

15,000 MESSAGES

BY MATEA TUHTAR

You have the right to protection and freedom from war. You have the right to live with your parents. You have the right to an identity. You have the right to choose your own friends.

These are just a few of the articles in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that have inspired 15,000 art panels created by all students and staff of the Pembina Trails School Division, expressing what human rights mean to them.

Over two days in May everyone from the division will be bused to the Investors Group Field stadium to place their 8x10 tile and transform the field into a giant art installation in the shape of the universal symbol for human rights.

“There will be 15,000 unique individual visual messages on human rights,” says Cameron Cross, visual arts consultant to the Pembina Trails School Division. “When you look at the image it’ll be one mosaic image but if you get closer it’s thousands and thousands of individual stories.”

Cross dreamed up the project two years ago and says he was thinking about large scale art installations and what a school division really is.

“If I ask you ‘What is a school?’ it’d be pretty easy to identify what school is. But if I ask you what a school division is, that’s a little trickier. Is a school division just a family of schools? At

the board office, do we just manage budgets and money, or is it a place that can actually influence learning and education?”

Turns out it’s both. The massive Pembina Trails Human Rights Project started modestly as a K–12 student project at its 33 schools. Now every adult that works in Pembina Trails is also taking part. “It’s very much a division project,” says Cross proudly, who also got the Investors Group Field and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights on board.

The museum will feature the project following the event. It will send out the message around the world challenging other school divisions to do something similar.

On May 20 and 21 the Pembina Trails students and staff will arrive in 90 minute waves to add their tiles to the mosaic. It will be finished by 2:30 pm on May 21, and the stadium will be open to visitors until 7:30 that evening.

The stadium’s jumbotrons will play videos from celebrities that are active in social justice, and a time lapse camera will capture the giant logo taking shape. Aerial photos will be taken from a helicopter and drones.

Cross says the project has exceeded his imagination.

“It’s beyond anyone’s expectations,” he says, adding that the project will also include a

Continued on page 10...





human rights website and wiki, along with videos in which students photograph their art piece and talk about their creations. Even the division math consultant has been getting high school math students involved, working out the dimensions for the giant logo template.

The project is led by a steering committee of 20 people, as well as two to three teacher leaders per school.

The year-long project has encouraged teachers in the division to discuss child and human rights with their students. One is Dawn Knight, visual arts specialist at Fort Richmond Collegiate, who asked students to pick a human rights topic that they identify with, or that has affected them in some way.

“We have a lot of students in our school who are refugees or who have come from other countries and have experienced different things. And as well, we have some Aboriginal students who have lived in some different places where they might not have access to some of the same things that people in Winnipeg might. So there are a lot of kids with different experiences who are bringing those experiences to the tiles that they’re making.”

She says she’s been surprised by how involved her students are getting and how moving some of their stories are.

“I get choked up all the time. When I heard about this project I loved the symbolism of it—because each child will go down on the field and place it—just that act alone is so symbolic. Giving each child a voice and without that voice the final piece would not be complete. It’s a great image for people to have in their mind.”



A FIELD TRIP PLUS

The Canadian Museum for Human Rights says a class visit is more than just a field trip

The Museum’s Learning & Programming team has worked with teachers, youth, curriculum consultants, and child development experts to create a range of school programs that inspire thought and conversation about human rights in age-appropriate ways.

“We’re trying to help students understand that you don’t need to be Gandhi or Malala to make positive change in the world,” says Mireille Lamontagne, CMHR Manager of Education Programs. “You can just be yourself and know that every action makes a difference.”

“The Museum experience is a journey of inspiration, full of stories that can make us feel hope and get excited about opportunities for the future. This is not a place to come and be sad.”

Programming is available for Kindergarten to Grade 12. For younger students, the focus is first on learning what rights we all have as human beings. Middle Years classes learn about standing up for their rights and freedoms and those of others. Older students wade into more complex topics such as human rights laws, discrimination, and what has happened in different parts of the world when peoples’ rights and freedoms were denied.

Multi-sensory museum activities and

exhibits are designed to impact learning and retention—ranging from an interactive discussion circle focused on Supreme Court cases, to a floor game that uses colourful lights to promote learning about the power of inclusion.

“The ultimate goal of human rights education is to develop critical thinkers who engage in respectful dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, examine their own attitudes and behaviours, and get motivated to take action,” says Lamontagne.

“The Museum and schools all share these goals. Human rights education is integrated across curricula now. Many schools have active social justice clubs and anti-bullying initiatives. The Museum is a central place where students can come to learn more from reliable and objective sources—and think about how to apply their knowledge. We can help them feel empowered.”

Eight different school programs are offered in 2015. Early bookings were offered on a ‘fair-share’ basis and are now available on a first-come, first-served basis for remaining openings in the latter part of the 2014–15 school year. Check www.humanrights.ca/learn for more information. Bookings for the 2015–16 school year begin in August.

To help classes prepare, the CMHR offers many online resources. See the ‘Learn’ section of the website at humanrights.ca.