

Showing pedal power: Dalhousie students pump up activism in Third World

By KRISTEN LIPSCOMBE Staff Reporter

Leslie Gray hopped up on a wooden contraption that looks like a homemade Stairmaster attached to some hose and a bucket of water. She began quickly stepping up and down.

But the Dalhousie University student wasn't trying to get a workout — she was actually demonstrating how a treadle pump is used to collect and haul water in developing nations such as Ghana.

The Halifax university's chapter of Engineers Without Borders displayed the innovative pump at the Student Union Building, as part of a student-run conference called Development Here and Away: A Sunday of Student Action, held at the tail end of International Development Week 2006.

"It's the difference between lifting and pulling a bucket out of the well," Ms. Gray, vice-president of public outreach for the group, explained during a break between presentations.

"A woman might spend hours filling up three buckets of water for the day, (but) this foot pump will make it a lot easier for her."

Engineers Without Borders was one of many non-profit groups at Dalhousie that participated in the event, which drew about 40 people into the building on a snowy afternoon.

"We all have knowledge about a certain aspect of development and sharing that makes us more aware," said the 22-year-old, who studies both environmental science and international development.

"Our goal is reaching out to students who are on the Dalhousie campus who may have an interest in international development and would like to contribute to one of the organizations."

Laina Jez, president of the university's International Development Education and Awareness Society, also helped organize the event and said the student groups in



attendance were learning how to combine their efforts and work together toward common goals.

"We're generating some new ideas as well," said the 18-year-old international development student. "We're learning some things that worked really well for other people and how we can expand on that."

Ms. Jez said all the presentations were put together by students for students, "which definitely takes the intimidation factor out of getting involved."

The day's schedule also included an activism seminar hosted by Students Coalition Against War, a workshop with WADENG Wings of Hope, a skit by the Otesha Project, information on overseas internships and a talk by Green party member Chris Harborne on youth involvement in politics.

Ms. Gray said it's exciting when people with similar interests come together to learn from one another.

"We're hoping that this conference will kind of keep that energy going and get more people excited."