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Fall 2017

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

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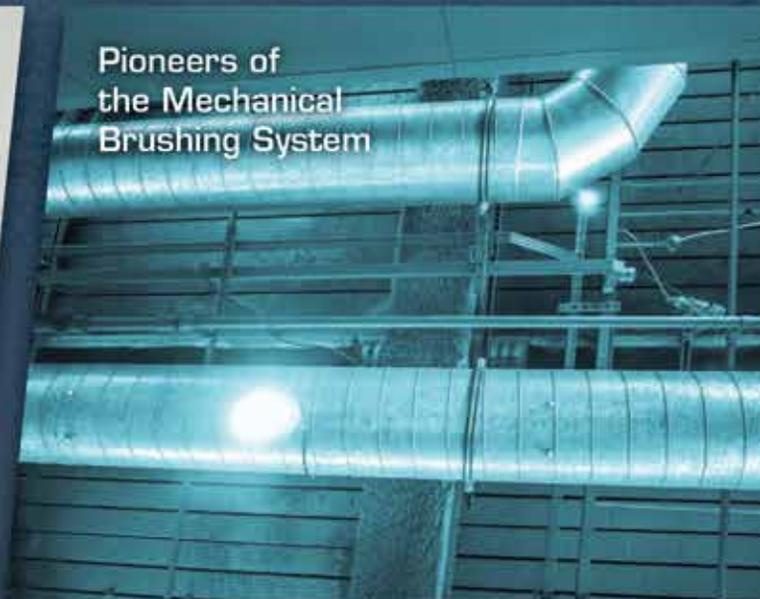
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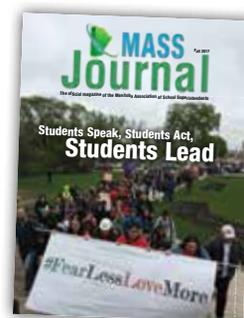
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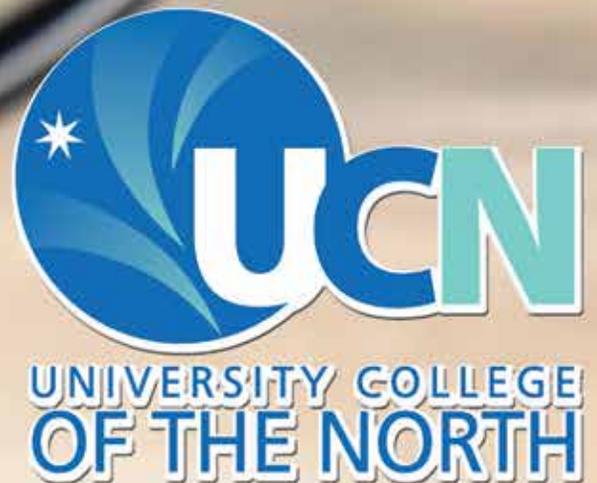
On the cover: In May 2017, close to 500 youth gathered at the #FearLessLoveMore rally in downtown Winnipeg, to raise awareness about Islamophobia and to take action on the *Safe Third Country Agreement*.



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“Meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy.”

– Adam Fletcher



« Pour mettre à contribution les élèves de façon constructive, il faut les mobiliser à titre de partenaires dans tous les aspects des changements scolaires afin de renforcer leur engagement envers l'éducation, la communauté et la démocratie. »

– Adam Fletcher

As president of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), I am pleased to present the Fall 2017 issue of the *MASS Journal*. The articles in this edition highlight exciting programs and projects that foster opportunities for students to contribute authentically to their school community and to the community at large. The examples also demonstrate the power of our youth when they are encouraged and supported to pursue issues of interest.

The articles bring to the forefront the importance of developing cultures that promote student voice, empowering them to make authentic contributions to the leadership of their school and to their communities, and cultivating a sense of agency to take meaningful action to benefit society. More and more school and division leaders are reaching out to the students, inviting them to participate in formal committees, tapping into their opinions and providing them with opportunities to work with their strengths to pursue ideas and interests they are passionate about.

Historically, student councils and other forms of student-led government were the most common venues for students to share their thoughts and opinions. We are now seeing a greater emphasis on promoting authentic student voice for a much wider group of students. Schools and school divisions are opening up spaces and ways for students to demonstrate their ideas and share their thinking, which is empowering young people to become valued partners in learning.

When students feel heard, appreciated and valued, they develop a “can do attitude.” They are not only academically successful, but they also develop a sense of agency. Students realize that they can make a difference in their lives and the lives of others. Students also develop competencies that support them in becoming involved and productive citizens.

Education is more than academics and the role of the education system goes beyond grades. As Cindy Finn, former CASSA President wrote in her message in the Winter 2015-2016 issue of

Continued on page 8

En ma qualité de présidente de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), je suis heureuse de vous présenter le numéro de l'automne 2017 du *MASS Journal*. Les articles de ce numéro présentent des programmes et des projets des plus intéressants qui offrent un éventail de possibilités aux élèves pour leur permettre de contribuer réellement à la communauté scolaire et à la communauté générale. Ils permettent en outre de démontrer le pouvoir des jeunes lorsqu'ils reçoivent des encouragements et du soutien pour approfondir des questions qui les intéressent.

Les articles mettent à l'avant-plan l'importance de développer des cultures qui donnent la voix aux élèves pour qu'ils deviennent une réelle force motrice dans leurs écoles et leurs communautés et cultivent un sentiment de pouvoir pour prendre des mesures concrètes profitables à la société. De plus en plus d'écoles et de divisions scolaires font appel aux élèves et les invitent à participer à des comités officiels pour obtenir leurs opinions et leur donner l'occasion de mettre à contribution leurs forces afin d'approfondir les idées et les enjeux qui les passionnent.

Historiquement, les conseils étudiants et les autres formes de comités ont été les moyens les plus souvent utilisés pour que les élèves puissent échanger leurs réflexions et leurs opinions. Désormais, nous laissons s'exprimer un beaucoup plus grand groupe d'élèves. Les écoles et les divisions scolaires offrent maintenant des lieux et des moyens aux élèves pour leur permettre de faire entendre leurs idées et de partager leurs réflexions, ce qui les aide à prendre leur place en tant que partenaires de choix dans leurs apprentissages.

Lorsque les élèves se sentent écoutés, appréciés et respectés, ils adoptent une attitude constructive. Ils obtiennent de bons résultats à l'école et acquièrent un sentiment de pouvoir. Les élèves constatent qu'ils peuvent changer les choses dans leur vie et dans la vie des autres. Les élèves acquièrent aussi des compétences qui les aident à devenir des citoyens engagés et productifs.

Suite à la page 8



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Leaders & Learners, “We take it as a given that we are not just trying to engage students to enhance their academic learning but that we have a broader moral purpose to shape and mold the citizens of tomorrow.” As leaders, we need to continue to promote school cultures where student voice and peaceful activism are valued and nurtured.

As you read through this Journal, may you feel a great sense of comfort in knowing that the youth of our communities are doing and can do great things when the adults around them create learning environments and offer programs that empower students to demonstrate their ideas and share their thinking. Our students are our future and our future looks bright!

Donna Davidson

President of MASS

Superintendent, Mountain View School Division

Suite de la page 7

L'éducation va au-delà du cadre scolaire. Comme l'a expliqué dans la revue *Leaders & Learners* (hiver 2015-2016) Cindy Finn, présidente de l'ACGCS en 2015-2016, le rôle du système d'éducation ne s'arrête pas à l'attribution de notes. « Nous tenons pour acquis que nous n'essayons pas seulement d'amener les élèves à améliorer leurs apprentissages scolaires, mais que nous visons l'objectif moral plus large de former et de construire les citoyens de demain. » En tant que leaders, nous devons continuer à promouvoir des cultures scolaires qui valorisent et favorisent la voix des élèves et l'activisme pacifique.

En lisant les articles, vous serez peut-être rassurés d'apprendre que les jeunes de nos communautés font et peuvent faire de grandes choses lorsque les adultes qui les entourent mettent en place des environnements qui favorisent l'apprentissage et proposent des programmes qui permettent aux élèves de partager leurs idées et leurs réflexions. Nos élèves sont notre avenir et cet avenir est prometteur!

Donna Davidson

Présidente de la MASS

Directrice générale, division scolaire Mountain View

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L'éducation jette des bases solides sur lesquelles les élèves s'appuient pour bâtir leur succès personnel et professionnel, tout en renforçant notre économie et les collectivités ce faisant.

As Minister of Education and Training, I commend the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) for your dedication and leadership as we continue to work together to promote quality education across the province.

Education provides a solid foundation on which students build toward personal and professional success, strengthening our economy and communities in the process. That positive ripple effect underlines why encouraging education excellence is vitally important, not only for today's students and lifelong learners, but also for the future prosperity of our province.

As you know, a well-rounded education serves to inform and inspire students to recognize their own talents to improve their communities and even change the world.

Our government was proud to support the 2016-2017 Leadership Cohort, a collaborative initiative between MASS and the Manitoba Teachers Society, which demonstrated the tremendous insight, creativity and social consciousness among Manitoba students. This valuable session provided an important forum for students to discuss timely topics, voice their opinions and formulate solutions to challenges in such key areas as health, human rights, social services and environmental sustainability. This event highlighted inspiring, youth-driven initiatives and the importance of helping students develop their skills as our leaders of tomorrow.

MASS members continue to be "leaders of learning," a collective role that you have long approached with passion and professionalism. My staff and I look forward to working with you to ensure educational excellence for all Manitobans.

Honourable Ian Wishart, Minister
Manitoba Education and Training

A

titre de ministre de l'Éducation et de la Formation professionnelle, je tiens à féliciter les membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) pour leur dévouement et leur sens de l'initiative dans la poursuite de notre collaboration visant à promouvoir une éducation de qualité dans l'ensemble de la province.

L'éducation jette des bases solides sur lesquelles les élèves s'appuient pour bâtir leur succès personnel et professionnel, tout en renforçant notre économie et les collectivités ce faisant. Cet effet d'entraînement positif fait ressortir toute l'importance d'encourager l'excellence en éducation, non seulement pour les élèves actuels et ceux qui continuent d'apprendre toute leur vie, mais aussi pour la prospérité future de notre province.

Comme vous le savez, une éducation bien équilibrée contribue à inspirer les élèves et à les amener à reconnaître leurs talents pour améliorer la vie de leur collectivité et même changer le monde.

