

ACTIVITY: Child Activist Spreads Awareness among School Children in Iowa City, IA

Spencer, 12, Iowa, USA

(Youth Network for Children's Rights, Sept '04)

On September 24, 2004, I had the chance to **speak to 350 6th graders** at Prairie Middle School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. My friend Chivy and I spent one hour talking about child labor. We presented some *facts and figures*, shared some *stories*, and showed a *video* to get the 6th graders to understand the life of a child laborer.

As Chivy talked about child labor, I had flashbacks to when I was in 6th grade. I remembered when I first learned about child labor, how I was overwhelmed by how prevalent child labor was. I was shocked to find out that there are 246 million child laborers around the world. I was frustrated with the fact that not many people were doing anything about this horrific human rights violation. So my friends and I decided to start a group against child labor. We decided on the name "CHILD" or Children Helping Innocent Laborers Democratically.

In working with this issue for the past year, I discovered that **kids can make a difference**. I know this because I have seen it with my friends as we worked on our group projects. For example, we have raised awareness about the issue by *speaking out publicly* at churches, university classes, and legislative forums. From seeing what kids can do, I want to rally my peers to help in the global movement against child labor.

This past July I met one of my heroes, Mr. Kailash Satyarthi, when he came to Iowa to speak at a conference on child labor. During his talk, he made it clear that **the fight against child labor cannot be won without youth participation**. I agree! That is why I took advantage of the opportunity to share my thoughts about youth involvement at Prairie Middle School.

I strongly believe that kids can make a difference in this world either locally or internationally. It doesn't have to be a big difference. We can start with small steps. But *if we all take small steps, we can walk a long way*. It is *like making a small snowball and rolling it down a hill*. The further it rolls, the more snow and speed it picks up. *In the end, it is unstoppable*. I believe the small snowballs make up the unstoppable force that will end child labor. I think that if all the youth of the world do something, big or small, we could have a great impact.

Now it is up to us. It is our future and we make it what we want it to be. If we want it to be a future without child labor, then we need to do our part.

"All the excitement you (Chivy) and Spencer had was multiplied by 300 here at Prairie! [...] I can't wait to see the art these kids will create!!"

- Lia Hansen, 6th-8th grade *Art Teacher*, College Community School District, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, USA

September 27, 2004