

Youth as Powerful, Ethical Consumers

All around us there is evidence of the power youth have as consumers. From Macintosh to McDonalds, companies around the globe are trying to capture young minds through multimillion dollar advertising campaigns and youth-friendly promotions. Having more disposable income means that youth are not only the consumers of the future, they are consumers right now.

Luckily, youth are also more informed than ever before. With advances in technology and international awareness, our world has become a community where youth see themselves in a global context and recognize that their actions have an effect on the lives of others. Given the right tools and information, youth can realize the importance of making responsible and ethical consumer choices and taking action to get others to do the same.

In addressing these issues, the Manitoba Council for International Cooperation (MCIC) is currently engaging students across Manitoba on issues of fair trade, food security and ethical consumption. This year, MCIC's *Generating Momentum for Our World – Appetite for Change* Middle Years conferences are bringing student leaders together to learn about global food issues and empowering them to take action on these issues in their schools and communities. MCIC will host conferences in Beausejour (January 14), Gimli (January 28), Strathclair (February 10), Winnipeg (March 17) and Brandon (April 14). A conference in Morden Manitoba was held in November, 2009. "I learned that a billion people in the world go hungry but that we have enough food to stop that," said a student at the Morden conference. "It made me want to do something to help." Schools can still contact MCIC about potential registration for the upcoming conferences.

To engage High School students on issues of consumption and fair trade, MCIC is coordinating the creation of an *Ethical Consumption Music Video*. Eight creative students from across Manitoba are currently working with music industry professionals to create a video for youth that features original music and images. The final product will be launched during International Development Week (February 7 – 13) and broadcast throughout the province to inform and inspire other youth to act as ethical consumers and realize the impact of their actions.

MCIC's Fair Trade Manitoba program is also directly involved with schools in promoting ethical consumption and fair trade. In 2009, MCIC worked with officials at Evergreen School Division (based in Gimli, Manitoba) to get the whole division to 'Go Fair Trade'. Today, schools in the division purchase fair trade food products, sports equipment and clothing whenever possible. Recently, MCIC has been promoting the Fair Trade Recess campaign, which involves the use of fair trade sports equipment and clothing, as well as Reverse Trick-or-Treating, which gets student distributing information on fair trade chocolate during Halloween. Each February, the Fair Trade Manitoba program also promotes the One-Month Challenge, a campaign that gets Manitobans to commit to consuming only fair trade brands of coffee, tea and chocolate for 30 days.

For more information on MCIC's many resources, conferences and campaigns, please contact us at (204) 987 6420 or mcic@web.ca.

Visit our website at www.mcic.ca for a list of teacher and student resources.