C'est avec fierté que notre gouvernement a accordé son soutien à la « cohorte leadership 2016-2017 », une initiative de collaboration entre la MASS et la Manitoba Teachers Society, qui a fait ressortir toute l'étendue du discernement, de la créativité et de la conscience sociale des élèves du Manitoba. Cette séance très positive a permis aux élèves de bénéficier d'une importante tribune pour discuter de sujets d'actualité, exprimer leurs opinions et formuler des solutions à des problèmes dans des secteurs clés comme la santé, les droits de la personne, les services sociaux et la viabilité de l'environnement. Cette initiative a amené les jeunes à mettre en œuvre des projets inspirants, tout en soulignant l'importance d'aider les élèves à développer leurs compétences pour devenir nos leaders de demain.

Les membres de la MASS continuent d'être nos « chefs de file de l'apprentissage », un rôle collectif que vous assumez depuis longtemps avec passion et professionnalisme. Soyez assurés que les membres de mon personnel et moi-même continuerons à collaborer avec vous pour assurer l'excellence en éducation pour tous les Manitobains.

Ian Wishart, ministre
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MASS Executive Director



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Students Leading the Way

This article introduces us to Nikita Dornez, Mackenzie Anderson, Lily Trevenen and Iroc Levasseur, students who were part of the 2016-2017 Manitoba Student Leadership Cohort, and to Ken Klassen, Executive Director of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). Together, with assistance from countless other educational leaders from across the province, the *Educating for ACTion: Our Human Rights Journey* conference this past April, was a resounding success. Here is a behind the scenes look at how the event came together, and the impact it had on those directly involved.



“

I was approached by my principal to participate on the executive planning committee for the 2016-2017 Manitoba Student Leadership Cohort.

He thought I might be interested because of my involvement in the school and in the community...he was not wrong; I accepted right away! I wasn't exactly sure what my role would be, but I had high hopes for this project and I have had no regrets about my decision.”

When she joined the committee, Nikita Dornez was a Grade 11 student going into Grade 12 at the École Pointe-des-Chênes school in Ste. Anne in the division scolaire franco-manitobaine. “I was always passionate about social justice and human rights for as long as I can remember. Growing up with a physically challenged brother, I saw the injustice and judgement in the world around me from an early age...and I have always wanted to make a difference!”

“I have always loved public speaking and I am very interested in current issues, so this opportunity to do both on a large scale was very exciting for me. I have always been inspired by young leaders such as Shannon Kootachin and the impact she has been able to make at such a young age. This was my opportunity to take action.”

Mackenzie Anderson joined the executive as a Grade 10 student going into Grade 11 at the University of Winnipeg Collegiate Model School. Her family originally came from the Fairford First Nation, before she moved to Winnipeg. “As a young Anishinaabe woman,

the work of reconciliation is very important to me. It is a way to heal from our past and a hope for a relationship of mutual recognition, respect and justice between the First Nations people and Canada.”

“As soon as I heard about what was being planned, I really wanted to be involved in this opportunity that was offered to me.” Iroc Levasseur was a Grade 11 student going into Grade 12 at the University of Winnipeg Collegiate Model School when she made the decision to join the executive. She has since graduated with honours and returned to her home community on the Ebb and Flow First Nation, but will return to study at the University of Winnipeg in the fall. “I wanted to be a part of something that would educate others and where I could gain more knowledge as well.”

“One of the challenges I had in accepting a position on the executive was my busy lifestyle. I play a lot of sports and I work quite a bit, so adding this initiative to the mix made things more challenging. I always knew it was worth it though, and never thought of giving it up.” Lily Trevenen was in Grade 10, going into Grade 11, at Churchill High School in the Winnipeg School Division, when she accepted the challenge of joining the executive. “I know I will be able to make an impact on other people and the cohort gave me the chance to see that this is my passion.”

“Working with this group of amazing students for almost 18 months to plan and to facilitate the 2016-2017 Manitoba Student Leadership Cohort, was truly a highlight in my educational career,” says Ken Klassen, who is currently the Executive Director of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS).

In his educational career as a teacher, principal and superintendent, and even more so today, student leadership has always been a passion and a priority for Klassen. He says, “I have learned from each new experience with students that the more you involve them in an initiative, the more you release the real decision making and implementation to students, the more they will exceed any expectations you might have had. Students of today are articulate, intelligent, respectful, responsible, creative and passionate about life—not just about their own interests, but about the concerns and needs of the people around them—about social justice and human rights for all.”

How it all came about

In the spring of 2016, a working group came together to begin to plan a major human rights initiative, in two major strands that would culminate in the *Educating for ACTION: Our Human Rights Journey* in Winnipeg in April 2017. One strand was the large provincial conference that was co-sponsored by MASS and the Manitoba Teachers’ Society (MTS). This conference brought together over 100 presenters and almost 1,000 participants to take part in a two-day human rights conference.

Participants were made up of divisional teams from almost every school division in Manitoba, consisting of trustees, superintendents, principals, teachers and community members, as well as students and their staff advisors. Keynote speakers were John Ralston Saul, Cyndy Blackstock, Raheel Raza and Chief Wilton Littlechild. More than 50 workshops highlighted the widest range of human rights concerns in schools and in the community.

The other strand was the 2016-2017 Manitoba Student Leadership Cohort, made up of 36 teams of students and their staff advisors from almost every school division across the province. The program included an orientation day at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in October 2016, with Buffy Ste. Marie doing the Keynote Address. This was followed up by a two-day Student Forum in February at the University of Winnipeg and Thunderbird House, where leadership development for students and their staff advisors focused on the three major themes of cultural competency, skills for leading difficult conversations on diversity and racism, and building a commitment to respond to the Calls to Action in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Student involvement, key to success

The culmination of the leadership development was full participation of the students and their advisors in the *Educating for ACTION* conference in April. There, the students introduced and thanked the Keynote speakers and took part in the workshops of their choice. In addition, they ultimately worked with Charlene Bearhead to prepare a Reconciliation Proclamation (which can be read on page 17), that was presented on the main conference stage by way of a student-made video and lead up to Chief Wilton Littlechild’s closing address.



Nikita, Lily, Mackenzie and Iroc.

The year-long multi-day student initiative proved to be highly successful in preparing the students to participate fully and meaningfully in the larger conference. Adult participants voiced their appreciation for the contributions of the students in the conference evaluation:

“It was amazing seeing such engaged youth!”

“I loved the way you were involving and including the voice of our students—giving them a voice and an understanding of their role to empower other students.”

“I was inspired by how involved the youth are and how they want to make a difference.”

“I am impressed by how powerful and insightful our youth are and how they make me hopeful that their generation will be the ones to make much needed change.”

“Every speaker and presentation was very powerful but watching our students be inspired and taking on the challenge of collaborating with their peers to write a proclamation at last session was the icing on the cake of their journey this week. Truly powerful and it will have a lasting effect on the students who participated. THANK YOU!”

Admittedly, many adults were needed in the planning and facilitation of both the larger conference and the student leadership cohort. Seed grants were generously provided by Manitoba Education and Training and school divisions contributed to covering the costs. A large group of educational partners collaborated to plan, facilitate, present and organize this complex initiative, including superintendents (MASS), teachers (MTS) and staff from Manitoba Education and Training; the Museum for Human Rights and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and a host of other educational and community partners.



Lily and Mackenzie accepted an invite to report on the cohort to the Minister of Education, Ian Wishart.

The impact

However, this takes away nothing from the work of the students on the planning executive committee. Mackenzie, Nikita, Iroc and Lily came to the committee with lots of talent, leadership skills, confidence, commitment and passion. Their growth in leadership and efficacy throughout the course of the 2016-2017 Manitoba Student Leadership Cohort and the *Educating for ACTION: Our Human Rights* conference, was a pleasure for everyone to observe.

“I needed to step outside my comfort zone to talk in front of so many people, admits Iroc.

“Of course, the public speaking and my role as a student leader on the executive and at the events were a challenge,” says Nikita. “It was nerve wracking to speak in front of so many people. But the biggest support I received was from Lily, Mackenzie and Iroc. Between the four of us, the quick words of encouragement and knowing we were not alone definitely made it easier!”

During the cohort and the conference, this foursome introduced and thanked all the major keynote speakers, almost stumped one of Canada’s foremost intellectuals on the main stage with some of their questions, posed for tweeted pictures of themselves with nationally renowned personalities and received hugs and signed books as gifts of appreciation from their new friends. Ultimately, Lily and Mackenzie accepted an invite to report on the cohort to the Minister of Education, Mr. Ian Wishart, in his office at the Legislature.

“My experience with the cohort made me realize that I can do great things, that nothing is too big or too small for me to make a difference,” says Nikita.

“My experience with the cohort has completely changed my life goals,” says Lily.

“I can now see a future where I am involved in protecting human rights, standing up for women who do not have a voice, and helping people.”

“My experiences with the cohort have helped me confirm what I want to do when I graduate,” explains Mackenzie. “I plan to become a high school teacher on a First Nation in the hopes of helping close the gap between these schools and our public schools. This will be my first step towards reconciliation in the education system.”

“I wasn’t sure about what I wanted to do, but being a part of planning and organizing the cohort events made me realize I can change lives,” adds Iroc. “I am now looking into preparing to be a youth coordinator.”

“I had quite a few highlights watching the year unfold, seeing evident growth in not just the student leaders, but in many of the cohort participants from one meeting to the next,” adds Ken. “However, the crowning moment for me was when a young indigenous girl from a rural school division came up to me on the last day and told me, ‘I now have so much hope for my future.’ That was all the reward I needed.” ■

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We, the Youth: A Student Proclamation

This proclamation stems from a video created by student participants at the *Educating for ACTion: Our Human Rights Journey* conference in April 2017. In less than one hour students came up with the ideas for this declaration and filmed a video that featured themselves speaking these thoughts. It was shown to all the attendees before the closing keynote speaker took the stage. This proclamation is based on a transcript of the original video.

We, the youth, declare this proclamation in the faith that ALL PEOPLES are emboldened by understanding, dedicated to the advancement of learning and the search for truth, devoted to the instruction of youth and the welfare of Canada, and we will empower all generations that follow.

We are open-minded, willing to make a change, willing to take a risk, willing to educate, willing to forgive injustice, willing to make sacrifices, wanting to start a conversation, wanting to form our own perspectives, wanting to be role models. WE ARE THE FUTURE.

We are...

We are the now that affects the future. We are the change. We are the largest impact. We are the hope. We are willing. We are educated. We are the future educators. We are not victims, we are survivors.

