



Here in Canada 'September' is always synonymous with, and always accompanied by, 'Back to School' scenarios. One special school, Mary Ward Catholic Secondary School, is known internationally because of its uniqueness as a 'centre for self directed learning.' Students are indirectly taught to take initiatives and to make the right choices in life, by studying and scheduling in a way that works best for each. A whole article could be written to illustrate how this 'way of proceeding' is a most singular experience and how it is lived out in the lives of the individual students and teachers alike. Mary Ward has a strong justice component incorporated into their school schedule. **United Social Justice (USJ)** is an umbrella group to which the school's five individual justice groups belong. Cathy Schwan is the teacher on staff who oversees the work of the five groups. In the following report she kindly explains who the groups are and how they function.

From Cathy Schwan

The reason we formed an umbrella group was because we had found that the groups were in competition with one another for student audience/awareness and also for student funds. I suggested the idea of USJ so that all groups would feel that they were part of a greater whole and also so that the groups would work together for the greater good rather than against one another. USJ meets once per month while the other five groups meet once per week.

USJ meetings consist of each group reporting to all what projects/initiatives their groups are working on and what the other groups can do to help. USJ organizes at least two major projects per school year in which all members can participate (for example: a habitat for humanity building day, street patrol, etc). USJ also hosts guest speakers, such as Engineers Without Borders and Five Minutes to Midnight as well as work shops on public speaking, petition writing, etc.

Each of the five groups has one week per school year during which they focus on education, awareness and fundraising for their issue(s). These dates are published in the student agenda so that everyone is aware of the dates and no other group will schedule anything during another groups' time.

The five groups and their mandates are as follows:

Free the Children meets Mondays at lunch and follows the mandate of the Keilburger's Free the Children Chapter which helps with education and medical funding for Free the Children Projects around the globe. They do this by raising awareness, running a Saturday Car Wash, knitting, selling scarves and participating in the Brick by Brick campaign where they sell symbolic bricks and the money is then used to build a school.

Our Kids Our Future (OKOF) meets Tuesdays at lunch This is a home grown group co founded by Joshua Liu and his brother Jerome. The main goal is the eradication of child poverty across Canada. The group does this through education and awareness campaigns. A postcard signing was sent to Paul Martin, Canada's then Prime Minister. The School to School Banner Campaign (the one you saw at Nathan Phillips Square), was an expression of OKOF's participation in the World Vision Make Poverty History Campaign.

This group also sits on the board of Campaign 2000.



The group sold t-shirts and was able to present the Star Santa Claus Fund with \$2000 and the MTCEF breakfast program with a \$250 donation. The banner campaign was extremely well organized and finally ended up hanging in Mayor David Miller's office window for Canada Day celebrations (1 July). Then it was sent off to Ottawa to be presented to Prime Minister Harper before the G 8 Summit. The group is also working on a self contained workshop package/presentation that could be used by groups in other schools to raise awareness about child poverty in Canada.

Green Quest meets Wednesdays at lunch. This is the Environmental

group. They are involved in education and awareness and are raising money to build a green roof on our school. Fundraising initiatives included selling green ribbons and water bottles with the Mary Ward Logo. They do pond clean ups, school yard clean ups and organize earth day activities such as planting trees, garbage free lunches etc. This group is also involved in the Ministry of Education's "ecoschool project" which aims at reducing energy consumption and promoting energy conservation in schools.

Amnesty International meets Thursdays at lunch. It follows the mandate of Amnesty International petitions and letter writing to free those unjustly imprisoned around the globe.

Women's Issues Group meets Fridays at lunch. It is involved in awareness and education around issues facing women especially those who are marginalised by society. The group sold roses to raise money for Julia's Place (Shelter for Women). Two students from the group gave a presentation on Julia's Place for The Young Philanthropists Program sponsored by the Toskon Foundation and won \$5,000 to donate to Julia's Place.

Joshua Liu, to whom I presented a Loretto Bursary at his recent high school graduation, sent me the following report on how he and his brother have been actively engaged in 'Making Poverty History.'

Canadian Youth Strive to 'Make Poverty History'

By Jerome Liu and Joshua Liu



Ever since 1992, the United Nations declared October 17 as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Our Kids Our Future, a social justice group at Mary Ward Catholic Secondary School that engages youth in addressing child poverty in Canada, decided to take action and raise awareness about ending poverty worldwide. By lunch on October 17, 2005, Mary Ward C.S.S. was draped in white, the official colour of the international Make Poverty History campaign. A 120-foot banner was hung along each side of the school roof like a white band, along with a 10-foot banner above the school entrance that read "Make Poverty History" in English and French. Various students and staff could be seen wearing bright orange "Make Poverty History" T-shirts. Other students were wearing white uniform tops in support of the event. At lunch, Our Kids Our Future members operated a booth, encouraging students and staff to sign over 500 official Make Poverty History post cards that were sent directly to former Prime Minister Paul Martin, asking him to commit to the goals of the Make Poverty History campaign. Yet on October 17, Our Kids

Our Future and Mary Ward C.S.S. were not alone. For months, the youth group had been collaborating with other schools to try to find a way to get more involved. In partnership with Campaign 2000, Our Kids Our Future launched the School2School initiative, a national resource tool endorsed by the Canadian Make Poverty History campaign to encourage and aid schools in raising awareness about global poverty. The School2School project successfully engaged five other high schools in Ontario and New Brunswick to run similar events on October 17, 2005.

After this successful event, the students remained full of excitement, and looked for other ways to get more Canadian schools and youth involved with School2School and the Make Poverty History campaign. One of our members, Jason Lee Pack, learned about the Make Poverty History U2 Fan Banner campaign that was being organized by Blake of afanspurpose.com. This U2 Fan Banner was being signed by thousands of Canadians across Canada in support of Make Poverty History's goals.

Inspired by Blake's initiative, the youth of School2School decided to start a Make Poverty History banner to be signed by youth and school communities across Canada, to show the Canadian government that our youth are passionate about Canada taking a leadership role in addressing global poverty. With the help of Blake, School2School achieved an exact replica of his banner, and the School2School Make Poverty History Student Banner Tour was born.

Since November 2005, the School2School Banner has travelled to over thirty-three schools and three universities. Many of these schools are home to Toronto, but several of them are even from Lindsay, Ontario and Hamilton Ontario. Part of the banner campaign included an extensive thirteen-school tour of Hamilton organized by Linda Lannigan. In less than a year, the School2School Make Poverty History Student Banner has reached the lives of thousands of students in Southern Ontario. The banner even received interest from schools located in both the East and West coasts, showing that youth support of the Make Poverty History campaign is nationwide.



With thousands of student signatures on the School2School Make Poverty History banner, the group plans to present the banner to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, to show him that Canada's "greatest resource" is urging him to make ending global poverty one of Canada's top priorities.

For the first time in history, we as a global society have the resources necessary to end the most extreme forms of poverty. The actions we take and the choices we make in the next five years will have an astronomical impact on the way our world will look a hundred years from now. We have a responsibility to ourselves and

to the rest of mankind to take action in this pivotal time of our day and age. Our youth know this and have recognized that the time for change is now.

Jerome Liu and Joshua Liu are the Co-Founders of Our Kids Our Future – a youth organization tackling child poverty in Canada.

For more information: <http://www.ourkidsourfuture.org> and

<http://www.school2school.net>

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Postscript

Beginning September 06 Joshua Liu will be attending York University in Toronto enrolled in Biomedical Sciences. He affirms that he will continue to be actively involved in the fight against domestic child poverty through the organization Campaign 2000 Youth Action Committee. I hope you enjoy the photos.

Doryne Kirby, IBVM