

Preventing Crime Through Social Development

BULLETIN No. 5, 2002

It's an Art



Artist: Chad Reeves

“Hey,” thought Steve Wilson, “that’s not bad.” In 1998, Wilson found himself eyeing some graffiti spray-painted across a Winnipeg building. The painting was perhaps crude, but it was obvious to him that the hand behind the work showed some artistic talent. While Steve probably wasn’t the first person to give grudging credit to a graffiti artist’s abilities, what he did next turned out to be fateful. It wasn’t long before Wilson went looking for the young men behind the city’s graffiti, armed with the idea that their talent and dedication could be re-directed. It was clear to him that these young men had no lack of skills and that they understood many of the finer points of art – they just lacked formal education. What they needed, he thought, was someone to show them how to put their work on canvas and package it as an art form.

“As far as I’m concerned, there is nothing more powerful than a piece of public art to connect a young person to a community. Like when we get young people to paint murals around the city – we’ve painted 30 murals already – they get to keep going back and bring their families and friends to see it. That mural will be around for 10 to 15 years. It has lasting value. If they get distracted and return to their old ways, it stands as a reminder that they can go back.”

– Steve Wilson, Founder and Director of
Graffiti Gallery



Artist: Mike Johnston

Wilson started with only 11 youth he managed to interest in his idea. Soon, Wilson’s artist friends began to sit down and talk with the kids, providing tips and guidance for their artwork. Encouraged by the positive

results, the group decided to get organized in a more serious manner. The Graffiti Gallery quickly evolved and the novel concept behind it helped its reputation grow. Before long, the gallery was housed in a 5,000 square foot, two-level warehouse the members helped clean up. "It was a pretty cool space for an art gallery," says Steve.



Artist:
Shaun Morin

Steve estimates that it took a year and a half to establish a track record for the Gallery as an organization. After that, they were able to put together a strong board of directors and get the support of the Winnipeg Social Planning Council, both of which proved crucial to the long-term viability of the Gallery. Steve credits the Social Planning Council with giving him much of his knowledge and understanding of the non-profit sector.

Today, the Gallery is in a strong financial position, with an annual budget of \$500,000. Its youth arts centre features the work of young artists in several mediums. The gallery hosts art shows for the

public and media that often draw crowds of over 300 people and have elicited glowing reviews in the media. Like any other gallery, the young artists can sell their creations and several have struck very lucrative agreements in design work. For example, one gallery graduate now produces designs for a special line of decorated leather straps used by Canada's second-largest manufacturer of guitar straps.

True to its roots, the Graffiti Gallery also provides art programs for disadvantaged kids. One of the programs Mr. Wilson oversees, the *st.ART Project*, is an after-school project targeting high-risk inner-city



Artist: Fred Thomas

youth aged 14 to 24. The project offers art instruction to youth who, because of family poverty and unemployment, can't afford the tuition fees charged by more established art centres. The director of the after-school program happens to be the first young man Wilson approached to join the graffiti art program back in 1998. He is now in his third year of a university fine arts program.

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The *Urban Canvas Project*, another Graffiti Gallery program, is a six-month daytime program aimed at young people aged 18 to 28. The program offers them the skills required to work independently or to gain employment in the advertising art industry. Most participants are local artists who have had difficulty maintaining consistent employment due to social barriers such as homelessness, poverty, disability or racial discrimination.



Artist: Pat Lazo

Through the program, they learn to develop and design mural concepts both manually and using computers, as well as how to bring a mural project from design concept to finished product on time and on budget.

Another project in the works is measuring the gallery's impact in terms of numbers of kids served and success rates. To date, they haven't kept statistics, although Steve says he has a good idea of where the youth are, thanks to their interest in keeping their links to the gallery. "Every single one

of our kids keeps in touch. Even those that aren't ready to change will drop in for coffee," he says.

Looking back, Wilson has few regrets. "We had to learn all this from scratch. It definitely hasn't been a nine-to-five job," he adds, laughing. Still, he shows no signs of stopping, and he is currently helping to set up a similar program in Saskatoon.

For further information, see the Graffiti Gallery website at: www.graffitigallery.ca.

Coming this Fall: The Progress of Canada's Children 2002

The Progress of Canada's Children 2002 is the sixth in a series of annual reports from the Canadian Council on Social Development that monitors the well-being of children, youth, and families from one year to the next.

The Progress of Canada's Children 2002 presents a wealth of data and information about children and youth, organized into two main sections. The first section assesses important inputs into child and youth well-being such as economic security, physical safety, and community resources. The second section reviews how children and



youth are faring by assessing outcomes such as learning achievements, health status, and youth employment.

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It's an art

Who's helping the girls?

