you started Free the Children and what really compelled you to do something so extraordinary?

Craig: Well I started very young. I grew up in the suburb, a very ordinary childhood. Both my parents are school teachers, wasn't very aware of global issues. I was looking in the old newspaper and saw on the front page this picture of a young boy and an article that was written. He was from Pakistan and when he was 4 years old, the family was desperately poor, they sold him for slavery. And he worked making carpets until he was 10 years old. He escaped and sort of speaking about his condition in Pakistan and was killed at the age of 12, he was assassinated for speaking on behalf of the children. And I was 12 when I read that article and I looked at his life in Pakistan, and I thought of my life in North America – two corners of this world. And those differences made me so angry that I tore up that newspaper's article and talk to my classmates, I need your help, I don't know what we are going to do, but we have to do something. And with a small group of friends, started Free the Children back in 1995, as a network to help young people and now anyone who's interested in global issue, who is really searching to help, with the simple believe that we can free children from abuse and exploitation and then poverty. Here in North America where kids are too young to make a difference.

Cynthia: One reason I shared your story, because here you were a 12 year-old child, knowing that most don't take you seriously and you were trying to get a meeting with the Prime Minister and all these people, and you got a lot of push back in the beginning because of your age.

Craig: A lot of people said, 'how cute, you know this kid want to change the world'. I remembered when we first started; we used to pick up the phone and called other organization, saying 'we want to help, we want to volunteer, we want to get engage'. And people would say, 'great, go to school, get a good job, get an education, then you can change things'. I believe no matter where we are, no matter what position you find yourself, whether we're 12 years old or retired seniors or parents or teachers on part-time job. We all have something to give. Not just financially, but in our time volunteering, in raising awareness of this issue. And with a simple believe if 12 years old can do it, then anybody can do it.

Cynthia: Exactly, and boy how you have done it. You have done so much. Tell me how did you get 500 schools though? What was the evolution of that journey for you?

Craig: One by one. I remember the first time we said we want to build a school. People were laugh at us. Then we have 10 people telling us, 'oh you kids don't know, don't over reach'. How we build the school is with a model we called Adopt-a-village. A lot of people are familiar with the idea of adopting a child. It's on a much larger scale to make it more sustainable and the idea to be able to enter the community and show the community to keep running the project. So it's not charity in the traditional sense of the word. It's more empowerment and community partnership. And it's something more sustainable. So we initially started building school, in communities halfway around the world, we would sit with the community. We have a philosophy we called the Green tea philosophy. We'd sit with women and drink tea, and the elders, drink tea with the children, drink tea with the men and goes do it

all over again. That's the spirit of partnership and ask how can we work together. Not just dropping a building, but really asking what do we need to do to help children go to school? Because education, there's no magic bullet to end poverty in this world. But if there was, it'd be universal primary education. Not to overwhelm listeners with statistics, but just for a second, if you provided universal primary education in this world, you would prevent 7 million new AIDS infection over the next 10 years. Because then people know how to protect themselves. You want to empower girls, the UN is showing United Nation showing just 3 years of basic education make such a difference in family income, family planning, and help the kids growing, the key to democracy, the key to economic empowerment, the old adage you can give someone a fish, or teach them how to fish and feed them for a lifetime. All comes down to education. So when we bring schools, we also bring health projects, ensuring kids can learn well because they are healthy in school, clean water, so the girls don't have to walk a far distance to go to the river and draw water that stop them from going to school. That said, they receive classes, they bring clean water from the well back home. And also economic empowerment for the women in the community. Small businesses based on the school, so the women can earn enough to cows, milking animals, sowing machine, little parcel of land. So it's an economically-sustainable school. So they take over the ownership. It's their project and as we stay back in the community, actually about five years. They can maintain the schools, and they run the school themselves. So it's empowering – in the true sense of the word.

Cynthia: So the investment, really, as you stay in each community for about 5 years until it's sustainable and then you kind of move to the next place?

Craig: Always staying in touch with all local relationship with the community. But it's part of our mission, we believe we want to put ourselves there. We are living in a world where 113 million kids between 11-15 have never stepped foot into a classroom. Here in North America sometimes parents complaining about school. But we spend a lot of time -- I spent, I just got back from two and a half month overseas. This week I was in Asia and Africa in the project. And when you sit with kids and ask them, if you could have anything in the world, if you could dream whatever could be, most answers are the chance to go to school. It's such a simple wish but kids are kids no matter where they are in this world.

