



**Remembering  
Joe Opatowski  
April 19, 1983 -  
October 29, 2004**

## **Joe's Dream Scholarship Fund**

### ***Joe's Spark***

Welcome to Joe's Dream Scholarship Fund. We're so excited that you're thinking of joining us for a leadership program this year—we can't wait to combine our creative energies to make our world a better place!

This scholarship was created in memory of Joe Opatowski, a humble and passionate leader who dedicated his life to empowering young people to change the world.

Joe learned about the power of young people through his own experiences. Growing up, Joe's home-life was full of challenges, from violence to addiction, abuse and fear. But Joe always tried to make things better for the people around him, and so it came naturally that he never stopped working to create peace in his family. He even extended his peaceful philosophy to help end the street and school violence so common in his neighbourhood of Scarborough, Ontario.

When he was just 17 years old, the problems at home forced Joe to move out of his house. He worked many jobs just to pay for rent and groceries, yet he still made time to hang out with his high school friends. Even at this young age, Joe's determination to confront each of life's challenges was clear.

Joe's family situation remained difficult, so Children and Youth Services occasionally helped by sending him and his two younger brothers to summer camp. At one of these camps, when he was still a teenager, Joe met a boy named Jordan who tried to get him interested in a leadership camp he was planning to attend. Joe, however, only heard two words: *leadership* and *camp*. Camp was fun, but leadership? 'Boring!' he thought. But then he heard that some young people even got to fly to other cities and countries to give motivational speeches. And Joe loved to talk! Then Jordan told him that there were also lots of girls at the camp. And Joe loved girls! Free flights, talking and girls? Joe was sold.

Soon after, Joe attended his first Free The Children international conference, which eventually became the Leaders Today summer Take Action! Academy. From the moment Joe walked in the room and saw so many young people who wanted to change the world, he knew this was the place for him. It wasn't long before he was interested in more than just the girls—he was quickly enthralled by the lectures and workshops. There was nothing boring about this place! Soon he was consumed with the idea that young people truly did have a big part to play in the global community, and that they could do this by spreading peace and compassion, regardless of who they were or where they came from.

After the conference, Joe remained committed to changing the world and found sponsorship to go with a group of young people to Jamaica to volunteer with a community living in a garbage dump. While playing with the children there, Joe learned that they spent their days rifling

through heaps of garbage just to afford something to eat. Suddenly, all of the problems that Joe was facing in his own life in Canada didn't seem so horrible. When he met kids who had to share their only pair of shoes with their brothers and sisters, he knew that he had a lot more to give to the world than he had ever thought. He knew that he could give love.

Joe's trip to Jamaica taught him that we all have the ability to take positive action in our lives and that not having money should never stop us from acting. He learned that love is the essence of change, and that the great thing about love is everyone has it to share.

Joe joined Leaders Today and Free The Children as a staff member in 2001, where he was an outstanding facilitator, public speaker and motivator. He always had hope for a brighter tomorrow, and he always believed in the power of one person to change the world, regardless of his or her life circumstances. Between 2002 and 2004, Joe went on speaking tours with Leaders Today where he had the opportunity to address audiences all over North America. At one point, Joe chose to be silent for a whole week in his own "vow of silence" to raise money for youth without the economic means to participate in Leaders Today programs. Today, Free The Children runs its own Vow of Silence campaign every March 1 for youth to effect change—a testament to what young people can accomplish.

In 2004, Joe began another Leaders Today speaking tour called Me to We. Me to We is a philosophy and a world movement largely based on Joe's own feelings about how to change the world, about how the small, selfless actions of one person can be truly transformative.

On October 29, 2004, Joe was on his way home from a week of speeches in New York. But something tragic and unexpected happened along the way: Joe was killed in a car accident. He was only 21 years old.

To honour Joe, and to carry on a legacy that he would be proud of, his family at Leaders Today and Free The Children decided to make one of Joe's dreams a reality. Ever since his trip to Jamaica, Joe dreamed of creating a scholarship fund that would give young people without a lot of money the chance to develop their gifts in a positive learning environment. Joe knew that his trip to Jamaica and his time at the Leadership Academy had changed his life. He wanted to give other young people like him the same opportunity. Joe never let go of this dream. He spoke of it to anyone who would listen, and he believed in the power it would have to change the world.

