



**WE**

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Written by Nicole Schubert





PROFILE  
Craig Kielburger

WE participants

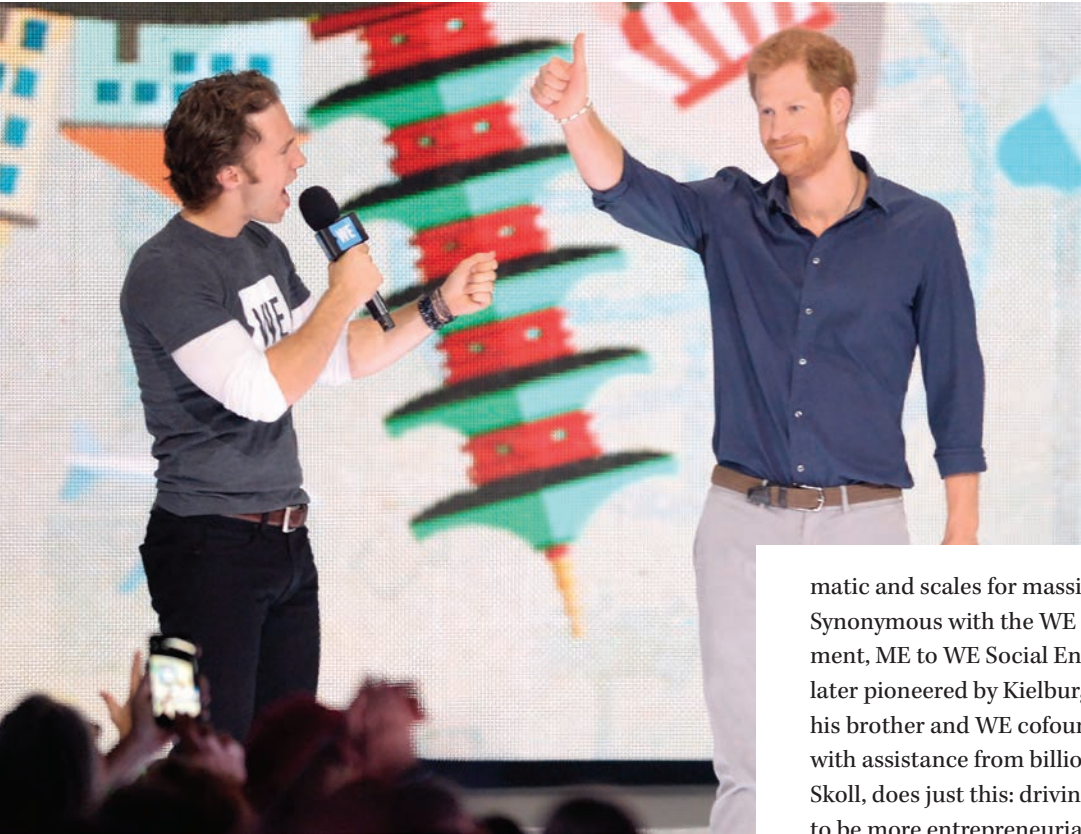
**AS** cofounder of WE, Craig Kielburger said amidst the world's fight against coronavirus, "the single but most powerful truth is that the whole picture matters. It's the 360 on how we do good."

Continuing to seek signs of bold innovation and trailblazing ingenuity as COVID-19 cases rage across the globe and the time that we social distance grows day by day, the activist turns to the next generation of philanthropic and business leaders to aid in the efforts of hope and optimism that together, "we can find meaning, make a living, and change the world."

Kielburger, who spearheaded a novel movement when he was 12 years old after fearlessly traveling through Southeast Asia and witnessing life-saving measures to free children from slave

labor, has since dedicated himself to tirelessly bringing people together through successful development models. These models, located underneath the WE umbrella, include WE Charity, empowering domestic and international change, and ME to WE, a social enterprise that creates socially conscious products and experiences to help support the charity.

WE engages 4.2 million young people each year across North America and beyond through its free, yearlong service-learning program WE Schools. Its international development program, WE Villages, has provided over 1 million people with



Kielburger with  
Harry, Duke of  
Sussex

clean water, built 1,500 schools and schoolrooms overseas, and empowered more than 200,000 children with access to education. However, though awarded with The Order of Canada, the Nelson Mandela Freedom Medal, and the World Children's Prize for his work in the field, Kielburger still sees room for massive change.

As waves of climate change and global pandemics continue to shape today's society, it's becoming less of a choice factor and more of an urgency to take action in an inventive way. Where "societal needs are so extreme," Kielburger suggests that de-coupling charity and business along with the values and the good that we do is a vision from days passed. Using the model of social entrepreneurship to mobilize resources and shape how we combat future crises is the solution.