Cynthia: And I know that the dropout rate is really high in the particular area where we will be building in Africa and I want to know what Free the Children do to sustain the children to stay in school. Because they have so many conflicting commitment, like you said, getting the water, and taking care of the – making the money or milking the goats or whatever. What do you do to encourage those children and the parents to keep their kids in school?

Craig: We have actually talked about a lot of the challenges that people face, you are looking statistically globally, the only part of this world where poverty increased over the past 50 years is Sub Sahara Africa. And there's a lot of reasons to that, HIV, conflict, history of post-colonialism and a lot of issues, especially right now with climate change, rains aren't falling, farmers have a hard time in a lot of rural Africa. To give you just some statistic to put things in perspective: 1 in 5 children in Sub Sahara Africa will not reach their 5th birthday. It's a staggering statistic when you think of infant mortality rate in

Africa. Another statistic, 1 in 16 women in the region where we were, will die in child labor. It's a huge issue, health and education, most kids in the region we're looking at South Kenya, very close to the Tanzanian border. And in this region of the world, most children in the rural area will not go on to secondary school, never mind college or university. Finishing even primary school. Learning to read and write and the empowerment. Imagine if you can't count the money you earn. Imagine if you can't find your own name. So you take your thumb, you have to roll your thumb print, and roll your thumb print at the bottom of the page, not your name. You don't understand the politics, voting or parties, don't know your rights. So many issue and a lot of community without going to school. That's where the central teaching happens around HIV and AIDS and trying to protect yourself. And something as simple as wash your hands and clean. So to answer the harder question, how do we make sure these kids get the chance go to school, definitely it's building school and providing the supply of the school, teacher training and the quality of education, every thing else. Because one the big drivers that stopped these kids is the grinding poverty. There's an old adage, you never understand a person's life until you walk a mile in their shoes. And what we're saying, you will never understand a child's challenges going to school until you realize they have no shoes. We sit down with them providing whatever they need to give them that chance to get that education. And that again is clean water, building the wells for the community, it's a humbling experience when you walk with the women in the community to see how far they have to go to bring water every day and a lot of young girls do that, because especially making sure young girls get a chance to go to school. It's so critically important to make sure that there's clean water at that school that they can bring home. We do it by setting up the health program. A lot of kids were sick, they can't learn well. We teach them about HIV, how to protect yourself, malaria, tuberculosis, a lot of the challenges, cholera, diarrhea. We bring medical workers to the school to the people's family and ensuring that at the school, that sustainability is built-in so kids don't have to work. They are not labors in the field, or working in dangerous mission, so the parents can earn enough to support the family with small businesses. Actually, it's holistic.

Cynthia: Exactly. And that's really one of the reasons – it's one thing to get kids to school and another thing to keep a child in school. And the whole approach is consistent really with my own philosophy and I mean it's so exciting when we look at an average of about \$25,000 adopt an entire community. So I'd like for you to share, what is the difference that you make, you have this experience now going and adopting this community. And I want to talk specifically about the area that we're building. So how does it really change over two, three, five years when you have gone in there and really start supporting them in this way.

Craig: I've head the pleasure of bringing groups who welcome you and welcome individuals who feel passionate, we believe in people connecting with the community and seeing it. We initially started with this community. The small thanks, you notice immediately. From kids who are coughing or under nourished, kids who don't have shoes, kids who say and talk about their dreams of going to school. To the larger thing you'll notice and one of the communities we're working, for example, a women collapse. She's a young woman, about 15 – 16, our health workers brought her to the medical clinic. And ask this medical clinic and said, 'we want you to run a free test, we want you to run and check for Malaria, for tuberculosis and for HIV AIDS'. Now this is a government-sponsored clinic. The health

