



## *Street Culture Kidz*

### ***Introduction***

Fostering the healthy, secure, prosocial development of children and youth is an important component of crime prevention through social development. The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention supports the efforts of communities to reduce risk factors that contribute to the victimization of, and criminal behaviour by, children and youth. Some of these risk factors include poverty, family violence, health and behaviour problems, poor school performance and parental substance abuse.

Promoting safe and supportive environments can help at-risk children and youth gain resiliency. Programs that empower young people and aid them in building personal skills can reduce their risk of victimization and criminal behaviour.

Regina-based Street Culture Kidz Project Inc. has developed a variety of programs that encourage children, youth and young adults to

strengthen their personal skills and make positive life choices. Street Culture Kidz began as a temporary summer activity for young children in an inner-city area of Regina in 1997. Since then, with assistance from the Community Mobilization Program and other partners, it has blossomed into a long-term, city-wide community development effort.

### ***Youth set the priorities***

Street Culture Kidz provides a range of programming and reaches out, in particular, to youth who are at risk because of unstable family circumstances, addiction or poverty. Although young people are referred by government agencies, such as Aboriginal Family Services or the departments of social services, justice and education, most come to Street Culture on their own.

Between 25 and 40 teenagers participate regularly in Street Culture activities, and about half of these are involved at least four days a week. Several young adults work with Street Culture Kidz through employment programs of CanSask Career and Employment Services, and some as part of the practicum component of the University of Regina School of Social Work.

Street Culture Kidz responds to what youth want to do, and builds learning and skills development opportunities into the activities. The

*This publication is part of the Caledon Institute's crime prevention series of community stories, produced in collaboration with the National Crime Prevention Centre. The series documents promising approaches to crime prevention through social development.*

youth are involved in organizing, developing, implementing and evaluating all projects. Community members help out, providing skills, knowledge and resources, and act as positive role models.

Projects include organizing entertainment and face-painting at community events, and weekly ‘open art nights’ at the MacKenzie Art Gallery where youths learn about painting, textiles, sculpture and other art forms. The ‘Kidz’ learn cooking and business skills through Street Culture’s catering operation, practise office techniques by helping out with administration, deliver flyers, do odd jobs in the community and help to raise funds. Day trips and retreats provide a chance to get out of the city and learn new skills. Peer counselling is available through talking circles,<sup>1</sup> addiction groups, ‘anger management’ groups and one-on-one discussions with staff. Young people who need help that Street Culture cannot provide are referred to appropriate community or social service organizations.

More than 100 children participate in noon-hour and after-school homework programs run by Street Culture Kidz in seven Regina-area schools. According to Kim Sutherland, coordinator of Street Culture: “We ask the schools to refer their most ‘difficult’ kids – the bullies, the victims, those who are most often in trouble, those who have limited family support.” Homework is followed by activities selected by the children – a combination that encourages positive attitudes about school work. Teenagers assist in facilitating the sessions, developing useful skills.

### *More than meets the eye*

Kim notes that all activities organized by Street Culture Kidz “are more complex than they appear. People who see us doing face painting in the children’s area during the Dragon Boat races, for example, don’t realize that we have also been involved in planning the whole chil-

### **National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention**

The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention aims to reduce crime and victimization by addressing their root causes through a social development approach. Social development is a long-term, proactive approach directed at removing personal, social and economic factors that lead some individuals to engage in criminal acts or to become victims of crime.

With an investment of \$32 million annually, the National Strategy enables the Government of Canada to help communities develop projects and partnerships that will prevent crime. The strategy focuses particularly on children and youth, Aboriginal people and the personal security of women and girls. It includes the Safer Communities Initiative, a Promotion and Public Education Program and the National Crime Prevention Centre. The National Crime Prevention Centre is responsible for implementing the Strategy.