Whereas, for the past 150 years, the settlers and the governments have violated aboriginals' rights, violated women's rights, forced slavery, taken treaty land, broke contracts and peace agreements, ignored labour laws, brought diseases, took away culture and started wars.

Settlement and government have been violating human rights, oppressing cultures, stereotyping through segregation, denying education, creating generations of hate, not providing sustainable funding, forcing people onto reserves, not working to communicate with people from other cultures and taking away other peoples' land without their confirmation.

Settlers and government have brought false teachings, colonization, residential schools, elimination of culture, caused

assimilation and caused financial issues, broke treaties and disregarded religion.

It will take sacrifice, courage, resources, resilience, bravery, collaboration, empowerment, persistence, and it will TAKE EVERY SINGLE PERSON.

It will take acknowledging what happened, educating your children, funding for better research, speaking out, compensating the survivors, sharing their stories and teaching what happened in the classrooms.

It will take every Canadian citizen, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, politicians, community members, education systems, individuals, immigrants, media organizations, businesses, law enforcement, leaders and followers, religious groups.

It will take understanding, perseverance, commitment, from not just one group of people, but all.

It will take local, federal and provincial governments. It will take voters and it will take taxpayers.

It will take from the youngest of child to the oldest of person, especially the people who are in power.

We hereby proclaim that indigenous rights are viewed in the same context as human rights. We will educate our peers about it. We will not be silent. We will break the stereotypes.

To achieve diverse societies, equality among Canadians, we will open our arms to new immigrants. Canada is a safe country to call home.

Therefore, we the youth proclaim THAT THE NEXT 150 YEARS WILL BE BETTER. ■



Be the Change You Want to See

Highlights from the four keynote speakers at the *Educating for Action: Our Human Rights Journey* conference.

By Shannon Savory, the *MASS Journal*

In April 2017, over 1,000 educational leaders, community partners and students gathered in Winnipeg to be active participants in a journey designed to be eye-opening, enlightening, at times uncomfortable, and 100 per cent inspirational. *Educating for Action: Our Human Rights Journey*, organized by leaders of the Manitoba

Association of School Superintendents and the Manitoba Teachers' Society, brought educators together for a conversation on human rights, including topics such as feminism, mental health, colonization, Indigenous rights, reconciliation, gender diversity, religion, and more.

As keynote speaker Raheel Raza noted, "we must learn to have better conversations." Raza, a documentary film maker focused on intercultural diversity, knows first hand the importance of conversation because she has had to initiate uncomfortable discussions on more than one occasion. When she came to Canada from Pakistan more than 30 years ago, two small kids in tow, her neighbour's advice was to wear western clothes and change her name to something that sounded more "English." Raza's response: "When do you think I should change the colour of my skin?"

Years later, a boss in her office would often note, "I saw *your people* in the news today." Raza decided to give him the benefit of doubt and invited him for coffee. She shared the details of where she came from and let him know that his comments were offensive. He responded by admitting his ignorance.

Conversations like this, said Raza, are not easy, but "exposing the problem and educating the masses is what is going to empower society to change."

She spoke of how she sees Canada's public school system struggling to deal with new cultures and new faiths, and she spoke of clashes, like one in Ontario where parents were taking educators to court because they did not want their children to interact with children who had gay parents.

She asked the audience, "what do we do when cultures clash? Whose human rights do we uphold?"

Her answer was simple, "don't wait for clashes to happen; have the conversations that pre-empt the conflict."

She ended her keynote address with this advice to educators: "When I was a child growing up in Pakistan, I did not have any rights. You are very blessed to live in Canada; it is a privilege and I urge you to not take it for granted. Don't ever stop being curious and don't ever stop caring about social justice; when that happens, it's apt to disappear. You have the potential to make change in the world—be the change you want to see."

Award winning writer John Ralston Saul, agrees. He connected with each attendee as he told them, "it is entirely in your power to change



society. I don't expect that you'll wake up every day and think about all of the complex, gigantic human rights issues in our world, but I would hope that you'll wake up and pick one, focus on one, be a champion for one."

Saul, who was the event's opening keynote speaker, spoke of human rights in relation to language, specifically focusing on how Indigenous language was removed from homes and institutions, resulting in the removal of culture. He believes that reconciliation and restitution is the single most important human rights issue in Canada, and that it's not just "an Aboriginal issue."

Saul urged attendees, no matter their skin colour, to be allies in the journey, noting that it's not enough for non-Indigenous people to limit their reaction to sympathy. "Sympathy means that you feel badly, but that you don't have to do anything about it. I believe that people need to be in the streets, advocating, being allies, supporting, standing up, and they need to be willing to say we pay taxes and we want all Canadians to be treated equally."

Speaking directly to the students in the room (read more about student involvement on page 14), Saul said, "just because you're a student

doesn't mean you don't have power, in fact, you have a lot more time to change it than your parents do. If you find right language, you can do it."

Dr. Cindy Blackstock, member of the Gitksan First Nation and Executive Director of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, also spoke of the importance of standing up and doing the right thing, even if you may take a personal or professional hit for doing so. Above all, she told the educators in the room, "the one thing I'll ask you not to do is to be silent. Have the courage to think differently, to act differently. Have the courage to believe in the children who are in your classroom and train them not to be like us. Train them not to turn away, not to look away. Train them to see their neighbour and friend as another person equally valuable in this world. If we do that together, we can raise a generation of First Nations children who never have to recover from their childhoods again."

Dr. Blackstock told the story of a young boy who was writing valentines for Have a Heart Day. She spoke of how the boy kept throwing his valentine in the garbage and how the teacher kept bringing it back to him. Finally, the teacher asked why he kept throwing it away. "Because," he said, "no one ever wants to hear what I have to say." The teacher told the boy of Shannen's Dream; of how a young girl fought for a safe and appropriate learning environment for students living in Attawapiskat First Nationals in Ontario, about how this one young girl succeeded in her fight for a new school, about how one voice can make a difference. Dr. Blackstock's story went on to tell how this boy went to Parliament Hill, letter in hand, to tell then Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, that, "if you do not build schools, you're going create a crime wave and lose all your money because kids who cannot go to school cannot get money but need to get by, so they're going to steal and invade homes. My teacher tells me you're in charge, so you better man up right now and build more schools."

The moral, of course, said Dr. Blackstock, is that "we have the voice to speak up to power."

The closing keynote speaker, Chief Wilton Littlechild, is the personification of this moral. He is a residential school survivor, a lawyer who has worked both nationally and internationally to further Indigenous rights, and is a commissioner for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Chief Littlechild reminded attendees that it wasn't that long ago when Indigenous people were not even allowed into the United Nations buildings. "Our voice was missing," he told everyone in the room. "We waited, quietly, until we couldn't wait any more. In 1977, elders marched peaceful into the United Nations. And it wasn't until 2007—only one decade ago—that the United Nations adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*."

While excited at first, Chief Littlechild recalls quickly feeling betrayed upon learning that Canada was one of four countries that voted against the declaration; he had sat at the same table as Canadian politicians to draft the declarations, only to have Canada vote against adoption.

Yet, despite setbacks like this, Chief Littlechild continues to use his voice to further human rights, and asked audience members to use their voices, big and small, to do the same. He reminded them that residential schools were the result of people looking the other way, and as a result, he knows his four brothers and seven sisters by name, but not by heart, as they were all separated.

He asked the educators in the room to get to know and understand the 94 Calls to Action recommended by the commission, because more than half relate to education. And he applauded the youth in the room, who dared to ask what Canada will look like in 50 years (see their Student Proclamation on page 17), telling them, "what you have done here, what you have created in such a short time, how you want Canada to look, it's encouraging."

Chief Littlechild ended his talk by telling the story of a reserve in Manitoba that had never had a student graduate from Grade 9. In response, the community developed a 10-year plan so that no matter who was in charge, those students wouldn't be left behind. They started with a Kindergarten class, followed the plan, and celebrated 29 graduates at the end.

"It takes vision and it takes a plan," he said. "But change is possible." ■

Shannon Savory is the Editor-in-Chief of the MASS Journal, and other education-related magazines like The CASS Connection, and CASSA's magazine Leaders & Learners.


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One Idea, One Movement: Making a Mental Health Difference for our Youth

By Susan Schmidt, Pembina Trails School Division, who writes about mental health champion, Loizza Aquino

A long-term priority of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) has been the mental health and well-being of our students. The MASS position paper, *Mental Health Framework for Students* (2012), is high evidence of this commitment. The role of the school has been regarded both nationally and internationally as an important environment for promoting psychological wellness and resilience of children and youth (Pan Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health, 2013, p. 20).

The purpose of this article is to highlight the leadership dream of a student at Institut collégial Vincent Massey Collegiate in the Pembina Trails School Division. At the time of this interview, Loizza Aquino was a 17-year-old student at the school; she has since graduated this past June.

Loizza was born in the Philippines and came to Canada at the age of one. Her parents thought it would be a better life in Canada and their children would have a better education with more opportunities. Loizza's parents say that coming to Canada



Loizza Aquino

was the right thing to do. Both of her parents have found work in Canada.

Loizza's sister will graduate from The Asper School of Business this year and her brother is in his first year in the Faculty of Pharmacy. Loizza is going to the University of Toronto in the fall to study Social Sciences and Humanities. Her goal is to be a social worker first and then go on to be a family lawyer. She feels that this combination

of study will assist her with her passion for creating a world where all people are accepted and valued for their strengths, and experience understanding as they face challenges.

Loizza began to develop her work in social justice with a fundraiser for the Philippines after the typhoon in 2009. She reported in our interview that this made her feel good, as she realized that doing

Continued on page 24



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Sky Zone Winnipeg has integrated their exclusive trampoline experience with four unique programs designed to help connect modern lesson plans with safe, active, healthy fun. Since opening in 2013, Sky Zone Winnipeg pioneered the trampoline park experience in Winnipeg and has proven to be a successful business, averaging 160 000 guests and 2 000 events per year. We sat down with General Manager, Eku Malcolm to discuss the programming Sky Zone offers specifically for teachers and students of local schools.



Staff: Hi Eku, thanks for sitting down with me. I'm looking forward to learning more about Sky Zone's approach to education and learning. Perhaps we could start with a little bit about Sky Zone's history?

Ekmalcolm: Thanks for having me. Sky Zone was founded in 2004 in Las Vegas and opened its first franchise location in 2009. The brand has since expanded to over 180 parks worldwide including 13 parks in Canada. Sky Zone Winnipeg opened in 2013 to great fanfare and has since been very successful in contributing to the Manitoba family-attraction market.

