

Be The Change Conference 2017
BETTER TOGETHER
Madrid, Spain

By David W. Wygant

It had the smallest beginning. It was only an idea ...

not unlike a small mustard seed. A twinkle in the mind of one person, Kiran Bir Sethi from India, a land of 1.13 billion people. It was a simple but grand idea that children are Superheroes who can change the world. It became Design for Change.

Design for Change is a study in planting a dream, doing daily things to feed that dream, ignoring the naysayers, pushing past personal fear and doubt, and having faith in the knowledge that a growing group of others believe in you and the idea.

Design for Change is a story of patience and persistence. A story of a bamboo shoot that must be cared for over years, and then emerges growing to the sky within only what seems like seconds in the timeline of life. Design for Change now spans across sixty plus countries

Fast forward to November 11, 2017, only eight years, almost to the day, after the TED Talk by Ms. Sethi that changed everything. On this day, delegations from twenty nine of the sixty plus Design for Change partner countries from around the world arrived in Madrid, Spain. Each brought a real story of adventure, dedication and courage. They brought young Superheroes who are changing the world. This is a story about a group of passionately dedicated volunteers and leaders in the host country, Spain, a country with a rich global history.

It is also my story. I made the trip to Spain from the United States of America. When I arrived in Madrid, the day before the conference on November 9th, I was greeted by warm and sunny weather, and a friendly helpful people. The convenience of an efficient subway system (Metro) made its' mark early. After I arrived at the airport, I called one of the Spanish team members for guidance. Noura's easy directions and friendly guidance quickly put me on the Metro headed to the hotel that I would call home for a few days. I was amazed that when I got off the Metro, Hotel ILUNION Suites Madrid was only one block away. Many others attending the conference also arrived that day. I can easily imagine they experienced the same thing I did.

Many others came to the Be The Change Conference. It is their story too. In all of 2017, 53,402,506 passengers arrived at the Madrid Airport dwarfing in comparison the count of all of us from Design for Change. The count of us was much smaller than a mustard seed in comparison, but the cumulative size of our hearts was oversize. In total, there were 290 of us: 107 student Superheroes along with 8 brothers

or sisters, 52 DFC Partners, 41 teachers, and 55 other adults. The list of countries includes teams from five of the seven continents.

Over the next two days, we all connected with old friends and made new. Earlier, I had written a feature article about Natalia, the Partner from Chile. We had a coffee time together and part of a lunch time. During the first general session, Miguel the Partner from Spain, spotted me in the audience and called out hello. I was completely surprised because we hadn't connected for five years. Yet, he remembered. That first evening, during the walk through old town, I met Vilma. Vilma is the new Partner from Lithuania. She had come to meet new friends and intensify her Design for Change infection. I am sure I'm not alone in remembering clearly the remarkable Superhero named Jaafar from Jordan. I was able to talk with him for ten minutes at lunch one day. Still, I wonder if the King of Jordan knows about Jaafar. If the King doesn't, he should because Jaafar is proof permanent that Superheroes are everywhere. How could someone like him emerge from such a conflict ridden part of the world? He is a blessing like all Superheroes.

For two days we met at the Auditorio Del Colegio Cardenal Spinola, We heard talks and saw performances by Kiran Bir Sethi, Mr. Candle, Koro Cantabrana and Alan Parra, Arni and Olga, Antonio Montalvo, and the Spain Be The Change Team. The break sessions included Marc Prensky, Jamming Together, Better Together Stories, Improv, Mindfulness and Best Relationships, and the Mutation of Sound. All of this informed and stretched us as a group, and personally. However, none compared or prepared us for the Superhero team presentations.

The Superhero teams from the different countries definitely gave us hope and raised our spirits. Nineteen country teams captured our hearts and inspired us as they reported projects that conservatively impacted over twelve thousand people in the communities in their countries. The range of issues these Superheroes touched is impressive: Open community spaces, Increasing respect, community, and a healthy environment, Increasing love for math and the sciences, Male and female equality, Human inclusion, Suicide, Contributing to global goal attainment, Creating a better learning environment at school, Bringing trees and plants into the school for more happiness, Safety for girls, Support for students in their studies, Increasing charity work by organizations, Preventing mobile device use while driving, Bullying, Community and citizenship, Preserving nature and open spaces, Obesity, Fixing leaking sinks at school, and Creating digital and virtual laboratories at school. To put these efforts in perspective we must dream about the possibilities.

The current global population is approximately 7.6 billion people. In 2017, the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFRA) reported that 24% or approximately 1.8 billion people were children under the age of 15 years. Based on these numbers and reflecting back at what the 2017 Be The Change Superheroes reported, there is much hope. Imagine what roughly 1.8 billion Superheroes might accomplish. There is much that needs to be done on our blue little planet, but

Superheroes with the urgency and energy they bring are clearly up to the task. As we leave 2017 behind, we can have faith in a bright future. Soon we will gather again.

The 2018 Be The Change conference will take place in November in Taiwan. It will be a super showcase for the planet's Superheroes. Can't wait to see you there. Now, it's time to get to work.