

WOMEN AGENTS OF CHANGE



Your Commonwealth Day

Every year, on the second Monday of March, young people from around the Commonwealth get together to celebrate being part of a special club of countries which work together to help each other.

In 2011, Commonwealth Day takes place on Monday 14 March and the theme that has been agreed by the Queen is 'Women as Agents of Change'.

This theme will be celebrated throughout the Commonwealth during the year, with special events taking place during the week of 14-20 March.

A little bit about the Commonwealth:

Two billion people live in Commonwealth countries, which are spread across the world. Some of these countries are very large with many people living there, like India, while some are tiny islands like Tuvalu. Some are richer countries, while some are poorer.

Over half of the people in the Commonwealth are under 25.

The Commonwealth is about friendship and respect between people and between countries. It works to improve education for everyone and treats boys and girls as equally important.

The Commonwealth brings people together to talk about their problems and ideas and works for the citizens.

What does the theme 'Women as Agents of Change' mean?

For a long time, world leaders have tried to solve big problems such as wars, hunger and sickness. They have tried many ways to do this, and good things have come about because of these efforts: For example, more children are able to go to school, there are new medicines to help sick people, laws to protect children, and better ways to grow crops.

But even today, there are still people who are very poor, who don't have a home, whose children cannot go to school, who can't get to a clinic for medicines, whose rights are not respected, and who are hungry – and don't have the money to grow or buy food.

The Commonwealth, and other organisations think that there may be a different way to improve their lives:

We think that the whole world is missing out because women and girls are often excluded from helping to solve the problems that affect them, their families and their communities.

Young women and girls should be able to attend school and college, where they can learn important skills. They should be able to see doctors and nurses to ensure that they are healthy. They should be treated fairly and have the same education, opportunities and protection as men and boys.

If we can achieve this, we believe we can help speed up progress towards addressing the many problems of the world.

The Commonwealth Secretary General, Kamlesh Sharma says:

'Women and girls make up half of the people in the world, but they receive much less than half of our attention, while they have to deal with much more than half of the world's challenges.

For example, in many poorer countries, there are fewer girls attending school than boys. Often these girls also have to work in the home doing chores or even earn money for food to feed their families. When someone is sick at home, the girls are often the main carers in the family. They carry a big burden.

In places where women and girls have opportunities, then the whole of that community and society does well. We need to look at boys and girls in the same way.'

The Millennium Development Goals:

In 2000, world leaders got together and made a plan to change the lives of millions of people who were suffering because of hunger, war, lack of education, illness, lack of clean water and other problems.

The plan is called the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs. The MDGs are eight goals that if met by 2015, will make this world a much better place for everyone.

All of these goals affect women and girls, but some of them even more so: These include the goals to get girls into school and to get women into government, where decisions are taken. Around the world – especially in poorer countries -- many women sadly still die while giving birth. One of the goals aims to stop this.

The Commonwealth works to support these important goals.

Some things you could do in your school or club to celebrate Commonwealth Day:

- Vote for your most inspiring woman/girl role model.
- Arrange a visit from a well-known woman in your community. She could be a businesswoman, an artist, a writer, or a local politician or leader.
- Organise a debate about whether girls and boys should share housework.
- Write a history project about an important woman and say why she was famous.
- Listen to the Queen's Commonwealth Day Message on the radio or television and discuss it with your friends. What would you say if you could address the world?
- Learn about other Commonwealth countries or this year's Commonwealth Day theme and tell your school all about it in an assembly
- Get creative: write an essay, take a photo or make a film about the important women in your life and enter it in the Young Commonwealth Competitions for a chance to win a prize (www.thercs.org/youth/competitions).
- Test your Commonwealth knowledge in a quick quiz at www.youngcommonwealth.org/game-1
- Get together with your classmates, wear the colours of different Commonwealth country flags and organise a Sport's Day...or your own Commonwealth Games.
- Organise a Commonwealth Feast with lots of tasty foods from around the world.
- Thousands of different languages are spoken around the Commonwealth – learn to say 'hello' in five of them

And don't forget to tell us about your event or send us your ideas and photographs!
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