Staff: Wow, what a story! So for readers who may not be familiar with what Sky Zone offers, what would a guest experience in a visit to the Winnipeg park?

EM: The guest experience is actually something we are really excited about. The park was built with the core offerings of Ultimate Dodgeball, Ultimate Volleyball, SkySlam, Foam Zone and of course our main court encompassing 45 individual floor trampolines. However, over the past year, we have invested heavily into innovation with both the programming we offer and the physical attractions within the park. We now offer Sky Wars - think dodgeball only with Nerf Blasters...

Staff: Hold on a second, did you say Nerf Blasters?

EM: (laughs), I did. It's a lot of fun, you will have to try it some time. We also installed black lights throughout the park for our GLOW events which run on Fridays and Saturdays. What we are most excited about though is the new attractions we have installed this summer. We put in a warped wall, a free climb wall, jousting and a performance wall which is something available in only one other Sky Zone in North America.

Staff: Wow, that all sounds incredible, so tell me a little about how Sky Zone is tying education into the park experience.

EM: We understand that educators are having a harder and harder time engaging students and connecting them to what they are being taught. We also understand that children and teenagers today are much less likely to be active than in the past. Each of our Sky Zone education experiences combines the modern curriculum with our core values of safe, active, healthy fun. These experiences encourage children to learn by doing and to be active in the process.

Staff: What a great way to get kids excited to learn. So what are the specific programs Sky Zone offers educators?

EM: We have three distinct programs designed for education:

1. SkyFit classes - For phys ed, which is applicable to all ages. Our instructors implement creative ways to get everyone involved and make use of the trampolines to include students of all athletic abilities.
2. Math and Science - Targeted to Middle School students, the Sky Zone Math and Science program allows students to explore the park, participating in activities designed to focus on the lessons being taught in class. An example of an activity is identifying the number of foam blocks in the foam pit based on measurement and calculation.





3. Business and Leadership - Targeted to High School students, these field trips spotlight the experiences of a successful entrepreneur opening and developing a unique concept in the Winnipeg market and my experience building the Account Management department at SkipTheDishes.

This program explores the components needed to run a business by taking students on a scavenger hunt throughout the park. They explore operations questions regarding maintenance and materials cost, labour cost analysis, basic profit and loss statements and understanding the various dynamics of Supply and Demand. In addition, they will explore HR topics of hiring needs, training requirements, staff coaching and staff management.

Staff: Wow, I wish I had programs like that when I was in school. So are those programs the only way educators can bring students to Sky Zone?

EM: Definitely not. Schools have found a number of ways to include Sky Zone in their activity calendar, whether it's an end of year event, a team windup, a fundraiser like the 30 hour famine or even a training program for their athletes. We are always excited to innovate so we love it when a school asks to attend our facility for a reason we haven't heard before.

Staff: That makes sense...so let me ask the question I know educators are going to ask. Trampolines...children...that must be a safety concern.

EM: It's a great question and something we are actually way more focused on than our guests realize. Safety is hands down, our number one priority. We pride ourselves on providing the safest trampoline park experience. While accidents do happen, we are proud to say that with 160 000 people through our park every year, our injury rate is less than 1%. We have court monitors on every court and a clear set of rules that significantly reduce the chance of injury. We have a distinct injury protocol and with every injury that does occur, we immediately review our video footage as a management team and implement any opportunities for improvement.

Staff: That's really reassuring to hear. I have one last question for you. If educators want more information on participating in Sky Zone's educational programs, what's the best way for them to contact you?

EM: They can always call our events team at 204-888-JUMP(5867) or email us at winnipeg.events@skyzone.com. They can also check out our website www.skyzone.com/winnipeg or follow us on Facebook @skyzonewinnipeg.

Staff: Awesome. Thank you so much for the insight into Sky Zone's opportunities for educators!

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Continued from page 21

things for others is better than doing it for yourself. Her parents had taught the family the value and importance of giving back, but she didn't realize that a life event would soon lead her to create a social movement.

Loizza experienced the trauma of losing a dear friend to suicide. In my interview with Loizza, she stated, "After M passed away I was looking for answers and realized that my goal was to find solutions to this growing concern. Just thinking about it is not going to get you anywhere! I have always been like that. If I want to change the world then I need to do it!"

Loizza created a movement called Peace of Mind, a non-profit organization dedicated to decreasing stigma around issues of mental health in high schools. The Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario, offers this insight into stigma: "Stigma is the negative stereotype, and discrimination is the behaviour that results from this negative stereotype."

In May of 2015, a Tweet made the difference for the Peace of Mind movement, when Loizza asked her followers who would like to join the movement. This has resulted in a growing group of supporters spanning a variety of Manitoba high schools.

"Just thinking about it is not going to get you anywhere! I have always been like that. If I want to change the world then I need to do it!"

Loizza shared more information about Peace of Mind at a *Youth Against Mental Illness Stigma* (YAMIS) event. YAMIS is held two to three times a year at various venues in Winnipeg. These non-profit events are sustained through fundraising and sponsorship, including the Province of Manitoba, which has provided support to YAMIS this past year.

YAMIS provides a safe place for young people across the province to share their stories. It takes incredible courage to stand up and tell about something, when you are unsure what will happen as a result. The power of these events is hearing what youth are doing to help themselves deal with mental health concerns. New immigrants have shared what happened in their home countries and the barriers and

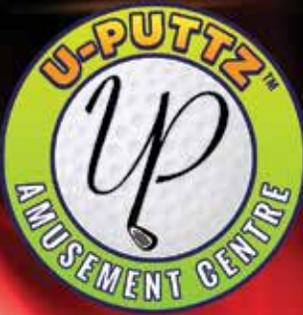
consequences they would face if they told their story. Students shared with the audience that stigma is created when faced with dismissive statements such as "you are dumb" or "you need to know that someone else has it harder." A powerful message delivered to the audience is that youth wish that they could be freer to share their issues with others.

During the interview, we discussed some of the successes of the Peace of Mind movement to this point. Powerful feedback has been shared with Loizza, such as "you saved my life" and "I have been clean from self-harm." Loizza stated, "Saving one person from suicide will save so many."

Focusing on this issue has created difficult but important conversations in a variety of



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high schools. It is like a chain reaction of youth! Youth are saying that our province needs a place to talk and share. Loizza says "It is okay not to be okay. It is not okay to not do anything about it. Together we can make change!"

What advice did Loizza have for teachers? She believes teachers need to allow time to create relationships where students feel safe and confident to talk about serious life issues. They need to be kind and caring for students to build trust. They need to be present for their students and be willing to take a little extra time for them, maybe even walking with them to the guidance office. And she suggested that teachers should talk to their students at the beginning of the year to show them that school is not a place to feel hate for their life.

Perhaps most important, Loizza says, "Teachers shouldn't feel uncomfortable if a student opens up. Lean in! Just because it is a touchy subject, don't be scared. Be open. Talking can save a life."

Every great initiative has its challenges too. The Peace of Mind group shared that some schools have been scared to talk about mental health and reducing stigma. The group reported that one school was worried about the liability that might come with talking about

issues of mental health. Some schools have not allowed students to go to assemblies and events because of timetable concerns. Some schools have not made it a priority. Fundraising is a hard way to pay for suitable venues for YAMIS events, these events occurring during the day and while students are at school. Because of their youth, credibility has been an issue with some, resulting in a lack of support.

Peace of Mind is focusing on reducing stigma. The Mental Health Commission of Canada (2008, p.9) describes stigma in this way: "Stigma is a mark of disgrace of discredit that sets a person apart from others. It involves negative stereotypes and prejudice. Stigma results from fear and mistrust of differences. It builds on repeated exposure to misinformation, reinforcing negative perceptions and false beliefs that are intensely held and enduring. Stigma leads to social exclusion and discrimination."

Students need help to create powerful initiatives such as Peace of Mind. Loizza said she is so thankful to Vincent Massey Collegiate for letting her go to events during the day. Her teachers have been so important. Her parents drove her to events, sometimes needing to leave work to do so, and they supported the group with funds.

Starting a movement like this can create self-doubt, making it hard to be confident. The support from the community and from the Canadian Mental Association has been critical.

Loizza challenges MASS to continue the conversations with teachers, administrators and students. Schools can find further information about Peace of Mind groups at www.peaceofmind204.com. Or follow on Twitter @2014PeaceOfMind.

Nelson Mandela stated, "It always seems impossible until it is done." The world will be a better place with students like Loizza championing healthy and flourishing schools. Keeping the conversation going makes this important work seem less impossible. Young leaders such as Loizza will get us there! Thank you to all the students in our schools whose passion inspires us all! ■

Susan Schmidt is an Assistant Superintendent in Pembina Trails School Division and is presently on the Executive for MASS. Pembina Trails has made it a priority to focus strategic planning on Mental Health and Positive Well-being.



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Dr. Steven Katz, OISE, University of Toronto. Opening address by Dr. Danielle Fullan Kolton (The Manitoba Teachers' Society). Interrupt the status quo of professional learning to enable changes in thinking and practice.

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Dr. Judy Halbert & Dr. Linda Kaser lead the Transformative Educational Leadership Program at the University of British Columbia, the Networks of Inquiry and Innovation, and the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network.

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Education to Activism: A Student's Journey to Engagement

By Ryan Barker, R.D. Parker Collegiate, and Lorie Henderson, School District of Mystery Lake, who write about activist in the making, student Krystal Bee

With a timely nudge from their filmmaking mentor Jim Sanders, two students from Thompson stepped forward to meet an icon. Sanders then took what turned out to be Buffy Sainte-Marie's final photo with members of the Student Leadership Cohort after her speech at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

"(Buffy) became an idol for me," said one of the Thompson girls. "Her music gave her a chance to say something." That student's name is Krystal Bee and this is a chance for her to say something—about her story so far, about *Our Human Rights Journey*, and about the *miskanow*¹ she wants.

Krystal "Turtle" Bee is a member of two unique cohorts. She was the only School District of Mystery Lake (SDML) student to attend all five days of the Student Leadership Cohort supported by the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate (IID) and the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS). She is also one of three dozen students in SDML's *Educating for Action* cohort, which is funded by the Indigenous Inclusion Directorate of Manitoba Education and Training.

As featured in the Fall 2015 *MASS Journal*, *Educating for Action* is a pilot project involving Krystal and her peers, from Junior High at Juniper School through to their graduation from R.D. Parker Collegiate. Supports emphasize student engagement, community connections, career planning and cultural proficiency.

"Indigenous people are not scared," Krystal Bee has written, "they're courageous."

