

# Wellness Symposium at Nelson Mandela High School

## January 11, 2017

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This fall Nelson Mandela High School received a wellness grant from the University of Alberta and Alberta Health. As a result, the wellness committee developed a wellness survey for staff and students to determine what the schoolwide needs were in regards to wellness issues. Based on the results of the survey, a wellness symposium was planned for the entire school.

The committee tried its best to give students and staff choices in terms of sessions to attend at the symposium. This was an ideal way to encourage students and staff to attend sessions that are both meaningful and of relevance.

The symposium commenced with our first keynote address by Walter MacDonald Whitebear, an Aboriginal singer/songwriter /storyteller who got the audience to reflect on its own journey and challenges. Walter was able to connect to the audience by sharing his journey as a young aboriginal person living in poverty, and the challenge of alcoholism that devastated his entire family and community. Walter still left the audience with a message of hope in that he said “you can’t allow the sad things that have happened to you define the rest of your life”. We must rise to the challenge and accept what has happened to us and draw strength from the circumstances that we have endured.

Within the course of the day, the symposium hosted over 45 professional presenters that presented on such issues such as: financial management, eating healthy, active living, anti-bullying/anti-racism, sexual health, healthy relationships etc. The staff and students were able to attend their choice of two sessions during the morning and afternoon.

To conclude the symposium was our final keynote speaker of the symposium, Constable Paban Dhaliwal.

Constable Dhaliwal explored with the audience the career as a police officer and the challenges that go with it. He was able to make cultural connection with most of our students since we are a diverse school in the heart of a very special community when it comes to multiculturalism.

The feedback from staff/students indicated that overwhelmingly the participants benefited from the wellness symposium in that they were able to learn new strategies and skills that they can use to deal with future challenges.

