

November 3, 2008

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Conference teaches Hamilton Teens to Become Climate Change Champions**

Event Scheduled for Nov. 4, Mohawk College STARRT Institute – Stoney Creek Campus

HAMILTON – “To tackle climate change we must recognize the challenge, accept responsibility and respond with integrity.” That is the message 17-year-old Meagan McKeen will carry to students from Hamilton’s 26 high schools tomorrow morning. It’s also the challenge she presented to the G8 Ministers of the Environment in Kobe, Japan last spring, as an “International Climate Champion”.

Ms. McKeen will be the keynote speaker at Hamilton Community Foundation’s fourth annual *Living the Environment* conference, hosted by its Youth Advisory Council (YAC) in partnership with Mohawk College and McMaster University’s Ontario Public Interest Research Group. A grade 12 student in Oakville, her impressive record includes travelling to London and Japan to work with 38 other students from around the world, on the Kobe Challenge, the global youth statement on climate change that was presented to the G8.

“Climate change is going to affect young people the most,” says Ms. McKeen. “World leaders must establish immediate ways to regulate our earth’s temperature, but it is youth’s responsibility to establish long-lasting alternatives to climate change factors such as transportation, energy consumption and waste disposal. With such an immense task soon to be ours, it is vital that today’s youth understand climate change and become engaged in developing solutions.”

Living the Environment enables some 100 high school students and their teachers from across Hamilton to learn more about environmental issues through hands-on workshops. The conference also launches HCF’s annual *Protecting Our Environment Together* (“POET”) youth grants which enable students to plan and carry out their own projects to improve the environment over the school year. Grants of up to \$700 each are available to area high-schools for youth-led initiatives.

As a result of last year’s POET youth grants, students across Hamilton turned their ideas into environmental action through 22 student projects. Mountain Secondary was one of a number of schools who used the grants to promote and enable biking to school. Other projects ranged from encouraging “super” recycling at Highland Secondary, to eliminating emissions created by school classrooms at Cardinal Newman, to a week-long Eco-blitz to raise awareness at Westdale Secondary.

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“Living the Environment isn’t just learning about how we affect climate change” says Linda Hughes, HCF’s adult advisor to its Youth Advisory Committee. “There is a strong emphasis on action and enabling these kids to carry out the responsibility they feel for changing their own future. The number of students who want to do something about climate change is growing like wildfire – virtually every high school in Hamilton participates. This conference aims to support them in their role as champions and the grant opportunities are also an important part of providing the means to get going.”

*Living the Environment* offers a full day of workshops including presentations from local environmental experts on how to get your climate change message out, play the role of a country in understanding how climate change affects the world’s water, find out about fashion as a medium for environmental change and find out why there is more than one reason to eat local.

A lunchtime demonstration will feature how to get your bike on the HSR bike racks.

Hamilton Community Foundation receives funds from generous citizens, invests those funds to generate income, and makes grants to support a wide range of local charities, including arts and heritage, education, the environment, health and social services. It brings people together to convene solutions to some of Hamilton’s most pressing challenges, such as environmental protection, engaging youth and other citizens, neighbourhood revitalization and poverty.

HCF’s Youth Advisory Council (YAC) provides young people age 13 to 21 with an opportunity to work together with HCF as they raise funds and make grants in our community to benefit other youth. YAC members learn about Hamilton’s strengths and needs, get involved in the community, gain leadership and provide a youth perspective to HCF’s work.

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Backgrounder Attached

**CONTACT:**

Linda Hughes  
Adult Advisor, Youth Advisory Council  
Hamilton Community Foundation  
905-523-5600 x 264

**Media Contact:**

Grace Diffey  
Vice-President, Community Relations  
Hamilton Community Foundation  
905-523-5600 x 260 cell: 905-518-4641  
[g.diffey@hcf.on.ca](mailto:g.diffey@hcf.on.ca)

## BACKGROUNDER

- The conference takes place 9:00 to 3:30 on Tuesday, November 4 at the STARRT Institute at Mohawk College's Stoney Creek Campus, 481 Barton Street
- McMaster University's Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) and Mohawk College are partners in the event
- HCF's Youth Advisory Council is a group of student volunteers from high schools across Hamilton who provide leadership and advice to HCF on youth-related issues. The "YAC" provides leadership experience, community involvement, and the promotion of youth philanthropy. YAC members work with the HCF's board and staff to develop funds and make community grants that benefit other youth. These include Protecting Our Environment Together Youth grants, and Youth-Led Community Action Projects

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

- Meagan McKeen's keynote address *We are the Champions* takes place at 9:50 a.m.
- The HSR bike rack demo takes place at 12:45

## THE WORKSHOPS

- **The Vision: Ideas into Action**, *Meagan McKeen*: In this interactive workshop teens will learn how to get their plans off the ground for making the world greener and more environmentally friendly while having some fun along the way.
- **The Race to Renew and How to Audit Your Trash**, *Jacquie Wilson and Florence Busnello, City of Hamilton*: Students will join the GSI (Garbage Scene Investigator) crew and learn how to figure out where garbage comes from, who put it there, and how to divert it from landfill in the future.
- **Walkabout and Learn**, *Daryl Bender, City of Hamilton*: Participants will get out and investigate how our transportation systems promote or discourage sustainability, and figure out how to decrease carbon emissions firsthand.
- **Eat Local: But Not for the Environment**, *Zsuzsi Fodor, PEAS, (Promoting Eating Alternately and Sustainably)*: This interactive workshop digs into Hamilton's famous local food production and also figures out whether eating local is a "solution" to our climate change concerns.
- **Climate Change: Getting the Message Out!**, *Julia Kollek*: This workshop taps into students' creative juices and puts their lifestyles centre stage. With real-life facts and everyday props they create a skit with a climate change message.
- **Water for the World**, *Kyla Fisher, Dave Pridham, Disha Joshi, Engineers Without Borders*: This hands-on activity explores global water issues in a real-life simulation. Students represent a country and use its currency to ensure a safe water supply in times when climate change affects all of us.
- **The Revolutionary's Wardrobe**, *Sapphire Singh, Revolution Wear*: –Rebellious reds, fertile greens and classic anarchist black. This workshop looks at fashion as a medium for change and the social, economic, and environmental impacts of the global fashion industry.
- **Teachers' Caucus – Making Things Happen**, *Tim Carr and Julie Buckle, HWDSB*: This interactive workshop for teachers shows ways to get students involved in local environmental projects and initiatives they consider important.

For more information on *Living the Environment 4* please contact Linda Hughes, Adult Advisor, Youth Advisory Council, Hamilton Community Foundation, 905-523-5600 x 264.

**Media contact:** Grace Diffey, Vice-President, Community Relations; 905-523-5600 x 260;  
**cell:** 905-518-4641