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Count Me In brings stars, teens and charities together

By John R. Kennedy
Global News



Shane Feldman is the founder of this month's Count Me In Conference.

John R. Kennedy / Global News

TORONTO – Shane Feldman is busier than most teenagers this month.

The 18-year-old Ryerson University student is balancing his studies in the Radio and Television Arts program with family commitments, a social life, and the demands of staging Count Me In Conference (CMIC), a youth-empowerment event taking place April 17 near Toronto.

Feldman, founder and director of Count Me In, has a hand in every aspect of CMIC.

“I think of Count Me In as my baby and I’m very protective of it,” he admits. “While I’m learning to delegate, my team of students are learning to juggle this job with their own school responsibilities and it’s not easy. I have to be ready to jump in at any moment and lend a hand.”

This year’s CMIC at the Mississauga Living Arts Centre will expose hundreds of students in Grades 8 to 12 to more than 20 celebrities, athletes and activists sharing unique stories. (The show will be broadcast online in May.)

The goal is to inspire young people to volunteer for causes that match their interests. To this end, the event includes a marketplace of organizations anxious to recruit eager volunteers.

“This is where students mingle with charity reps and actually sign up for volunteer opportunities. It’s vital that students find a charity or volunteer opportunity that speaks to them,” says Feldman.

Among those appearing on the CMIC stage this year are teen rapper Jake ‘Lil Jaxe’ Zeldin and Annalise Carr, the youngest person to swim across Lake Ontario.

The event will be hosted by 18-year-old *Degrassi* star Luke Bilyk.

“He’s a great actor, he’s young, he has been involved in various charity projects, and he’s from Toronto,” says Feldman, who also sings the praises of Broadway and TV star Kristin Chenoweth, who recorded a video message that will be played at CMIC.

“Kristin founded a charity that gives a voice to pets and helps rescue animals. She has done some great work and it all started when she matched her passion for animals with a community service opportunity,” he says. “She is living the Count Me In lifestyle every day, and when we reached out to her she was excited to jump on board.”

Feldman, though, remains the star of CMIC and admits he enjoys the spotlight. “For as long as I can remember I have had a love of theatre and performing,” he says. “As a kid I took up magic as a hobby and apprenticed for awhile. I got involved in drama in middle school and it drove me to an arts-based high school where I pursued theatre.”

Feldman performed in a number of amateur theatre productions and was cast in the Toronto production of *The Railway Children* in 2011.

“My original plan was to continue down that road and see where it took me,” he says, “but when Count Me In started to grow everything changed. Between school and volunteering, I didn’t really have time to audition anymore.”

His show business dreams are not dead, though. “I definitely love acting and I’m sure I will try to jump back into the industry later in life.”

For now, Feldman is focused on Count Me In, which he founded five years ago after starting at a new school where he knew almost no one.

“After two weeks of spending lunch periods alone, I was ready to switch schools because I truly thought the school was the problem,” he recalls. “I made an appointment with my guidance counsellor to talk about transfer options but instead he ended up helping me sign up for all the clubs, councils, and student initiatives we thought I would be interested in. That changed everything for me.”

Feldman says he was motivated to do more. “I couldn’t imagine not wanting to share that feeling,” he explains. “I wanted every student at school to know what I now knew — that getting involved was the key to happiness.”

Earlier this year Feldman got involved with Disaster Volunteers of Ghana (DIVOG) and travelled to the West African nation to help build schools.

“The trip opened my eyes to a community that had so little and yet were the happiest people I had ever met,” he recalls. “I lived in a remote village with no running water or electricity, and even so there was this contagious positive attitude and love that I felt from the second I arrived.”

DIVOG founder and director Richard Yinkah is scheduled to be one of the speakers at CMIC.

A cursory look at CMIC oftens elicits comparisons to We Day, a youth empowerment initiative organized by Craig Kielburger's Free the Children in 2007.

"Although on the surface Count Me In Conference may appear to be similar to other large youth events, there is no other event like it in the world," counters Feldman. "First and foremost, the entire event is run by students, for students. We have a team of over 100 teenagers that do everything. If you look around at the event, you will see students everywhere running the massive show, which I personally think is the most empowering part of the day."

Just as We Day has expanded to several cities in Canada and the U.S., Feldman hopes to take CMIC beyond Ontario's borders.

"There are so many different volunteer opportunities out there and what's missing is a link between teens and charities," he says. "We are that link, and it's time to truly reach out nationally."

For more information go to cmiccountmein.com.

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John R. Kennedy

Senior Web Coordinator

John R. Kennedy is Senior Web Coordinator, Global News.


 RYERSON UNIVERSITY

Shane Feldman knows how to get youth motivated

By Antoinette Mercurio

April 12, 2013



RTA School of Media student Shane Feldman turned his outreach ambitions into a movement to get other youth involved.

Shane Feldman refuses to quit.

The first-year RTA School of Media student is the founder of Count Me In, an organization that promotes volunteerism among youth and aims to link youth with charities based on their interests. On April 17, 1,500 students from Grades 8 to 12 will attend the third annual Count Me In Conference (CMIC) at the Living Arts Centre in Mississauga. The conference is the largest youth-empowerment event in the world and brings together charities and teens for an opportunity to network, build partnerships and get students involved.