They have needed courage to live with inter-generational trauma and all of



its impacts, and Krystal's family is no exception. Indeed, some, like the late Chief Maxwell Bee of God's Lake Narrows First Nation, survived the frontlines of World War II as well as cultural genocide on the home front. She also has connections to Mathias Colomb Cree Nation and fond memories of visiting her Granny there. Inspired to reflect

*Krystal with icon Buffy Sainte-Marie.
Photo by Jim Sanders.*





by conference speakers, Krystal recalled her Granny's favorite card trick, noting, "I admired her and tried to spend time with her because she was my only (living) grandparent. I loved her so much and won't ever forget that memory of her."

Family connections like these were the explicit target of government policies, including residential schools. That is why SDML has made clear its goals for a culturally proficient education. It is why the asset-based approach of *Educating for Action* has been loaded with activities that build personal and cultural resilience. From participating in a traditional winter camp to learning a version of *O Canada* in Ininimowin, Krystal's Grade 7 year made her and her classmates more aware of the value of learning from both land and culture.

A first taste of activism

One of the challenges they faced, in Krystal's words, was, "knowing what to do and how to do it." So, they took a hint from a shirt emblazoned with an image of Nelson Mandela and the simple injunction: do right. Human rights became the project theme for their Grade 8 year.

It was in that year that Krystal learned of Buffy Sainte-Marie. In fact, Krystal and a few friends selected her from a host of human rights heroes. In a letter addressed to Buffy, they wrote, "We are proud of you for speaking out." They painted an iconic portrait of her and as part of that year's documentary, the students helped make a short video that featured their work. For the same film project, Krystal interviewed local YWCA representatives about women's rights. Working together, the students successfully lobbied Thompson's city council to pass a resolution on the right to a healthy environment. This was Krystal's first taste of activism.

Krystal's first-ever trip to Winnipeg also took place in that Grade 8 year. Initiated by her principal, Lucy Mayor's collaboration with Hugh John MacDonald School, and inspired by the fact we are all treaty people, the trip's highlight was a cycling tour of downtown Winnipeg.

She returned to the city with her class four months later for an education day organized by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). On her visit to the NCTR, Krystal was embraced by survivor Rose Hart, who, "inspired her to talk about

residential schools and about herself." She also met Olympian and honorary witness Clara Hughes, who, "encouraged her to talk about the future and about what it should be like."

It takes a village

From her Granny to Buffy Sainte-Marie, from Lucy Mayor to Rose Hart, to Clara Hughes, Krystal has connected with a great many remarkable female role models. She has continued to visit Juniper staff Sherri Alexander, Sheri Porth, and others for guidance and tutoring. Krystal has become a leading participant in GirlSpace activities coordinated by the YWCA's Nina Cordell. In addition, Krystal has learned much from her school district's cultural proficiency consultant, Loretta Dykun, especially on Student Leadership trips. Whether sharing books or creating new opportunities, Superintendent Lorrie Henderson has also been a steady, positive force for growth.

It truly does take a village, a village with strong women at its core in this case, to raise teen girls and support their relationships first and foremost with family. As Krystal put it, after acknowledging with gratitude to all the previously-mentioned women, "My mom, my sister and my cousin are my heroes."

"I see the world differently because of my father and my mom and people who taught us to be different and to treat people kindly and peacefully," Krystal recently wrote.

Being okay with difference is a key theme in her learning. On her first assignment at R.D. Parker Collegiate, a personal coat-of-arms, the motto she crafted—"Don't be afraid to be different—was meant as much for herself as for anyone else.

"At the beginning of the Grade 9 school year, I was scared," she admits. "I never really showed it. I wanted my feelings to be a secret." Supporting students as they work through such fears, and personalizing learning in the tough transition to a big high school, has been part of *Educating for Action's* raison d'être.

Building up

For all the extra connections and activities that a project like this provides, adolescence can still be lonely, disorienting and uneven. Krystal's skills as a reader and her capacity for empathy have helped her move forward and gain perspective. In a dialectical journal response to a character living with post-traumatic stress in the

novel *Shattered*, she wrote, "This passage (beginning 'Some things are better talked about...') reminds me of my feelings. I've been a depressed kid all my life. Life is like a rollercoaster...I always had days when I felt down in a ditch, when I didn't want to do anything. But I always find a way, or someone helps me find a way, to climb back up."

One of the ways we climb back up is by reaching out and doing things for others. The event that the whole cohort ranked as "most beneficial" during their Grade 9 year was not a trip elsewhere, but instead the opportunity to host others at home. Krystal's cohort had the opportunity to show northern hospitality to a delegation from the same school which had welcomed them so warmly in Winnipeg. Together, they participated in a round dance at Juniper School, a painting workshop with Jasyn Lucas, a basketball round-robin at R.D. Parker, and an overnight camp at Mile 20 in Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation territory.

The highlight for Krystal was building and experiencing a sweat lodge with the guests. This Treaty One-Treaty Five exchange was grounded in reciprocity for mutual benefit. As Krystal wrote in a letter, "I'm talking more and smiling more...I'm finally starting to grow. It may take some time, but I'll get there."

Feeling inspired

Krystal's selection to participate in the MASS-IID-MTS Student Leadership Cohort could not have come at a better time. She and her peers overcame initial shyness at the orientation and by the end of February's forum they had struck up a rapport with newfound friends. Sessions on self-identity with Danielle Fullan Kolton and the Rainbow Resource Centre were especially pertinent, as Krystal began to grapple with what she will come to understand as intersectionality.

What is clear is that she felt inspired by the diverse range of voices she heard for social and Indigenous justice, and she is finding her own. "I want to take a stand for what's right," she later wrote. "I want the housing on reserves to be better. I want the people who went to residential schools and their children to be well taken care of. I want people to know that women aren't objects, but more beautiful than what you just see. I want gay Indigenous people to feel safe when they come out. I want to make change."

She will not be alone. One of the year's key outcomes was that the Student Leaders could see in themselves a generation of change-makers ready to work together. "It felt really good at the end because we cooperated to do the Youth Proclamation for Reconciliation." Krystal said on the drive home, "It felt like we were important."

Krystal rode that feeling of self-confidence into the very next week, when she actively joined in the shooting of the Grade 10 edition of the *Educating for Action* cohort's digital storytelling initiative. Dubbed the Digital

Lodge, this is one aspect of the project that has always drawn Krystal's interest.

"Filmmaking lets me explore the world differently," she says. "It allows me to open up and show what I want to say, to express myself."

Their powerful music video for A Tribe Called Red's *How I Feel*, featuring Northern Voice, Shad and Leonard Sumner, can be viewed on YouTube or at www.digitalodge.ca.

Being part of the *Educating for Action* and Student Leadership cohorts has had a big impact on Krystal Bee. "Before, I didn't know what I wanted to be. I didn't know myself. I was lost," she writes. "Now I want to be a filmmaker, a teacher or nurse, a leader... to learn more about everything."

Whatever direction she chooses, she is already helping reconnect the gaps between generations of Ininiw caused by 150 years of Canadian colonialism. "My sister put a tiny human being in my arms," Krystal shared in

a memoir. "He opened his eyes and I said, 'Hi, I'm your Auntie Turtle.' He looked at me and smiled."

It is apt that Krystal goes by Turtle, representing as it does the sacred teaching of truth.

As Tom King says, "The truth about stories is that's all we are."²

And Krystal's story has only just begun. ■

Ryan Barker is a teacher at R.D. Parker Collegiate, in Thompson, Manitoba. Lorie Henderson is the Superintendent of Educational Services & Programming, School District of Mystery Lake.

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By Michele Polinuk, Lord Selkirk School Division, who shares an interview she did with student activist, Ava Truthwaite, Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School Graduate (2017)

Data, research, studies, books and experts are accessed as resources to improve education. A human resource that may or may not be forgotten and is often under-utilized, is the voice of the student. Student voice is a medium that schools and divisions use to receive feedback.

We want students engaged, active and involved in their education and school life. Are we inviting students to share their thoughts and tell their stories? Are we merely asking, or are we really listening to what students are saying? For educators to truly teach our students and improve the system, we must be willing to learn from them.

Manitoba School Boards Association (MSBA) Annual Convention 2017 – Ava was heard!

At the March convention, a student panel representing five school divisions

responded to questions focusing on the student perspective on life and learning in Manitoba's public schools. Ava Truthwaite, a Grade 12 student from Lord Selkirk Regional Comprehensive Secondary School (LSRCSS) in the Lord Selkirk School Division, participated on this panel.

Those in attendance will remember the conviction in Ava's voice as she shared her perceptions of what makes a successful student regarding personal growth, core values and academic success. Attendees heard Ava share that grades can make you miserable, not all parents care and students need a support system. Ava also encouraged schools to celebrate everyone, not just those excelling in sports and academics. At the conclusion of the student panel, several people approached Ava and applauded her for the courage and passion in her dialogue.

Listening to Ava during the panel experience prompted this article and follow-up interview. Here is Ava's story.

BECOMING ACTIVE

Michele: When did you first think of becoming more active, and an activist?

Ava: Truthfully, initially getting active was never a conscious decision that I made. Influencing change is hard-wired into my DNA. For me, getting active was never a question. The question has always been, "What can I do to make this situation even better? How can I help change the world, even in my own unique little way?" I believe that I am meant to be a change-maker, whether that be on a small scale or large scale; I have yet to find out.

Michele: What prompted you to take action rather than just think or talk about it?

Ava: For me, the main thing was just asking myself, "If I don't, who will? If not now, when?" There is no time like now. If I want to see change, I had to make change, so that is exactly what I try to do in my everyday

life. I am always striving to improve a situation, even if it is just in a small way, by talking to elderly citizens or volunteering at elder's homes, or on a larger scale participating in events like the Ethics Bowl and the MSBA panel.

CHALLENGES ALONG THE WAY

Michele: What have been some challenges?

Ava: One of my biggest pet peeves is “not being heard.” Thankfully, I live in a part of the world where my opinions are not seen as “lesser than” simply because I am a woman. I live in a time and place where my opinions are (mostly) welcomed and embraced. Women still have to “claw their way” into rooms that men can simply walk into. I most definitely have to fight for others to hear me, especially when discussing current world affairs. There have been times when I have not been taken seriously with my views. I have been seen as too extravagant or unrealistic, my goals too far-fetched.

Michele: What have you needed help with and/or been able to do yourself?

