

## One Great Day!

### Westman Human Rights Youth Conference

It was the first time students from Dauphin Regional Secondary School and Roblin's Goose Lake High School joined students from high schools across south western Manitoba at the Westman Manitoba Human Rights Youth Conference. The event, which was held on May 9, in Brandon, attracted almost 100 students and teachers from such communities as Cartwright, Shoal Lake, Swan Valley and Erickson. In all, fourteen area high schools, including the three in Brandon were represented.

The Third Annual Westman Human Rights Youth Conference was called "Mission Possible." Jerry Woods, Vice Chairperson of the Commission and host of its youth conferences told the students that this name was chosen "because we believe we are on the road to the elimination of discrimination."

Mr. Woods says the goal of the Commission's youth conferences is to educate the students about their rights under the Manitoba Human Rights Code, and take what they have learned back to their schools and communities. He believes that the key to a successful conference is the action that follows it, saying "we hope to give students some tools so they can take the message of respect, equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination back with them."

Conference organizer Patricia Knipe says that the Commission pays close attention to what the students have to say at the end of the day. "The feedback we get is used to continually improve our conferences," she says, adding that "it is actually the students' evaluation of the conference that helps us plan the next year's topics and activities."

Ms Knipe says that this year many of the students had high praise for the Mission Possible Conference. "When we get comments like *Wow! Not a dull moment* or *I can't wait to come back*, the staff, who organize and facilitate the sessions, know that they have put on an effective conference," she says.

After the morning workshops, the students were entertained by CP Express, the pride of Crocus Regional



*As part of the Standing By to Standing Up Workshop, students are asked to improvise scenarios depicting such situations as bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment. Props like wigs and dresses help them get into character.*

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### The Rights Connection by Janet Baldwin - Chairperson

#### Past and Future

As the end of my second term as Chairperson approaches, I am drawn to reflect on our accomplishments and challenges as well as the pleasure and privilege it has been to work with the Board, staff and community of human rights advocates.

I recently asked our Vice-chairperson, Jerry Woods, a proud member of the Couchiching First Nation, about the significance of the direction that a discussion moves around a sharing circle. He explained that when the speaking order moves to the left, the discussion is about the past. If it moves to the right, the discussion is about the future.

As I ponder what has been, I am pleased with the improvements to our complaint investigation process and the gains we have made in the number of complaints resolved through mediation. Our educational programs have expanded: both our well-received employment seminars and our programs directed at youth, including annual youth conferences in Winnipeg, Brandon and the North.

We have embraced our mandate to promote human rights. Through letters to the editor, media releases, presentations to governmental committees and interventions in significant human rights cases at the Supreme Court of Canada, we have taken a proactive approach to advancing the recognition of human rights.

We have pursued systemic human rights issues brought to us or raised through individual complaints. We have engaged in dialogue with various Government of Manitoba departments on issues such as rights of common-law partners, access to medical services for transgendered Manitobans, access for personal care home residents to drugs to treat dementia and Alzheimer's, and rights-respecting approaches to the control of the sale of intoxicants. We are collaborating with a team of researchers from the University of Winnipeg to look at concerns raised by a group of Aboriginal youth about racial profiling by the police.

I regret that our proposed legislative amendments have not yet passed, particularly the inclusion of "social disadvantage" as a protected ground under *The Code*. I hope that the newly re-elected government will now focus on issues of poverty and homelessness.



Students show off their banners at the end of the 2007 Westman Manitoba Human Rights Youth Conference “Mission Possible.”

Secondary School in Brandon. Students participating in this musical group receive credits but must audition first. Their names may change every year, but the talent is constant.

Once again the Commission invited the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sports Achievement Centre (WASAC) to host the afternoon session called *How Can I Make a Difference?* Under the watchful eye and enthusiasm of the WASAC facilitators, students were asked to come up with a human rights slogan and create a banner to take home with them. One student summed up the session by saying, “the banner activity really helped us interact and be involved in trying to resolve human rights issues.”

Another highlight of the conference was awarding the “Making a Difference Certificate of Achievement” to the students of Crocus Plains Regional Secondary School, who after attending last year’s youth conference, took up a challenge to complete a human rights project of their own. From this Challenge the students organized a group called Youth Making a Difference (Y MAD) and put on their own human rights conference with guest speaker Stephen Lewis, former Canadian Ambassador and Special Envoy to the United Nations. The school also received a prize of \$500.00 for its continuing human rights work.

## Kudos to the mediators by Elliot Leven

Mediation is becoming more and more popular as a way of resolving legal disputes. For those not familiar with mediation, it is simply a process by which a third party helps the two parties that have a legal conflict resolve their differences by mutual agreement.

Mediation can take many forms, from informal discussions to formal “shuttle diplomacy” and face-to-face negotiations. A good mediator often helps the parties find a compromise or some middle ground that they can both live with.

At times people can resolve their disputes by themselves. However, emotional issues can get in the way of a rational compromise. A trained mediator recognizes the emotions at work, but helps show how a reasonable compromise can be in everybody’s best interests.

Sometimes, parties just don’t think of all the settlement options at their disposal. A mediator can bring all the possibilities to their attention. Also, if one party gets sidetracked by a marginal issue, a good mediator can help focus on the primary issue in dispute.

Mediation is often less expensive than adjudication and a successful mediation almost always allows both parties to walk away with at least a certain degree of satisfaction. It can also result in systemic changes in a work environment, such as an anti-discrimination policy that benefits many more people than the individual who initiated the complaint.

Although a successful mediation is usually a good thing for the two parties involved, there can be an indirect downside. If the disputes are settled by mediation, society may lose the benefit of trailblazing court decisions. Some important decisions made by the Supreme Court of Canada are in respect of private disputes.

There are some disputes that simply don’t lend themselves to mediation; challenges to legislation pursuant to the Charter of Rights can rarely be solved by compromise. In general, a court must decide either that the law in question violates the Charter, or that it doesn’t.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is very fortunate to have remarkably talented and creative mediators on staff. Every year they are extremely successful in helping parties reach mediated settlements, sometimes against long odds. The Commission’s success both at informal dispute resolution and formal mediation is something to be proud of.

## Commission mediator Jean Boyes retires

“How lucky we have been to have had someone with Jean’s skills as a mediator working with us for the last eight years,” said Executive Director Dianna Scarth at Jean Boyes’ retirement celebration last month.

Jean began her government career at family court and later became the Provincial Coordinator for its Family Conciliation Program. She joined the staff at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission in 1999, to take part in a mediation pilot project.

Jean is now looking forward to enjoying more of her time with the Manitoba Historical Society, Manitoba Herb Society and Manitoba Naturalists.



Jean listens and smiles as Mediator Lorrie Parsons talks about her colleague’s signature mark – “to be diligent, dedicated, and not quit until the work is done – then move forward.”