The day features guest speakers and performers such as Danny Fernandes and Kristina Maria as well as a trade show of 60 organizations such as World Vision Canada, Right to Play, Canadian Cancer Society and Habitat for Humanity.

Ontario high school students are currently required to complete 40 hours of volunteer work before graduation. A new app will be launched at the conference that will replace the present paper recording system that students use to document their volunteer hours.

"Students feel it's a hard challenge to complete 40 volunteer hours and we're teaching students how fun it can be," Feldman said. "Life's too short not to do something you love every single minute."

CMIC is one of the only student-run events in Canada – a disheartening piece of news for Feldman who would like to see more youth campaign to create change. Every spring he starts the application process to recruit 100 high school students to volunteer at the next CMIC. A core team of 15 youth work with him as talent managers, administrators, coordinators and media relations officers. Feldman is dedicated to fulfilling the goal of spearheading a conference and organization that is run by students for students.

"I disagree with the too many cooks in the kitchen idea," Feldman said. "I think it matters how you utilize those cooks. I think that's why we have such a successful event because we have teens who are creating for themselves."

Feldman's expertise in youth volunteerism has made him a popular motivational keynote speaker for organizations all over North America. While his commitments to Count Me In and public speaking engagements have forced his acting and regular volunteering gigs to take a back seat, Count Me In has presented him with endless opportunities and lessons.

"I believe you can do everything as long as it's not all at the same time," he said.

Feldman initiated Count Me In by chance when he was 13 years old after experiencing a difficult transition to high school in a new community. Guidance counsellors encouraged him to sign up for any clubs that piqued his interest which helped him make new friends. He approached his principal about holding an assembly telling his peers how to get involved and through word-of-mouth in the community, the assembly turned into a movement. As a result, Count Me In was established.

The conference this year wasn't without its challenges. Rotating teacher strikes in the public district school boards in Ontario and the ban on extra- or co-curricular activities forced Feldman and his team to change their strategy. Moving their focus to the Catholic school boards and reaching out to educators who don't require substitute teachers enabled the team to achieve a sell-out show.

"There are hard days but you have to be ambitious and push yourself," Feldman said. "There were many times Count Me In was going to be shut down but I had just enough support from parents and friends to get through."

To find out how you can volunteer, visit http://cmimovement.com/Count_Me_In/Volunteer_Join_Our_Team.html.

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WHAT IS COUNT ME IN?

1,258 people like this. Be the first of your friends.



The Movement

The primary focus of Count Me In is to raise awareness of local and global issues and volunteer opportunities. By helping teens *plug-in* to their communities, Count Me In is forming lasting relationships between students and the charitable sector.

The Program

Count Me In Conference is the world's largest youth-run empowerment event. The unique field trip inspires student involvement and volunteerism, and helps connect youth with local charities, causes and volunteer opportunities matching their interests. [\(More\)](#)

The App

Check out our innovative online app to start finding local volunteer opportunities! Help us in our goal of contributing 1 Billion Hours of youth-led community service to our world! Visit 1BillionHour.com and sign up today! It's FREE!

The Story

After experiencing a difficult transition into high school, 13 year old Shane Feldman was inspired to get involved and make new friends. This opened his eyes to the importance of student involvement, and the opportunities that present themselves when you are engaged in your community. Shane ended up turning a dark freshman year into an uplifting national movement. [\(More\)](#)

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Inspiring Students to Get Involved AND Make a Difference!

COUNT ME IN CHARITY PARTNERS

Count Me In is the link between students, and the charitable sector. Our goal is not only to inspire students to get involved in their communities, but also to help connect them with specific local and global volunteer opportunities that match their interests, passions and lifestyle. Below are just a few of the organizations we are proud to work with. If you are interested in joining us as a Charity Partner, please click here.

Some of the awesome organizations we hook students up with include:

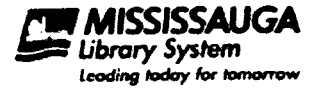
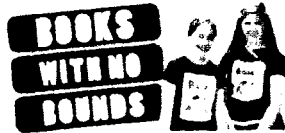


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volunteer



...and many more!

- Past Speakers
- Charity Partners
- Get Involved
- Our Sponsors
- Our Founder

HOW TO JOIN
 Sign up for our newsletter to receive updates on volunteer opportunities and events. You can also sign up for our monthly newsletter to receive updates on our programs and services.

GET INVOLVED
 We have a variety of volunteer opportunities available for people of all ages and abilities. You can choose to volunteer in person or online, and you can work for a few hours or commit to a longer-term role.

OUR SPONSORS
 We are grateful to our many sponsors who support our work and help us provide services to our community. We have a variety of sponsors, including local businesses, government agencies, and individuals.

OUR FOUNDER
 Our founder is a dedicated and passionate individual who has worked hard to build our organization and provide services to our community. We are proud to have her as our founder and we look forward to continuing her legacy.

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Quit smoking in ON for your chance to win a choice between two @Dodge cars! Reg. at DrivetoQuit.ca by Feb 29. #D2Q ow.ly/rOgoR

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