Ava: I do not think one person alone can make exponential changes. We are a global village and in order to see change, we must work together to make those changes. My participation in many group events, like Winnipeg Pride, the High School Ethics Bowl, Help Portrait (Christmas photo event for low income families), Global Issues Project (local soup kitchen), and other clubs all achieved results and made a difference by working with others.

SUCCESSSES

Michele: What have been some of your successes you have had with your initiatives?

Ava: Most recently, my biggest success has been the experience of the MSBA student panel. For an hour, I, along with four other Manitoba students, discussed several changes we would like to see in school divisions across the province. It was during this panel that I felt heard and that my opinions truly mattered to everyone in the room.

I was speaking in front of more than 200 people, all of whom have the power to make change. When I left that day, I felt overjoyed. It felt as though I really took part

in positive changes that would make a difference for future students across Manitoba. After attending that panel, I felt even more driven to help make changes.

Michele: What experience influenced you the most as a student activist?

Ava: One of my most influential experiences was the Rotary Adventures in Human Rights summer camp, which I attended a few years ago. I, along with about 15 other students from across the province, joined for one week at the University of Manitoba and learned about current world affairs. Quite literally, we became “human sponges” for a week as we were challenged to bring changes to the world. It was one of the greatest weeks of my life.

EDUCATION AND SCHOOLS

Michele: How has your school experience influenced your plans for the future?

Ava: I took several classes that spoke of current world affairs and I became more aware of the problems going on across the globe. There are many different topics to list, such as racism, homophobia, islamophobia, transphobia and sexism, and while some are improving, others are not. I want to help make those positive changes and my drive for change originated in those classrooms.

I sat in my Global Issues class during the United States' Election Day and feared for women, people of colour, the disabled, transgender people, Muslims and every single minority in the world. It is learning about these issues and discussing them that really fuels my drive. I want those glass ceilings to be broken, and I want to be a part of helping to shatter them. Therefore, I am going to dedicate my life to doing just that.

Michele: What are your hopes for the future of education and schooling?

Ava: I would love to see all Canadian schools grow and improve. Ultimately, I would like to see more recognition for *all* students, not just students who fit a certain criterion of sportsmanship or academia. There is so much more going on!

Several students are contributing to their communities and yet they receive very little to no recognition for their tremendous work. I think this just shows the dedication

of these students; not doing it for recognition, but simply because they want to help make changes. We see things like “athlete of the month” or “student of the month,” but what about “humanitarian of the month” or “citizen of the month?” I think it is time to acknowledge all the efforts, contributions and diversity of the students.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Michele: Has your experience with activism changed your plans for the future?

Ava: Most definitely! For the longest time, I had convinced myself I would be a doctor. I appreciate the work that doctors do for all Canadians, however, I now see myself doing other work. It was during my time attending the Rotary Adventures in Human Rights summer camp that I came to the realization that I wanted to spend the rest of my life dedicating myself to making change in the world. Helping others is what keeps me sane. It fuels my drive for life.

Michele: What are your plans after graduation?

Ava: This fall, I will be starting my four-year journey to becoming a Human Rights lawyer at the University of Toronto. I decided to pursue this career because that is where I feel I can reach my fullest potential as a change-maker. I hope for acceptance into the Ethics, Society, and Law program offered at the university. From there, I will earn my Bachelor's degree and then continue on to law school under the International Human Rights Program. While I work on my degree, I will be doing as much volunteer work as possible.

IMPLICATIONS - NOW WHAT?

Ava is passionate about making this world a better place. Educators are passionate about creating engaged citizens that aspire to make a difference and contribute to society. As leaders in education, we can create the conditions and provide meaningful opportunities for our students. Student voice matters and is a mechanism to learn their stories, listen to their dreams and ideas—but only if we truly listen! Students like Ava inspire hope of a great future! ■

Michele Polinuk is Superintendent at Lord Selkirk School Division.

Building Student and Community Leadership Capacity in Indigenous Ways

By Kateri Phillips, Frontier School Division

Over the last 150 years, the term “leadership” has taken on a dramatically different meaning in Aboriginal communities. Indigenous peoples had governments based on self-sufficiency and equality regardless of gender. This model of self-governance was replaced by federally appointed leadership which sidelined our Aboriginal leaders. Under the new leadership, Aboriginal people also had to give up their rights to educate their own children as they had been doing for generations before. School houses took the place of nature and stories. Residential schools stole generations of children from their homes.

Recently, that educational system has evolved, with residential schools slowly closing (the last one closed its doors in 1996), and Aboriginal people began to take back control over the education of their children.

In 2017, we have reached a period in our history where Aboriginal people throughout the nation have fought for and won the right to lead their children’s educational

journeys. In schools across Manitoba, the Frontier School Division has tried to restore this capacity for leadership for the people, through school programming aimed at allowing students to learn and work towards building their own leadership skills.

I was fortunate enough to spend all 14 of my primary and secondary education years at one Frontier school, Wanipigow School. I also student taught there for one year and returned as a teacher once I had completed my post-secondary education. I have now been teaching at Wanipigow School for several years and have had the privilege of teaching the leadership program as well.

The leadership program at Wanipigow School is offered at the Senior Two level and provides students with the opportunity to take part in weekend workshops that bring together nearly one 100 students from across the Frontier school system. They learn a variety of topics, from effective communication to oral speaking skills. In addition to these workshops, students are also able to take part in philanthropic and volunteer activities. These students are also

able to attend the “Me to We” sponsored We Day activities in Winnipeg each year because of their volunteering.

In 2013, a group of leadership students from Wanipigow embarked on a humanitarian trip to Nicaragua to help build a schoolhouse. For over two years the students fundraised to be able to participate in the trip. One student recalls his journey to Nicaragua: “When I was on my trip to Nicaragua I learned a lot about that country. The way they live is a lot different from the way we live our lives in North America. There are many things that are different, such as the food they eat, the houses they live in, school, and the availability of drinking water. I found it sad how the people in Nicaragua must live like that every day, because most people all over the world take a lot of things for granted. [...] We take school for granted because some of us just go to school just so we can see our friends. While in Nicaragua most kids there can only go to school until Grade seven. [...] The good thing that changed me was building the school. We didn’t finish building the school but it felt

really good being a part of a good thing like that. I usually wouldn't do anything like that before I went on the trip just because I haven't done a project like that in my life and just spending the afternoon with the kids after we finished our part of the school. The kids and our group just connected right away. I think that's what made me change because I wouldn't mind doing a thing like that again."

This trip made a lasting impact on the kids and myself as well. To be able to see firsthand what it looked like to be living and going to school in a third world country, really put it into perspective how lucky our students are now to have the opportunities they do.

Also incorporated into the leadership curriculum are issues of social justice and the fight for human rights, not just in Canada but around the world. Topics range from the Holocaust to segregation in the United States and the situation of Canada's Aboriginal peoples. Recently the Manitoba government came up with a course titled *Global Issues: Citizenship and Sustainability*, which was just a different name for our school initiated course already in place.

This trip made a lasting impact on the kids and myself as well. To be able to see firsthand what it looked like to be living and going to school in a third world country, really put it into perspective how lucky our students are now to have the opportunities they do.

This past year students reflected on their time spent in the course. Sierra Smith looks back on what she learned this past year, saying: "Taking part in the global issues citizenship and sustainability leadership program I have learned [...] about [the] civil rights movement, global issues, activism, conflict resolution, international humanitarian law, etc. I have learned what makes a good leader. I have learned about effective communication, homelessness, armed conflict and segregation. Taking part in this program

I have improved in my communication skills and I improved in my public speaking skills because I remember in Grade nine I couldn't speak in front of anyone or present in front of anyone, but now that I am in Grade 10 doing the global issues citizenship and sustainability leadership program, I am able to speak and present in front of people. My self-esteem in speaking is high and I am confident because I feel comfortable in front of people and when I present I always make sure I speak loudly and clearly so people can



hear me. I volunteer for the required hours so that I can get my two credits and I think if I volunteer and help people out it makes me a better person and a better leader. [...] Volunteering makes me feel good because I want to be a person everyone likes and admires because I make an excellent leader. My class and I fundraised for charity at the school [...] Fundraising for charity makes me feel very caring and good about myself because it goes to charity and I feel so good when I do something to help people. [...] I like doing fundraising events at the school because everyone always has fun and even I have fun. I enjoy this class because it helps me with my skills that I need for the future.”

Another student, Talia Moneas, believed the course helped her learn and grow in many ways: “For example, I used to be really shy speaking in front of people. So much so that if I had to speak, I would probably start crying, but this program has helped me in that area. [...] Overall, it has taught me that I can overcome obstacles in life, it has also given me some confidence and that makes me happy. What I enjoy about this leadership program are the trips, the

fundraisers, and, well, basically everything in this program.”

Her classmate Darby Klynne had this to say about the program as well: “Over the months of being in leadership, I like to take part in more activities that I probably wouldn’t have back in grade nine. My communication is still on the shy side of things, but I’m trying to ask for things myself rather than asking a friend to do it for me. [...] I also feel like my self-esteem is higher on the scale. I don’t care that I’m trying to be a leader in a way. Before, it would really bother me when people would tell me to stand up for myself or state my opinions. I felt like it didn’t matter and that it was useless to try, embarrassing even. Now, I know that I matter just like everyone else and my opinions and questions matter too. I grew to love volunteering, finding that it made me feel better about the day when helping someone. [...] When helping someone, it’s good to be humble about the fact that they needed it and you were there without a price tag.”

In addition to our own school initiatives, we also took part this year in the Manitoba Student Leadership Cohort. This provided an

opportunity for four youth and myself to join with other students and educational staff from across Manitoba to learn about cultural competency, leading difficult conversations about diversity and racism, and Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report. Education and programs such as ours are at the core of the Calls to Action. Our division-wide compulsory Native studies program also reinforces these Calls to Action and helps them come to fruition.

Overall, leadership in our First Nations communities has continued to evolve, both in the communities at large and within our school systems. We have begun to move away from imposing a western view of education on students towards incorporating Aboriginal wisdom into the schools as well.

It is through programs such as this, as well as our own community-based learning, such as Wanipigow’s on-the-land program and our language immersion classes, that our young people are in the position to learn and to thrive as individuals and leaders. ■

Kateri Phillips is a high school teacher at Wanipigow School, in the Frontier School Division.

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Creating the Leaders of Tomorrow, Today



By Angela McGuire-Holder and Micayla Krahn, Brandon School Division

If you were asked what is key and essential for teaching children, the one thing we want to excel at as our “must do, can’t fail,” what would you say? What do you believe? Most would agree that relationships are the cornerstones of a child’s educational experience. Youth Revolution (YR), in its purest form, embodies the spirit of forming relationships. So, what do 550 students and over 70 staff have in common in the Brandon School Division? They belong to an inspirational group of young people who are creating positive waves in their community and beyond.