When you speak to people in Victoria about services and supports for girls these days, there's usually a haunting undertone to the conversation. The beating and drowning death of Victoria teen, Reena Virk, and the subsequent trial of her teenaged female assailant are still too fresh to be far from the minds of those who look out for girls' welfare.

"In terms of problem behaviour, traditionally women were said to act inward, men to act out," says Dean Fortin, Community Development Officer at the Burnside Gorge Community Centre in Victoria. "That perception has increasingly been challenged in recent years, and not just by the events of last year." Noting increased incidences of bullying and fights among girls, he and other professionals look for ways to make a difference.



Dean Fortin, Community Development Officer, Burnside Gorge Community Centre, Victoria

The Burnside Gorge Community Centre serves an area that has experienced a staggering amount of development over the last few years. New condominiums, townhouses, apartment buildings and duplexes have put additional stress on an already inadequate infrastructure. Parks, schools, recreational and social supports – they could use more of just about everything.

"We help the new girls who come into the program."

Perhaps due to the dearth of access to physical activities and quality recreation, young women from this neighbourhood seem particularly vulnerable to a wide range of health challenges. "We've seen cases of bulimia, and lots of the problems that go along with low levels of self-esteem, a lack of self-determination and poor body image," says Mr. Fortin.

"I like the things we do, such as hanging out, going places, being with new people and our leaders."

Under these circumstances, staff members at the Community Centre do what they can. Fortunately, funding has been available, including contributions from the Royal Bank. However, as Suzanne Cole, the Centre's Youth and Family Services Coordinator puts it, "We usually don't wait for funding to get things going." Counting on the proper supports being found as they go along, the Centre's staff members try to stay flexible and pitch in as necessary.



The Centre offers continual programming for two girls' groups. Historically, boys dropping in at the Community Centre predominantly used the sports

facilities. The girls' program, in response to their requests, goes beyond sports to include a wide range of recreational opportunities. Activities include arts and crafts, swimming, bowling, movies and discussion sessions. Also included are health information and special training sessions covering such things as street smarts and assault prevention. "This gives the girls opportunities not only for dealing with things that have already occurred, but preparing them for the future," says Mr. Fortin. "It's also very important to them to have a place where they can speak freely and air their concerns."

"I have met new friends and done different things. It's fun."

One surprise hit has been the group's homework club which now has a large, regular following. "This is actually much more popular than we had expected," says Mr. Fortin. "We had no idea they would be so serious about homework."



"Just girls, no boys because they are rough, bugging you, making fun of you and calling you names."

The underlying goal of all the activities is to instill a sense of self-worth and help the girls build a positive self-image. "Bullying and fights are one thing, but you can have other equally harmful things occurring to girls with low self-esteem," says Mr. Fortin. "We want to give them greater control over their lives and the ability to make their own decisions."

"We talk about stuff that we usually can't talk about at home – like boys and stuff."

Although the program was set up initially to give girls something to match the boy-dominated sports facilities, staff were surprised at what happened next. "The boys saw the girls' program and wanted one like it," says Ms. Cole with a laugh. "So we started one for them."

For more information, please see the Burnside Gorge Community Association's website: www.burnside.city.victoria.bc.ca.

The fresh face of crime prevention



If you've been to a festival or outdoor activity in Regina in recent years, chances are you've seen kids with their faces painted like the one above – courtesy of Street Culture Kidz. Street Culture Kidz is a crime prevention program with a difference. True, you can find other youth programs aimed at developing professional skills through recreational and other activities. But a typical first-encounter reaction to this group is one of surprise. How is it, some people wonder, that a program with so little apparent structure is so obviously successful?

“I’ve learned how to work with the public and be appropriate in public situations.”

– Jennifer, 16

The answer seems to lie partly in the pragmatic approach developed by Kim Sutherland, the founder and executive director of Street Culture Kidz. “When I first started working with youth, I thought I knew what kinds of things they wanted to do

before I even asked them,” says Sutherland. “But when I listened to the kids’ ideas, I found they had some extremely creative ones – it was a humbling experience.” As a result of these formative lessons, today’s Street Culture Kidz program is made to fit the kids, not the other way around. The result has been called everything from “flexible” to “chaotic,” but it seems to work.

“I had the opportunity to come to a personal realization: I am amazing. With the help I received, I was able to hone my work skills.”

– Dave, 21



Street Culture Kidz began as a summer program in a community centre in inner-city Regina in 1997. Since then, it has expanded to encompass a variety of programs for children, youth and young adults. Activities vary widely, from face-painting at festivals, to learning how to cook, to practicing office

“It gave me an awakening and a chance to look at my way of interacting with others.”

