

We Day 2016: A student's perspective ? six years apart



By **Julia Clark-Farmiloe**

Last Wednesday, I was lucky enough to attend We Day 2016 in Toronto.

Now, for those who may not be familiar with We Day it is a youth empowerment event in the style of a concert that is put on by Me to We and Free the Children.

It features many speakers and musical artists who all use their stories and talents to inspire the 20,000 or so youth in Air Canada Centre. With musical performances from the likes of Jason Derulo and Gord Downie as well as speeches of empowerment and awareness of Canada's history and future it was a concert like no other.

You can't buy a ticket to We Day. It is earned through your school and the work you do to support Me to We and Free the Children. This wasn't my first time attending a We Day event. Back in 2010, I was fortunate enough to attend one of the first We Days in Vancouver. It is interesting to compare the two events and how they have evolved, as well as how I interpreted them at the ages of 10 and 17.

Because Vancouver was one of the first events to be put on, it wasn't as huge a spectacle as it is now. 2010 seemed to be more about the speakers and the stories they had to tell opposed to the musical artists and celebrity-based inspiration.

It still had some of the star power backing it up, but the focus seemed different to this year's event.

I found that I got more of a chance to hear the stories and true messages that these people had to offer, there was a reason why they were there; some had defeated the odds or done amazing things in their lives and they were so open to share it with us all.

As a young ten year old, it blew my mind. I left the stadium being impacted and the idea of 'Be the Change?' really made me think. It was one of the first times I can remember thinking about my surroundings and what was happening in the world, and how I could make an impact myself.

It was a sort of awakening that would stay with me for the rest of my life.

Even though it was the same idea as the 2010 event, I felt that the one I attended last Wednesday was different. In general, to me it was more commercial and I had a difficult time connecting to the speakers as I had before.

Maybe it was the fact that it was being broadcast on television, or that it was in different cities or, simply the fact that I am now 17 and have a different awareness of things. I left feeling like I wanted more, that I didn't get the messages I craved.

My school sat behind the stage, so I was able to read the TelePrompTer and the countdown clocks to show the presenter how much longer they had to do their speech. It almost seemed less genuine. There was a level of fakeness that surprised me and put that gap between me and the show.

Another point that emphasized that gap would be the time the speakers would have. The average speaker had a rough time of about two to five minutes.

Now, I'm just going from memory but I think at the 2010 We Day the speaker had much longer to talk and connect with the audience. Here, they would announce the person's name, the person would then come out onto the stage, wave and then proceed to say something quick and oddly forgettable then leave just as quick.

For some, maybe just catching a glimpse of their favourite celebrity was enough to make them feel inspired but as someone who

craves a good story I found it wasn't fulfilling enough for my impressionable appetite.

Even though maybe the messages weren't there, there is still lots of good that came from this experience.

The messages that were said are important and I did learn things I did not know.

It has done its duty in inspiring me to do more and to get involved.

Even though there might have been some negative things, I felt, personally, my overall idea of We Day 2016 is still positive. I

enjoyed the experience and am grateful for being chosen to go. I would jump on the chance to go again if ever offered.

I hope to be as involved as I can be with this organization in the future and admire the work that they do.

I also would say to any youth that have read this that if they too get the chance, to go and be inspired because that's what We Day is all about.

Like I said, it's a concert like no other.