

Take Action!

A GUIDE TO ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Marc Kielburger

Craig Kielburger



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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Contents

Acknowledgments	v	Writing Letters to Government Officials	31
A Message from Craig Kielburger	vi	Format for a Letter to a Public Official	31
How to Use This Book	vii	Sample Letter to a Public Official	32
Part 1 — How to Get Involved: The Step-By-Step Process	1	Letter to the Editor	33
Seven Steps to Social Involvement	2	Format for a Letter to the Editor	34
Step 1: Choose an Issue	2	Sample Letter to the Editor	35
Step 2: Do Your Research	4	Letter to the Editor by Vanessa Nicholas	36
How to Be a Critical Reader	7	Public Speaking	37
A Checklist for the Wise		How to Write a Speech	37
Web Researcher	8	The Do's and Don'ts of Delivering a Speech	38
Step 3: Build a Team	9	Speaking	39
Step 4: Call a Meeting	10	Sample Speech	41
Step 5: Make a Plan of Action	11	How to Do a Survey	42
Step 6: Take Action and Then Review	13	Four Steps to a Successful Survey	42
Step 7: Have Fun!	14	Sample Survey	45
Some Thoughts to Keep You Going	14	How to Write a Petition	46
Part 2 — The How-To Guide	15	Format for a Petition	46
How to Use the Telephone	16	Sample Petition	47
How to Set Up a Group	18	How to Write a Petition to the Government	47
Building Your Core Group	19	Format for a Petition to Congress	49
How to Hold a Meeting	21	Sample Petition to Congress	50
Step 1: Call a Group Meeting	21	How to Raise Public Awareness and Support	51
Step 2: Hold a First Meeting	21	How to Use the Media	51
Step 3: Hold a Second Meeting	22	Using Posters, Flyers, and Pamphlets Effectively	52
How to Hold Great Meetings	22	How to Write a Press Release	54
Sample Agenda	23	Format for a Press Release	55
How to Make Decisions	24	Sample Press Release	56
Writing Letters	25	On the Day of Your Event	58
Letter to Request Information	26	Sample Interview with Craig Kielburger	61
Format of a Letter Requesting Information	26	Public Service Announcements	63
Sample Letter Requesting Information	27	Format for a Public Service Announcement	64
Thank-You Letter	27	Sample Public Service Announcement	65
Sample Thank-You Letter	28		
Contacting Public Officials	29		

How to Raise Funds	66	Children’s Rights Are Human Rights	106
How to Put the Fun into Fundraising	66	How to Raise Money to Help	
The Budget	68	Children Go to School	107
Top 10 Crazy Fundraisers Guaranteed to Work	69	Profile: Chris Pettoni	109
101 Fundraisers	70	Environment	110
Ask the Community to Help	77	How to Organize a Garbage-Free Lunch	110
How to Write a Donation Letter	78	Profile: Melissa Poe	112
Sample Donation Letter	79	Hunger	113
How to Write a Proposal	80	How to Organize a Halloween	
Format for a Proposal	80	for Hunger Campaign	114
Sample Proposal	81	Profile: Shagufta Pasta	116
Grants and Foundations	82	Poverty	117
		How to Make a School Kit	118
		Profile: Audrey Ting	119
Part 3 — Where You Can Get Involved — Everywhere!	83	HIV/AIDS	120
At Home	84	How to Organize an HIV/AIDS	
Plan a Family-Togetherness Activity	85	Awareness Day	122
At School	86	Profile: Nkosi Johnson	123
Encourage School Spirit with Spirit Week	87	Peace	124
Take Action to Give Students Power	89	How to Organize a <i>War Is Not a Game</i>	
Start a Club with a Purpose	89	Campaign	125
In Your Community	91	Profile: Sadako Sasaki	127
Organize a Drive	92	More Issues for Social Action	128
A Rally or a Forum	93		
More Actions to Take to Get Your Message Across	95	Part 5 — Sources and Resources	130
Working with Government	96	Human Rights	131
Influencing Your Local Government	97	Children’s Rights	131
Other Ways to Get Involved with Government	98	Environment	131
		Hunger	132
		Poverty	132
		HIV / AIDS	133
		Peace	134
Part 4 — Tackling Social Issues	101	About Leaders Today	135
Human Rights	101	About Kids Can Free the Children	136
How to Organize a Human Rights Awareness Day	103		
Profile: Elias Roman	105		

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A Message from Craig Kielburger

While eating breakfast one morning in Toronto, I reached for my favorite section of the newspaper, the comics. Suddenly, I noticed the picture of a boy on the front page of the paper. The headline read, “Battled Child Labor, Boy 12, Murdered!” Being 12 years old myself, I felt an immediate connection and grabbed the paper to read more.