"Some people call social entrepreneurship the love child of charity and business," says Kielburger. "Taking the best of both. This generation is demanding it."

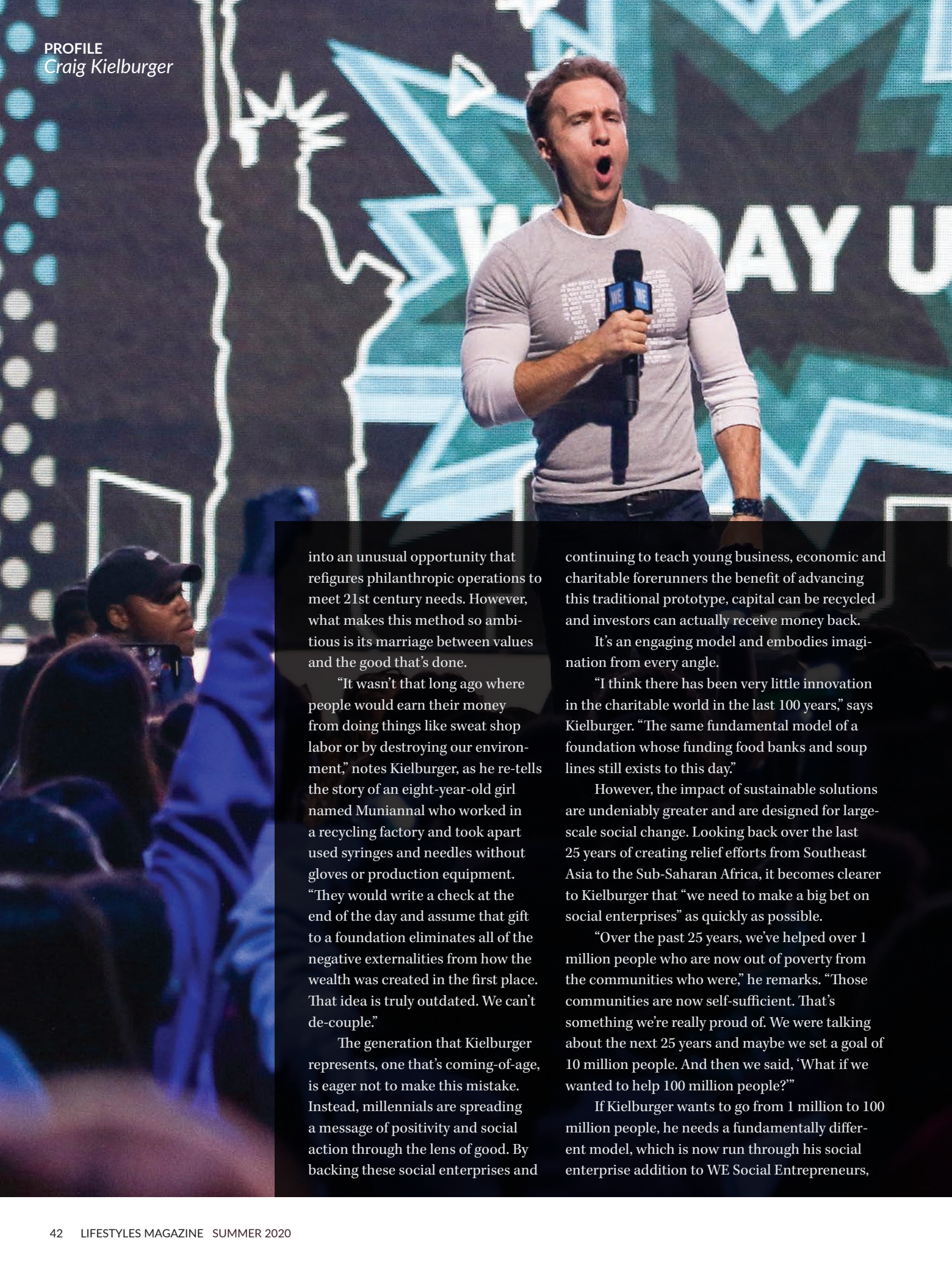
Labeling the next generation as "sufficiently bold," Kielburger notes that young philanthropists are leaving the traditional model of separating what's earned from what's given to challenge themselves in a new approach that's monochro-

matic and scales for massive good. Synonymous with the WE movement, ME to WE Social Enterprises, later pioneered by Kielburger and his brother and WE cofounder Marc, with assistance from billionaire Jeff Skoll, does just this: driving charity to be more entrepreneurial without a government program or donor having to fund the initiative. ME to WE's charter requires it to donate a minimum of 50 percent of its profits annually to WE Charity. For the past five years, the enterprise has donated an average of 90 percent of its profits to the charity.

