

Manitoba Humanist

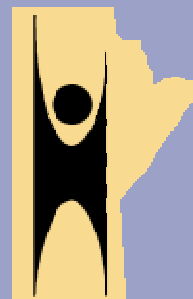


*"We may have
different religions,
different
languages,
different colored
skin, but we all
belong to one
human race."*

- Kofi Annan, 7th
Secretary General of
the United Nations

Published by and for the
Humanist Association of
Manitoba

*"We are beyond
belief"*



www.mb.humanists.ca

April Meeting – Amnesty International

The speaker at our April Monthly Meeting is **Alison Etter**, from Amnesty International.

Alison's talk is entitled "Be a Voice of Hope: promoting human rights in Canada and around the world".

She'll be talking about the history and mission of Amnesty International, how individual members of Amnesty International can make a real difference in the lives of those whose human rights are being violated, as well as their latest campaign – "Demand Dignity" – which aims to end the human rights abuses that drive and deepen poverty.

Amnesty International has been around since 1961, and it now has more than 2.2 million members and subscribers in more than 150 countries and regions.

Their main mission is to improve human rights through campaigning and international solidarity.

There are many ways you can help out this worthy organization, including making a donation, joining Amnesty International and taking action.

Find them on the web at:
www.amnesty.org

See page 5 for meeting details.



*April 22, 2010 is the
40th Anniversary of
Earth Day*

HAM'S MARCH MEETING – THE ROOTS OF EMPATHY

Which age group demonstrates the highest level of physical aggression?

- a) 2 – 3 years
- b) 6 – 11 years
- c) 12 – 17 years
- d) 18 – 35 years

If you attended last month's meeting with Leanne Boyd, the local director of the Roots of Empathy program, you'd know the correct answer is a), children from 2 to 3 years old.

From statistics regarding toddlers, 70% of children between 2 and 3 years old hit other children, more than 70% will take a desired object from another by force, and a quarter of children will bite others.

But just as natural aggression is controlled and reduced by appropriate parenting, so, too, is our in-born ability for empathy enhanced through experience-based brain development. Experiences increase or decrease a person's level of empathy, and each experience of empathy creates new connections in the brain.

Since Roots of Empathy was introduced in Manitoba in 2000, approximately 25,000 schoolchildren in our province have participated in the program, while almost 500,000 children have gone through the program across Canada, New Zealand, the USA and Europe.

The program involves 9 school visits from local parents and their infant, once a month throughout the school year. The schoolchildren really bond with "their" baby throughout the year.

And while the stories and anecdotes about the changes in children's behavior are striking, the proof rests in the data that's already been gathered. Teachers rate students' behavior, both at the beginning of the year and at the end. And there have been at least two randomized controlled trials already conducted. Those results include:

- Increased helping behaviour in up to 78% of students
- Increased peer acceptance in up to 74% of students
- Increased perspective-taking in up to 71% of students
- Increased sharing in up to 69% of students
- Increased pro-social behaviour in up to 65% of students
- Decreased social aggression in up to 39% of students

So far, positive changes in behaviour have been maintained at the three year follow up. In the future, Roots of Empathy intends to continue monitoring the data through other tangible results such as graduation rates and rates of teenage pregnancies.

IRAN SOLIDARITY



We recently learned about the efforts of a tireless crusader for human rights, Maryam Namazie.

Maryam is a rights activist, commentator and broadcaster. She is the Campaign Organiser for Iran Solidarity, which was formed in July 2009 to mobilise support and stand with the people of Iran against the Islamic regime of Iran.

She is also spokesperson for Equal Rights Now - Organisation against Women's Discrimination in Iran, the One Law for All Campaign against Sharia Law in Britain and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain. She is also a Central Committee member of the Worker-communist

Party of Iran; co-editor of WPI Briefing; a National Secular Society Honorary Associate and the NSS' 2005 Secularist of the Year award winner.

Maryam is involved with a large number of campaigns against a variety of topics: Sharia law, the Islamic regime in Iran, women's Rights, Children's rights,

These are extremely important issues. There are a couple of examples worth noting:

Our Neda

Neda Agha-Soltan was a 26-year-old Iranian woman who was shot to death on a Tehran street in the unrest that followed the country's disputed election in June 2009. A news report states that although Ms. Agha-Soltan, whom her relatives described as unpolitical, was killed on a quiet street and was not participating in any political rally when she was shot, she became an instant symbol of the anti-government movement when a video of her death was shared on social networking sites.

