

THE VANCOUVER SUN

All in the family

When it comes to Me to We Trips, changing the world can be contagious

BY MEGAN HARRIS, VANCOUVER SUN | OCTOBER 15, 2012



The Mowbray family takes in the local culture in Kenya. From left, Jamie, Holly, Stacey and Paul Mowbray.

There is no understating the impact of volunteer experiences around the world on participants of all ages. As Second Cup transforms their cafés into new "Social Change Headquarters"- to provide a space for young people to gather and share world-changing ideas with other like-minded people – we have one teenage girl named Jamie to thank.

In 2009, Jamie went on the first of two inspirational adventures - a Me to We trip to Ecuador. The following year she traveled on another Me to We trip, this time to Kenya.

In Ecuador, young people like Jamie volunteer on reforestation projects. They also delve into Ecuador's rich history, biodiversity and culture, as well as learning about indigenous issues. In Kenya, youth learn about Maasai culture, stepping into a local mama's shoes and joining her for a water walk.

Jamie was inspired by the work she did, the people she met and the things she saw, and she passed on that inspiration to her family.

Her enthusiasm was contagious, which was lucky. Her mom just happens to be Stacey Mowbray, CEO of Second Cup in Canada.

And it all started with Jamie. "One of the reasons that Second Cup has partnered with Free The Children is that although it is a global charity, it all starts in the local community," Mowbray says. Both organizations are Canadian, and share similar values - including a focus on sustainability and on the local community. In April 2012, an official partnership was announced.

Today, Second Cup is one of Free The Children's major partners and supporters. It has teamed up with the organization for several ventures and has announced that it will transform their cafés into "Social Change Headquarters."

"We love the fact that we can engage with people in our communities, but we can impact globally," says Mowbray.

Last year, on a family trip to Africa, the family stopped in at Me to We's Bogani Cottages and Tented Camp in the Maasai Mara. The trip was a turning point for the entire family. They were immersed in a rich and vibrant culture. And Mowbray describes two especially profound experiences.

"One was actually meeting Craig [Kielburger] in person," says Mowbray. "To spend time with him and to feed off his passion, to see he's so genuine and authentic, the wisdom around the work that's being done, we're all very impacted by him as an individual."

The second highlight was visiting the Kenyan village where Jamie had volunteered on her trip the previous summer, and meeting the community members whose lives Jamie had impacted directly with her work.

"[Seeing] the absolute pride and genuine appreciation from the visitors to our family [...] you realized how much you could impact a large group of people," says Mowbray.

Soon after their Bogani trip, Mowbray and her family attended We Day, which Mowbray says helped magnify her desire to make a change.

"We Day brings to life that it's about people here, right now, doing something and taking action - it's not just about money, it's about action," she says. "We are very keen to continue to find ways that we can help both our organizations be successful," says Mowbray. Second Cup will also be involved in Free

The Children's We are Silent campaign in the spring - only the beginning of what is sure to be a longstanding partnership.

This November, Second Cup will also carry Me to We's Water Rafiki Friend Chains for sale in their cafes, to support Free The Children's year-long Water Initiative, which has a goal to provide a permanent source of water to 100,000 people.

And while Second Cup's partnership with Free The Children is fast-growing and involved, it's unique because it grew out of one teen's inspiration to change the world.