

Elmwood High hosts climate change forum

By: Sheldon Birnie

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Last week, students in Elmwood had climate change on the brain.

On Dec. 5, over 150 students from 32 schools across Manitoba assembled at Elmwood High School for the Arctic Climate Change Youth Forum (ACCYF).



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Dec. 5, 2016 -Shaelie Nilles (left) and Zainab Kagbanda are Grade 12 Elmwood High School students who helped organize the Arctic Climate Change Youth Forum at the school. (SHELDON BIRNIE/CANSTAR/THE HERALD)

"We were really honoured to be asked to host," Elmwood High School principal Michael Babb said.

A biannual event, the ACCYF was scheduled in conjunction with an international meeting of scientists organized by ArcticNet.

"Our main goal is to highlight some of the current research programs being done in the Arctic, and bring awareness of climate change in the Arctic," said Michelle Watts, program co-ordinator with Schools on Board, an ArcticNet outreach program based out of the University of Manitoba.

The day-long forum was packed with learning opportunities. Keynote addresses were delivered by the University of Manitoba's Dr. David Barber, Canada Research Chair in Arctic System Science, and Andrea Brazeau, a 19-year-old Inuk student from Kangiqsualujuaq, Que.

Students broke off into smaller groups for hands-on workshops took place throughout the day, while a panel discussion about the effects of climate change on northern living capped the forum off.

"The planning for this event started last year," said Shaelie Nilles, a Grade 12 student at Elmwood.

"We started in class, learning about climate change," added Zainab Kagbanda, also in Grade 12 at Elmwood. "Here, we're able to be more hands on, to learn more about it."

Students interested in sustainability at Elmwood High School meet regularly to discuss and plan projects for the school. Since April, their main focus has been on getting the ACCYF off the ground.

"Students have been involved in all the workshops, all the logistics and promotions," said Jenna Forslund, a teacher at Elmwood involved with the school's sustainability group. "They're really the ones organizing it. It's a huge dedication on their part."

Both Nilles and Kagbanda were involved in organizing logistics for the ACCYF.

"We had to set up all the signage, had to get up early to be here on our day off," Nilles said. "But we're having a lot of fun, we're learning new things."

Nilles and Kagbanda were able to take part in a couple workshops between their organizing duties.



Dec. 5, 2016 - Andrea Brazeau, a 19-year-old Inuk student from Kangiqsualujjuaq, Quebec was a keynote speaker at the Arctic Climate Change Youth Forum held at Elmwood [High School](#) . (SHELDON BIRNIE/CANSTAR/THE HERALD)



Dec. 5, 2016 - Jenna Forslund, a teacher at Elmwood [High School](#) , helped students organize the Arctic Climate Change Youth Forum. (SHELDON BIRNIE/CANSTAR/THE HERALD)

"The first workshop we did (was about) sea ice," Nilles said. "Our presenters ... talked about drilling into ice, how thick ice can be, the organisms that live under the ice. We got to look at some of their equipment. That was really neat."

"Our second workshop was about traditional knowledge," Kagbanda said. "The presenters explained how climate change was affecting things up north."

"They showed us traditional wear, stuff that keeps them warm," Nilles added. "They were teaching us new words (in Inuk), too."

First-hand accounts and hands-on experience go a long way towards understanding climate change. Forslund recently had an opportunity to see the Arctic up close herself.

In September, Forslund spent two weeks travelling the Northwest Passage on the CCGS *Amundsen*, a former icebreaker turned research ship, as part of Schools on Board's annual science expedition to the Arctic. Forslund called the experience "amazing" and "life changing."

"It was definitely a unique opportunity which has changed my whole scope on teaching, how I want to promote action and awareness in school," she said.

The ACCYF was part of that, providing participants with unique insights into a global issue. Forslund is hopeful students will build off the lessons learned at the forum.

"The conference might be over today," said Forslund. "But it's the beginning of so many projects that we're going to be taking on in the near future. Whatever projects we do, we want it to be student-led."

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