Right now, Maryam Namazie's organization is holding regular rallies and protests. As their website www.iransolidarity.org.uk states, "We intend to continue these daily acts until June 20, 2010. June 20 will mark the day our lovely Neda was shot dead at a protest in Iran by the Islamic regime's forces. We will be organising mass protests on the day to mark her death and to show our support of the movement in Iran."

Executions

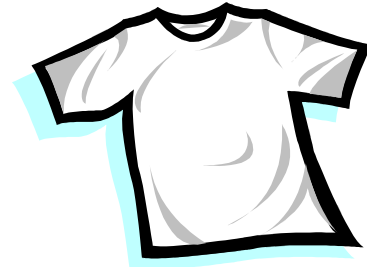
The other specific campaign that came to our attention was to support religious dissenters in Iran, and protest capital punishment. In January, 2010, two men involved in recent protests had been executed by the Islamic regime of Iran for the 'crime' of 'enmity with god'. The two men were Mohammad Reza Ali Zamani and Arash Rahmanipour.

As of February, 2010, Iran was holding 66 political prisoners who had been sentenced to death.

The Iran Solidarity website has a list of things you can do to get involved, such as signing their

petition(s), writing to various government leaders, volunteering your time, holding protests or rallies, or even just learning more about the situation and spreading the word.

CONTEST!!! DESIGN OUR HAM T-SHIRT



Your Goal: create a T-shirt that members of the Humanist Association of Manitoba can wear with pride when volunteering for Habitat for Humanity, donating blood, or just hanging out!

Design Constraints: no more than two colours for the screening, specify the preferred colour of the shirt, no images or quotes used that require permission or licensing, one side only and no arm designs (keeps the cost of making the t-shirts down)

Design Deadline: May 1, 2010.

Method: Submit your design in a standard image format (jpg, gif, pdf) to HumanistAssociationManitoba@yahoogroups.ca. The HAM Executive will pick the winning design and make an announcement later in June.

Your Prize: a free T-shirt with your winning design

The winning design will also be posted on our web site, and orders will be taken for all those wanting to promote HAM by wearing a T-shirt while gardening, teaching, working at a food bank and so on.

So... dust off those colored pencils or start up Photoshop or the Gimp, and send in your design entry!

ARE YOU A SKEPTIC TOO?

"Human beings, who are almost unique in having the ability to learn from the experience of others, are also remarkable for their apparent disinclination to do so."

—Douglas Adams, *Last Chance To See*

Skepticism isn't always popular, and that's quite understandable. No one likes to be told that he or she is mistaken, however gently. People have the unfortunate tendency to take simple critiques of ideas as personal attacks. I'm sure that we've all found ourselves chatting with a Cliff Claven-type at a party, only to be caught between agreeing that aliens built the pyramids, issuing a non-committal "Hmmm," or making an enemy on the spot. The person who runs to Snopes.com every time he or she receives a forwarded email isn't making any friends—but that person *is* performing a valuable community service.

Skepticism isn't popular, but it is important. The critical analysis of evidence and the application of reason and logic have proven time and again to be the only reliable method for sorting truth from falsehood. It seems to me that the pursuit of truth is a laudable goal, and I would like to live in a society that prizes knowledge over ignorance.

"Every society has its own problems. The way to do it, I think, isn't to run away. You have to work at creating your own culture."

—Morrie Schwartz, quoted in *Tuesdays with Morrie*

Skepticism is important, because pseudoscience can be very harmful. Just ask the children who have been injured by unnecessary chelation, by the recent resurgence of measles and mumps thanks to Jenny McCarthy and her ilk, or by the use of prayer instead of medicine.

The Winnipeg Skeptics is a local group dedicated to the promotion of critical thinking and the investigation of paranormal or pseudoscientific claims. If you're interested in contributing to the advancement of science, reason, and critical thought, join us at www.meetup.com/WinnipegSkeptics/.