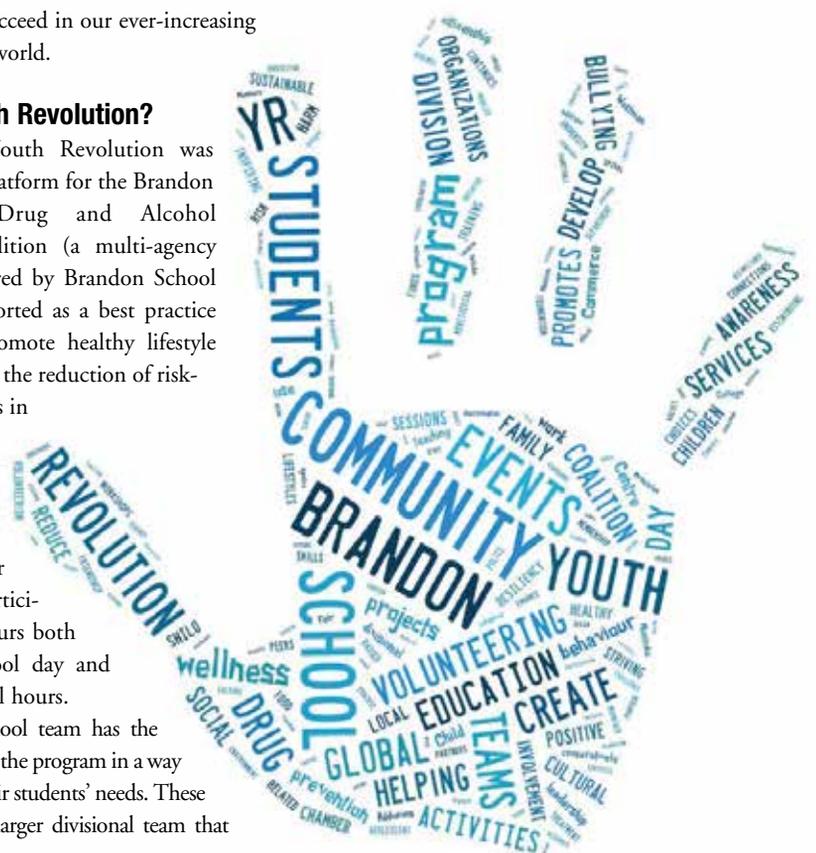
Foundational to YR is allowing students to explore and champion healthy lifestyle choices, volunteerism and service learning with their peers. YR strives to instill good leadership skills while helping students find ways to increase their sense of belonging and wellbeing. School teams create programs or events for their peers, parents and guardians to mobilize and inspire their community. YR is a vehicle to build unique, real world knowledge and skills to

help students succeed in our ever-increasing interconnected world.

What is Youth Revolution?

In 2011, Youth Revolution was formed as the platform for the Brandon Community Drug and Alcohol Education Coalition (a multi-agency committee chaired by Brandon School Division), supported as a best practice approach to promote healthy lifestyle choices to aid in the reduction of risk-related behaviors in children and youth in the community. YR scaffolds opportunities for students to participate in endeavours both within the school day and outside of school hours.

Each YR school team has the freedom to shape the program in a way that best suits their students’ needs. These teams form the larger divisional team that



comes together, two times per year, to discuss issues, share projects, explore healthy lifestyle activities and build lasting relationships. Many of the YR school teams also come together to plan partnership projects with each other and community based organizations. YR strives to empower and encourage students to pursue their passions, activate their peers and become compassionate leaders.

YR supports Brandon School Division youth, putting them at the forefront of making positive impacts in their schools through a fusion of positive citizenship, strong leadership and 21st century skills pedagogy. YR allows students to explore and dissect pressing global challenges; gives the students a chance to discover possible solutions while strengthening their creativity, innovation and adaptability. YR teacher leaders encourage teams of student learners to have fun, take risks, and focus and frame challenges while incorporating educational outcomes into exciting opportunities for learning. Youth Revolution is creating opportunities for students to practice skills such as critical thinking and media literacy to prepare them to live successfully in the 21st century.

Recent YR student interest in bullying prevention has led to a new branch of the program. YR teams in nine schools have come together to train in the bullying prevention program, *Beyond the Hurt* (Canadian Red Cross). With their training and peer teaching, these students say that they are working at reducing bullying one person, one class, and one school at a time.

How does YR work?

Making Youth Revolution “work” in the schools is not by chance. It takes a well-planned and conscientious commitment to tying in student engagement and learning, working around road blocks and thinking outside the box when necessary. The Divisional Youth Revolution Coordinator manages, supervises and supports weekend and evening community volunteer events. The coordinator role allows for planning of larger cross-school events boosting our students’ connections to each other. YR also has a Youth Ambassador (university student/ alumnus of the program) and a Senior High School Mentor who are considered key members of the YR team.

Youth Revolution School Teams are led by highly skilled and caring volunteer teacher leaders who encourage our YR learners to think like global citizens, and see and act like positive agents of social change. School teams often have

multiple teacher leaders as there can be anywhere from 25 to 90 students on a team. Some schools have an open membership policy, allowing all eligible students to participate. Others require a certain criterion (such as committing to three meetings). There is room for schools and YR school teams to craft their own vision.

The YR teacher leaders strive to listen to the ideas of young people and what they believe their school or community needs, and then try to resource, troubleshoot and support this vision until it becomes a reality. YR gives students the tools to use their voice in a safe, supportive environment so they can build a foundation for practicing lifelong leadership, relationship and teamwork skills.

Why community partnerships?

Youth Revolution is a community connected program. A key partnership is with our local food bank, Samaritan House. Thea Dennis (Executive Director, Samaritan House Ministries) believes that students who are actively growing and believing in Youth Revolution are serving their community, province and nation by creating champions of advocacy.

Youth Revolution has over 70 community organizations and partners who help provide opportunities for students to volunteer, build relationships and learn about social justice issues in their school and global communities. These partnerships create a culture of volunteerism that resonates with our parents and the larger community. Each partnership project or community volunteer opportunity is chosen with educational outcomes in mind and is often used to enhance curricular outcomes or overall school climate. Students on our high school YR teams say they believe these important connections are changing the way the community interacts with its young people.

The Youth Revolution program is fortunate to have many community leaders who champion the initiative, beginning with our very supportive Board of Trustees. The Brandon School Division Board of Trustees has supported this program since its inception in 2011, and frequently invites YR students to present on their activities at regular Board meetings.

Our city mayor attends and speaks at many of our YR events. His encouragement of the Youth Revolution students and their endeavours has created a positive relationship with many of the students, so much so that they made him an honorary YR member.

Chief Ian Grant, Brandon Police Service, supports and often attends YR events, and finds it reassuring that “youth are learning the value of being great community ambassadors while they learn new skills and make new friendships.”

As well, our parents believe YR students are strengthening their community because they care deeply about others and are learning to see beyond their own school borders.

Students guiding the program

Youth Revolution students are integral in the shaping of the program. Over the last three years two important sources of student feedback have been incorporated into the program. First, is a partnership with Brandon University Psychiatric Nursing community practicum course as well as interviews with individual YR students. These psychiatric nursing students attend various YR activities and conduct informal focus groups (Hot Chocolate Chats) with YR students at each school. Through a series of questions, students can give timely feedback and suggestions about their school YR program, as well as provide insight into the larger divisional program.

Second, is a YR “Student of Distinction” interview, based on a set of exploratory questions. Each school nominates a YR student who they believe inspires others. Nomination criteria is open so that each team can choose how they wish to participate. These nominees are interviewed about their favorite YR project or volunteer opportunity, which is created into a year-end video.

The power of blue, encouraging youth involvement

So, what makes bringing 550+ students together, all wearing the blue YR shirt, in one place, at one time, so powerful? Students in Youth Revolution say it is because they feel like “one big family.” It creates “opportunities” for them and of course “helps them make new friends.” YR is an inclusive group and students say they feel connected to each other regardless of their cultural, linguistic, or socioeconomic background.

Gillian Black (Youth Revolution Senior Mentor) recently graduated from Grade 12 after being a member of the YR program for her entire high school career. She believes

that, “this program is acting in school as a step towards evolving our future leaders of tomorrow.” Gillian articulates that YR was not only an essential tool in her development, but a gift that helped her transform from a shy introvert to a confident young adult.

School Leaders see YR students applying leadership skills both within their schools and in the larger community. Shelley Cords, Principal, Green Acres School, sees the connection of younger to older YR students as a positive and authentic role modeling opportunity. She stresses how her school’s YR projects give her students voice and choice, and she has seen the student leadership capacity increase in her YR members.

When YR students put on their blue YR shirts they are instantly recognizable to each other, their school and the community. They say they feel safe, and it inspires a sense of belonging in them; in short, they feel empowered to make a difference. From the moment that blue shirt is pulled over their heads, students feel they belong to something more than just a school-based group; they are part of a larger, powerful divisional team.

In interviews with Student of Distinction nominees, student after student expressed their unique insights into what they feel the program is doing for them. But perhaps equally pivotal is the conversations with YR teacher leaders; they talk about how the program is changing them, inspiring them and how much they are connecting at a very real level with these truly amazing young people. ■

Angela McGuire-Holder (lead), is Coordinator of the Brandon Community Drug and Alcohol Education Coalition and Youth Revolution Coordinator, for the Brandon School Division. Micayla Krahn (co-author) is a Brandon University Education Graduate (2017), Youth Ambassador, in the Youth Revolution Program. Special thanks to these contributors: Chief Ian Grant, Brandon Police Service, Brandon, Manitoba; Thea Dennis, Executive Director, Samaritan House Ministries Inc.; Shelly Cords, Principal, Green Acres School, Brandon School Division; and Gillian Black, Grade 12 YR student, Crocus Plains Regional Secondary School, Brandon School Division.

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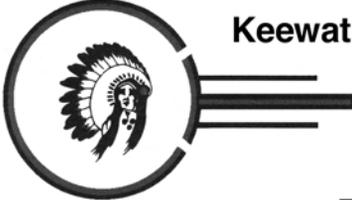


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#FearLessLoveMore



Palvi and Nancy on the day of the rally.

By Nancy Janelle, Seven Oaks Met School, who shares an interview she did with student activist, Palvi Saini

Nancy: So, I hear it was quite a big year for you. Can you tell me about it?

