

## **FREE THE CHILDREN'S NEW WE LEARNING CENTRE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### [What is the WE Learning Centre?](#)

The WE Learning Centre is Free The Children's international hub for youth engagement, and the site of its new global headquarters. The Centre will bring service-learning resources to 10,000+ schools, ensuring that every student experiences the empowerment and life skill development associated with service-learning, while these young change-makers benefit their community and world.

The WE Learning Centre was acquired thanks to a generous, targeted donation from long-term supporters of Free The Children and Founding Chairs of WE Day: Hartley Richardson, President & CEO of James Richardson and Sons, and David Aisenstat, President & CEO of the Keg Steakhouse & Bar, along with the generous support from The Richardson Foundation.

Located in Toronto's historic Corktown neighbourhood at the corner of Queen Street East and Parliament Street, the Centre will allow us to expand our operations, while keeping a close connection to the Regent Park and Cabbagetown community. Going forward, we are excited to operate through both "North" and "South" campuses, with improved technological resources, increased video conferencing capabilities, and dedicated spaces to meet and collaborate with each other.

The WE Learning Centre will serve two key functions:

- I. **Global Learning and Empowerment:** The Centre will allow Free The Children to better connect with educators and students around the world. Enabled through state-of-the-art technology and a dedicated community space, it will promote greater learning and connection with the schools we serve.
- II. **Global Headquarters, Programming Support and Administration:** The Centre will act as a headquarters for Free The Children, providing an innovative and professional space to host the dynamic teams that bring our programs to life, including WE Schools, WE Day, and our Adopt A Village global program.

### [Where did the idea of creating a WE Learning Centre come from?](#)

We are grateful for the vision of Hartley Richardson, who believed that the leading Canadian institute for service learning should have a solid foundation to spur further innovation. He approached his friend and fellow Free The Children supporter David Aisenstat, and the idea for the WE Learning Centre was born.

### Were any charitable dollars used in the purchase of this building?

The building was acquired thanks to a generous, targeted donation from long-term supporters of Free The Children and Founding Chairs of WE Day: Hartley Richardson, President & CEO of James Richardson and Sons, and David Aisenstat, President & CEO of the Keg Steakhouse & Bar, with the generous support from the Richardson Foundation. Thanks to their philanthropic leadership, no other restricted charitable donations were used to purchase this property. In other words, no donations from youth, families or corporate sponsors were used.

We are incredibly grateful to the Richardson Foundation, Hartley Richardson and David Aisenstat for their vision, support, and commitment to empowering youth to change the world.

### Where will the new WE Learning Centre be located?

The new WE Learning Centre will be found at 339 Queen Street East, in the heart of Toronto's historic Corktown neighbourhood. The building is located at the corner of Queen Street East and Parliament Street (approximately one kilometre south of our current location). We feel a deep connection to the Regent Park and Cabbagetown community, and we are grateful to stay active in this neighbourhood.

Features of the property:

- 43,000 square feet, over four floors
- Turn of the century character building, with exposed brick and beams
- TTC at front door
- Vibrant community
- Shipping and receiving area with freight elevator

The WE Learning Centre will also extend to 337 Queen Street East, adjacent to the main building. The new property was donated to Free The Children by a dedicated former board member. The two-story structure will allow us to enhance the impact and sustainability of our domestic and international work, with a focus on providing additional office space for our growing staff, as well as much-needed storage facilities.

### When will the WE Learning Centre open?

The WE Learning Centre will open its doors in the summer of 2017!

### Why was this location chosen?

339 and 337 Queen Street East were chosen as the site for this centre because of their proximity to Cabbagetown and Regent Park, where Free The Children has had deep roots since 2004.

This close proximity will allow us to maintain the strong relationships that we have built with students and parents in the neighbourhood over the last decade through long-standing volunteer efforts. For example, through a staff-led initiative, “We Read,” employees mentor local youth between the ages of 5 and 12 in Regent Park. It is important that Free The Children maintain its connection and partnership with this neighbourhood.

