

MHR *Connections*

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Hundreds of Students Attend Conference

They came by bus, van and car. Over two hundred and thirty students arrived in Winnipeg to attend the first ever Manitoba Human Rights Commission Youth Awareness Conference.

“It was worth the sixteen hour bus trip” one student said as the day drew to a close.

Vice Chair of the Commission, Jerry Woods opened the conference acknowledging the distance some students, teachers and chaperons travelled to attend this event. “Some of you are here from the North: Lynn Lake, Thompson, Flin Flon, Oxford House and Snow Lake. Welcome.” In total, twenty-three Manitoba schools participated.

Four topical workshops were offered to the students. They were: Nothing to Cheer About, Backlash, Working Blues and Bully Alert. Students had the opportunity to attend two of the four workshops.

Nothing to Cheer About focused on harassment in sports. Guest speaker Kevin Chief presented a video on the University of Winnipeg’s basketball team. Kevin played with the team for five years, the last two as captain. The video was based on the different and unique background of the players and how their differences brought them together. Also, to help the students better understand human rights issues in sports, the facilitators handed out case summaries and discussed possible rights violations. As one student put it, “the sports workshop was great because it was relevant to our lives”.

The Working Blues workshop dealt with human rights and employment. Most of the students had part time or summer jobs. They spoke about personal incidents and the experiences of their friends. Their interests ranged from discrimination and harassment in the workplace to dress codes. The facilitators also explained to the students the concept of accommodating special needs, whether those needs relate to a disability, pregnancy or religious belief.

Shahina Siddiqui, the Coordinator of Community Relations for the Manitoba Islamic Centre, was a guest speaker at the Backlash workshop. She talked about how the attack on the United States on September 11th brought out pre-existing stereotypes and prejudices

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Remembering December 6, 1989

The Rights Connection

Janet Baldwin Chairperson

December 6th was the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women. This day commemorates the sad anniversary of the 1989 Montreal Massacre, when fourteen young women were killed at l’Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal. That was twelve years ago and still we ask why. Diana Bronson gave a simple answer when she was interviewed on CBC radio’s Morningside program shortly after that tragic day. She said, “Fourteen women are dead for one reason: they are women. Their male classmates are still alive for one reason: they are men.”

These young women were striving to succeed in a traditionally male dominated career. On that day, the bright future of fourteen, young, female, engineering students came to an end.

If you believe that violence against women is decreasing, you are wrong. Despite the horrifying event of December 6, 1989, violence against women in our society continues. Every week at least one woman in Canada is murdered by her boyfriend or spouse. Every minute a woman or girl is sexually assaulted somewhere in this country. As we are now acutely aware, there exists international regimes that harbour terrorists and repress women.

Recently I attended the Manitoba Human Right’s Commission’s first Youth Conference. The young men and women there spoke out against bullying and harassment. They are our future now.

It is time to pause and remember those fourteen students and consider what each of us can do to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women. It is also a time to reflect on today’s students and consider that never again do we want to hear that simple, but sadly correct answer to why.



Ian Ross has just returned from Scotland where he was performing fareWel, his Governor General Award winning play, at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Ian's lunch time presentation was one of the highlights of the conference.

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against Muslims. Shahina ended on a positive note. "It is hard to imagine that anything good came out of that terrible day, but if you had to find something it would be that there is a new quest for the understanding of Islam and Muslims."

Mahwash Rajput accompanied Shahina. Mahwash, a Dakota Collegiate student, spoke of how terrible she felt that people of her faith had done this. However she was also angry that she was being blamed. She spoke of her friend who had been spat on while waiting for a bus. Her parents, she said, feared for her safety. There is no doubt that this was the most talked about workshop at the conference.

Bullying is a concern to almost every student and this was reflected in the number who attended "Bully Alert". The first session was a full house. It began with students talking about their own knowledge and experience. They referred to bullies as insecure, intimidating, prejudiced, and cruel. Some believe that bullies have a need to control others, perhaps, as one student suggested, "because they cannot control other aspects of their lives." One student spoke of the fear of retribution if someone in authority was told about a bully. Although this controversial subject gave the students something to think about, many left feeling the need to know more about their rights under the Manitoba Human Rights Code and how those rights apply to bullying.

This specific workshop was selected by the Commission to be featured on its website in the near future. The work-

shop was taped and will be produced into a twenty minute streaming video. It will be accompanied by flash text to help students understand what The Human Rights Code says about bullying or harassment.

The 2001 Youth Awareness Conference had an Aboriginal focus and in keeping with this theme, it began with words of guidance from Elder Nelson James from Rousseau River. Rosanna Deerchild, former columnist for the Winnipeg Sun and current news producer at the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, delivered the keynote address. Both spoke from the vantage point of growing up and working as an Aboriginal person in Manitoba.

Over lunch the students were entertained by Ian Ross, also known as "Joe from Winnipeg." He spoke of who Ian Ross really is and how his alter ego Joe from Winnipeg came to be. As Joe from Winnipeg, he delivered three monologues and had everyone laughing for twenty minutes.

The conference concluded with door prizes and the results of a video competition. École Communautaire Aurèle Lemoine won for best video and received a \$1000.00 gift certificate from Advance Electronics. Second place and a \$500.00 gift certificate went to RD Parker Collegiate. Killarney Collegiate received an honourable mention.

The lucky recipient of the mountain bike Grand Door Prize was Shauna Bighetty from Lynn Lake. The Manitoba Human Rights Commission would like to thank all the students, teachers and chaperons for participating.

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