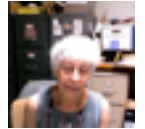


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Human Rights and Making a Difference...by Jon Western

It's easy to get discouraged and think what difference can it make.

But, then I think about – *Kids Can Make a Difference*. And, I realize how much has improved in the world because *ordinary people* – men, women, and kids -- have made a difference in advancing the causes of human rights. And how important it is for my students to learn and know the history of how ordinary people have made such a profound difference.

For example, *in 1859*, a young Swiss businessman named *Henri Dunant* witnessed the Battle of Solferino in northern Italy that left 40,000 soldiers dead or wounded in a mere sixteen hours. Moved by a basic belief that soldiers wounded on the battlefield should receive protection and care, he returned to Geneva and organized a small group that eventually became the *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)* and drafted what would later become known as the First Geneva Convention. Today, the ICRC and the Geneva Conventions protect and support millions of human beings in conflict areas.

In 1961, Peter Benenson, a British lawyer became outraged after reading in his morning newspaper about the imprisonment of two young Portuguese students. Benenson wrote an appeal published in the London *Observer* calling on readers to write letters in support of these and other “forgotten prisoners” of conscience. His appeal inspired ten, then a hundred, then a thousand, and then tens of thousands of people to write letters to corrupt regimes demanding release of the prisoners and within months, Benenson and his friends formed *Amnesty International*. Today, Amnesty International monitors and reports on human rights violations and empowers indigenous human rights organizations to confront political, economic, and social abuses in every country on the globe.

In the *1970s and 1980s* amid Argentina’s Dirty War, *a group of mothers and grandmothers* of young men who were illegally abducted and killed began to hold a weekly vigil in the *Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires*. Their vigil grew and drew global attention to the human rights abuses of the regime. Within a decade, the country removed the dictators and began its path toward democracy. Today, the generals who were responsible for those human rights violations are either in jail or facing criminal trial for the kidnappings and abductions.

In 1991, Jody Williams, a young woman from Rutland, Vermont organized a group of small non-governmental organizations to coordinate their efforts in a campaign to *ban the use of landmines* by armies around the world. Within two years, she had assembled more than a hundred organizations to join the cause. And, four years later she and her organization successfully lobbied more the 100 countries to sign an international treaty to ban the use of landmines – she also *won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997* for her efforts. Today, 156 countries in the world have joined this ban and the resulting efforts to clear land mines have saved tens of thousands of lives.

Today, because of the work of men, women, and children around the globe there is a large web of international institutions and other governmental and non-governmental instruments to promote international human rights. More governments than at any time in history provide some measure of constitutional protections for its citizens. Furthermore, with advances in technologies, citizens and groups can monitor and report.

Donna Stokes writes about a Heifer International project dealing with nutrition in Bolivia. We not only

learn what the third grade class in El Alto learned through the program but Stokes introduces us to the wide ranging work of Heifer International. The work done at the school has a far-reaching effect on students, families and the community of El Alto.

From Bolivia we come back to the United States where Martin's Fergus article, "Promoting 'By Far the Most Effective Poverty Tool in the United States'" addresses the real cause of the hunger issue and what we can do to address the problem. As he tells us, "people are hungry, in this country and abroad, primarily because they are poor." Fergus explains the Earned Income Tax Credit program and describes how all of us can join together developing actions that impact people in poverty in a meaningful way. Fergus is a long time contributor to this publication and we anticipate many more articles from him in the future.

Finally, we go south of the border again to Argentina where Rosa Isabel Aguila tells us a remarkable story of Telar and how it grew from a local program internationally into what is now known as the International Educational and Resource Network (iEARN). The transition from six schools into a nonprofit organization made up of over 30,000 schools and youth organizations in more than 130 countries is an example of how just a few people can make a huge difference in this world.

Read more on Kids Can Make A Difference <http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org/Newsletter/may2010/about%20this%20issue.pdf>