

International council spawns young global citizens



Interlake school children learned about the world's food supply from Manitoba Entrepreneurship Minister Peter Bjornson and Bequie Lake and Tyler Morden, both from the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation. The students are Rowan Strempler, Jayda Larocque, Teagan Park, Meghan Sholdice and Brynn Arksey.

By Roger Newman

The Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC) is starting early to develop citizens of the world.

Besides undertaking international projects, council officials are running one day conferences around the province to acquaint grade 6-8 students with the world's food and hunger problems.

Twenty two students from four Interlake schools learned all about global hunger at one of these conferences last Thursday at Gimli's Johnson Hall in the Waterfront Centre. Accompanied by four teachers, they came from Fisher Branch, Teulon, Warren and Winnipeg Beach schools to digest the information that 300 million mostly malnourished children go to bed hungry every night.

The Gimli conference for middle years students is one of six that the MCIC organization has scheduled this winter. Other conferences have already taken place in Beausejour, Morden, Winnipeg and Minnedosa while Virden is still to come in mid-March.

"We are working to foster global citizenship," says MCIC public engagement coordinator Bequie Lake. "We hope the middle years students will return home to organize activities to raise awareness of the world's food problems in both their schools and communities. We also hope their interest will carry over to high school so they will become actively involved in international development projects."

Lake said that since the MCIC student conferences started in 2007, there have been different themes ranging from fair trade, climate change and water supply to gender and education issues. This was the fourth MCIC visit to Gimli where this year's food supply conference was facilitated by Lake and youth engagement coordinator Tyler Morden with the assistance of several helpers.

Financial support for the six conferences was provided by the federal government through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

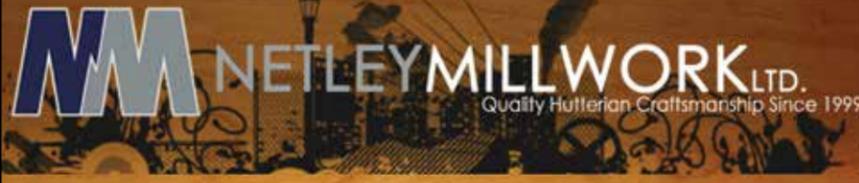
The Gimli conference opened with a morning plenary session where the facilitators and students explored the lack of food security in the world. The young people learned that

too much food is wasted and that not enough is being produced due to such factors as climate change and the quantity and quality of available land and water.

They acquired practical skills to spread the "Food for All" message at a series of afternoon workshops. Students had a choice of workshops ranging from filming short videos and making T-shirts to studying theatre techniques and digital photography.

Guest speaker was Manitoba Entrepreneurship Minister Peter Bjornson who praised MCIC for both its international development work and education conferences at home. "The Manitoba Government helps fund MCIC projects all over the world," Bjornson said. "Each year their representatives come to a provincial cabinet meeting and brief us on the things they're doing."

Bjornson, also Gimli's MLA, said that while Canada has no current problems, necessities like food and water are in short supply in many countries. "It is important to learn what is happening in other parts of the world," he told the students. "You can make a difference and you will."





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