

Local student returns from national conference ready to make an Impact

Wolfville, Nova Scotia, CANADA; September 18th, 2011 – The second edition of a conference that brought 165 Canadian students together with sustainability experts from business, non-governmental organizations and academia wrapped up today with a commitment from participants to use their knowledge, skills and passion to build a more sustainable world. IMPACT! Youth Conference for Sustainability Leadership was a unique four-day event held in Guelph, Ontario, where students formulated ideas for more sustainable practices geared to ten systems including energy, water, food and transportation. The Conference was attended by Kelli Ashley Armstrong, a Bahamian student at Acadia University in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada.

“The IMPACT! Conference was the most incredible thing I have experienced in my college life. It was so enlightening to hear sustainability veterans talk about their various experiences over the years and to give encouraging words. It was also reassuring to be around so many young bright people with similar visions of a sustainable future, who are willing to work together and mentor each other. Overall, it was a truly motivational experience and I left the Conference inspired to change the world, more than before.”

To help students make an impact in their communities and on their campuses, Kathy Bardswick, President and CEO of The Co-operators announced a further \$75,000 for The Co-operators Foundation – IMPACT! Fund. This fund has already given \$88,685 to support sustainability projects undertaken by alumni of the inaugural conference, held in 2009. The new funding will be available to support both 2009 and 2011 conference alumni.

“Before I left the Conference, I made a public pledge to take advantage of all programs available to me as an Environmental Science student, as well as through my position on Student Representative Council to help create more awareness about sustainability issues in an effort to get the Acadia community more involved in being an active part of the sustainability movement. At Acadia University, we already have an Environment & Sustainability office that operates under the Acadia Students’ Union. I will be working closely with them over the next year along with my Conference comrade, Monica Reed, to ensure that Acadia progresses with this exciting development. There are a lot of ideas to be developed; among them is a sustainability workshop to inform those in the Acadia community not only about environmental issues, but also economic and social sustainability issues.”

At the beginning of the conference, it was also announced that IMPACT! alumni will fill 4 of twelve internship positions at the David Suzuki Foundation that are being sponsored by The Co-operators over the next four years.

“The 2009 conference showed us just how driven, committed and innovative these young people are when it comes to sustainability,” Bardswick said. “And the new crop of participants this year was equally impressive. We’re excited to be able to bring them together, to further their skills and knowledge, and to provide financial support to help them achieve their goals.”

More than 850 students applied to the program. Participants were chosen from a variety of fields of study, perspectives and geography to ensure a diverse and multi-disciplinary approach. Prior to coming together at the host University of Guelph, each student completed approximately twenty-five hours of study.

The conference included two inspirational keynote addresses. David Suzuki, award-winning scientist, environmentalist and broadcaster, and co-founder of the David Suzuki Foundation, set the tone by outlining the challenges the younger generation faces in addressing ecological challenges.

Jonathan Glencross, an alumnus of the 2009 conference, showed students they can make a difference at their schools and in their communities. His initiative, the Sustainable McGill Project, had the mission of integrating sustainability into the culture, curriculum and operations of the university. The project, which received funding from the IMPACT! Fund, was very successful and led to the creation of McGill's Office for Sustainability, and a Rethink Your Curriculum student engagement initiative.

Other speakers included experts in community engagement, networking and activism, poverty, ethics, business, government and the media relations, innovation and leadership, and people management. More information can be found at www.impactyouthsustainability.ca.

IMPACT! The Co-operators Youth Program for Sustainability Leadership is a partnership with the David Suzuki Foundation, The Natural Step Canada, the University of Guelph, the University of Saskatchewan Centre for the Study of Co-operatives, Wilfrid Laurier University, Lambton College, Conseil de la coopération de l'Ontario, AIESEC, and the Network for Business Sustainability.

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