

Human Rights Conference “Eye Opener” for Students

“This conference is superb”, said Kyle Ross a student from Joe A Ross school in The Pas. “Racism is there, but sometimes you don’t see it. This is like opening the blind a little.”



Kyle was among the 60 students who attended the first ever Manitoba Human Rights Northern Youth Conference in Thompson on March 23.

They came from Garden Hill, Lynn Lake, Wabowden and Shamattawa. The Pas was represented, as was Snow Lake, Cranberry Portage, Leaf Rapids and Cross Lake. Students from R.D. Parker in Thompson not only attended, they also volunteered their services and arranged for lunchtime entertainment.

A team from the Manitoba Human Rights Commission travelled to Thompson to hold a one-day Youth Conference for Northern school students at the Juniper Centre. Two workshops were offered to groups of about 30 students each – Sticks & Stones which covers bullying and harassment and Taking Care of Business, the popular, interactive workshop about rights and responsibilities in the workplace.

Thompson Mayor Bill Comaskey welcomed the students and spoke about the existence of racism and the importance of human rights.

The Commission invited Kevin Chief who works with River East Transcona School Division, to speak to the students during the Sticks and Stones workshop. As part of his presentation, Kevin showed a film called “Making a Difference”, about James Zerbrasky a young Aboriginal man whose message that everyone should be proud of who they are, inspires young people. James has become a role model, not only to Aboriginal youth, but also to students from all backgrounds. He is with the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport Achievement Centre (WASAC).

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The Rights Connection by Janet Baldwin - Chairperson Gender Neutral Washrooms Considered

Simon Fraser University is considering adding “gender-neutral”, single stalled washrooms to its campus buildings. This proposal stems from the difficulties in using sex-specific washrooms faced by some transgendered persons and others that do not easily fall into our society’s binary male-female norms.

The policy of other institutions, such as a YWCA in Toronto, is to allow persons to use the facilities of the gender with which they identify. Some transgendered persons see separate washrooms in institutions as a necessary accommodation to preserve their right to be free of discrimination and harassment based on gender identity. Others see segregation as rarely appropriate and advocate education to address discrimination.

Unions are also starting to address transphobia and discrimination based on gender identity as an equality rights issue. For example, a few years ago the Canadian Union of Public Employees (“CUPE”) amended the equality statement in its constitution to explicitly include transgendered members.

Many persons who are transgendered face discrimination and harassment in their daily lives. While we currently accept human rights complaints based on gender identity under the grounds of “gender-determined characteristics”, we have recommended that the Government of Manitoba amend our legislation to add “gender-identity” as a protected characteristic. We believe that specifically protecting persons from discrimination on the basis of “gender identity” is important to clarifying that such discrimination is contrary to The Human Rights Code. It would more clearly inform potential complainants, respondents and the public-at-large that discrimination on this basis is prohibited.

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Kevin also spoke about how some kids have many reasons not to succeed. He emphasized the importance of having resilience and the ability to bounce back.

According to student Kyle Ross "it's like a lesson in kinship hearing Kevin Chief."

The Taking Care of Business workshop was also a hit. Nadine Walker from Snow Lake says she now has a better understanding of harassment. "Some parts were pretty eye opening," she said. "I thought they had to physically touch you to be harassment. I was not aware of a lot of things, like some of the questions employers can't ask you."

The conference ended on a high note with the showing of the 2004 Northern Youth Conference Winning Video



produced by the students of Oscar Blackburn

School in South Indian Lake. Jerry Woods, Vice Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and Master of Ceremonies at the conference, described the video as "both powerful and clever". He said he believed it was one of the best entries ever received by the Commission. The rap song video called "Respect" was greeted with laughter, applause and cheers. Unfortunately, the students of Oscar Blackburn were not there to see how much their video was appreciated by the other students. Their bus broke down just outside of South Indian Lake en route to the conference. Their first place certificate and a \$500 cheque will be sent to the school and the video will soon be available on the Commission's website.

Here There and Everywhere



2004 Brandon Career symposium

Pat Daniels of the Brandon Manitoba Human Rights Office provides students with information about their rights in the workforce. The MHRC exhibit was one of approximately 140 booths present from March 8 -10. More than 6000 people, many of them students, were at the three-day event.



Maples Unity Group Human Rights Banquet

The Maples Collegiate Unity Group receives the YMCA Peace Medal at a banquet fundraiser on March 3, 2004 in Winnipeg. The group, which meets once a week, promotes anti-racism, human rights and unity among all members of society. Over 230 tickets were sold to the event, some of which were donated to people who might otherwise have not been able to attend.

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Employment Seminar in Thompson

Human Rights Officer Simon Gillingham explains the implications of discrimination and harassment in the workplace to forty-five supervisors and employers in Thompson. The City of Thompson generously donated its council chambers for the afternoon. The three-hour session canvassed a variety of topics including the type of questions an employer can ask job applicants, the questions to avoid during pre-employment inquiries and what happens when a complaint is filed.

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UPCOMING MANITOBA HUMAN RIGHTS EMPLOYMENT SEMINARS

For more information call 945-3007 in Winnipeg and 726-6261 in Brandon

Brandon: April 29, 2004
8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Riverbank Discovery Centre
#1-545 Conservation Drive
\$75.00 (Lunch included)

Winnipeg: May 5, 2004
8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Norwood Hotel
112 Marion
\$75.00 (Lunch included)