

Rotary shares polio eradication message with thousands at Global Citizen Festival

Rotary News -- 2 October 2012



Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, Canadian Rotarian Ramesh Ferris, and RI General Secretary John Hewko make the “This Close” sign before the concert begins. *Photo by Marga Hewko*





Rotary International shared the polio eradication message with the world Saturday during a massive charity concert in New York's Central Park, organized by the [Global Poverty Project](#). Headlined by the Foo Fighters, The Black Keys, and Neil Young with Crazy Horse, Global Citizen Festival 2012 drew a live audience of more than 60,000, and many more online and via television broadcasts.

Rotary produced a seven-minute segment preceding Neil Young, himself a polio survivor. Emmy-award winning actress Archie Panjabi, a celebrity participant in Rotary's "This Close" public service campaign; Aseefa Bhutto Zardari, daughter of Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari and the country's goodwill ambassador for polio eradication; Canadian Rotarian and polio-survivor Ramesh Ferris; and RI General Secretary [John Hewko](#) stirred up the crowd to help eradicate the disease.

"The long road bringing us to Central Park tonight began in the 1970s, when Rotary -- an international humanitarian organization of business and professional leaders -- began vaccinating the world's children against polio," Hewko said. "Since then, Rotary and our partners -- UNICEF, WHO, the CDC, and the Gates Foundation -- have immunized more than 2 billion children, pushing polio out of almost every country on earth."

Hewko encouraged the audience to play a role by lending their voice to the cause. "Help us convince the leaders of the world that resources are needed NOW to end polio FOREVER. We did it with smallpox -- Now let's make history again by wiping out polio."

Ferris shared how he contracted polio as a child in India 25-years after the vaccine was available, and how his birth mom put him up for adoption to a Canadian family so he would have a better life.

"Polio is vicious. It attacked my body -- withering my leg muscles and weakening my lungs," said Ferris, who can now walk with the aid of mobility devices after the surgery and rehab he received as a child. "I didn't let polio stop me. And I vowed I would do whatever I could to make sure it didn't infect another child, ever again."

Ramesh has become an outspoken advocate for polio eradication, meeting with leaders like Queen Elizabeth, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and the prime minister of Canada. Canada recently made a new commitment to the cause.

“Your voice matters,” he said. “Just by being here, you are showing that you care about making this a polio-free world.”

The Global Festival, which organizers are calling the largest syndicated charity concert in online and broadcast television history, was timed to create awareness around the UN General Assembly in New York. At a high-level side event on polio eradication 27 September, Rotary [announced a new funding commitment](#) of US\$75 million over three years to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI). Rotary has already contributed nearly \$1.2 billion to the GPEI since the beginning of the campaign.

- In November, General Secretary John Hewko and a team of Rotarians will be taking part in a bicycle race in Arizona, USA, to raise money for polio eradication. [Learn more](#).
- [Watch footage of Global Festival 2012](#)
- [Lend your voice to advocacy efforts](#) by signing the petition.
- [Contribute now](#) to help end polio.

5 Comments:

At 11:43AM on 8 October 2012, <http://www.carlsbadvillageortho.com> wrote:

I'm moved to this groups dedication to help others. Awareness with a mix of entertainment is such a good combination. How can I join this group?

At 11:27AM on 8 October 2012, **Mark Flanigan** wrote:

The article doesn't mention or feature any of the photos on this, but there were also approximately 30 New York-area Rotarians and friends who came and volunteered to collect signatures from the crowd on the End Polio Now campaign.

At 11:20AM on 8 October 2012, **Sk Abdul Hadi, R C Khulna North, D-3280** wrote:

The WHO warned there was a high risk of the crippling virus spreading further during Muslim pilgrimages to Mecca. Polio (also called poliomyelitis) is highly infectious and affects the nervous system, sometimes resulting in paralysis. It is transmitted through contaminated food, drinking water and faces.

At 3:09PM on 5 October 2012, **Dennis Wong** wrote:

Great event - Global Poverty Project (GPP). Now how do we build on this GPP event? What was the direct impact on behalf of the End Polio Now campaign in terms fo dollars raised? There were so many causes being featured at the GPP event, I wonder how many people, if and when asked ... had polio as one of the top three in unaided recall? What are the follow-up actions for Rotary with the Global Poverty Project? How do individual clubs become involved in GPP? Peace.

At 10:41AM on 5 October 2012, **Barry Krane** wrote:

End polio, feed the world, cure kids cancers' [ok, I added the last one]. . . I'm not sure how many Rotarians were there, but this one was and the mix of good ole rock n roll and earthly messages was awesome

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