

# Engaged Learner Conference: A Student Perspective

October 23, 2008

Winnipeg Sun Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba

## Introduction

Annually, the MB4Youth Division hosts a Youth Citizenship Conference for high school students in Manitoba. The 2008 Youth Citizenship Conference was held in partnership with Manitoba Association for School Superintendents (MASS) and Manitoba Council for Leadership in Education (MCLE) and was held on October 23 at the Winnipeg Sun Centre. Over 85 youth in grades 8 through 11 from 19 school divisions throughout Manitoba participated in the event. Broad representation from across Manitoba led to engaging and participative discussions about ways youth can become engaged in their classroom, school and community.

A parallel conference entitled *The Engaged Learner* aimed at superintendents, school administrators and educators was held on October 23 and 24, 2008 in partnership with MASS, MCLE, and Manitoba School Improvement Program.

One of the highlights of the youth conference was the opportunity for students to share their ideas about student engagement in the classroom, school and community with their Divisional Superintendents who participated at the Educators' Conference.

## Speakers & Workshops



**Darrell Scott**, father of Rachel and founder of the program *Rachel's Challenge*

Rachel Scott was a 17 year old student at Columbine High School; she was the first to die in the tragic school shooting in 1999. After her death, Rachel's father Darrell Scott, founded a training program to promote kindness and compassion to youth around the world called Rachel's Challenge.

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, Darrell shared the story of his daughter Rachel and how she was able to impact the lives of many of her peers by simply being kind and compassionate on a daily basis. He described how his daughter had a theory that if one person went out of their way to show compassion, it would start a chain reaction of the same. He challenged all those in attendance to read and accept the five principles of Rachel's Challenge.

- 1) Eliminate Prejudice by looking for the best in others.
- 2) Dare to Dream-set goals-keep a journal.

- 3) Choose your Influences – input determines output.
- 4) Kind Words – small acts of kindness=huge impact.
- 5) Start a Chain Reaction with family and friends.

Participants were asked to sign a banner to show their support and acceptance of the principle of Rachel's Challenge.



In the afternoon, Darrell led a workshop, sharing the stories and ideas many who have heard his presentation have put into action in their schools and communities. Friends of Rachel (F.O.R) groups have been started in many schools throughout North America, these groups focus on activities and projects that have a positive influence in their communities. Chain Reaction teams are created in each school and work towards goals on a variety of projects decided on by each school, whether it's raising money for a cause or making sure new students feel welcome in their schools.

<http://www.rachelschallenge.com/>



**Hannah Taylor**, *founder of The Ladybug Foundation Inc.*

Hannah Taylor shared her story of how seeing a homeless man eating out of garbage can when she was 6 years old had a profound impact on her life. She was determined to help, and by the age of 8 she had started The Ladybug Foundation Inc. to raise awareness and collect funds to help provide food and shelter for the homeless in our country.

Hannah shared some of the experiences she has had with the homeless across Canada, and how she has had a positive impact on many of their lives by sharing love and showing compassion. Hannah's message to her young audience is that if you believe in something, it is possible for one person to get involved and make a positive change. At 12 years old, Hannah now shares her stories and inspires youth across Canada, the United States and the world.

<http://www.ladybugfoundation.ca/>

## Announcements



**Honourable Peter Bjornson**, *Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth*

Bringing greetings on behalf of the Province of Manitoba, Minister Peter Bjornson welcomed all participants and spoke to the ripple effect of making a difference in the classroom, school and community.

Minister Bjornson announced that Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth would be providing \$150,000 annually over three years to the Ladybug Foundation Education Program Inc. for the introduction, implementation and enhancement of the *Make Change* program designed for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students. The program is designed to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of homelessness, hunger, poverty and street life issues and encourages students to get involved in community action that helps reduce the effects of poverty on the community.

In addition, Minister Bjornson announced the launch of the *Youth Making a Difference* publication that highlights examples of Manitoba students doing great things to improve their classroom, school and community.

**<http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/youth/leadership/youthmakingadifference.html>**

## Discussions

Conference participants had the opportunity to engage in various discussions throughout the day focusing on youth engagement in the classroom, school and community. Youth discussed ways to be engaged in the classroom, school and community, challenges they may face and ways to overcome those challenges. Youth also discussed the characteristics of a good leader and the supports needed from educators, school administrators and community representatives to get involved in citizenship and leadership activities and initiatives.

Each participant was asked to identify a change they would like to see happen to increase student engagement in the classroom, school and community as well as identify what they are going to do to make it happen. Youth recorded their responses on a postcard that will be mailed back to them in two months as a reminder of their commitment to make a difference. At the end of the day youth also had the opportunity to meet with school superintendents or assistant superintendents and share their ideas for change and discuss ways that the school divisions can help to make their ideas happen.

## Conclusion

The Youth Citizenship Conference provided youth with an opportunity to share ideas, stories and insights into youth engagement and leadership. Youth were given the opportunity to make recommendations and identify solutions that would make a difference in their classroom, school and community. Participants also had the opportunity to hear stories and perspectives of youth from across the province. Many youth participants left with more than knowledge and awareness, they left with new friends and the motivation to make a difference. Who knows they "may just start a chain reaction." *Rachel's Challenge*, [www.rachelschallenge.com](http://www.rachelschallenge.com)