

**Nelly Furtado, Kardinal Offishall and iconic Canadians come together with Spencer West to celebrate students opening the door to education at We Create Change Tour grand finale**

*-- Epic 10 week coast-to-coast We Create Change Tour made possible by RBC and Ford of Canada --*

*-- Free The Children surpasses goal to build 200 schools as part of the Year of Education --*

*-- We Create Change Tour finale event to be streamed live at [www.freethechildren.com/watch](http://www.freethechildren.com/watch) at 10:00 a.m. ET --*

**Toronto, Ontario (June 17, 2014)** – Today the Honourable David C. Onley, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, GRAMMY® and JUNO Award-winner, Nelly Furtado, Award-winning Canadian rapper and record producer, Kardinal Offishall, three-time Olympic Gold Medalist and RBC Olympian, Jennifer Botterill, cast members from the Emmy-nominated TV series DEGRASSI and more will come together with 800 students at Western Technical Commercial School in Toronto to welcome home Spencer West and the We Create Change Tour team for an amazing finale event.

Ten weeks. Nine provinces. One epic Canadian road trip. The We Create Change Tour has come to an end after connecting directly with tens of thousands of young Canadians to celebrate the incredible actions they have taken to provide their peers overseas in developing communities with access to education. An initiative of international charity and educational partner, Free The Children, made possible by RBC and driven by Ford Motor Company of Canada Ltd., the We Create Change Tour gathered students and supporters in schools and auditoriums across the country for a series of dynamic and interactive educational events that explored the issue of equal access to education. Akin to a 'mini We Day', each Tour event was headlined by motivational speaker and author Spencer West and featured musical performances from chart-topping, MMVA nominated Canadian group, Neverest and 11-year-old activist Hannah Alper.

Told that he would never be a functioning member of society after losing both his legs at the age of five, West strives to redefine what is possible and inspires millions of people with powerful stories of overcoming challenges. Last year West helped inspire Canadians to raise over \$1.4 million through Free The Children's We Create Change campaign with an 11 day, 300 km walk from Edmonton to Calgary – which he did on his hands and in his wheelchair – to raise funds to provide clean water for life to more than 56,000 people. In 2012, West reached the summit of Mt. Kilimanjaro, garnering international media attention and raising more than half a million dollars in support of clean water.

The We Create Change Tour was West's third initiative with Free The Children. West has travelled the world to hear girls talk about their hopes for the future. He has met parents who built bamboo school rooms by hand on the coast of Ghana. He has talked to boys on the sprawling plains of Kenya's Maasai Mara and the foothills of India's Aravalli mountains about the power of education. Everywhere West travels, stories of empowerment begin with the same dream – the dream of going to school.

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“Fifty-seven million children are still denied access to education. I've had the chance to speak with young people around the world, who dream of changing their lives and the lives of their families through education. I've seen firsthand, the difference that going to school can make,” said West. “I've had the privilege of meeting the most incredible students over the past ten weeks. Students who value the educational opportunities they have in Canada and who want to give the gift of education to their peers in the developing world, so they have taken action in their communities to fundraise and make this dream a reality. To say I was humbled by this generation of change-makers would be an understatement and I'm so grateful I had the opportunity to witness and celebrate their stories along the way.”

Throughout the school year students across Canada have supported Free The Children's Year of Education initiative – a commitment to build 200 schools and school rooms for children overseas, to provide them with an education that will help break the cycle of poverty. From bake sales and school dances, to pajama days and participating in the national We Create Change coin drive, young Canadians have been hard at work shining a light on the issue of equal access to education and fundraising to build schools and school rooms overseas.

“Free The Children launched the Year of Education this year, setting the challenge to support the building of 200 schools and school rooms. We are proud to announce that through the collective fundraising efforts of young people and supporters across Canada to date, 210 schools and school rooms will be built in Free The Children developing communities overseas in the coming years,” said Free The Children Executive Director, Scott Baker. “Education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and these schools and school rooms will offer life changing opportunities to 84,000 students over the next 10 years.”

Free The Children and RBC jointly launched this year's We Create Change campaign in September 2013, as a Canada-wide coin drive in support of Free The Children's Year of Education initiative. Throughout the school year, students across the country have been reaching out to family, friends and the community for support in collecting coins in special cardboard school houses. Students have then been rolling up their coins and depositing them at their local RBC branch, where each \$20 donation has equalled one brick to build a new school or school room overseas. Since the campaign began, students have raised enough money to build 50 of the 210 schools and school rooms – and the campaign isn't even over yet.

“Our RBC branches will be accepting donations right up till the end of June, to ensure that every last coin collected by students throughout Canada can help Free The Children build as many new schools and school rooms as possible,” said Jennifer Tory, group head, Personal & Commercial Banking, RBC. “We've seen how even small amounts can add up to make a big difference. We encourage everyone – young and old – to participate in this campaign to help Canadian youth create the positive change they want to see in the world, one coin, one brick, one school at a time.”

To travel coast-to-coast for the We Create Change Tour, Spencer West drove a custom 2014 Ford Escape donated by Ford. The Ford Escape was outfitted with hand controls for brakes and gas pedals, extra padding in the driver seat and hand grips for ease of accessibility into the vehicle for West and his wheelchair. Remote control engine start and remote control lift-gate, already standard in the Ford Escape, offered added convenience and accessibility for West. The vehicle also has functioning gas and brake pedals for use by other drivers offering maximum flexibility.

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“We have heard Spencer share his inspiring story of passion and dedication and we have watched and listened as this nation’s youth have come together to speak in a similar spirit of collaboration and positive change,” said Dianne Craig, president and CEO of Ford Motor Company of Canada, Ltd. “At Ford we are looking forward to going even further with Free the Children and all of us – our dealers, our employees and everyone in the Ford family – are extremely proud to support this initiative and this organization.”

Footage and high resolution photos from today’s event, of participating students, Spencer West, Hannah Alper, Neverest and other supporters, the tour bus and the 2014 Ford Escape specially modified for Spencer, etc. can be downloaded from the Electronic Press Kit:

[www.freethechildren.com/wecreatechangetour/press](http://www.freethechildren.com/wecreatechangetour/press).

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### **About Free The Children**

Free The Children is an international charity and educational partner. Founded in 1995 by international activist Craig Kielburger, Free The Children believes in a world where young people are free to achieve their fullest potential, and empowers youth to remove barriers that prevent them from being active local and global citizens. The organization’s domestic programs – which include We Day, Free The Children’s signature youth empowerment event – educate, engage and empower 2.3 million youth across North America and UK become engaged global citizens. Its international projects are implemented through a holistic and sustainable development model called Adopt a Village. Currently, Adopt a Village supports community development in eight countries; Kenya, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Ecuador, Haiti, Nicaragua, rural China and India. Through its international programming, Free The Children has brought more than 650 schools and school rooms to youth and provided clean water, health care and sanitation to 1 million people around the world, freeing children and their families from the cycle of poverty.

The organization has received the World’s Children’s Prize for the Rights of the Child, the Human Rights Award from the World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, and has formed successful partnerships with leading school boards and Oprah’s Angel Network. For more information, visit [www.freethechildren.com](http://www.freethechildren.com).

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