I had never heard about child labor but decided to do some research. When I discovered that there were more than 250 million child laborers in the world, many working in slavlike conditions, I knew I had to do something. I was not sure how I could help, but I knew I had to at least try.


When I gathered my friends to start Kids Can Free the Children, we were simply a group of Canadian youth getting together to write letters, make phone calls, fundraise, and take other small actions on an issue we felt passionate about. At first, no one believed that children could actually make a difference. But they can. We proved it.

What started out as a group of kids dreaming about changing the world has, in six short years, grown into an influential international movement, involving over 100,000 youth in 35 countries, speaking out and taking action on behalf of their peers. The impact of Kids Can Free the Children has been remarkable. Through the efforts of young people, Kids Can Free the Children has been able to build and open over 300 primary schools in developing countries, providing education to over 15,000 children; ship over 100,000 school and health kits to developing countries; and pressure governments around the world to enact laws to protect children.

People sometimes ask me what type of person makes the best leader. My response: All types! Every one of us is born with special gifts or talents. And as young people, it is both our right and our responsibility to use these talents to help find solutions to problems affecting our world. The first thing we need to do is learn as much as possible about the issues that concern us as youth.

Young people are in a unique position to change the world. All we have to do is believe that we can make a difference, and we will.

We hope this book will help you use your special gifts to become a powerful force for progress and change.



Craig Kielburger
Founder, Kids Can Free the Children
www.freethechildren.com



Life's most
urgent question

is: What are
you doing for
others?

— Martin Luther
King, Jr.
(1929–1968)
Civil rights leader

TAKE ACTION!

How to Use This Book

This book has been inspired by the vision, spirit, and activities of thousands of youth working to improve the lives of others in their schools and communities. Their ideas and actions have led to the formation of Leaders Today. Leaders Today is a global organization that trains young people to become socially involved on a local, national, or international level. It runs leadership training programs in schools, community centers, and places of worship, and leads workshops on educational topics such as how to give effective speeches, how to fundraise, and how to inspire others to become socially involved. Leaders Today also offers leadership training and volunteer programs in Kenya, India, Thailand, and Nicaragua, where young people from North America and Europe volunteer at Free the Children projects, help build primary schools, and make a real difference while working in a local community. (More information about Leaders Today is available at the back of this book.)

What has emerged out of the hundreds of Leaders Today training programs offered around the world each year is the realization that each one of us has the potential to change the world. It does not matter where you live or how old you are — your contributions are important and can help promote change. What young people often lack, however, are the tools to take action. This step-by-step guide to social action has been designed to show you how to get organized and get moving to tackle important issues in your community, your school, your country, and around the world.

“Young people are the leaders of tomorrow,” or so the saying goes. But you do not have to wait until tomorrow to change the world. You can be a leader today, and *Take Action! A Guide to Active Citizenship* will show you how. By following the suggestions in this book, you will be taking concrete action and helping to make a difference in your life and in the lives of others.

Each of the five main parts of this book, described below, contains valuable tips, strategies, and examples that will help you to become more socially aware and involved.

Part 1: How to Get Involved: The Step-By-Step Process outlines seven steps to social involvement, which are easy-to-follow guidelines for developing personal skills while tackling a new social issue.

Part 2: The How-To Guide contains suggestions regarding communication, media, fundraising, and research that you will find invaluable when you decide to take action on your social issue.

The unselfish effort to bring cheer to others will be the beginning of a happier life for ourselves.

— Helen Keller
(1880–1968)
Author and
educator

Part 3: Where You Can Get Involved — Everywhere! will inspire you to become socially active at home, in your school, in your community, and by working with government.

