

Children for Change: Student philanthropy

A global non-profit helps students learn about philanthropy



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The Montessori Global Growth Fund

The Montessori Global Growth Fund (MGGF) is a non-profit founded to financially support Montessori initiatives in under-resourced communities across the globe. Since its first grant awarded in March 2020, it has awarded more than 35 grants all around the world. MGGF funds these grants through donations from individuals, mostly Montessori teachers, parents, and friends.

When the war in Ukraine erupted in February 2022, MGGF was asked by several schools and individuals if it could raise funds for Ukrainian relief. The MGGF leadership put together a learning module it called Children for Change (CfC). CfC focuses on introducing elementary and middle school students to philanthropy and encourages them to create, conduct and review their own fundraising campaigns.

That spring, Chesterfield Montessori School in St. Louis, Missouri and Meadows Montessori School in Ferndale, Washington were two of the first schools to pilot the CfC module. Sara Kruger, Montessori Educator & Developmental Specialist, from Chesterfield and Robin Sheehy, Head of Curriculum, from Meadows downloaded the initial CfC slides,

worksheets, and supporting materials through the MGGF website. Along with several other schools' elementary students, their students raised about \$5,000 to help Ukrainian Montessori students.

Children for Change

MGGF designed CfC to help elementary and/or adolescent students to learn about philanthropy: what it is, what role it plays in our lives, who does it and why, and what impact it can have locally as well as far afield. It can show children through their research on philanthropy and philanthropists how they, the students, can be part of something bigger than just their classroom, family or neighborhood. They are part of the global world and they have important roles to play.

Through the students' research on sharing and giving to others, they can explore both what they themselves have or do not have, while seeing what others have or do not have. CfC is a free module offering students an opportunity to develop greater insights into their own environments as well as offering a chance to explore environments of others in different parts of the world.

To encourage students and give them examples of philanthropic work far from their own homes, CfC materials links to the MGGF website, where the students can see photos and read about current and past MGGF grant recipients, and see the outcomes they have achieved.

They can explore Montessori initiatives in countries far from their school or in the United States perhaps much closer to their school.

They can see photos of Montessori classrooms with children using the

same materials that they use or materials like theirs that were made by the local teacher. They may learn about how a teacher became a Montessori teacher. They might also explore a grant where the awardee used the funds to change the school facility in some important way.

Being part of the cosmos

The underlying purpose of CfC is to help the students begin to understand they are part of the wider world—the cosmos—and that they can impact that wider world. Participating in CfC, the students can step back, look at the gifts they have in their school, while seeing that other children elsewhere in the world may not have those gifts. Many of those other children might not have access to a school with lots of materials, or highly trained teachers or facilities that keep them safe and healthy. Once the children understand the global aspect of a Montessori education, they have a wider perspective.

Next, by actually conducting a fundraising project, they experience agency and realize the difference they can make in the lives of others. Sara Kruger from Chesterfield Montessori observed: "When we ask, 'How do charity and philanthropy resonate with children?' we can turn to the Chart of Interdependencies for guidance. This chart helps children understand their connection to the world around them, illustrating how humans fulfill their needs through a mutual reliance on both living organisms and nonliving elements of nature. Charity work also relates to their 'Cosmic Task' as members of humanity. They not only work to meet their own needs, but also contribute to the en-

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vironment and society, helping others fulfill their needs as well. In the case of the Children for Change fundraiser, my students made a significant impact on the lives of many children who, like them, are Montessori students. The cause particularly resonated with my Upper Elementary students, as they have been learning about the War in Ukraine.”

Chesterfield's and Meadows' Montessori schools' 2023/2024 fundraisers

Sara Kruger at Chesterfield used the link to MGGF's Ukrainian grant that tells the story of the Ukrainian children living in a war zone. Sara commented that the video was a powerful testament. Because all the Upper El children knew about the Ukrainian war, they were quickly able to understand the need, and in 2022 they contributed more than \$500. Chesterfield Montessori has been running an annual Thanks Friends Day for many years. In 2023, the Chesterfield Upper El students decided to donate the funds raised from their “Thanks Friends Day” Thanksgiving bake sale to MGGF's Ukraine initiative, and sent more than \$700.

Students at Meadows had raised more than \$900 for Ukraine in 2022. In early 2024, the Head of Curriculum, Robin Sheehy, requested the updated CfC slides, worksheets, and supporting materials through the MGGF website (montessori-mggf.org/children-for-change-intro).

Robin reported that Meadows Montessori School students have always helped local support activities. The school is located near the Lummi indigenous American nation. Each year Meadows students had collected clothing and supplies for babies and children and taken them to the Lummi community center. They knew and understood how a community supports all its members.

MGGF's CfC project offered an additional way to go beyond the local community to the wider, worldwide community. For Meadows Montessori students, it was at this point that they became excited and eager to create their own fundraising project. In 2024, they chose to do a special fundraiser using the CfC materials. They solicited coins from parents, other family and friends. They also made presentations about charity to the primary children and collected coins from the primary and elementary students as well as their families, raising more

- Who needs help and what do they need?
- What do we need to learn about them?
- How can we find out more about them?
- What could we, the students, do?
- What would be a doable project?
- How much money do we want to raise?
- Who would do which tasks?
- What would be a good timeline for executing the project?
- How would we promote our fundraiser and to whom?

The purpose is to help students understand they are part of the wider world—the cosmos—and that they can impact that wider world.

than \$700. They were so energized by their ability to help others.

CfC Resource Materials

CfC resource materials for the guide or teacher help them to prepare students to learn about philanthropy and how it fits with Maria Montessori's vision of world peace. A set of slides provide an overview of CfC, its goals, the work of MGGF and links to current or recent grant awardees. These web pages about the grant recipients include photos, stories and occasionally videos about each awardee.

Launching a project is not a simple task. The guide has some questions to ask the students to help them think through conducting a fundraiser. The guide and children can use the worksheets designed to aid the students as they discuss a range of topics, such as:

- What problem do we want to focus on?

After the fundraiser is over

Once the students with their guide's assistance have conducted their fundraiser, collected and counted the funds, and given those funds to the organization the students have selected to support, it is time to thank all those who made a gift.

And it is important they both celebrate their achievement and also examine their fundraising plan, its execution and the results. They can ask:

- What went well?
- What did not go so well?
- How could we have resolved any challenges?
- What changes should we make when we next conduct another fundraiser?

“But humanity is not yet ready for the evolution that it desires so ardently, the construction of a peaceful and

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harmonious society that shall eliminate war. Men are not sufficiently educated to control events, so become their victims. Noble ideas, great sentiments have always found utterance, but wars have not ceased! If education were to continue along the lines of mere transmission of knowledge, the problem would be insoluble and there would be no hope for the world... we have before us in the child a psychic entity, a social group of immense size, a veritable world-power if rightly used. If salvation and help are to come, it is from the child, for the child is the constructor of man, and so of society. The child

is endowed with an inner power which can guide us to a more luminous future. Education should no longer be mostly about the imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities."

—Maria Montessori, *Education for a New World* (1947)

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