

2015 GLOBAL CITIZEN AWARD WINNER

DAVID & WILMA WESSEL are global educators who have spent a lifetime training teachers and educating the public about global issues. After David's first experience teaching in Nigeria, he and Wilma trained teachers in Jamaica in the 1970s with CUSO, and in Zimbabwe with WUSC in the 1980s.

In between, Wilma worked in Fort Qu'Appelle where she facilitated programs that challenged Saskatchewan people to think critically about issues of global social justice, and encouraged them to work together to create a more just world for all. During this time David worked with First Nations people and as an adult upgrading teacher, making valuable contributions to the education and empowerment of people in the Fort Qu'Appelle area.

David has made significant contributions to the state of Global Education in Saskatchewan, not just by volunteering with CUSO and WUSC, but also through his



work with Regina Committee for World Development as its first rural animateur, and with SCIC. There he undertook a major research project on the status of Global Education in Saskatchewan schools. This ground-breaking study informed the Global Education Program at SCIC, which has now been supporting Saskatchewan students and educators in learning about and teaching global issues for more than 13 years.

Throughout their lives, Wilma and David have been staunch

supporters of many agencies involved in social justice, refugee support and human rights work, including Amnesty International where David is currently a board member. They continue to be in touch with and support many of the colleagues they worked with, and have provided much needed support to students, refugees and others who have come to Regina from overseas. They continue this work as life-long active citizens who embody the characteristics of global citizenship.

A Conversation with Saskatchewan's Global Citizens...

What does global citizenship mean to you?

DAVID—We're all in this together. As a first priority, we are all collectively responsible to care for the planet which sustains us. This includes far more than just our own irresponsible species. As far as humans are concerned, human rights and respect for all. No exceptions. I also feel it is important to strive for community,

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democracy, science, education and a more just and equitable sharing of those natural resources that we do use.

WILMA—It is something I have always felt, although I was too young at the start to know what it was. I have always felt a part of the whole world and its people and that I was no better than anyone else. Perhaps more privileged in my circumstances, but not intrinsically better. Therefore, I needed to share knowledge or skills that I had been given with anyone who needed them. I have tried to do this by sharing



my skills abroad, and also in sharing my knowledge of the wonderful world cultures when I returned.

What do you feel are some of the biggest challenges currently facing our global community, and some possible solutions?

WILMA—Lack of literacy and education are still huge challenges. Despite all the Social Media available, people need basic education and a community where they belong. When people feel shut out of the mainstream opportunities, they may not find positive beliefs and actions. Building positive communities: villages, communities of faith, schools that are open to underprivileged, adult literacy, even choirs—all these have an impact on the negativity that is growing, even in our Canada. I have tried, in whatever my work, church or choir leading, to make the communities as inclusive as possible. Breaking down barriers is what it's about.

DAVID—There are many. We are destroying the natural environment by poisoning, overuse, and overheating. Inequality of wealth and power is exploding and getting worse. Human rights abuses such as torture are increasing. Who knows what the solutions might be, but they must involve replacing the current global religion of mindless competitive consumerism with values more conducive to caring for the environment, and loving and respecting other people (no exceptions). Only networks of engaged and mutually-educating ordinary citizens can begin to accomplish that.

What advice would you give to today's high-school graduates?

DAVID—Be curious, and never stop learning: Don't be satisfied to get your information from main-stream media or internet gossip. Get to know, enjoy



and work with all sorts of people: They will enrich you. Work for change, but don't get discouraged if progress is slow: Fighting to make things better is more satisfying than giving in to apathy or despair.

WILMA—Look behind the news stories of the major networks and newspapers. You have to read and search sources very well to be informed. We are generally fed a diet of distractions--sitcoms and entertainment, which lull us into believing that everything is improving or that all those refugees have somehow found homes. It is difficult to

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look at the realities of the world. Working on them can be discouraging, when results are slow. But the knowledge that you have somehow made a difference in the world is a terrific payoff.

Where do you find your inspiration?

DAVID—In nature: the universe is wonderfully huge and miniscule, dynamic and beautiful. It's worth taking care of our tiny corner of it. In people: despite our species' tendencies toward violence and self-destruction, the vast majority of people I meet really care about each other and the world. And some, such as Malala, are impressive beyond words and comprehension. ♦