

Youth hear message of Dreamcatcher

Conference empowers students while warning about substance abuse

by Roxanna Thompson
Northern News Services
Edmonton, Alta.

Deh Cho students were exposed to a world of experiences earlier this month.

The annual Dreamcatcher Aboriginal Youth Conference included sessions focusing on issues like drug use, volunteerism and personal empowerment.

For Garrett Bonnetrouge, listening to people tell their stories of drug use was a practical deterrent from trying that lifestyle. The 14-year-old student of Deh Gah School in Fort Providence said he learned a lot about drugs and why people shouldn't use them.

Twelve students from Echo Dene School in Fort Liard and 13 students from Deh Gah School attended the conference from Oct. 16 to 18 on the Grant MacEwan University campus in Edmonton. Roslyn Gardner Firth, a chaperone with the Fort Liard group, said many of the sessions at the conference had strong messages that resonated with the youth.

Powerful lessons

A session on life on the streets, prostitution and drugs was particularly powerful, said Gardner Firth.

"A pin could have dropped in the room while the woman was giving her presentation," she said.

Blair Kotchea, a student from Fort Liard, said the conference inspired her.

"In the workshops I learned to be proud of who I am, embrace my interests, travel the world and go for my dreams and goals," Kotchea wrote after the conference.

For Kotchea, 15, the highlight of the conference was meeting Lindsay Willier, an aboriginal woman who competed as a finalist on the television show Canada's Next Top Model. Willier shared a message of holding onto your dreams and looking towards your future.

Attending Dreamcatcher has become an annual ritual for students from Deh Gah School, said Margaret Thom,



photo courtesy of Roslyn Gardner Firth

Lyle Bertrand, left foreground, with fellow Echo Dene School students to his immediate left, Tyre Timbre and Monica Berreault, participate in the fit rhythms session at the Dreamcatcher Aboriginal Youth Conference in Edmonton.

the school's community councillor.

The topics covered and events are what continue to draw groups from the school, Thom said.

"How powerful it is to see a large group of youth in one place," she said.

In addition to the conference the Fort Providence youth also had their eyes opened while volunteering at the Edmonton Food Bank. The students work diligently for two hours bagging potatoes.

The experience showed the stu-

dents there are individuals who don't have enough food who have to rely on the generosity of other people and organizations to help them, said Thom.

"None of our kids have experienced hunger to that extent," she

said, adding that it was good for the students to see how fortunate they are.

Jodie Bonnetrouge, 18, said volunteering at the food bank showed her the importance of helping others.

"I enjoyed helping out," she said.

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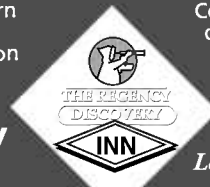
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