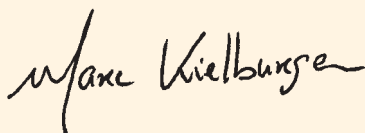
Part 4: Tackling Social Issues provides information about seven social issues that need your help. Here, you learn about seven concrete plans of action, which you can follow to make a difference. You will also be introduced to a number of ordinary young people who have made an extraordinary impact on these issues.

Part 5: Sources and Resources lists the names of organizations working to make a difference, and provides current contact information (at the time of publication).

Here are some things to think about while reading this book:

- Think of this book as a springboard for new ideas and do not limit yourself to the plans it provides for social action. Be creative. Be original. Challenge yourself to come up with new ways to help. Being a leader means taking steps beyond what you thought was originally possible. It means believing in your power to change the world.
- Every time you tackle a new social issue, review the section Seven Steps to Social Involvement, beginning on page 2. By becoming more and more familiar with these steps, you will have a greater impact on your issue.
- Do not be afraid to ask for help. Many people want to make the world a better place in which to live, and both youth and adults alike are often looking for ways to make a contribution.
- Do not give up. Getting involved in social issues is difficult sometimes because learning about the world's problems can be depressing. But if you get frustrated, do not turn away; instead, turn to other people for support. Find out how others have conquered the odds and remind yourself why you got involved. Turn your anger and your passion into action.

Remember, we are the generation that we have been waiting for. Good luck!



Marc Kielburger
Co-Founder, Leaders Today
www.leaderstoday.com



TAKE ACTION!

PART 1

How to Get Involved: The Step-by-Step Process



What's Inside

Seven Steps to Social Involvement

Step 1: Choose an Issue

Step 2: Do Your Research

Step 3: Build a Team

Step 4: Call a Meeting

Step 5: Make a Plan of Action

Step 6: Take Action and Then Review

Step 7: Have Fun!

Some Thoughts to Keep You Going

Seven Steps to Social Involvement

Are you interested in becoming socially involved? Have you come across a social issue that motivates you but you are uncertain about where to start? You are not alone. It is often very difficult to become socially active. Many of the problems currently facing the world, such as child labor, AIDS, or war and conflict, are complicated and controversial. However, simply because an issue is difficult does not mean you should avoid becoming involved in it. Frequently, the more complex the issue, the more your help is needed. This section of the book introduces you to seven easy steps you can take to break down the issue into manageable stages for your social involvement. Following the suggestions outlined for each step will help you become a more effective social advocate. Try to use these seven steps every time you pick a new issue in which to become active. Doing so will maximize the impact of your involvement.



Step 1: Choose an Issue

The first and most important step in becoming socially involved is to choose an issue that you are passionate about. Ask yourself: What social problem motivates and inspires me? Try to find a topic that you would like to research in order to learn as much as you can.

There are so many ways that you can make a difference. What issues are important to you?

Be observant and ask questions

Is there something in the world that does not seem fair or just to you? Perhaps you have read about it in a newspaper or on the Internet, or seen it on television. Is there anything that you would like to change at school, in your community, or in the world?

When choosing your issue, try to be as specific as possible. If your issue is, for example, war and conflict, try to focus on one particular aspect of that topic. You could become involved in ridding the world of nuclear weapons or

addressing the problem of child soldiers in Sierra Leone. The chart below lists other examples.

Once you have chosen your issue, find out what other organized groups are already addressing this or associated issues. Thoroughly research the groups to make sure they are legitimate and credible, and then consider approaching them for help. You may also want to research to determine how other individuals and groups are making significant contributions in your community.

Issue	Specific Problem
world hunger	Students at my school are hungry. Children in North Korea are starving.
child labor	A local store is importing clothes made in sweatshops that use child labor.
war and conflict	Some countries harbor and finance terrorists. Many war criminals are not brought to justice.
poverty	Our city lacks shelters for the hundreds of homeless people. One in six children in the United States lives in poverty.
AIDS	Millions of people in sub-Saharan Africa are dying from AIDS. People in our community have the illness and need our help.