This scholarship is Joe's dream. It is proof that one person can make a world of difference and can achieve their goals and dreams if they are passionate and positive. Joe's Dream Scholarship Fund gives young people without the financial means the chance to be a part of one of our International Volunteer and Leadership Trips or one of our Leadership Academies. Every trip offers opportunities to learn about new cultures, build leadership skills, volunteer in local communities and build lifelong friendships. Every academy offers opportunities in youth empowerment, skills development, issues exploration and endless fun. With Leaders Today, you will experience the world in a whole new way and truly understand that **we are the generation we have been waiting for!**

Thank you for helping to make Joe's dream a reality by applying for this scholarship.

Welcome to the infinite possibilities of today.



**Joe's Dream Scholarship Application: PART I**  
*Contact Information*

**YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION**

*Note: All fields must be filled out. Please print clearly.*

**Applicant (That's You!)**

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Program you're applying for \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Day ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ Evening ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Sex \_\_\_\_\_

Name of School \_\_\_\_\_

Address of School \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Address of Employer \_\_\_\_\_

**YOUR PARENT'S / GUARDIAN'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

*Note: If you are under 18 years of age, you **must** include contact information for one of your parents or guardians. If you are 18 years of age or older, you may choose to instead include contact information for either your partner, your roommate or another contact such as a relative.*

**Contact 1: Parent or Guardian** if applicant is under 18, or  
**Parent/Guardian/Partner/Roommate/Other Primary Contact** if applicant is 18 or older

Full Name \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Day ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ Evening ( \_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Have you lived or will you live with your parent(s)/guardian(s) for at least six weeks...

in the past 12 months? Yes No

in the next 12 months? Yes No

NAME of APPLICANT: \_\_\_\_\_

**Joe's Dream Scholarship Application: PART 2**  
*Letter of Motivation*

Write a Letter of Motivation to Leaders Today/Free The Children addressing the following questions. This letter should be a **maximum** of two pages double-spaced.

1. What do you hope to gain from going on an International Volunteer and Leadership Trip or from attending a Leadership Academy?
  
2. As a leader, what are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
  
3. Describe a challenge that you were recently faced with and how you effectively handled the situation.
  
4. Provide a written letter of reference from two of the following people:
  - (a) Family member
  - (b) Teacher
  - (c) Mentor/friend/employer

*Please respond to the following questions in the space provided:*

Are you currently involved with Free The Children or have you ever participated in a Leaders Today program?

Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_

If so, which programs?

How did you hear about Joe's Dream Scholarship?

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NAME of APPLICANT: \_\_\_\_\_

**Joe's Dream Scholarship Application: PART 3**  
*Dreams and Vision*

Joe Opatowski was a visionary. He was a young man uniquely able to see through the world of today to the best of all tomorrows and to understand how, by opening ourselves up to other people and new possibilities, we can make that better world a reality.

By giving of himself in all his daily actions, Joe worked toward that world every day. Understanding the power of art to define a new reality and to communicate fundamental ideas on a deep, powerful level, Joe expressed his dreams through his speeches, poetry, prose and hip hop.

To honour Joe's love of art and his commitment to changing the world, we have included this *Dreams and Vision* section of the application process, to be completed in your most creative, passionate way. What is your dream and vision? How do you see yourself? How do you express yourself? How do you see the world? Where can we go from here? Show us.

We would like you to submit three of the following:

1. Your life in your words: A written history of your life, including any struggles that have helped to shape who you are today, and how you got through (or are getting through) them.  
**Length:** Two pages  
**Style:** Tell us a story!
  
2. A description of **one issue** that you're passionate about and **a solution** you see to solving the challenges associated with your issue in a clear action plan.  
**Length:** One page  
**Style:** Be concise, be specific and be a visionary!
  
3. The world in your words: A description of your world view that encompasses what you see as the world's greatest struggles and challenges.  
**Length:** One page  
**Style:** Feel free to support your written answer in creative ways. Use your imagination.
  
4. **Express yourself:** Show us your dreams, your passions, your intensity, your beliefs, your ideas, your issues, your inspiration, your personality and your vision through your creativity!  
*Some suggestions:*
  - a. Audio – rap, music, spoken word, radio show, comedy routine
  - b. Dance – submitted by video
  - c. Drama – a play or film you've written, directed or acted in, submitted as a script or video
  - d. Visual art – paintings, drawings, sketches, digital art, website, photography (film or digital), animation
  - e. Writing – poetry, fiction, non-fiction, journalism, essays, opinion pieces

★ Please note: Each piece must include a description/explanation of at least 50 words.  
★ *Your items will not be returned to you after your submission*

NAME of APPLICANT: \_\_\_\_\_

**Joe's Dream Scholarship Application: PART 4**  
*Finances*

**FINANCES**

A. List the types and amounts of any outstanding loans

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

B. Estimate of Need

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total Program Cost

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Amount I Can Personally Provide

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Amount of Aid from Other Sources (including fundraising)

\$ \_\_\_\_\_ Net Amount Needed from Joe's Dream Scholarship Fund

I (We) declare that the information provided is true and complete.

