

Career centre celebrates Onkwehón:we culture

JESSICA DEER
THE EASTERN DOOR

As a way to celebrate the diversity of its student population, the NOVA Career Centre launched a new initiative that brought a week of activities to explore Indigenous history, culture and identity.

"We wanted to give our Aboriginal students a chance to be recognized, to feel valued in a really explicit way, to share their culture, share their heritage and talk about some of the issues that they might be facing," said Emilie Bowles, a resource teacher for Aboriginal students at NOVA.

This is the first time the career centre, which is located in Chateauguay, organized this type of event.

"Last year, we kind of did something in conjunction with Billings, because they usually have an Aboriginal Culture Week celebration, but this year we kind of wanted to do our thing," said Bowles.

Bowles said the centre, which is located in Chateauguay, has an Aboriginal student population around 20 percent, with most being Kanien'kehá:ka from Kahnawake.

In addition to celebrating unique culture, history and identity, NOVA's Aboriginal Culture



Students at NOVA Career Centre in Chateauguay got a taste of Kanien'kehá:ka culture at their first annual Aboriginal Culture Week.

Week was also organized to bring awareness to the rest of the student population.

"We really wanted to give our non-Aboriginal students a sense of the different culture, the different issues that Aboriginal communities face in Canada, dispel some of the stereotypes they may have about Aboriginal students," she said.

The weeklong activities

kicked off on April 25 with the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, an interactive way of learning a history many Canadians are not taught.

"We did that to open up the week and to give our non-Aboriginal students a bit of an understanding about the history of relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada," said Bowles.

On Tuesday, Wayne Robinson, a human relations agent at Native Montreal, spoke with students about the role of the Native Friendship Centre and their most recent human rights campaign.

In March, youth at Native Montreal launched a campaign that brought attention to how Indigenous youth in Montreal often face discrimination when

looking for housing.

Robinson said the organization is now using videos that the youth produced with the help of Wapikoni Mobile as a tool to engage other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth, including students at NOVA.

"That was really just a first step. It's really about starting a conversation, so showing some of the videos, having very informal discussions, building that trust with the community," said Robinson.

Other Aboriginal Culture Week activities included a motivation workshop with Konwatsi'tsa:wi Meloche on history and stereotypes, and concluded with a lunch with meat pie, cornbread, strawberry juice, corn soup and Indian tacos.

"We really wanted everybody to be able to get something out of this week and it was incredibly successful, I think everybody really enjoyed it," said Bowles.

"It's going to be an annual tradition now, we said. We're never going back. We want to organize more cultural celebrations too, for all the rest of our students to have a chance to showcase their heritage and what's important to them."

jessicad@easterndoor.com



KEEPERS OF THE EARTH

Giving smokers a kick in the butt

ONAWA K. JACOBS
THE EASTERN DOOR

Cigarette butts are the top discarded waste in the world and if you take one look around our community, you will notice that Kahnawake is no exception.

Flicking a cigarette butt on the ground after smoking has been a long-time, socially-acceptable act, however this laissez-faire attitude about this seemingly small waste is damaging our environment in colossal ways.

Contrary to popular belief, cigarette butts are non-biodegradable. They are made from cellulose acetate – a type of plastic that resembles cotton. After time, the sun's ultraviolet rays do break them down into tinier pieces, however, cigarette filters never completely disintegrate back into the earth.

To make matters worse, cigarette butts carry scores of toxic chemicals and heavy metals –cadmium, lead, nicotine, arsenic, and copper to name a few – that will find their way into our waterways and soil, and eventually, even our food chain.

Across the globe, approximately six million people die each year from smoking and second-hand smoke, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Birds and aquatic animals are the next victims, ingesting the poisonous waste. Pets, other wildlife and

small children have also been known to eat cigarette butts, causing reactions such as nausea, vomiting, tremors, high blood pressure, seizures and even death.

Not only does cigarette butt litter pose monumental health and environmental concerns, but it also takes a toll economically. Cigarette butts account for an estimated 1.69 billion pounds (or 845,000 tons) of toxic waste each year, which of course, needs to be managed.

One major US city estimated that \$11 million is spent annually in cleaning up; money that could very well be used in more appropriate venues such as education or health care.

So what are the solutions to this growing problem?

For smokers:

Ideally, environmentalists and your loved ones want you to quit smoking, however if that isn't in your immediate plans, at minimum be responsible for your own waste.

Look for cigarette butt receptacles and if there aren't any available design your own 'Plan B' by carrying a small plastic container (i.e. a pill bottle) or purchase a pocket ashtray (they come in a myriad of designs, colours and concepts).

Properly dispose of your butts when you get the chance.

For organizations, schools and businesses:

The easiest way to reduce cigarette butt waste around your place of work or school is to increase the availability of butt receptacles. Low-cost, functional and visually-appealing options are available online in free-standing and wall-mounted units to fit your budget and the look of your building.

Another way to increase awareness of the toxicity of cigarette butt litter is by placing informational signage in smoking areas. Easy to create "did you know?" type of posters can be made by your students, communications staff or anyone with a little bit of Microsoft Office skills.

For everyone else:

You don't have to go through extreme measures to help with this growing problem. Talk to your friends or co-workers who smoke and share some information to get them thinking about their littering habits - and what they can do to change.

As Onkwehón:we people, we were given tobacco as a traditional medicine and have since used it to our advantage spiritually and certainly economically. With that gift also came the social responsibility to ethically manage its by-products and waste, especially within our own communities.