Furthermore, eighty per cent of Free The Children staff, average age 26, live in the core of Toronto. The location will enable many to be able to walk and ride their bikes to work or take the TTC, which is important to our staff.

### [Why is Free The Children establishing the WE Learning Centre?](#)

Free The Children is now at a critical time in our organizational history. As we celebrate our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, we are embarking on an exciting plan to grow our mission and further our impact on young people and communities around the world.

The organization has set a goal to grow the schools we engage with service-learning resources from the current 10,000 schools to 24,000 schools, over the next five years. This will increase the number of youth we reach annually from 2.3 million to over 4.8 million. In 2014, these young people provide over \$60 million dollars of social value serving their communities (as calculated by dollars raised for 300+ charities, in addition to the standard value per volunteer hours and food collected for foodbanks). By 2020, we aim to increase this impact to \$200 million dollars annually of social value benefiting their community and world.

To truly create a widespread shift in thinking and acting, we require a space that will accommodate the infrastructure and technology that our team needs to work to its fullest potential, especially with technology resources. We aim to especially grow our reach to support youth in rural communities, with a special emphasis in Canada to reach fly-in communities. The creation of the WE Learning Centre is not just an “office move.” It represents an expansion of the mission and capabilities that will carry us into the next 20 years.

### [What are the unique features planned for the WE Learning Centre?](#)

The WE Learning Centre will offer a number of exciting facilities, including:



FREE THE  
CHILDREN

- Dedicated Learning Centre that will be a space to welcome young people, deliver on-site workshops, and also serve as a space for staff to gather for full staff meetings and town halls.
- Technology-enabled spaces that will improve connectedness between our network of offices and our stakeholders.
- Collaborative spaces, such as meeting rooms with proper technology, will allow staff and stakeholders to connect effectively to create and design better and more effective programming.
- Global Classrooms: a number of interactive Global Classrooms (including audio/visual components) that will allow speakers and Educational Programming Coordinators from the Free The Children team to deliver compelling virtual experiences to schools. Skype sessions will allow the organization to reach schools that otherwise would not be able to receive an in-person touch point with Free The Children. This includes schools located outside of a WE Day region as well as remote areas across North America.
- Incubation Hub: a dedicated space (including desks and office materials) for start-up organizations as they build their foundation. This incubation hub will provide non-profits/social enterprises with a unique foundation for support, unparalleled access to resources, and potential mentorship opportunities.

### [Did Free The Children's Board of Directors approve the purchase of 339 Queen Street East?](#)

The Canadian and American Board of Directors have been following this project very closely from a governance perspective and have provided thorough oversight on all major steps in the process. The Canadian and American boards made a motion to approve the purchase with the donated funds from Hartley Richardson, David Aisenstat and the Richardson Foundation. As part of this resolution, they noted that no general charitable dollars would be used in the purchase of this property.

### [How do real estate holdings support Free The Children?](#)

Thanks to sound counsel and guidance from our advisors and our Board, Free The Children adopted an early philosophy of using real estate as an organizational asset rather than expense whenever possible. Unlike many organizations of our size and scale, we do not enjoy a formal endowment. Instead, over the years Free The Children has acquired Victorian-style small office buildings within the same community.

This strategy allows us to avoid substantial leasing costs and to deliver a safe and secure working environment for our young staff. We have raised the necessary funds to make these purchases from targeted individual adult donors, including a number of Board members, as well as targeted donations and bequests from supporters. In a format similar to a university or think-tank, individuals have targeted gifts to ensure a mix of functionality and financial security for the organization's mission.

As a matter of policy, we do not use any project-designated funds and/or any funds from schools or children to finance these purchases. The model, and all past financial transactions relating to real estate, were independently reviewed by a former Supreme Court Justice who found good and reasonable judgment in this structure, proper source of funds for the purchases, and proper oversight by the Free The Children Board of Directors throughout the process.