Editor: Winnipeg Skeptics is a new group. Our aim is to meet on a regular basis, and become active locally. Our next meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 17th, so check out the website for more details.

- Gem Newman

THE ADDICTIONS FOUNDATION OF MANITOBA BLOWS IT

The CBC news reports that a Winnipeg man who is struggling with an addiction to alcohol has taken the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) to task by filing a complaint with the Manitoba Human Rights Commission because they offer no programs for people who not religious.

Its actually true, AFM does not offer any secular programs. As a test of this idea I made a phone call to AFM a few months back and asked for secular treatment "for a friend" where no belief in a higher power is necessary "just good science and medicine".

The lady on the other end of the phone told me that "my buddy" would have to ignore the religious component, raised her voice and made an attempts to make me feel guilty. "don't you want your friend to get better".

I was completely amazed at her lack of professionalism. She was insulted that a person could think "belief in a higher power" was not necessary to recover from an addiction.

CBC reports, *"And just as a person's overall well-being depends on their physical health, it's the same for spiritual considerations, said Laura Goossen, director of the AFM's Winnipeg region. "Spirituality ... is part and parcel of everyone's life. For some people, their spirituality is more important than others, but it's a dimension of all of our lives as human beings," Goossen said. "When they're in ... programming, we do want them to go look for a grain of something that will be helpful for them and disregard the rest," Goossen added."*

Sadly Laura Goossen is ill informed. There are other secular programs available "off the shelf". some of them are SMART Recovery, Secular Organizations for Sobriety (SOS) and Rational Recovery (RR). In only 10 minutes of searching I was able to find them offered in various places in Canada, including Ontario, Vancouver and more.

It appears that Ms Goossen has her head buried in the "spiritual" sand

- Jeff Olsson

FOLLOW UP – POLYGAMY CHARGES IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Last month, we wrote about the case against the polygamist leaders of the FLDS community in Bountiful, British Columbia. In January 2009, the RCMP arrested and charged Winston Blackmore and James Oler with the criminal offence of practicing polygamy.

Well, not only were the charges dropped, but Winston Blackmore is suing the B.C. government for damages arising from what he calls an "unlawful" prosecution.

He claims that the attorney-general's ministry acted in a manner that was "high-handed, arbitrary, reckless, abusive, improper and inconsistent with the honor of the Crown and the administration of justice."

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, April 10, 2010

Monthly Meeting

Location: Prairie Theatre Exchange, Portage Place, Saan Rehearsal Hall

Time: 6:00 p.m.

Speaker: **Alison Etter, from Amnesty International**

Topic: Introduction to Amnesty International

April 22, 2010

Earth Day

Saturday, May 8, 2010

Monthly Meeting

Location: TBA

Speaker/Topic: Stuart Taylor, International Development Enterprises; and Engineers Without Borders

June 21, 2010

World Humanist Day

June, 2010

Annual Summer Solstice Gathering

Date and Location: TBA

Executive:

Jeff Olsson, President
Neil Schipper, Vice President
Helen Friesen, Treasurer
Heather McDonell, Secretary

Members at Large:

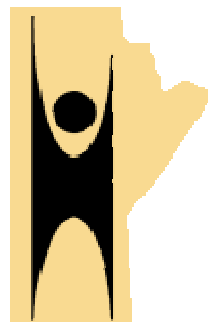
Alain Beaudry
Myrna Donald
Barry Hammond
Donna Harris
Jake Peters
Grant Rogerson
Scott Shabaga
Sophie Shulman
Barrie Webster

Newsletter Editor:
Donna L. Harris
ham_librarian@yahoo.ca

We're on the Web!

See us at:

mb.humanists.ca



Yes, I would like to BECOME A MEMBER of the Humanist Association of Manitoba

New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership \$25.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$45.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____

Postal Code _____

Telephone#: _____ Cell #: _____

Email address: _____

*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

DONATION (Tax receipts issued for all donations of \$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HAM of:

- \$10 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100
- Other: _____

PAYMENT: Cheque Money Order
 Visa Mastercard Amex

Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

Account No. _____

Expiry Date: ____/____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

Please make cheque or money order payable to:
Humanist Association of Manitoba and mail to:
*Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane,
Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.*

Or bring your form and the fees to any HAM meeting and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the executive.