

## Northwest Students Attend National Leadership Convention

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Eleven students from the Northwest School Division travelled to Newfoundland recently to take part in the 27<sup>th</sup> Canadian Student Leadership Conference. Students Beth Nerbas and Cortney Maier from Maidstone High School, Travis Hall, Shalane Down, Janayea Benko and Taylor Beamish from Lashburn High School, joined Turtleford Community School's Kennedy Lundberg and Sydney Lake and Carpenter High's Caia Chiverton, Denika Friedrich and Samantha Rowland for the national conference in Corner Brook at the end of September. They were accompanied by staff advisors Jordan Hansen and Megan Gerwing from Meadow Lake, and Don Wheler and Gordon Rook from Lashburn.

The Northwest students spent four days with around 1000 other students and staff advisors from all over Canada participating in activities, attending workshops, listening to superb keynote speakers, and soaking up the warm and welcoming culture of western Newfoundland.

"We left on the 26<sup>th</sup> and flew through the night, arriving at the airport in Deer Lake around noon on the 28<sup>th</sup>," said student Beth Nerbas. "The welcome was amazing – there was a big bus and a crowd of people dressed in red helped us with our luggage and getting onto the bus."

"We pulled up on the bus in Corner Brook and there was this sea of people in red jumping up and down and clapping," said Kennedy Lundberg. "As we walked through the crowd they were cheering and yelling and it was scary and cool at the same time."

"It was surreal," said Sydney Lake.

"We met in our provincial room and all of us received our provincial shirts," said Nerbas.

"Then we broke into spirit groups with two or three people from each province in them – kids from all across Canada – you'd sit with your spirit group for the keynote sessions and meet with them quite a few times a day as well," said Lake. "It was a great way to meet new people."

In addition to the over 75 workshop sessions and seminars that were available to the students, the keynote speakers for the conference included artist and activist Chantal Kreviazuk, former Newfoundland premier Danny Williams, Canadian Forces General Rick Hillier, Professor and mountaineer Dr. T.A. Loeffler, Toronto Raptors announcer Herbie Kuhn, author and leadership mentor Justin Boudreau, and the former Canadian Junior team and Washington Capital captain, and presently Montreal Canadian, Ryan Walter.

"The Toronto Raptors announcer Herbie Kuhn was really loud and knew how to get the crowd into it," said Nerbas, "I liked him, and I also liked the message that Chantal Kreviazuk delivered. She spoke about her activities outside of her singing career and about her social activism and how she learned from her life experiences. It was very inspirational."

“Rick Hillier spoke about leadership in tough situations,” said Lundberg, “and about optimism and how lucky we are to live in Canada,” Lake chimed in. “He said that a balanced leader needs to be both tough and optimistic at the same time – mentally and physically tough and able to handle the situations that come, but looking forward to the future and seeing the bright side when things aren’t going well.” “He also spoke about how you need to be inspired by your followers and inspire them in return,” Lundberg finished.

The student pairs of Lake and Lundberg and Beamish and Nerbas each delivered a workshop session on the Northwest Leadership Academy to delegates. The students also enjoyed the wealth of presentations – including sessions on leadership styles, healthy schools, how global issues impact us, setting personal and intellectual goals, and the art of overcoming. On the last day all of the delegates performed a service project within the community – cleaning up walking trails, establishing a community garden and other projects.

All of the students commented on the kindness and warmth of their host families, noting that many of the best learning experiences came from meeting and sharing with students from across the country. “I made friends with kids from Quebec, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Alberta,” noted Nerbas.

After the day’s activities the hosts provided wonderful entertainment experiences for the delegates. “The first night,” said Lake, “were the opening ceremonies, and although we were tired and jet-lagged, we were still jumping up and down and sharing in the enthusiasm and fun. There was a hypnotist one night and a traditional Newfoundland kitchen party on another.”

“We got to listen to a lot of Newfoundland artists,” said Kennedy, “a lot of traditional music. There was always an accordion and a fiddle. We got really good at jigging.” (Author’s note: Kennedy was referring to the art of dancing a jig and not the art of fishing for squid).

Following the conference some of the students spent a day touring Gros Morne National Park and the Norse Point lighthouse before returning home.

“I went because I wanted to learn more about leadership,” Nerbas said reflectively. “I learned new ways to meet people, and how to stand up and be confident in front of people. I brought back a lot of information and activities that I can use in school and in our SRC. It made me want to be more involved. The conference was the best experience that I’ve ever had. I met more people in 4 or 5 days than I’ve met in a long time. Corner Brook did a great job hosting and the fall colours, the hills and the colourful houses were perfect.”

“We are so lucky,” said Lake, “to have the Leadership Academy and a school division that is so behind us, that wants us to take advantage of all these opportunities that are out there, and that provides us with the information and support that we need to get out there and do these amazing things.”



The photograph was taken by Sydney Lake and shows, from left to right, Janayea Benko, Beth Nerbas, Cortney Maier, Shalane Down, Travis Hall, Taylor Beamish, Kennedy Lundberg, and two unidentified students.