One spring day in 1995, Craig Kielburger was looking at the newspaper when a photograph caught his eye. It was a picture of a boy in Pakistan, a country far away from Craig’s home in Canada. Craig, who was 12 at the time, read the story of Iqbal Masih.

Iqbal started working as a debt slave when he was four years old. This meant that he worked to pay money that his family owed. But no matter how much he worked, the debt stayed the same. After about five years, Iqbal managed to escape his slavery. Then he used his freedom to help other child slaves. Sadly, on April 16, 1995, Iqbal was shot and killed, most likely for speaking out against slavery.

Craig decided that he had to help children like Iqbal. So, later that same year, Craig and eleven of his friends started Free the Children. Their mission was to stop child slavery forever.

Kids Helping Kids

At first, not everyone wanted to hear what Craig had to say. Some people thought he was too young and inexperienced to understand world issues.

Craig didn’t give up. He believed that all children had the right to be free and educated. He and his friends also believed that young people are the key to making our world a more peaceful place.

As Craig wrote articles and spoke to audiences worldwide, more people got involved and Free the Children grew. In this way, and with adult support and advice, this youth-based movement started to make a real difference.

Since 1995, Craig has travelled all over the world and met with world leaders such as
Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama. Today, over a million kids in 45 different countries have joined Craig in his cause! Free the Children has built over 500 schools, set up health clinics, sent medical aid, and helped thousands of people get access to clean water.

Be The Change
Craig and his brother, Marc, have also set up a fundraising organization called Me to We. This group raises money for Free the Children. It also offers youth leadership programs, volunteer training camps, and much more. Even more importantly, Craig and Marc want Me to We to be a way of life. Their motto is “Be the Change,” and it invites all young people to get active in helping others and changing the world. Are you up for the challenge?

Get on the Peace Train!
Craig Kielburger believes that “anyone can change the world.” That means you! Start by being an ambassador for peace in your own neighbourhood. Volunteer to work at the local food bank or shovel driveways for elderly neighbours. Get your friends together and organize some fundraising activities at school. You could hold bake sales, dances, raffles, and car washes. Also, try collecting books, school supplies, or toys to send to children in developing countries. For more advice and ideas, visit kayakmag.ca and follow the links!