worker in the government-sponsored clinic responded by saying, 'I run those two tests, I will check for Malaria and tuberculosis', and we said, 'No, it's three tests, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV AIDS', which is such a factor in Africa and the entire region. And the health worker responded 'OK we run the test for Malaria, for tuberculosis and the other one'. The stigma is so great around AIDS because there are no schools, there are no health workers talking about it. It doesn't – it's not necessarily being discussed. People don't know it, don't know how to protect themselves, it's literally a life saver education. And in the case of this young woman, she was so happy with tears and joys, that when her test result came in, that she, and this is how she phrased it, 'only had malaria and tuberculosis'. To put things into perspective, now young women in the school and in the community are talking about HIV AIDS. There are understanding how to protect themselves and talking about things like early marriages. A lot in the community are working in partnership, of course, with other foundation in the community. A lot of the young women will marry at 13 – 14, that's the norm. And this is a huge factor that they stop going to school, much, much larger families. Many of them aren't aware of their rights. And so we had a conversation with them in understanding what education means. Something as simple as farming. Our school for example, not only teaches reading, writing and arithmetic, but it also how to improve the crop you grow in your farm. A lot of these people, they probably won't go on to study, some do. We give scholarship up to high school. Even few to universities and college, we are seeing a few kids who go on and study and become nurses and doctors. But even if it's just elementary school, they are going back to their home and improving their crop by planting something that takes the nitrogen out of the plant, plants that put nitrogen back in the land. And so they could grow their own food, and they could sustain their family better. Live healthier lives. Education, it truly transforms the community. Now a lot of people think you're building a school, you teach reading, writing and arithmetic, it's so much more. You build a school, and you create a backbone for the community. You teach health, you teach farming, food, you teach about rights, general empowerment, and so when you come to a community, that first time you walk in the community and five years later, for example, when we're exiting and saying we'll never be far but when we exit a community. We see so many transformations. Our enrollments are going through the roof. We see healthier children, women there who hands proudly stand and have money in their pockets from doing their businesses well. You see families that are eating more and healthy is truly a transformative effect. And it's the power of education that makes it sustainable.

Cynthia: Craig, that is so beautiful. And you know something as simple as bringing in a well at the school, specifically in the area that we are building, the main source of water is a river that's six kilometers. Children walk for hours to collect water for the household. Imagine, freeing up that time, where they can be in school and learning.

Craig: For a lot of women particularly, and it is 99 percent women in the community that made that walk. It's hard to imagine. If you have a family of five or six children, between bathing and basic washing, and cooking, and cleaning the food, you will spend almost every waking hour for young women walking back and forth daily to get water. And something so simple as bringing in a well, not only helps with health. Because a lot of this water is polluted, dirty and carries water-borne illnesses. And again the statistic I mention, 1 in 5 children died mostly from water-borne illnesses. Something as simple as diarrhea, losing too many of the nutrients, not being able to fight off infections, something as simple as

clean water -- they save lives. But more than just that, it's empowerment for those women who no longer have to make that walk and young girls now go to school. It frees them dramatically in reaching their future and what they want to be. We asked a lot of young women why you make this journey a lot and they give you a blank stare because this is their life. This was the life of their mother and this is the life of their daughter, and there's no break in that cycle.

Cynthia: So it's exciting because really through your organization, through the generous people who are supporting this Unstoppable Giving Challenge. We are under way, we already started building school. I know, it's so exciting. So let's talk about this community the (Pendenye). Tell us a little bit about this community. I know that it's on a high-priority. There's a great need there. So tell us a little bit about the opportunity of this school and the community that we are supporting.

Craig: To put it in geography for those who are interested, it's in South Kenya, not far from what is called the Rock district. (Pendenye) is a name of a village and it's a mix of two tribal communities. So one is the (Masai) and the other is the (Kisiggi). These are people who have lived here for hundreds and hundreds of years. And they are mixed -- people who are traditionally nomadic, mostly with a cattle and they live off the milk and blood of the cows. They live that lifestyle and the (Kisiggi) who are mostly farmer. They grow things like corn, maize, to basic wheat and small crops. They basically grind it by hands and is a very traditional way of life. In this community, people have started to settle. And they had to settle because the world is changing around them and they found they settle on land, their children can't grow the same crops the way they used to, they can't survive in the same way that they used to, so they invited us into the community to sit down and have a partnership when they saw neighboring communities have school and children living longer, they said, we want to do the same. How do we do this together? And we want to create a system that's very respectful that's based on keeping tradition of the elder and respect women and children in the community and gain education for reading, writing, and HIV AIDS empowerment. And the reason why this community is on a high priority list is that, a high priority list is when you and I, and a couple of foundations started the conversation, there's an increase in the priority because we saw the economic crisis in the world right now, and we know how, what devastating effects it had here at home. But what we often don't talk about is the ripple effect it has had all around the world. And in the case of this community in east Africa, the World Food Program exited recently. They had to cut back, because their budget had fallen short. And one of the reasons why this community survived and they are able to maintain the health and well-being of their kids -- is because donors and aids started coming. We are working now with a couple of foundations within the community to start looking at schools, and building schools, and clean water, and medical and mid-day feeding program at the school for kids, and there's micro credit cooperative small businesses for the women in the community. So when we first entered, I have actually been there twice now, the community in the initial opening, everybody came out when we first broke ground. We had -- it was a community gathering, it was a celebration. That's how I can describe it. You had children, women, elders, and we sat under these trees. They took us to the old school. Now the old school was made of mud and dung, and they're basically (inaudible) building. In the summer when w -- it became so hot the walls were made of mud, so they literally crumbled. And the dust would kick up, so these kids would cough. And you can barely see this basic chalkboard that they had and in the rainy season which comes

