

MHR *Connections*

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Students create their own video human rights message at Youth Conferences



Windsor Park students tape their human rights message.

The Winnipeg and Brandon 2009 *Class Action: Rights Here, Rights Now!* Human Rights Youth Conference began by celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This was followed by four new and creative workshops and concluded with one of the most exciting afternoon activity sessions ever presented.

Camera crews assembled in the afternoon for the session called *Rights, Camera, Action!* The students were about to be asked to conceptualize, script, rehearse, direct and record human rights messages.

With topics supplied by the Human Rights Commission they were given less than an hour to put their message together before standing in front of professional camera crews



Before: Miles Macdonell students practicing their message.



After: Miles Macdonell students record their message.

who were set up in separate rooms. Executive Director of the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, and filmmaker Cindy Murdoch gave the students some tips on creating public messages.

“Having students create their own public service message was a great way to get them involved in human rights,” said one teacher, while another called the session “a valuable experience.” As for the students? The session was described as fun, challenging and nerve racking.

And since not everyone could be in front of the camera at the same time, the staff of the Commission put together a concurrent activity session called *The Circuit*. While some of the

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The Rights Connection by Jerry Woods - Chairperson

I wrote a letter last month, on behalf of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, to the Government of Canada urging it to ratify and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Canada signed this treaty more than two years ago, but has since failed to complete the formalities required for it to be bound by the convention. I also wrote to the Government of Manitoba encouraging it to support the ratification and do everything possible to implement those provisions that fall within provincial jurisdiction.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities would require Canada to take appropriate steps to promote, protect and monitor a range of social, cultural, economic, civil and political rights of persons with disabilities. Canada would also have to regularly report on the progress towards realization of these rights.

With the ratification of this Convention, Canada and its provinces and territories would move forward to identify and eliminate barriers to accessibility in buildings and services and in the administration of justice. It would facilitate independent community living, participation and inclusion of disabled persons. Canada and provinces and territories would also be required to take measures to reduce poverty of persons with disabilities.

In Manitoba, about 47% of all complaints disposed of by the Commission in 2008 alleged discrimination on the basis of physical and/or mental disability. Often systemic issues of discrimination were involved in these complaints and settlements.

In our work at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission, we have seen the importance of ratified and implemented international agreements in forwarding the human rights of racialized groups, of women and of children. We have interpreted our own legislation in keeping with the international agreements that Canada has entered into. There is a critical need for the Government of Canada to ratify and begin to implement, without delay, the important measures encompassed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We urge Canada to do so, and encourage Manitoba to do everything in its jurisdiction to support the realization of the rights of persons with disabilities.



After removing their shoes and looking at the many pieces that put together last year's banner, students pose for picture.

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students were filming their messages, others joined *The Circuit*, which consisted of hoola hoops, origami, drawing and taking a stroll around or even on, last year's Peace by Piece Banner. It was laid out on the floor and students respectfully removed their shoes, read the messages and took pictures. One of the human rights staff described

The Circuit as "organized chaos." The feedback from the students on the *Rights, Camera, Action!* activity was almost unanimous. The session gave them a voice, and as one student put it, "It's a chance to think about what the public needs to hear."



Talented students used the Circuit to create beautiful art with a message.

All the video messages will be sent to the participating schools to use as they wish; for their own human rights presentation or on the school website or the Commission's website.

As with past Commission's youth conferences, the morning speeches and workshops set the stage for the creative sessions that follow in the afternoon. This year's Winnipeg and Brandon *Class Action; Rights Here Rights Now!* conferences acknowledged the

20th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which in 1989 made a number of promises to everyone under eighteen years old. These rights included the right to childhood, to be educated, to be healthy, to be treated fairly and to be heard.

In his opening remarks, Jerry Woods Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and host of the youth conferences for the past nine years said, "Those promises were made to you. This agreement is a major milestone in the effort to achieve a world fit for children." Mr. Woods added however, "...let's not be mistaken; the work is not done. Like all powerful ideas, the Convention continues to reflect the need for deep and profound change in the way the world treats its children."



Students not only learned the connection between cranes and the peace movement, they also discovered that paper folding really is an art!

Both Mr. Woods and co-host Robin Dwarka, who is a Human Rights Commissioner, set the stage for the rest of the day by saying "this conference will give you a chance to have your voices heard."

The four morning workshops included *Beyond the Buzz*, which examined how we get and interpret information while looking at how the medium can influence a message, whether you read a newspaper headline, watch or listen to broadcast news or surf the web.

The Rights = Responsibilities workshop gave students a crash course on their rights in Manitoba and when those rights might be violated.

The Rights in JEOPARDY workshop proved that learning about human rights can be as much fun as a game show. Just like television's Jeopardy game, the staff had the answers and the students had to come up with the right questions.

And finally, *WANTED: Interesting, Rewarding Career* workshop had three very special guests who have made a career working in human rights. Jamie Frank, an active member of Architects Without Borders Canada, Donna Seale, human rights lawyer and educator and Joel Marion, the Executive Coordinator of the University of Winnipeg Global College spoke to the students about how to develop a career path in human rights.

The conferences were held in Winnipeg on November 16 at the Louis Riel Arts & Technology Centre and in Brandon on Wednesday, November 18, 2009 at the Manitoba Agricultural Centre.

The Class Action: Rights Here Rights Now Conference will be held once more in Thompson Manitoba during April 2010.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission would like to thank StrongFront A/V Productions Inc.; The Manitoba Government Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth, School Programs Division; The Academy of Broadcasting Corporation; Recurrent Solutions Inc. and Westman Communication Group, specifically WCG TV, for their valuable help and camera work.

Lieutenant Governor will be guest speaker at Awards Lunch

Nominations have been received, and planning is underway for the annual Human Rights Commitment Award of Manitoba and the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award.

A panel consisting of representatives from the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties is reviewing the nominations. The 2009 recipients will be announced at the beginning of December.

Manitoba's 24th Lieutenant-Governor Philip Lee will be the guest speaker at the Human Rights Day luncheon at which time the achievements of the award winners will be recognized.

His Honour is a former Manitoba Rights Commissioner and on his website he says that, "It is my goal to bring attention to the need for equal opportunities for all Manitoba youth so they may become equal partners in our society."

The awards luncheon, will be held on December 9, 2009 at Kum Koon Garden Restaurant, 257 King Street, Winnipeg, from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Tickets for the event will be available from the Manitoba Human Rights Commission during the first week of December and cost \$25.00.

This year's Commitment Award will recognize individuals or organizations who, through their innovative approaches, have advanced the human rights of new immigrants to Manitoba. The Youth award will recognize a youth group or young person who has promoted respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms within Manitoba.