

Arts program helps keep kids in school

By Pat St. Germain

FOUR YEARS AGO, CORRIGAN Reid's greatest ambition was to be a high school dropout.

Today, in the midst of shooting a rap video in a hallway at Rene Deleurme Centre, the 17 year old has a new focus in life.

One of 27 high school students working on a multi-disciplinary arts project centered on rap music in Louis Riel School Division's Transitions for Success program, Reid is as surprised as anyone to find he's fully engaged in school.

"When I first got here, I didn't want to be here. I didn't want to be in school. I was dead set on getting out of school, dropping out, skipping, not showing up," he says.

He credits TFS teachers for helping him develop twin passions for music and computers. And his teachers pass along some of that credit to the arts project, funded through a \$9,500 Manitoba Arts Council ArtsSmarts grant.

"It's been transformative," teacher Bill Pollett says.

"He's helping other students with their audio productions. He's been a mentor to other students in a lot of ways. We've seen a lot more responsibility and maturity."

Divisional development music teacher Bill Quinn initiated the project, and the school would like to expand it to include kids in the centre's immigrant and Aboriginal resource programs.

Quinn says veteran rapper Pip Skid (Patrick Skene) has worked with TFS kids for the past three years, helping them write and record raps that reflect their life experience. This year, recording artist DJ Kutdown (Michael Arnone) joined Pip on the project and Graffiti Gallery artist Pat Lova spent hours helping the kids create artwork for posters and CD covers.

For the final component, Strongfront AV Productions videographer Sean Parenteau is shooting videos with Reid and another student. The first boy's rhyme is all about crime.

Reid's rap is about his relationship with his father. It's called I Hate that You Messed Up.

Family troubles, including addiction and violence, are a common theme in TFS. Most students have behavioural issues, so four teachers and four educational assistants work on empathy, tolerance and conflict management as well as academics.

"Those teachers there are going straight to heaven the second they die," Quinn says. "There's a lot of layers to their jobs and they have to be resilient and really care about those kids and man, they do."

Teacher Kristen Unrau says assignments are tailored to students' interests to encourage engagement, and the arts project was another way to help connect them with school. She says one boy who initially balked at taking art classes was surprised to discover he has a talent for drawing.

"He draws in sketchbooks now. It's this fire in him that he has now that he didn't have before."

Pollett says all the kids are gifted in their own way, and tapping into their potential can be the catalyst for making positive changes in their lives.

"Whether they're doing it through the painting or hip-hop or through photography or creative writing, it's all the same process. They're just getting pieces of their story out there, learning to deal with their lives and communicate what they're all about in some form or another."

Reid was so taken with Pip Skid's digital audio computer program, he bought a copy and uploaded an original R&B-flavoured song to YouTube, using a computer he spent months building from spare parts. He also recorded audio for other students and even created beats and instrumentals for their CDs.

Over the past three years at TFS, his home life improved, too. He was taken in by a "fantastic family," and while his father moved without leaving a forwarding address a few



Transitions for Success student Corrigan Reid and AV Productions videographer Sean Parenteau

years back, they've recently been in touch.

This fall, he's pursuing a new ambition, attending Louis Riel Arts and Technology Centre to take the computer architect program, with an eye to working in information technology or music—preferably both.

"I'll be graduating with more credits than I need," he says. "But I'm taking the full year just so that I can learn everything that there is to offer there." **T**

Puppets assist in challenges of cancer

Sophie, Natalie, Mathew and Jack entertain and educate

By Matea Tuhtar

SOPHIE, NATALIE, MATTHEW AND Jack want to come to your school and show other kids how to be a good friend and supportive friend. Just a heads up, however; Sophie, Natalie, Matthew and Jack aren't human kids, but four charming life-size puppets who are part of the Camp Quality puppet team.

"The Camp Quality puppet teams are an extension of the Camp Quality summer camps program," says Deb Scott, a retired Louis Riel teacher who brought the puppet program into Manitoba. Camp Quality began in Australia in 1983 and expanded to Canada in the late 80's. There are currently seven Camp Quality summer camps in Canada, one of which is at Lake Brereton in the Whiteshell. The camps are for children dealing with cancer and their siblings.

"Often the siblings of a child with cancer feel pushed aside as the sick kids need so much more attention from their parents," says Christine Hallick, puppet volunteer. "With these camps all the kids in the family get to attend and the parents also get a much needed break."

The Quality Camp puppet team is on its first year of performances which are divided into two shows; for younger and older students. The shows deal with the challenges faced by Sophie and Matthew who are both dealing with cancer and the side effects of their treatment. The theme of the presentation is "Even though I'm different on the outside, it doesn't change who I really am on the inside." The shows are designed to teach kids about cancer,

being a good friend and to help those students dealing with cancer integrate back into the school setting.

According to the Childhood Cancer Canada Foundation, there are about 10,000 children living with cancer in Canada today and Scott says she saw a definite need for the puppet program in Manitoba.



"I had cancer as an adult and it was so tough, I can't imagine what it's like for the little guys going through it", says Scott. "Every school we've visited has had a student or teacher affected by cancer."

A student like three-year-old Finlay who is battling cancer and whose mother Karly Conway attended the puppet performance in

his hometown of Starbuck, Manitoba. "I really enjoyed the show today," said Conway, blinking back tears. "The kids all care so much about Finlay and it's so good for little kids to hear this kind of message—they always have so many questions."

The puppet shows try to dispel many of the prejudices which may exist regarding contact with children who have cancer. Sophie explains to her friend that she cannot 'catch' cancer from her, and tells her that her hair fell out because of the special medication she took in the hospital and that it will grow back eventually.

"I thought it would be hard to find volunteers but I have more than I need," says Scott. Many of the puppet volunteers are retired teachers and nurses and all have either had cancer or been closely affected by it. "The volunteers love doing the show. We really enjoy all the questions that kids have."

Scott says the puppet show has received great feedback from schools. "Because it's a non-cost the schools sometimes might not expect the level of professionalism and enthusiasm that we bring."

The Camp Quality puppet show is completely free of charge to the school. Teachers or principals interested in booking a show can contact Deb Scott at deb.scott@shaw.ca. For more information on Camp Quality summer camps and the puppet shows visit www.campquality.com. **T**