twice a year, when the rains came, it literally washed away everything in the classroom. So these kids would be unable to study, they made long walks to school -- the teachers sometimes couldn't show up because they couldn't make it to school. So this is why not only we are building schools, but also teacher's accommodation and dorms at the school. So we broke grounds. And our school, just to give you an idea, these are schools that will last about 100 years. They built 8 feet into the foundation, to lay large-reinforced steel that acts as a foundation. And you put layers of bricks and stones that have the walls. On the top of the walls, the roof has a skylight in them to let natural light come in. And there are schools, libraries, teacher's accommodation, nursery, and a cooking area for the children and the community there.

Cynthia: Now how many children per school? I know from there are like 900 children under the age of 18 in that particular area?

Craig: Yes.

Cynthia: So how many kids per school building?

Craig: Each one varies. Per school building we try to bring in to the classroom, you have either form 30 – 80 depending on the size and depending on how many different section of that building. So you might have, one community has a series of school-like compound, you have some that focus on elementary and primary school children. Some focus on kindergarten, they have their own school compound. And then even secondary education. We started doing investment particularly in secondary education for young girls. Because a lot of the family don't feel comfortable sending young girls to a boarding school in the city.

Cynthia: Wow, it's such a comprehensive solution for the community. I'm so excited to be able to make such a difference. There's a lot of organization that just put up school and you go back there five years later, and they are not utilizing it, because they haven't gone deep into handling the real issue. And that's what you are doing with Free the Children.

Craig: We learnt the hard way. The first time, you asked that question back then how did we start. We started building one school. We found the school we built the kids weren't going there. That's why we had to drink tea with the women and asked why -- they said, 'our girl must collect water'. They were the one who told us, not a consultant from Europe or international aid organization. They said we need water at the school. So we said OK we found out how we can do that together. They said, our kids can't go because poverty, they need to work, they need to feed the family. So what if we bring feeding program to the school. What if we set up small businesses for the women so they can sustain it. We learnt from them. We bring, we bring about 1,600 young students from across – mostly the states and Canada, but also parts of Europe, Japan and other developed country. They come overseas and teach and help build this community as volunteers. We found out we learnt the greatest lesson and bringing it back home. Not only do you learn what it takes to really make a sustainable development and really make a difference. This is not exact science, about food, school, medical. We know this, we've done it, we can work together to make this happen. But we also learnt a lot about community. We learnt a lot about sharing and a lot about what it takes for people to come and work together a for a collective

good. And there are some amazing lessons that we walk away with from this community. Because here we worked very hard. Not just handing the school. They helped with the construction. Family makes sacrifices so their kids can go to school. The children walk a long distance everyday to go to school. They study in the wee hours of the morning with small kerosene lantern trying to get a high mark on their exams so they can get a scholarship to go on. We learnt a lot from this community and it's a humbling experience, to be able to say that we work in partnership.

Cynthia: How long does it take, generally speaking, when you break ground to build a school?

Craig: I have to say it's depending on so many factors. Depends on rainy season, dry season, depends on the construction, where you are. Generally though, the construction -- they are overseen by the engineers, local community labors and often, international volunteers who come and build, especially students. Because we're a big believer in kids need to learn about the world. And North Americans young people get the chance to interact and learn and serve and volunteer together. When you break ground, again, our experience has shown different time, because they are volunteers. They're bringing shovels, there's no giant crane, big truck, and mixing cement truck here. It's all done by hands. The cement is mixed by hands, the shoveling, so you often have about three months from start to finish a classroom. You have many kids working as they are doing this construction, digging the foundation, laying the bricks, mixing the cement, laying the cement, seeing the walls up, placing up the roof, the painting and the decoration, putting on the blackboard, bringing in the decks. None of the stuff is imported. And the only thing that comes externally is the school books and the chinks, pens, papers, and things like that. From start to finish, we had a lot of group, especially over the summer and winter break. We had a lot of volunteers, giving helping hands, a lot of families. That's when the building got built even faster.

