

# IT'S ABOUT RESPECT. | A HISTORY OF THE INITIATIVE

## THE IMPETUS

In the spring of 2006, incidents of inappropriate, disrespectful behaviour (swearing, racist talk, sexual jokes, bullying, etc.) were being informally reported to the counselling department, to professors and to the student unions. Students were also giving the message that they didn't want to challenge the behaviour for fear of reprisal or being targeted themselves.

Anecdotal reports from professors and managers indicated that inappropriate behaviour was on the increase and it appeared to be "normalized"... students just tolerated it, and didn't expect that it could change.

In June, 2006 a meeting of interested faculty, students, administration, and support staff was convened to share experiences and get a sense of how widespread these issues were being experienced. If anything, the consensus was that inappropriate behaviour was worse than originally thought. These discussions revealed a widely held view that we needed to do more as a community to address how people treat each other.

The Respect Campaign was born out of a desire to do something in the short term, to essentially put the issue of respectful behaviour on the radar.

## CONCEPTION

Jim Lees, Coordinator of the Counselling at the time brought some ideas to Alicia Scott and Thomas Russell who were working as summer students at the campus residence. Doris Quistberg, Manager of the Residence, a long-time advocate of the need to "build community" at the 229 person residence, was excited about this campus-wide project and volunteered the services of the students, both very skilled in art, multimedia, design and marketing.

The original suggestion was simply to build a campaign on the word RESPECT. Four days later the students had created a collection of more than a dozen posters, as well as a button, a name tag hanger and a lanyard design. All were prototyped and ready to go. After some fine tuning and informal feedback sessions with various stakeholders around the college, the Respect Campaign was pitched to the senior management team and was enthusiastically endorsed. A modest budget was struck. The campaign would be rolled out in six weeks!

## ROLLOUT

The campaign was presented in concept on August 28, 2006 to the Confederation College faculty at the Faculty Welcome Back Session. All faculty (and over about a week, all staff) were provided with a button, a tag hanger, a "why card" and what we called a Learning Guide which explained the philosophy of the initiative. Faculty were asked to do three things; to wear a button if they were comfortable; to discuss student rights and responsibilities and to foster discussion about respect during the full day orientation (and during the school year). A series of fourteen Respect posters were placed in all College buildings and regional campuses during the school year. The posters depicted current or former students and staff, not models, and were representative of a broad spectrum of constituent groups which our students were able to identify with. It was hoped the posters will help set a tone about appropriate behaviour and to help give permission for people to speak up when disrespect is shown.

A coordinator was hired part-time to facilitate a series of classroom presentation and to operationalize the campaign. During the first two months of school classroom presentations were delivered to over 50% of

the student body. The campaign was officially launched to the media and community in November of 2006 during College Week.

#### MEASURING SUCCESS

In addition to student surveys and focus groups, the question “Does the Respect Campaign create a positive learning environment at Confederation College?” was asked on the 2007 and 2008 KPI (Key Performance Indicator) surveys by Confederation College. At the end of the 2006-07 year, 48% of respondents answered yes. At the conclusion of the second year of the campaign in 2008, 64% responded affirmatively.

We believe several factors account for this increase.

In the second year of the campaign, 95% of all programs received presentations on Respect and Student Rights and Responsibilities in a core subject class. (in a classroom with one of the students’ core teachers). The second year of the campaign also saw us conduct departmental presentations with 80% of staff departments (i.e. the Registrar’s Office, the Bookstore, Accounting). As well, SUCCI, the Student Union of Confederation College, passionately supported the campaign by piloting a new position called Wellness and Diversity Programmer. The portfolio of this position included responsibility for the Respect Campaign which provided continuity to both the message and the momentum of the campaign.

Focus groups in the second year of the campaign basically indicated that students saw the Respect Campaign as a beneficial and established part of the college culture. Their feedback has guided the development of Respect’s third year; a greater focus on skill building and on bystander education.

#### SHARING THE WORD, AND THE FUTURE

At the invitation of several conferences, groups and agencies, the campaign has spread to seven different community colleges, nine different conferences including NISOD (National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development) in Texas and CACUSS (Canadian Association of College and University Student Services) in Saskatoon, and to many different institutions and organizations including the City of Thunder Bay Department of Recreation and Culture and the Lakehead Public Schools.

We have also partnered with the City of Thunder Bay, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre, Fort Frances O.P.P. and many other organizations and colleges across the province to help them to build and foster respect. initiatives in their own communities.

In the last decade since the inception of respect, it has become a permeating thread through all areas of the college. Now entering its 10<sup>th</sup> year, the initiative has once again undergone a visual refresh, focusing on making respect. an active part of your life, with the slogan “give it. live it.”

An advisory group has monitored and guided the progress of the campaign since its inception. Among other challenges, the group will be developing measures to determine the nature of the impact of the It’s About Respect on the Confederation College community. Funding has been granted to continue the development of this initiative for the future.