

News Release: The Manitoba Human Rights Commission

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HUMAN RIGHTS INFORMATION MADE AVAILABLE TO ALL MANITOBA STUDENTS IN A DYNAMIC AND INTERACTIVE WAY.

Website Offers Video and Chat Room on Bullying and Harassment

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission has launched an innovative, online communication service especially designed for students.

On January 23, 2002 this interactive multimedia service will enable students from across the province, throughout the country and around the world to see, hear and chat online about the issue of bullying and harassment.

Developed by Allmedia Inc. of Winnipeg, the online communications interface features streaming video, an integrated chat room and Flash graphical support. All this is accessible by simply clicking one button on the Commission's website. The website is found at www.gov.mb.ca/hrc.

"Our goals are to encourage students to talk to each other about human rights issues and to increase the accessibility of the Commission to students in remote areas of the province," says Executive Director Dianna Scarth.

The video is the result of the first Human Rights Youth Conference sponsored by the Commission last November. Over two hundred and thirty students came to Winnipeg from as far away as Lynn Lake and Thompson to attend the one-day conference. Discussions centred on discrimination and harassment on the grounds of ancestry, age, sexual orientation, disability, and other topics covered in the Human Rights Code. The "Bully Alert" workshop was one of the most popular at the conference and was chosen as the focus for the video presentation.

Scarth says the Commission recognizes young teens have integrated the Internet and chat rooms into their everyday lives. They have logged on to the web since early childhood and are the first Internet generation.

"We needed to find the most cost efficient way of reaching teens throughout the province. We are hoping that this innovative approach will engage students and give them the opportunity to speak to each other about harassment."

The Commission plans to use the information gathered from the students to devise future education initiatives. "It is important to first listen to the students and find out what their needs are," says Scarth.

The website will have a monitored chat room and email access so that inquiries can be easily transmitted. Human rights officers will be able to reply promptly.

According to Scarth, precautions have been taken to minimize problems in the chat room.

"There are filters to ensure that inappropriate language is screened out, there are no private chat rooms, it is only be open between 2:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m weekdays and it will be monitored."

The video presentation will remain online and available to students for six months.

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