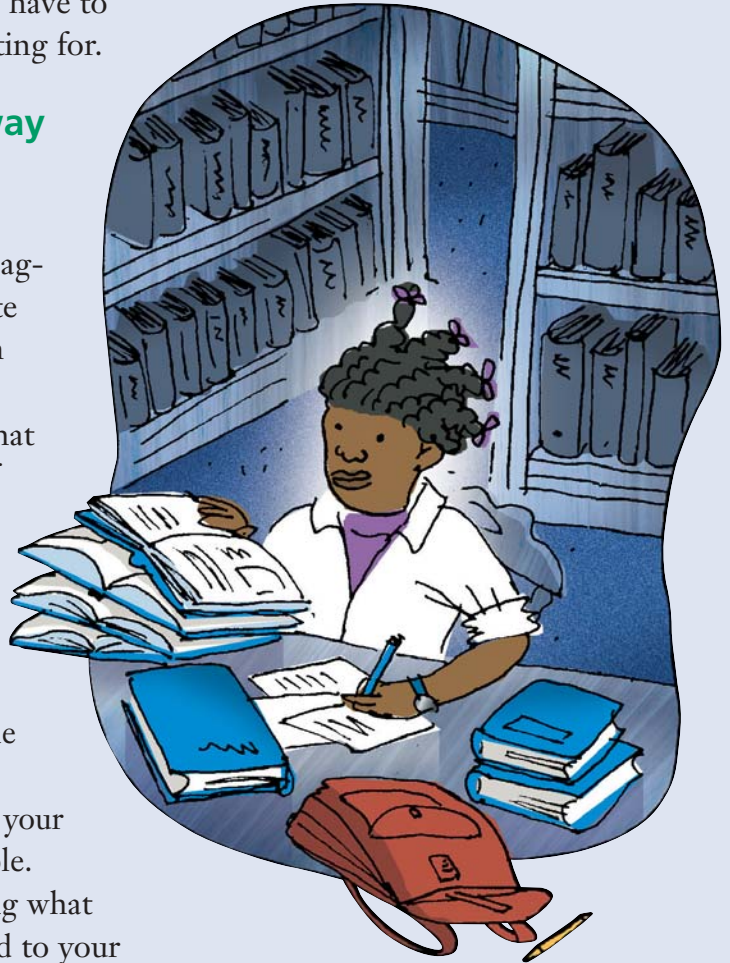
Step 2: Do Your Research

It is important to learn more about the problems that prevent millions of people around the world from being healthy, happy, and reaching their full potential. If you want to help them have a better life, you have to educate yourself. You have to know what you are fighting for.

What is the best way to start your research?

Read newspapers and magazines to keep up-to-date on current events. Then visit the library to learn more about the topics that sparked your interest. If an issue is too large to learn about all at once, remember to break it down into several smaller issues and think about the different aspects of each problem. This will make your research more manageable.

Begin by determining what specific issues are related to your topic. For example:



Poverty



Issues related to poverty

unemployment
hunger
child labor
homelessness
disease

Where can you obtain information?

- Library
- Textbooks
- Internet
- Teachers, principal, parents/guardians, and community leaders
- News media
- Government
- Surveys and interviews
- Organizations and community groups
- Corporations and local businesses
- Magazines and newspapers
- Films

Begin your research by making a list of specific questions concerning the issue, and then set out to answer them. To gain a broader understanding of the problem you are researching, think about its causes, its consequences, and its possible solutions.

Example issue: Child labor

Here are some questions you might ask yourself:

Causes

- What is child labor?
- Why are children working? Examine all the causes.
- What situations force children into child labor?
- Where are they working? In which countries is child labor extensive? What kinds of industries employ children?

Consequences

- How many children are working?
- What kind of work do they do? What are the dangers involved in child labor?
- Is all work harmful to children?
- Are there any advantages to child labor?
- Who is benefiting from child labor?
- What are the long-term effects on children and on society?

Solutions

- What is being done to solve the problem? What does and does not work?
- Who are the decision-makers I need to approach in order to solve the problem?
- What laws are in effect in various countries to protect children? Are additional laws needed?
- What can I do to help children who are exploited in child labor?

You gain
strength, courage,
and confidence by
every experience
in which you
really stop to look
fear in the face....
You must do the
thing you think
you cannot do.

— Eleanor Roosevelt
(1884–1962)
Former First Lady,
United States

HOW TO GET
INVOLVED: THE
STEP-BY-STEP
PROCESS