

# MHR *Connections*

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THE MANITOBA  
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LA COMMISSION DES  
DROITS DE LA PERSONNE  
DU MANITOBA

[www.manitoba.ca/hrc](http://www.manitoba.ca/hrc)



*These images about the Japanese Canadian experience, are from presentations found on YouTube and the links can be found on the Manitoba Class Action website.*

## Learning from past human rights violations in Canada

In recognition of March 21, Elimination of Racial Discrimination Day, the Manitoba Human Rights Commission officially launched the Manitoba Class Action Website.

“Many students have been involved in putting this site together,” says Pam Roberts, a human rights investigator and one of the Commission’s youth conference coordinators, adding, “When you are on the site you will watch a student read about a specific human rights event that happened on that day in the past.” There are also questions, background information, links to the Manitoba Human Rights

Commission’s website, other sites of interest and specific social networking sites for those interested in discussing the human rights issue with others.

For example, a student explains the events of February 26, 1942. That was the day when the Canadian Minister of Justice ordered the removal of all people of “the Japanese race” from the “protected area” of the Pacific coastline.

This is considered to be one of the most appalling examples of human rights violations in Canadian history. Japanese Canadians were stripped of all their property and condemned to live in internment camps for four years. Many years later the Government of Canada and the National Association of Japanese Canadians signed the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement, which acknowledged that the treatment of Japanese Canadians during and after World War II was unjust and violated principles of human rights.

*Continued on page 2*

### The Rights Connection by Yvonne Peters Vice-Chairperson

In 1975, the United Nations officially proclaimed March 8 International Women’s Day (IWD). The history, however, goes back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1911, the first successful organized IWD event took place.

One hundred years after that inaugural event, IWD was celebrated at the Manitoba Legislature, with a special program and public reception recognizing the achievements of women with disabilities. I was honoured to be one of the guest speakers.

Not all that long ago, women with disabilities were invisible within the general society as well as among those promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, and those promoting gender equality.

Back in the 70s, when I was a young woman, I was excited and inspired by the women’s movement as it took hold in Canada. Through meetings, conferences, rallies and protests, we claimed our right to equality and autonomy.

Running parallel to the women’s movement was the emergence of the Canadian disability rights movement. This movement had a similar argument; persons with disabilities were entitled to the right to equality, the right to control their lives and make decisions for themselves and the right to participate as equal citizens in all aspects of society.

Despite my enthusiasm and support for both movements, neither one accurately reflected or understood the reality of my life as a woman with a disability. Gender issues were left to the domain of the women’s movement, and disability issues were relegated exclusively to the disability rights movement. But my gender and disability are interrelated and it was not easy to divide my experiences into distinct categories. Today, both movements have a much more inclusive view of equality.

Like many rights seekers, women with disabilities have a very long way to go before true equality is achieved. Poverty among women with disabilities remains a significant and crushing reality. But small victories have been gained, particularly at the political level. We now have the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which contains a specific article proclaiming the rights of women with disabilities. The convention also makes several references to girls, women and gender issues.

Today, it is reassuring that both disability rights and women’s rights organizations are working hard together to overcome remaining barriers.

continued from page 1

The website ([www.manitobaaction.com](http://www.manitobaaction.com)) is designed for students who have an interest in human rights as well as teachers who are looking for a catalyst for class discussions and a tool for human rights education. "The general public will also find it an interesting and informative human rights site," says Ms Roberts.

The Commission is hoping to get feedback from those using the site.

"Manitoba Class Action continues to evolve, and any suggestions would be helpful in keeping the site relevant," says Ms Roberts. She adds that the Commission is very interested in knowing what type of assignments or projects students are working on and you are invited to contact either her or Patricia Knipe at the Manitoba Human Rights Commission.

The site is based on a book by Human Rights Consultant Stephen Hammond called *Steps in the Rights Direction*. This book chronicles past human rights events, one for every day of the year.

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## Canadian Human Rights Commission wants issue clarified by a higher court

The Canadian Human Rights Commission intends to apply for a judicial review of a Tribunal decision which dismissed a complaint of discrimination. The case dealt with child welfare services provided to First Nations children, on and off reserve. Considered was whether or not federal and provincial or territorial funders could be compared to one another.

"The Commission believes that this important issue should be clarified by higher courts and we will be applying for judicial review of the ruling before the Federal Court of Canada," says Commission senior counsel Philippe Dufresne.

In 2008, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and the Assembly of First Nations filed a complaint against the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada, alleging that a First Nation child living on reserve receives less child welfare and protection services than those living off reserve. They further alleged that the Federal Government's underfunding results in systemic discrimination impacting the lives of Aboriginal children living on reserve.

The Tribunal Chair Shirish Chotalia dismissed the complaint, writing that "two different service providers cannot be compared to each other."

Mr. Dufresne says the case "is huge because it deals with the human rights and welfare of very vulnerable children living on reserves," adding that "It is a concern for us because it may have an impact on other services such as police, health and education on reserve."

## Legal Help Centre opens its doors

The Legal Help Centre, a joint initiative of the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba has opened its doors to the public. The Centre provides legal information and resources, a drop-in and referral service as well as community workshops addressing specific legal issues.

The Centre, which is located on the University of Winnipeg campus (MacNamara North Building, 380 Spence Street), will offer its services Tuesdays and Fridays from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. For more information please visit [www.legalhelpcentre.ca](http://www.legalhelpcentre.ca)



Ernesto Griffith as Billy Beal.

## Movie "Billy" receives more accolades

"Billy," the movie that chronicles the life of Billy Beal has won the Best Narrative Feature Film at the Winnipeg Reel to Reel Film Festival. The Manitoba Human Rights Commission congratulates Ernesto Griffith and Winston Moxam of Winesto Films Incorporated. Both received the Human Rights

Commitment Award of Manitoba last December for advancing human rights through the arts.

## Guide helps women with disabilities

In celebration of International Women's Day earlier this month, Labour and Immigration Minister Jennifer Howard, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women unveiled a new publication, *Living in Manitoba: A Resource Guide for Women with Disabilities*. It provides information to help women with disabilities find resources, and access programs and services. This resource was developed by Manitoba Status of Women with assistance from the Disabilities Issues Office and the Women with Disabilities Advisory Committee.

## Celebrating Elimination of Racial Discrimination Day

Human rights commissions and agencies across Canada and throughout the world celebrated the United Nations (UN) International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Barbara Hall, President of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies and Chief Commissioner of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, stated that, "Although we have come a long way as a society in dealing with racism and discrimination since 1960, we still have a lot of work to do until we can truly say that we have overcome racism in all its forms. I am delighted that commissions across Canada are marking this day with activities that recognize how important it is to continue fighting discrimination and promoting tolerance and mutual respect for one another."