

Students have far-reaching impact through École H.J. Cody School's Interact Club

For Immediate Release, November 18, 2016: The long list of community projects undertaken by high school students in Sylvan Lake hit a high note recently, when their Interact Co-President was invited onstage with Craig Kielburger at WE Day in Calgary.

"I'm really goal-oriented, and when I challenge myself and reach my goals it's so fulfilling," said Brynne Takhar, a Grade 10 student who among other projects, ensured the continued success of the school-wide recycling program at H.J. Cody. "I think my teachers started to see leadership potential in me when I was in elementary school and they nurtured that. I enjoy volunteering and it's so good that my schools provided opportunities for me to grow in this way. I think I just really like to boss people!"

Brynne is Co-President of the school's Interact Club, along with Jaidra Russell. She had been in touch with Free the Children (organizers of the massive WE Day event) on previous occasions, having looked into some of their awards and opportunities. A few days before the Calgary event last month, organizers contacted H.J. Cody to invite her onstage to speak to 16,000 people.

"I was so scared, but I was determined to sound confident," said Brynne. "Everyone involved was efficient and friendly and I got to see behind the scenes. I have such admiration for Free the Children, and there was so much peer support and warmth from the audience – especially from the H.J. Cody group!"

Students at École H.J. Cody have plenty of opportunity to become involved in community projects – from their own school community to villages overseas. One of the Grade 9-12 school's student leadership initiatives is the Interact Club, the high school division of Rotary Clubs International. The H.J. Cody Interact Club was started by teacher Alana Routhier in 2011. She had been involved with the launch of Interact in other Chinook's Edge schools, and collaborated with peers to set it up in Sylvan. The H.J. Cody Interact Club now has 35 motivated and dedicated members.

"I wanted to get it going because it's such a positive thing and I thought it was important that our students could be exposed to that. There were great students here who got really excited about the idea," said Alana. "Sylvan is a very active community and people also began approaching us to get involved in their projects. Now our students are busy volunteering in the community throughout the year and I'm happy to volunteer my own time, because I noticed right away that it's energizing. It gets students engaged in the community, and helps develop their confidence and a host of other positive skills. We have amazing students who have stepped up with huge ideas to tackle."

École H.J. Cody is now involved with a large number of initiatives, from a development project in Uganda to providing face-painting in their home community on Canada Day – and everything in between. The school has been involved with WE Day since the first year of Interact, and the association keeps students motivated all year. WE Day organizers extend a number of invitations to schools to attend the event, based on their number of volunteer hours. This year, École H.J. Cody was invited to send an impressive 47 students to WE Day.

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