– Christine, 22



techniques. Many of the activities involve art and recreation. But all of the activities, says Sutherland, are meant to allow young participants to learn marketable skills that will give them both the abilities and incentives to make better choices in their behaviour.

But it's not just the activities that account for the program's popularity and success. According to many participants, it's the underlying philosophy of personal support for troubled kids that really makes a difference. Kim Sutherland explains: “We don't try to change kids – we provide an environment where kids can choose personal change.” It's a philosophy that seems to have had a tangible and very positive impact. One striking fact is that, with the exception of the executive director, every one of the 33 full-time and part-time staff members is a former program participant – a graduate.

“The Employability program is great. I didn't expect all the training we are receiving. I know it will help me in my future plans.”

– Jason

Graduation, it should be noted, is a flexible concept at Street Culture Kidz. “We don't have a fixed age or anything for graduating kids out,” says Sutherland, “because not every kid fits into a rigid time frame.” Which is probably just as well, given the evident desire of many young people to maintain their connection to the program. When asked what makes Street Culture Kidz special, young participants tend to reply, “They care about us there.”

“I have never felt so welcome and accepted in any other place

– not even in my own home.”

– Anonymous

Among Street Culture Kidz' many programs is “Choices and Employability,” a program with a provincial, community-development focus sponsored by the National Crime Prevention Centre. Workshops provided by a professional video production company give kids the opportunity to learn to use audio-visual equipment, computer programs and video-editing software. Sutherland stresses the logic of providing interesting, marketable skills to youth at risk of offending. “They have to develop skills at the same time as they address problems. After all, when adults have a problem, we don't expect them to put their lives on hold – so why should we make kids sit on the sidelines until every problem is ironed out?”

“Whether or not I have the ‘right stuff’ for a role model, for the first time in my life I realize that I *am* one.”

– Anonymous



While the program has seen a lot of “difficult” youth, it has also had more than its share of success stories. According to Sutherland, youth with a history of involvement in crime who become participants always achieve a dramatic decline in their negative encounters with the law. He is careful, however, to give credit to the kids for their own triumphs. “We don’t take the blame for kids’ bad choices, so it wouldn’t be fair to take credit for their good choices,” he says. “We try to provide an environment of encouragement and opportunity for them to take control of their lives. They make the changes.”

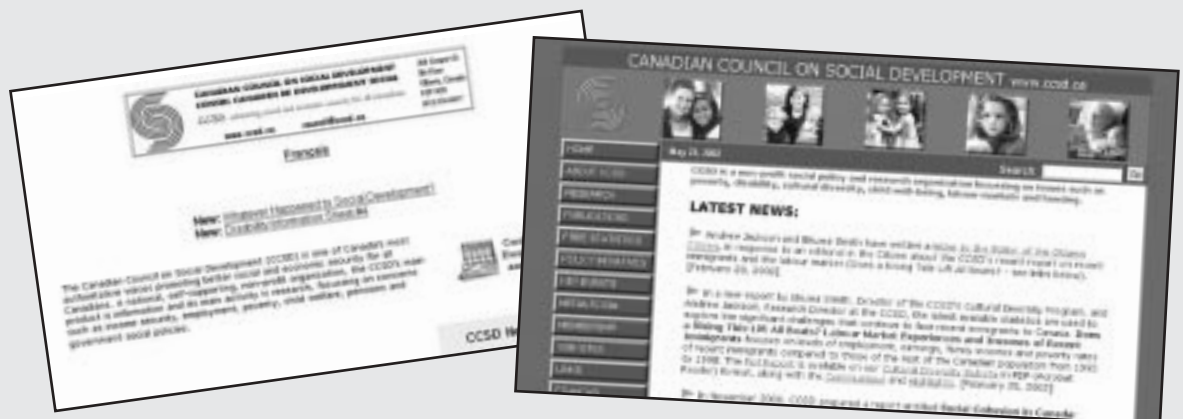
For more information, please e-mail streetculturekidz@hotmail.com, or phone (306) 565-6206.

“I can now create a future for myself.”

– Wayne, 19

We’re updating the CCSD website!

Watch for the change in the coming months, as we make the switch to a newer, more streamlined web format! Our new website will be at the same address as the old one – www.ccsd.ca – but with a brand new look and feel.



The new website will still house all of our “greatest hits” from the old version, including the ***Crime Prevention Sub-site*** and other popular services. Plus a few surprises that you’ll have to wait to see!

The new site will continue to allow you to access a wealth of free information on social development in Canada, information that you simply won’t find elsewhere. In addition, fans of our highly accessible site will be pleased to hear that our new site will continue to reflect our commitment to the greatest possible accessibility, an area in which the CCSD continues to be a leader.