

Vice Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission commends the Government on New Act

“Dogs are not machines, and like many of us, the prospect of tasty food or other fun activities may be a distraction and put both the handler and the guide at risk,” said Yvonne Peters, Vice-Chairperson of the Manitoba Human



Yvonne Peters with Hope, her dog guide.

Rights Commission in her submission at public committee hearings earlier this month on Bill 238 *The Service Animals Protection Act*, which protects service animals and the people who use them.

The bill makes it an offence to touch, feed, impede or interfere with a service animal, or to allow an animal to touch, impede or interfere with a service animal, without consent.

In addition to paying a fine, a person who is convicted of an offence can be ordered to pay compensation if the action causes loss or damage.

Ms Peters, who is visually impaired and has a dog guide, said the new bill offers a great opportunity to educate the public about the work of these animals.

She explained her personal experiences regarding the safety concerns with interfering with the work of service dogs.

“On one occasion I was crossing a very busy street here in Winnipeg and a stranger, who thought my dog looked hungry, began feeding her some chips,” she said, adding that many people do not realize the risk of distracting dog guides. She compared such actions as being just as dangerous as grabbing a steering wheel or interfering with a driver when a car is in motion.

Ms Peters understands that in many cases, interference with a service dog is unintentional but emphasized that the result can be emotional and physical harm to both dog and person, and often the dog guide is no longer capable of working.

Ms Peters also addressed the cost of breeding and training a dog guide, which can range from \$20,000 to \$60,000. Also, if a dog needs to be replaced, the process of matching a dog with a handler can take many months, she said.

Ms Peters also thanked Sharon Blady, the MLA for Kirkfield Park, for bringing this legislation forward through a private members bill.

The Rights Connection by Jerry Woods - Chairperson

Concerns echoed by public

A recent opinion piece in the Winnipeg Free Press is perplexing (View from the West, September 23, 2009). I have no problem with opinions. They lead to discussion, which can evolve into understanding and perhaps even change. In this case, the value of *The Human Rights Code* was called into question.

Contrary views, however, should be balanced. Other than the numerous letters of support for *The Code* printed by the paper over the next three days, to date the Commission has not been granted the opportunity to respond. Our concerns, echoed by the public, were reinforced by replies from former Attorney General Roland Penner and former Lieutenant Governor John Harvard.

The public probably realizes that the media does not always provide the full story. For example, a few months ago, the Winnipeg Free Press had to print a correction following an inaccurate front page article about the Commission. Under the title of “Our Mistake,” found on page two just beneath the lottery numbers, the paper admitted that its front page story “contained some inaccuracies and errors of omission.” We wrote to the Free Press regarding the original article and expressed our concern that such errors can confuse the public.

We all stand to lose when stories about human rights and the commissions that protect them have inaccuracies.

For years, most Canadians have valued their basic right to work, obtain services and housing without outdated prejudices and discrimination based on race, religion, age, sex, disabilities, or sexual orientation getting in the way.

Many of these fundamental protections were achieved through the work of human rights commissions, including ensuring that people are not denied jobs on the basis of the colour of their skin, removing physical barriers that assured equal access for people with disabilities, recognizing that working women should not endure sexual harassment or securing the right of children with learning disabilities to receive an appropriate education.

The Commission takes pride in its achievements and continues to make a difference to the lives of many people living in this province.

Human rights messages delivered on most local TV stations

With the help and support of some very special friends, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission has released five, 30 second video public service announcements.

Included in the castings are Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra Maestro Alexander Mickelthwate, Rap Musician Wab Kinew, former Blue Bomber Troy Westwood and Winnipeg Royal Ballet Dancer Jacelyn Lobay. Comedian Big Daddy Tazz was paired with Arlene Ursel, who recently won a human rights case regarding services and disability.

The PSAs show two people with differences in their music, their occupation, their age or their disability. What they all have in common is their belief in human rights.



Dancer Jacelyn Lobay puts on her ballet slippers before getting in front of the camera with former Winnipeg Blue Bomber Troy Westwood.

Four Winnipeg actors, Manny Sylvester, Erik Berg, Lois Brothers and Raimey Gallant also volunteered. Their PSAs deal with age discrimination and sexual harassment.

All the participants took part in this project because of their conviction that everyone has human rights, and to send the message that Manitobans can live their lives free from discrimination.

“The message of human rights is an important one and we are very pleased to receive such great support from those

who participated in this project,” says Dianna, Scarth Executive Director of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

The announcements can be seen on CBC, Global, City, Shaw and WCG Television stations, and were filmed and edited by RecurrentSolutions Inc. The Commission would also like to thank local filmmaker and current Executive Director of the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, Cindy Murdoch.



Arlene Ursel who filed a human rights complaint against a hotel regarding access and subsequently won her case has a laugh between takes.

Nominations now open for the 2009 Human Rights Awards

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission, the Canadian Human Rights Commission and the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties will once again be celebrating International Human Rights Day on December 10, by awarding individuals or groups with the Commitment Award of Manitoba and the Sybil Shack Human Rights Youth Award.

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.

The deadline for nominations is Friday, November 6, 2009. Nomination forms will be available on the Manitoba Human Rights Commission’s Website or by calling the Manitoba Human Rights Commission at 945-3007. The awards will be presented at a lunch to be held on December 9, 2009.

Students to produce their own human rights videos at youth conference

This year’s youth conferences will be highlighted by “Rights, Camera, Action” an afternoon session where students, teachers and the Commission staff will work together creating video public service announcements. The students will be asked to write a short script about their own human rights and the rights of others.

The goal is to have every school produce a human rights public service announcement, which they can show at their school or put on their website.

The conference also offers four workshops in the morning session. These sessions range from looking at media coverage of human rights stories to the Commission’s latest human rights game to learning rights and responsibilities and considering a possible career path in human rights.

The conference will also be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Three conferences are planned during the school calendar year; Winnipeg on Monday November 16, 2009; Brandon on Wednesday November 18, 2009; and in Thompson on Thursday April 8, 2009.

Each school that registers can send up to six students (grades 10-12) to the “Class Action: Rights Here, Rights Now Youth Conference. The deadline for registration is October 30, 2009. For more information call Beatrice Watson or Lorraine Lambert at 945-3007 or toll free at 1-888-884-8681 or email the Commission at hrc@gov.mb.ca

Brandon Human Rights staff on the move



It was packing day last August as the staff at the Brandon office of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission moved down the hall to a new office. Pat Daniels (right), is part of the intake staff and Pam Roberts is on the Commission’s investigation team. The new address is:

Room 341, 340 - 9th Street, Brandon MB R7A 6C2.