Palvi: It sure was. On Wednesday, May 17th, 2017, close to 500 youth gathered at the #FearLessLoveMore rally in downtown Winnipeg, to raise awareness about Islamophobia and to take action on the *Safe Third Country Agreement*. This was a project I'd been working on since the beginning of Grade 12. As you can imagine, it took a lot of work and planning to organize something this big.

Nancy: So, why #FearLessLoveMore specifically?

Palvi: I'd been researching the Syrian Civil War and the resulting refugee crisis for my senior thesis project. Then President Trump was elected and implemented the United States Immigration Ban, which directly affected refugees trying to come to Canada via the U.S. This, along with many other things, has led to a rise in Islamophobic behaviour, not only in the U.S. but in Canada as well.

I believed a lot of fear had built up in people's hearts and so I wanted to bring young people together, to celebrate our diversity and let local Muslims know that they are welcome and loved, here in Winnipeg. While the campaign focused specifically on Islam because of the connection to Syria, the hashtag means so much more than that. I feel we shouldn't fear people who are "different" than us, whether that be race, religion, sexuality, etc., but that we should all love one another and embrace our diversity.

Nancy: It sounds like you are speaking from experience. Can you tell me about your inspiration for the campaign?

Palvi: There were a quite a few moments in my life that led me to take on this project. In Grade 4, as a newcomer to Canada from India, I wasn't welcomed and it was hard for me to make friends. I was bullied and called a lot of awful racial slurs. I'm Sikh, by the way.



Start with small projects to prepare yourself for something big. Be ambitious, step out of your comfort zone, and challenge yourself. Find a mentor to guide you. Don't settle. Dream big!

I was in Grade 7 when I went to my first WE Day, as a part of our Student Voice learning about different world issues, and I was inspired to know I could make a difference. I've been involved in social justice ever since. In Grade 11, I found out about the Syrian Civil War when my social justice group watched a video about the destruction of Aleppo. When I learned about all the Syrian refugees coming to Canada I knew that I wanted to do something to help them and give back.

Nancy: Why was it important for you to help the Syrian refugees and what did you do?

Palvi: Well, with the issue being so complex, I didn't know how to make a difference at first. However, because of my personal experiences being new to Canada, and the rise of Islamophobia, I knew I wanted to make the newcomers feel as welcomed and loved as possible. I started by looking for an internship where I could help the incoming refugees by working one-on-one with them. I discovered N.E.E.D.S (Newcomer Employment Education Development Services) and started interning with them as a teacher's assistant with the five to 12-year-old children.

During my time there, I helped three siblings who were here in Canada, all on their own from Syria. The oldest girl, at age 14, was covered in burns and bandages, and it was clear that she had been severely injured. Over time, as I got to know her better, I learned that while she was at school one day, the school was bombed. Not only was she injured but she lost family members. It was also around this time that there was shooting at a Mosque in Quebec City. It was then I decided I still wasn't doing enough.

Nancy: This is when your #FearLessLoveMore campaign came to life. Can you talk me through it?

Palvi: After a lot of research on the Syrian crisis, I approached my school's social justice club, the Met School Justice League, to see if they would help with the campaign. Thankfully they said yes! As a group, we always focus our social justice projects around the ABCs: Awareness, Bucks and Change.

To help raise awareness, we started with a large youth outreach component. We did presentations for about a dozen schools in the community, from Grade 6 to a class in adult education, as well as a presentation at a Hutterite colony and to a group of recently arrived Syrian men. The initial community outreach led to the larger awareness component of the project, the youth-led rally, which included petitions and motivational speakers in downtown Winnipeg, with the hope that it would get the media's attention and spread the message even further.

We also partnered with WE and CF Polo Park, and that's when we started in on the "bucks" component of the campaign, by collecting donations for the White Helmets; a group of Syrian men who volunteer their time, doing search and rescue after civilian areas are bombed. There is a great documentary on Netflix about them. We also sold #FearLessLoveMore buttons at the mall in early May and again at the rally.

It was also at this time that we started in on the "change," an important action component of the project, by getting shoppers to sign petitions to have the *Safe Third Country Agreement* rescinded. It's because of this agreement that refugees, having been denied asylum in the U.S. due to the new Immigration Ban, are forced to make unsafe border crossings; putting themselves and their children at risk. According to the agreement, if they try to cross safely at official border crossings, they would be sent back to the dangerous situations they have been trying to escape all along.

Nancy: Can you tell me about the day of the rally? How did you feel that morning?

Palvi: I didn't have too much time to be nervous. It was such a busy day, starting with a live interview on CBC radio first thing in the morning. To begin, 500 of us teenagers gathered at the Central Mosque to learn about Islam and to clear up some stereotypes about the religion with Idris Knapp (the Mosque Director). We heard firsthand about the transition from Syria to Canada from a teenager's perspective, Foton Khatabi, a Grade 12 from Maples Collegiate.

From there, we marched to the front steps of the Manitoba Legislative Building, where we heard from Shahina Siddiqui (Islamic Social Services Association) and Isha Khan (Canadian Council of Muslim Women and the Manitoba Human Rights Commission). The next stop on the agenda was the U.S. Consulate at the corner of Portage and Main, where I spoke about the United States Immigration Ban and the *Safe Third Country Agreement*. The entire time students from my school were in their red #FearLessLoveMore t-shirts chanting, pumping up the crowd, selling buttons, and collecting donations and signatures. The press was there and people were honking their horns and waving in support. We shut down Portage Avenue!

Nancy: This project sounds huge. Can you tell us about the high school you went to that allowed for the time needed for such a rigorous project?

Palvi: I was lucky to be able to attend the Seven Oaks Met School. It is a project-based learning school where your work is cross-curricular and based on your passions and interests right from Grade 9. In Grade 12, we do a Senior Thesis Project, where you get to work on one big project all year long that goes towards several credits, like Global Issues and ELA. This gave me the time I needed to be able to plan such a big campaign.

Nancy: What kinds of challenges did you face taking on such a large project?

Palvi: There were, of course, all the expected challenges around planning a big event:

organization, time management, creating deadlines, regular meetings, getting donations, emails, phone calls, getting reliable helpers, etc. But the first real hurdle was trying to figure what we, as a social justice group, could do to help with such a big and complex global problem.

With all the changes in the U.S. since the election, including the implementation of the Immigration Ban, rising Islamophobia and the *Safe Third Country Agreement*, it was clear that we now had a direct role to play as Canadians. Another big challenge was clearing up misconceptions about Muslims due to a lot of misleading information found on the internet about Islam, Syria and all the refugees coming to Canada.

Nancy: Do you feel that you were successful with your campaign?

Palvi: YES! It was more than I ever could have hoped for. At first, I wasn't even sure that I would be able to do all the presentations to the schools to get students out at the rally. This kind of public speaking was a big obstacle for me to overcome but as it progressed everything else started falling into place. Reaching out to the community played a huge role in making the campaign a success. I couldn't have done it without the support of my teacher, my principal, the Met School Justice League, and of course all the schools that invited us into their classrooms who also came out and marched with us on the day of the rally.

As a part of the campaign, we were able to engage with the public at Polo Park. I spoke with 1,000 educators at the MTS/ MASS Human Rights Conference. We

raised over \$500 for the White Helmets. There were close to 500 people at the rally and we collected 453 signatures on the petitions to be read in the House of Commons. One hundred and seven letters were sent to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and we received a ton of media coverage and recognition from different organizations. I even won the City of Winnipeg Youth Role Model Award for Action Against Racism and Discrimination. I was also lucky to receive the Spirit of WE Award and through this, donated \$1,000 to NEEDS.

Perhaps most importantly, I feel the biggest success from the campaign was the actual rally itself. Watching 500 youth gather in the Central Mosque was one of my proudest moments. When I looked back, I saw the police had shut down the street. And there was this huge crowd holding all these amazing inspirational signs (Hope Beats Hate, Love is Greater than Fear, Refugees are Welcome, etc.). With this, and being surrounded by Syrian refugees and the media, I was overcome with emotion at the magnitude of it all. That they were all embracing our diversity and standing in solidarity with our Muslim Community. Just, wow!

Nancy: How do you feel about the work you've accomplished this last year?

Palvi: I'm still trying to wrap my head around what's happening south of the border. I think the rally I organized is even more important than before, given rising racial tensions in the U.S. Seeing all the

amazing youth come together at my rally gave me hope for the future and inspired me to keep standing up for what I believe in. I think hope and inspiration are things we all need right now, given what is happening south of us. It's more important now than ever, to not be silent and to stand up against all forms of racism.

Nancy: So, what advice do you have for young people who want to make a difference, and make the world a better place?

Palvi: Apply to the Met School! Just kidding. But seriously, they should get involved with the social justice group at their school, and if there isn't one, they should start one. It's important to find like-minded people who care deeply about the same issues as you. Create a team, a network of people with a common interest and a common goal. Reach out to the community, volunteer, join other groups and do thorough research on the topic you are interested in. Start with small projects to prepare yourself for something big. Be ambitious, step out of your comfort zone, and challenge yourself. Find a mentor to guide you. Don't settle. Dream big! ■

Nancy Janelle is Principal of Seven Oaks Met School. Palvi Saini is a recent graduate of the Seven Oaks Met School, and is currently studying Human Rights at the University of Winnipeg, with the ultimate goal of representing Canada at the United Nations.

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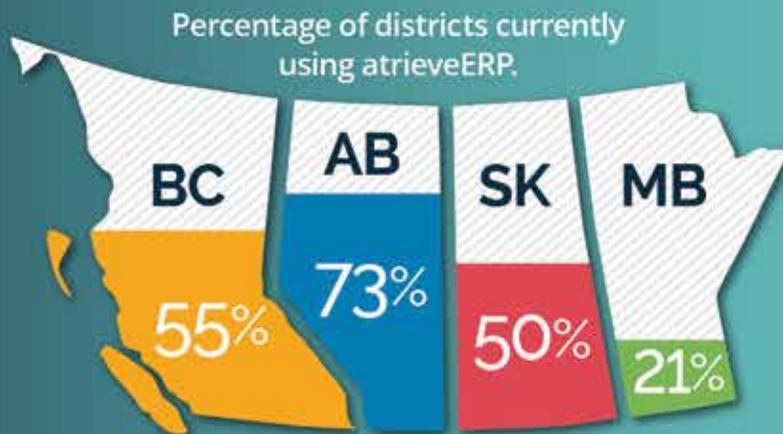
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