

DreamCatcher launches another season

By STEPHANIE WADDELL
Star Reporter

Deciding on a career path is no easy task for many high school students, but as the DreamCatcher program is set to spend another year connecting Yukon students with professionals in the fields they want to work in.

The program began this year with officials visiting area schools to tell students about it. As part of that, they brought mentor Moira Grant, who works in medical laboratory science, to the territory.

Grant acted as a mentor in the program last year. Mentors volunteer to share their experiences with the students in DreamCatcher to give them a sense of what's involved in the student's "dream career". E-mail allows for regular correspondence between the mentor and student.

Funding from the Canadian Institute of Health Research enabled the group to bring up a mentor. In an effort to promote health careers in the North, officials asked Grant to join them in the 2009 launch and were set to meet her mentor from last year on Wednesday.

"I am very excited about my career, medical laboratory science, and I try not to miss an opportunity to talk to people about it," Grant said of her involvement in the program.

"Aside from the health human resources issue across the country and, in particular the northern or remote areas - I do want to help with that - I've always enjoyed working with young people and just an opportunity to talk with some young people, most of whom today at our workshops, hadn't even heard of the profession."

Watching the students who were part of the workshop they did on Tuesday, Grant said it was wonderful to see "the light bulb" go on for some of them as they learned of the career opportunities and realized they had some connection with lab technology. Many had grandmothers who use a glucose metre, for example.

She likes helping students make that connection between what they already know and what's new and could be waiting for them in a career.

Grant is just one example of a mentor who wants to share her career with youth.

"We're finding a lot of mentors who participate in the program want to talk about their career, they want to impart wisdom and knowledge about what they do," said DreamCatcher executive director and co-founder Josh Silvertown, who was also up from Toronto.



Star photo by VINCE FEDOROFF
READY FOR ANOTHER YEAR - Officials with the DreamCatcher mentorship program are visiting schools in the territory this week to kick off another year of matching up youth with professionals in their prospective career choices. In front are executive director and co-founder Josh Silvertown and mentor Moira Grant, both from Toronto. Behind are Yukoners program co-ordinator Denise McDermid (left) and co-founder Beverly Sembsmoen.

high school.

"We had a student mentored by a working actor in Hollywood," Sembsmoen said.

The actor told the student his career, the good and the bad, is "not just a walk in the park," Sembsmoen pointed out.

There have also been cases where students learn what they may have thought was their dream career really isn't for them.

Sembsmoen said those are also successes as the students don't end up spending a lot more time and money pursuing education or a career they really don't want to be part of.

It means they can move on to exploring other options for themselves. As the program heads into another semester, officials with DreamCatcher are hoping to expand on their achievements of previous years.

This marks the first year it will offer the program for two schools in the first semester of the school year. That

meant until now, students who took the Planning 10 course where the program is offered in the first semester didn't have the opportunity to be part of DreamCatcher.

"We're also hoping to expand and get to some of the other communities involved," said Denise McDermid, DreamCatcher's program co-ordinator.

As Silvertown said: "We're always looking to improve the quality of the delivery of our program."

That means incorporating the feedback officials get about DreamCatcher by all those involved.

This year has also seen the launch of a new website (www.dreamcatchermentoring.ca).

"That will help with the delivery of our program," Silvertown said.

Over the next 12 months, there are also plans to increase the Nunavut DreamCatcher program, which was offered at one school in Iqaluit last year.

A long-term plan would see the program also offered in the Northwest Territories, beginning next fall in Yellowknife. In five years, officials would like to see every school in the North have the opportunity to be part of the program.

"It's a very ambitious plan, but it's not that we're in every school, but that every school will have the opportunity to be involved if they want it," he said.

As Grant heads into another session as a mentor, she said her goal with any mentorship is to be helpful to the student.

"I want there to be a give and take of questions and answers," she said.

"I want to feel like the student remains, the mentee remains, interested; they feel encouraged as well; that some of their doubts are resolved and that they stop saying, 'I don't know and I can do it' or 'I don't know if I have what it takes' and more 'Yes, I can do this. I have the information I need and the next step is mine'."

Based on her first experience with DreamCatcher, Grant said she believes she was successful in doing that as the student shared her goals with Grant, who was then able to direct her to further information she could pursue.

Over the years, the program has drawn from its experience. Last year, for example, McDermid produced a teachers' handbook, designed to help incorporate DreamCatcher into the curriculum teachers are required to teach.

"It's a phenomenal thing that Denise did because what we were hearing from teachers is that, 'I haven't got time to do this in my classroom. I've got so much to do and there's so few hours,'" Silvertown recalled. "So what we did was figured out a way to integrate DreamCatcher as part of the curriculum."

While McDermid, who's a teacher, said it took "a lot of hours" to come up with the document, showing teachers how to incorporate wasn't difficult.

It's a handbook teachers have said they like, with one teacher who had taught the course earlier stating they wish they had it when they had students in DreamCatcher.

Along with visiting Whitehorse schools this week, the quartet was set to visit Dawson City and Pelly thanks to a donation from Whitehorse resident Rick Nielsen, who volunteered his plane for the trip.

"That's the kind of grassroots support we have," Sembsmoen said.

The group also noted the support it receives from both the federal government level and corporate sponsors like Northwestel Inc.

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