

# Inclusion focus of high schools' workshop

By Heather Robbins

Seventy-one Warren, Stonewall and Teulon Collegiate students, such as Grade 10 student Andrew M. of Stonewall Collegiate, are hoping they can make their schools, communities and world more inclusive for the disabled, women, poor, indigenous, and lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered, as they discussed acceptance issues these groups face during a Generating Momentum for Our World: Student Voice Workshop at the Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre last Wednesday.

"It's good to talk about inclusion," said Andrew. "If no one talks about it, no problems can be solved. You can change things if you put your mind to it."

Christine Penner, the Interlake School Division's assistant superintendent, says this workshop, a collaboration between the division and the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC,) is part of the division's Student Voice program, which provides high school students with an annual opportunity to talk about improving themselves and their local, national and global environments.

"Inclusion is part of the division's strategic plan, so it's well worth the time to talk about," said Penner.

Bequie Lake, public engagement coordinator for MCIC, says the workshop was student-driven.

"There were three major components to it," Lake explained. "First was a chance for the students to discuss inclusion issues with volunteer facilitators from Canada World Youth (we had volunteers from Kenya and Nunavut) and Menno Simons College. Second was skill building sessions for public speaking, leadership skills and planning and organizing events. Then, the students had a chance to



TRIBUNE PHOTO BY HEATHER ROBBINS

Facilitator Sumeep Bath, far right, discusses accessibility issues for the disabled during the Generating Momentum for Our World: Student Voice Workshop in Oak Hammock March last Wednesday.

explore those same issues through five different art medium facilitated workshops: digital photography, spoken word, theatre, video and silk-screening (t-shirt design.)"

Lake says MCIC, a coalition of 40 different organizations involved in international development that started these workshops 10 years ago to get youth to be active global and local citizens, began working with the division on this workshop in August.

"Christine Penner and the three schools' administrators guided us on their priorities for the conference," said Lake.

Penner says each school's administrators selected 24 Grades 9-12 students to attend.

"Each had a different selection process, but they looked at who had leadership positions in their school," said Penner.

Penner says, unlike previous workshops, this one was administration-driven.

"Last year, we looked at the regional health authority's youth health survey results and had the students pick topics to discuss an action plan for and had speakers about social justice initiatives that have taken place, such as the Flying Doctors of Canada," said Penner. "The difference this year is we're focusing on student leadership."

Penner says this workshop's aim was to engage students.

"The goal was for our high school

students to develop their leadership capabilities and to immerse, educate and engage them in the area of social justice," said Penner. "Our students are very social justice conscious."

Students such as Grade 12 student Dan Halldorson of Warren Collegiate, believe this was a valuable opportunity.

"My group looked at how the community views youth and how we can change that," said Dan. "Honestly, the community looks at youth negatively because of the bad actions of a few. This workshop showed us what we can do with other schools. You can do things by yourself, but when you get to hear ideas from other schools in other communities, you can look at

making a bigger change."

## MY VOICE

As for the division's My Voice program for middle years students, Penner says they had their first forum at the South Interlake-Rockwood Agricultural Society's red barn October 13 and that they'll have more forums in January and April.

"Each school did their own thing (to select students to participate)," said Penner. "Some schools had their students write letters about why they wanted to be on the My Voice committee. One did a video process. The schools looked at their student body for leaders and if they didn't know, they had them be part of the selection process and chose based on that."



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Seventy-one Warren, Stonewall and Teulon Collegiate students discussed how to make their school, community and planet more accessible for all during the Generating Momentum for Our World: Student Voice Workshop at the Oak Hammock March Interpretive Centre last Wednesday.

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