Cynthia: It's beautiful and my mentor, he would say there's love in the mortar join. There's love in the building and it's the same as I'm hearing with you. There's love, it's like the community and the volunteers, everyone is coming together. Really, I think acknowledging how important these people are and how we are all connected and really taking responsibility for each other in the community.

Craig: It is a beautiful sight when you see local kids who we know are going to be students of the school, working side by side with someone who traveled halfway across the world. A young kid from North America who because of this experience, will never look at kids his school back home the same way.

Cynthia: That is so true. You know some people asked me, why Africa. Why are you building in Africa? There so much needs here in the United States. I told them, first I felt called to do it. And secondly the need is so great. What is your response to that question why Africa?

Craig: Well I don't believe it's either or for. I believe we started both, and a lot of us here helped at home and other organization, you mention the partnership we have with Oprah for the Angel network called the O Ambassador. Getting people here from North America to help volunteer, but we have to look at the world. When you look at the stats, there is poverty here at home, absolutely. But there are, there's a level of poverty and we know this even for people who haven't set off. They see it on

television and the news, those commercials with children. The most destructive, back breaking poverty we can imagine gripping many community around the world. And it's so simple to solve. That's the beauty of it, we know what the solution is. For A lot of complex problem here we are struggling in America. For overseas, when the schools are build, kids run to them. It's that level of excitement. They are really. To answer the question, why, the only way to answer it is by describing one moment where we have one school built, and there's a group finishing the school, we are up on the roof finishing up construction, and then as we are finishing, the local kids all gather around. They can tell that it's almost done. So we stepped off the roof and looked at the children were excited. These kids race to the door and they ran to the school and they stopped a few feet in front of the school and started to argue with each other, go back and forth, in a language called (Maa). And one of the translators told us, they are arguing with each other about who will get the honor to open the door for the first time to school. And they picked a grade 8 girl who used to walk 2 hours each way to go to the old school that was crumbling and fall apart. And so they opened the door, raced to their desk, these kids never have their own desk before. And they held pencils. Most these kids never have their own pencils, used to be 5-6 kids will share a pencil. So they held their notebooks and never enough books. These kids now have their own books, desks, and pencils, all excited when they looked at us volunteers. We didn't have the heart to tell them that it's Sunday, there's no school that day. So we reached for the chalks and started to teach the first lesson on the chalk board. It's – we live in a world and we have to take care of our most vulnerable. And that's kids and by some roll of the dice when we were born, an inner city community or suburb. Yes, or even halfway around the world. We all have to do what we can do.

Cynthia: Well Craig I really appreciate your time and I am honored to be a partner and really supporting your work and plan on building a lot of schools this year. What would be your final comment that you'd make to people who are listening to this, who are donors, who maybe they are considering to being a part of this. What would you say to them?

Craig: A lot of gratitude, first and foremost. To everyone who has contributed to a couple of foundations, whether that be donation and funds, or by spreading the message, or by telling others, by going online and researching and learning more because even though that's just a part of the community. And I would challenge, especially family, everyone has a role, but especially family, in getting kids involved and talking as a family over the dinner table laying the newspaper flat on the kitchen table. Talking what's happening in the world and how they can help with all the challenges they see. For CEOs or adults bring this back to the work place. Have a conversation how a company can adopt a village overseas, a well or feeding program. To the students, imagine a school, adopting other school. Imagine a school here in North America being twin in a developing part of the world -- imagining sponsoring their notebooks or textbooks, the teachers' salary. We all can do something. And the beautiful part of it when you look at Africa is really so little goes so far, whether they give a donation or funds, or donations of time and volunteers going overseas, or donation of spirit and voice. Talking about this and then spreading the word -- all of us can be a part of this community.

Cynthia: And of course as you have indicated earlier in this, when the giver meets the receiver. We are all transformed in the process. So I just encourage everyone go to [UnstoppableGiving Challenge.com](http://UnstoppableGivingChallenge.com) and I know you have been inspired by this interview as I have and just really recommit, to

sharing such an easy program to share people get a million dollar idea online course, for a hundred dollar donation and the money goes directly to organization like Free the Children with Craig Kielburger.

Craig, thank you much for the time. I look forward to this ongoing partnership and building lots of schools and taking people over the next 12 months to visit this school that we are building and the lives that have been changed as a result of all of our work together. Thank you so much.

Craig: Thank you.

Cynthia: Thank you so much. God bless you.