

Committee recognized

“Surreal” was how Richard Jurasek described the experience of he and fellow student Rhys Middleton as they received an award on behalf of the School District No. 83 Me to We Student Committee at We Day Vancouver, on November 22 at Roger’s Arena.

“I can only describe the day as surreal,” commented Richard.

The inaugural “Get Doing” award went to SD83’s student committee for its work globally and locally. It was presented by Vancouver Mayor Kennedy Stewart at We Day, an event that brings together speakers, activists, philanthropists and students to celebrate those committed to giving back to the community and others in need.

The two pointed out the award belongs to the entire district team and to all students who support Toonie Tuesday as their work allows the district committee to support the local and global causes. Through the committee’s leadership organizing annual fundraisers, students and staff have raised more than \$140,000 over the years to support both local and global causes.

“It’s really a massive collaboration of everyone in the district to help a bigger cause. It shows how each person’s actions, working together, can have a huge impact,” said Rhys.

Richard described being at We Day Vancouver as high energy. “It makes you feel good. Everyone is excited to be there. Everyone wants to take action.”



Richard Jurasek and Rhys Middleton with the district committee’s Get Doing award.

“It’s a big, enthusiastic group of like-minded individuals,” added Rhys, who has attended every year since Grade 6, since he became part of the SD83 Me to We Committee. “I’ve never seen anything quite like it.”

The two said the event really focused on mental health this year and both indicated that Sophie Grégoire Trudeau’s talk on mental wellness was one of the highlights and very thought-provoking. This year was a very different experience for the two Grade 12 students as, after their bus being held up by accidents on the road to Roger’s Arena, the two, and sponsor Wendy Woodhurst, were whisked away to the Green Room

to be prepared to go on stage rather than going with the other 150 SD83 students out to the general seating area. “From the nosebleed section in Grade 9 to backstage in Grade 12,” laughed Richard.

An omelette chef, handlers to powder their faces and prepare them to go on, and being surrounded by some impressive people made the morning a little surreal. They said they were sitting chatting with someone on one of the couches and it turned out to be Vancouver Mayor Kennedy Stewart, who they all found out a bit later, was actually the one presenting the award to them.

Rhys and Richard had been prepared to speak about the work of

the district committee but unfortunately, the event was running behind schedule, and they didn't get the opportunity.

Richard said when he started with the SD83 Me to We Committee in Grade 9 he was quiet and shy. He said being part of the group has not only helped him help others but has developed his own leadership skills and given him the opportunity to be part of We Day Vancouver. Rhys was in Grade 6 when he started and has stayed on the entire time!

The District 83 Student Me to We Committee has been operating since 2006. Following the "Me to We" philosophy, the committee is 'for youth, by youth'. Looking ahead, Principal Wendy Woodhurst, who sponsors the committee, said she panics a little when her Grade 12 members graduate. "Every year I panic when I think about losing members like Richard and Rhys. But they do such a good job of mentoring the other students that each year I'm grateful to have a new Richard and Rhys, who also go on to do such a good job."

Woodhurst explains the committee is run by the student representatives and each meeting is chaired by a different student. Not only does the committee decide which global project to support, the committee also discusses each local application and decides whether to partially or fully fund the request which are available to interested schools in the district.

The two explain the committee has a thumbs up, thumbs down, thumbs horizontal method. Up means support, down means opposed and horizontal means the committee member would like further information before making a decision.

Sometimes at first an application might not get much support and then after additional information it gets full support. Over their years on the committee, Rhys and Richard comment there have been many great local projects and they are looking forward to seeing this year's proposals in January.

Committee members also go out to all the schools before Toonie Tuesday and talk about the impact youth helping youth can have and what Toonie Tuesday has allowed students to support. Woodhurst credits the success of Toonie Tuesday to the presentations made by the student committee members in addition to the excellent work of teachers and students in schools. Each school has their own unique way of fundraising; from WaterWalks to gigantic toonies, to sabotaging other classes in friendly competition!

Students are selected for the Me to We Committee by leadership teachers in each of the district's middle and secondary schools. These students are recognized as being outstanding leaders and most commit to the group from middle school right through to graduation.

Over the year student leaders rotate the committee chair position and work as a team to make excellent decisions, comments Woodhurst who sponsors the committee.

The 2018 committee includes returning members Maddison Coombs, Keeya Corbett, Destaney Dean, Katie Findlay, Brynn Gowen, Andrew Hall, Richard Jurasek, Rhys Middleton, Brody Mitchell, Sebastian Nyeste, Chris Ollinger, Haleigh Parker, Taylor Parker, Sunny Pickup, Ethan Pyle and Fiona Young. This year, the committee is welcoming Maddison Collins from A.L. Fortune, Lauren Williams from CEMS and is looking for new representatives from Len Wood Middle School and Eagle River Secondary to add to the group (contact school leadership teacher or school principal if interested).

The district also, through Me to We, takes part in service learning tours (every second March) to allow those interested to travel to developing countries, build a school, learn about the culture and develop personal leadership skills. In 2019 there is a trip to Tanzania organized by Lisa Coombs-Smith, teacher at Highland Park Elementary. This trip, as with previous trips to Ghana, rural China and Ecuador, allows students to see their toonies in action in villages adopted by the committee. For students who participate the opportunity to see the difference SD 83 makes is life changing.