"The money only goes to the charity, but it created all of these lines of businesses," says Kielburger. "We run eco-lodges around the world. We created artisanal and fair trade lines, where 1,500 women can achieve economic empowerment through us. We have our own line of fair-traded coffee that we sell to offices. We have technology licensing that we do to help companies track their social impact. This creates millions and millions of dollars to fund the charity every year."

Achieving an enormous amount of good through program-related investments or investing in ventures that fundamentally help the world, Kielburger unequivocally tapped





into an unusual opportunity that refigures philanthropic operations to meet 21st century needs. However, what makes this method so ambitious is its marriage between values and the good that's done.

"It wasn't that long ago where people would earn their money from doing things like sweat shop labor or by destroying our environment," notes Kielburger, as he re-tells the story of an eight-year-old girl named Muniannal who worked in a recycling factory and took apart used syringes and needles without gloves or production equipment. "They would write a check at the end of the day and assume that gift to a foundation eliminates all of the negative externalities from how the wealth was created in the first place. That idea is truly outdated. We can't de-couple."

The generation that Kielburger represents, one that's coming-of-age, is eager not to make this mistake. Instead, millennials are spreading a message of positivity and social action through the lens of good. By backing these social enterprises and

continuing to teach young business, economic and charitable forerunners the benefit of advancing this traditional prototype, capital can be recycled and investors can actually receive money back.

It's an engaging model and embodies imagination from every angle.

"I think there has been very little innovation in the charitable world in the last 100 years," says Kielburger. "The same fundamental model of a foundation whose funding food banks and soup lines still exists to this day."

However, the impact of sustainable solutions are undeniably greater and are designed for large-scale social change. Looking back over the last 25 years of creating relief efforts from Southeast Asia to the Sub-Saharan Africa, it becomes clearer to Kielburger that "we need to make a big bet on social enterprises" as quickly as possible.

"Over the past 25 years, we've helped over 1 million people who are now out of poverty from the communities who were," he remarks. "Those communities are now self-sufficient. That's something we're really proud of. We were talking about the next 25 years and maybe we set a goal of 10 million people. And then we said, 'What if we wanted to help 100 million people?'"

If Kielburger wants to go from 1 million to 100 million people, he needs a fundamentally different model, which is now run through his social enterprise addition to WE Social Entrepreneurs,





Kielburger (left) and his brother Marc

launched in collaboration with Thor Richardson, Director of International Operations at Casamigos Tequila.

Mentoring young social entrepreneurs through the WE Social Entrepreneurs program lends these novice philanthropists the support they need for the future, inherently helping the helpers.

“What Oprah did for us, we’re doing for them,” says Kielburger who remembers the words media mogul Oprah Winfrey shared with him while appearing on her show when he was 15 years old: “It’s easy to do good, it’s hard to do it well.”

According to Winfrey, willing to ask for help is the key component of becoming a successful philanthropist and thus was the centerpiece to Kielburger’s original initiative, building schools for low-income families in underdeveloped communities.

“Oprah became this great mentor, where every quarter we were presenting in front of her foundation board,” says Kielburger, who was the recipient of Winfrey’s largest international gift to date in 1999. “They became these great mentors to us as we built 100 schools together.”

This practice of mentorship and teaching youth the best of blending business and charity is now one of the core focuses of WE and is closely instilled through WE Social Entrepreneurs and more recent projects spotlighted from home. Due to social distancing, Kielburger is running an “im-

mense amount” of programs around youth mental health in 20,000 schools.

“We’re particularly helping kids deal with the reality of COVID-19,” he explains. “We have a whole slew of resources. We have a podcast series that’s hosted by the wife of Canada’s Prime Minister, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau. We have a new guide to well-being for young people in the COVID-19 era. All of this at home. On the global side, we continue to work with kids and programs around the world. We had \$4 million in medical supplies shipped to part of our hospitals in Sub-Saharan Africa just last week. We’re preparing communities to deal with the response.”

Extending a hand to those affected by coronavirus in an ultra-captivating way, Kielburger tells the story of future social activism on the upcoming stage. Crossing the boundaries of tradition, the philanthropic arena is reenergized and the next gen is forced to look at the model of foundations in a unique way, digitally and globally.

It’s the winning bet. **LM**