

MindShift Program Overview:

Youth Educating Youth –
Shifting to a Sustainable Culture

September 2009



MindShift is sustainability education and youth leadership program for high school students that involves the development of peer education teams in each high school with the aim to develop knowledge about sustainability and positive environmental attitudes and behaviours among students. MindShift engages young people in a powerful teaching and learning process that inspires action towards more sustainable lifestyles. It was designed in 2007-08 by a team of seven high school students working with the HRM Adventure Earth Centre. This 2-part program specifically addresses outcomes in the sustainability of ecosystems unit of the Atlantic Canada Science 10 curriculum. It uses an interactive approach to engage young people in understanding humanity's role and impact on the earth while identifying how students can reduce their impact on a personal level.

There are two components of MindShift: the presentation, and the events. With the support of an interested teacher, a high school peer education team learns and presents the one-hour presentation to each Science 10 class in their school. The presentation involves a humorous and hard-hitting dramatic approach, an interactive team game and a reflective discussion. The team continues to operate in the school throughout the year planning events to engage the entire student body. The youth leaders encourage students to take specific actions with respect to sustainability at home and/or to work on opportunities through school.

MindShift Outcomes

Participants and youth leaders will...

- be able to explain how their personal lifestyles have important environmental impacts
- explain how a paradigm shift can change scientific worldviews in understanding sustainability
- take step(s) to reduce the impact of their daily activities through refusing, reducing, reusing and recycling.
- increase their appreciation that they can make a difference to the health of the environment
- share their knowledge with others of how individuals' daily activities have important impacts on environmental sustainability.

Youth leaders will...

- strengthen their presentation and drama skills
- gain confidence in presenting to others
- gain skills in working cooperatively with others as part of a team

Team Structure, Training and Resources

There is a designated teacher/facilitator who supports the training, rehearsal and delivery process in each school. The members take the majority of the responsibility with respect to planning and carrying out the events and activities (the teacher plays a support/facilitation role). There is a training video and detailed scripts to enable teams to learn the spaceship and skit elements. In HRM, there are two training days for the high school teams to assist them in learning and appreciating the program.

For further information, please contact: www.earthed.ns.ca/mindshift or

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The 2-Part Program

PRESENTATION	EVENTS
<p>The MindShift one-hour presentation involves a humorous and hard-hitting dramatic approach and a structured discussion:</p> <p>Spaceship in Distress (15 minutes) The presentation begins with the dramatic transformation of the classroom into the deck of the Starship Earth, with 7 astronauts in command. As the ship travels through time from the year 1890, it experiences increasing challenges to its life-support systems: water, atmosphere, terrain, health, and energy. Despite dire warnings, the ship stays on its course and reaches maximum distress in the year 2030, just before it crashes. The purpose of the “Spaceship” is to powerfully engage teens in the magnitude and importance of the environmental problems, so as to emphasize the need for them to take action.</p> <p>Lifestyle Skits (20 minutes) After the crash, there is a quick transition back to “real life”. The actors present a series of humorous, youth-friendly skits that translate the large environmental problems into actions applicable to the lives of teens. The skits depict everyday events in the lives of high school students: the morning routine, chemistry class, lunchtime, shopping, leisure time and watching TV, and address issues such as recycling, reusing, reducing and rethinking our use of materials and energy. In each skit a “shift” is made from less to more sustainable choices.</p> <p>Structured Discussion (25 minutes) Members of the MindShift Team facilitate small group discussions where they reflect on the presentation and consider practical ways through which they can adopt a more sustainable lifestyle. The purpose of the discussions is to provide the youth with opportunities to relate the presentation to their everyday lives, and create a supportive environment in which to motivate each another to “shift it”.</p>	<p>The MindShift team organizes school-based, youth-led events during the year in which to engage the student body, particularly those who have experienced the presentation.</p> <p>The purpose of the events component of MindShift is to expand the experience and scope of MindShift to the entire student body over the school year. While the presentation may “plant the seed”, these events provide motivated students with opportunities to get involved in taking sustainability actions. Students are more likely to change their behaviour and take action if they are provided with multiple and varied events and initiatives with which to become involved.</p> <p>Teams are provided with resources and templates for a selection of events, and are encouraged to make each event “their own”. Teams are also invited to come up with their own ideas for events and initiatives. Successful events with young people are often youth-defined and youth-led, so this format offers students ultimate flexibility and choice.</p> <p>Examples of events and initiatives could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A second-hand clothing fashion show • A schoolyard anti-idling campaign • A Buy Nothing Day trading post • A meat-we-eat reduction contest • Planting a schoolyard vegetable garden • Conducting a school-wide energy audit

Recent Progress

The program was piloted in 2008-2009 with 6 teams at 5 high schools in HRM: Citadel, Cole Harbour, Halifax West, Lockview (2 teams), and Sir John A MacDonald. There is also a team of youth from across HRM, based at the HRM Adventure Earth Centre, which carries out presentations outside of the schools. In total, 56 youth were engaged as leaders of the MindShift Program. After a 2-day training in the fall the school teams began presenting to the Science 10 classes, and reached in excess of 1,200 grade 10 students over the school year. In 2009-10, the program will expand, with 9 teams in operation at 8 different high schools.

The original MindShift Development Team has also delivered the program as a keynote presentation to the EECOM Canadian Environmental Education Conference in Newfoundland and the Recreation Nova Scotia Annual Conference in Halifax, both in the fall of 2008. In sum this included approximately 500 educators, recreation professionals and youth. They received standing ovations in both instances and large number of requests from participants working across Canada (in the case of EECOM) and across Nova Scotia (in the case of RNS) for further information and for interest in developing teams in their schools and communities.