The Safer Communities Initiative is designed to help Canadians undertake crime prevention activities in their communities. It includes four funding components: the Community Mobilization Program, which helps communities develop approaches to crime prevention and undertake activities that deal with the root causes of crime; the Crime Prevention Investment Fund, which aims to establish reliable information on what works and what is promising in reducing the risk factors associated with crime and victimization; the Crime Prevention Partnership Program, which supports the involvement of organizations that can contribute to community crime prevention through the development of information, tools and resources; and the Business Action Program on Crime Prevention, which involves national and provincial/territorial business and professional associations in helping communities prevent crime, share information and encourage community mobilization.

dren’s area for the event. Often, the public only sees a small part of what we do.” In one case, when a youth wanted to learn how to make puppets, organizers contacted a local group of people with disabilities who perform puppet shows. The process of learning about puppets led to learning about issues of disability and exclusion as well. At one of the ‘open evenings’ at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, two women who had started ‘The Regina Peace Council’ helped the young people make felt banners to carry in a parade for the council. From a distance, the activity looked like a typical ‘arts and crafts’ evening, but the participants also learned about the goals and activities of the peace council.

### *Partnerships are key*

Partnerships have been an important part of the success of Street Culture Kidz. The organization aims to avoid duplicating available programs or services, and often works with other groups to deliver joint projects. A few examples have been an Internet project for girls organized with the YWCA, clowning workshops with the City of Regina and anti-discrimination efforts supported by various organizations. Many businesses and service clubs in Regina contribute funds and materials, and Street Culture has good relationships with social service agencies and community groups across the city. Kim notes that: “It’s usually an individual in the agency who makes a difference, similar to a teacher who cares about a kid beyond the school day.”

### *Broader horizons*

From the beginning, it was clear that the Street Culture Kidz approach had promise. Organizers believed the best way to expand its reach was to send young people who had participated in the project to other regions to conduct workshops and training. However, they had no idea whether or not this would work.



*Street Culture Kidz working with community partners SaskTel and Dairyworld at a summer picnic.*

According to Kim, funding from the Community Mobilization Program “allowed us the process of learning the challenges of working with an at-risk population. The way kids behave and the issues that arise are going to be very different when they’re away from home in a small group for several days,” as opposed to participating in Street Culture Kidz activities for a few hours a day and then going home.

Through longer-term involvement with young people, organizers have learned valuable lessons. They found that those who took part daily in Street Culture Kidz activities made more progress than those who participated less frequently. They observed that, after a while, young people began to see Street Culture Kidz as a reliable source of support – for example, bringing their report cards to show to staff. Kim notes that: “We also learned that, at a certain point, the kids will engage in ‘testing behaviour.’ What they were looking for was someone who would be there. At some point, they would

test us to see if they would be kicked out. We didn't know this would happen when we started." Staying true to their commitment to long-term support, Street Culture Kidz facilitators have learned to 'hang in there' during this testing period, and in over three years, only one person (a young adult) has had to be removed from the program.

After three years, Kim sees a consistent cycle of "what kids are capable of if they are given the freedom available through Street Culture. We know with confidence that we will show a life change. They're ready to – they just need a method to do it. We create an environment where youth can make good choices." He stresses that: "We create an environment for kids to choose change – we do not change kids. We are a long-term program, so we see a high percentage of successful long-term outcomes." Many participants make positive changes and develop healthier relationships with family members. About a third of the participants do not make as much progress, and eventually return to open or closed custody.

Replicating Street Culture's approach elsewhere continues to be a priority for the organization. There are many regular 'sites' for Street Culture activities in Regina, each with its own coordinating team, and other cities have shown interest in Street Culture's approach. Recently, Street Culture received funding from the Community Mobilization Program to create a video to help other communities develop similar 'life transition' programs for high-risk youth. Plans are still evolving, but Kim hopes the video will show youths at various stages in their involvement with the organization – participating in activities and talking about their attitudes, values and beliefs. True to the Street Culture philosophy, the youth will be actively involved in developing and producing the video: "It will be what the kids themselves want to do."

Street Culture Kidz continues to grow and change in a spirit of adventure and openness.

Looking back over its development, Kim Sutherland says: "I would change nothing. Like a youth who has to fall to feel that hurt, every challenge that we've overcome has taken us to our next stage of success."

*Ann Simpson*

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For more information on Street Culture Kidz, contact Kim Sutherland at (306) 565-6206.

For more information on the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention, call (toll-free) 1-877-302-6272, or visit the website at [www.crime-prevention.org](http://www.crime-prevention.org)

Limited quantities of this publication are available in alternate formats (Braille, disk and audiotape).

*Cette histoire communautaire est également disponible en français.*

#### **Endnote**

1. The talking circle originated with Aboriginal cultures as a method of discussion and decision-making. People in the circle speak one at a time; sometimes a symbolic object such as a stick or stone is held by the speaker.

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