Free The Children is proud of this economic model. Based on social entrepreneurship, it represents a new way to innovate in the charitable sector by providing a degree of financial security and intelligent use of resources. The housing model has been recognized by others as a best practice worth imitating. We are honoured to have received a prestigious award at Oxford University from the Skoll Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship.

In October, 2015, we announced that we received a targeted donation to create a WE Learning Centre at 339 Queen Street East in Toronto. The generous donation came from long-term supporters of Free The Children and Founding Chairs of WE Day: Hartley Richardson, President & CEO of James Richardson and Sons and David Aisenstat, President & CEO of the Keg Steakhouse & Bar; with generous support from the Richardson Foundation. Leading up the opening of the WE Learning Centre, Free The Children will assess what buildings in the Cabbagetown community will continued to be used as the official North Campus of the organization and what buildings are no longer required.

In April 2016, a building located at 337 Queen Street East was donated to Free The Children by a former board member.

### [How much did the building cost?](#)

Thanks to a generous targeted donation, Free The Children did not incur any costs in the purchase of the building. The building was purchased for \$14.5 million.

When the building was bought by a developer a year ago for \$10 million, it was a basic building in “as is” condition, with plans to create numerous units and rent it out to tenants. By the time of our purchase, the developer had carried out extensive planning and renovations.

He had hired engineers and heritage consultants, commissioned architectural drawings, environmental studies, structural and mechanical assessments, made zoning applications, and plans for HVAC. The developer also gutted the basement, and spent six months removing asbestos from the walls, ceilings and around pipes.

The purchase price not only includes past work on the building, but also includes various go-forward costs to ensure the building meets our needs.

The acquisition of 337 Queen Street East came at no cost to Free The Children. It was donated by a former board member.

### What is Free The Children's vision for the next 20 years and how does the WE Learning Centre fit in with this?

We envision a world where every child in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom has service-learning as a key part of their education. Where, how and what students learn is transformed to be deeply engaging and connected to the world they experience around them. We imagine how fundamentally different our schools, communities and world would be if we helped to raise a generation of compassionate young people. We want to provide unparalleled opportunities for young people to build their skills as active citizens so that they may create the next generation of non-profits, found innovative social enterprises, and continue the cycle as future parents raising compassionate children.

At home: specific goals for domestic programming

- Grow the reach of the WE Schools program from 10,000 to 24,000 schools in five years
- Grow the number of engaged and empowered young people from 2.3 million to 4.8 million by 2020/21
- Grow the social value created through WE Schools from \$60 million to \$200 million annually by 2020/21

We imagine the possibility of moving development indicators overseas in so many communities that we shift entire states/provinces on graduate rates, health rates, and other indicators through the Adopt A Village development model. We envision a world where all young people and their families are able to develop the skills and resources they need to take charge of their future, and where communities and entire regions are equipped to break the cycle of poverty.

Around the world: specific goals for international programming:

- Expand the number of Adopt A Village communities from 40 to 150 by 2024/25
- Expand the number of direct beneficiaries from 100,000 to 300,000
- Expand the number of indirect beneficiaries from 800,000 to 2.5 million

### What place does the WE Learning Centre have in this vision?

The establishment of the WE Learning Centre will transform service-learning opportunities for millions of students coast-to-coast, enhancing their skills and knowledge to create positive change in their local and global communities. Enabled through state-of-the-art technology and a dedicated community space, it will promote greater learning and connection with the youth we serve, both at home and around the world.



FREE THE  
CHILDREN

In light of the acquisition of 337 Queen Street East, in addition to the WE Learning Centre, does Free The Children still intend to operate through both “North” and “South” campuses?

Yes, the intention is to maintain both North and South campuses for the charity and its affiliated social enterprise, ME to WE. Free The Children has deep roots in the Cabbagetown and Regent Park communities, and our continued presence here will allow us to maintain the strong relationships that we have built with students and parents in the neighbourhood over the last decade through long-standing volunteer efforts.