Note: Your parent's or guardian's signature is needed if you are under 18 years of age.

**Applicant's** Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent or Guardian's** Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

- You have the option of attaching a one-page explanation of your financial need, noting any circumstances that you would like the Leaders Today team to consider.

**NAME of APPLICANT:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Joe's Dream Scholarship Application: PART 5**  
*Follow-up Process*

Right now you are at the application stage of this scholarship. If you are chosen as a scholarship recipient, we ask that you commit to sharing your experience with others. After the fun of the trip or academy has come to a close, you will be able to apply your new skills and give back to your community and your world! We ask you to commit to:

**a) Spread the message of the importance of changing the world by presenting your thoughts and experiences to one audience in the next six months.**

During the trip or academy you'll experience some amazing things, and we guarantee that people will want to hear about them. If we're going to find a solution to some of the world's problems—and we are!—then you need to help us by telling people what you learned and what you did during your time with Leaders Today. This will also help people learn about Joe's Dream Scholarship and about the ideals and visions it encompasses. There are many audiences that would love to hear your stories: your class or school, your friends' schools, service clubs, community gatherings and a whole lot more.

**b) Write an article, testimony or story for Free The Children and Leaders Today to use as they see fit (it can be anonymous).**

Youth who are thinking of getting involved with one of our programs look to our website for information and testimonies to help make their decision. Who better to represent the ideals and values of our programs than the participants themselves? This piece of writing can be anything from a few sentences to a few pages, what's important is the thought behind the words!

**c) Hold a fundraiser for Joe's Dream Scholarship Fund using your gifts and talents to help give the same opportunity to another young person.**

In order for other youth to have the same opportunity to participate in the Leaders Today experience, we need to find ways to ensure the sustainability of the scholarship. You've been chosen as a recipient because of your talents, passion and creativity. We would love for you to use these special qualities to raise awareness about Joe and his dream, as well as to raise funds to provide opportunities for youth next summer.

**d) Network with other scholarship recipients to support each other in your future actions and endeavours.**

Each young person who receives a scholarship from Joe's Dream is a leader with countless gifts, talents and stories. We want to give you the opportunity to learn from and inspire each other so, after the trip or academy, we ask you to connect with other scholarship recipients so you can all share your creative energy. Through these meetings (whether they're over the Internet, on the phone or during a shared meal), and through the other things you're committing to, you'll help this scholarship achieve the greatest impact possible on your life and on the lives of other awesome young people like you.

If I am chosen to receive a Joe's Dream Scholarship from Free The Children and Leaders Today, I, \_\_\_\_\_, commit to do these four things after returning from the International Volunteer and Leadership Trip or Leadership Academy.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Applicant Check List:

Joe's Dream Scholarship Fund applies to Leaders Today's International Volunteer and Leadership Trips and to its Leadership Academies. Your scholarship application must accompany a completed application for the trip or academy of your choice.

Please be sure that you have included all of the following items in your application!

- ❑ Your Letter of motivation describing your level of interest
- ❑ Your letter of reference from two of the following categories: family member, teacher, friend/mentor/employer
- ❑ Your letter of financial need (optional)
- ❑ Three submissions out of the four listed in part 3
- ❑ Parts 1, 2, 4 and 5 all fully completed

We suggest that all materials be submitted prior to the following dates.

**March 20:** Deadline for scholarship applications for summer International Volunteer and Leadership Trips

**May 1:** Deadline for scholarship applications for the Leadership Academies

We look forward to receiving your application!

If there is anything we can help you with, please don't hesitate to contact us. Our trips and academies are incredible and life changing experiences for everyone who participates. We can't wait to show you, firsthand, how much of an impact we can have on this world!

Have the best day you've ever had,

Joe's Dream Team

*Keep on Living it up!*

233 Carlton St  
Toronto, Ontario  
Canada M5A 2L2

E-mail: [trips@leaderstoday.com](mailto:trips@leaderstoday.com)  
Phone: 1.416.964.8942 ext.103  
Fax: 1.416.964.2199

Free The Children website: [www.freethechildren.com](http://www.freethechildren.com)  
Leaders Today website: [www.leaderstoday.com](http://www.leaderstoday.com)