



CONNECTIONS Program Testimonials from Stakeholders

Via EMAIL:

From: **Annette BruisedHead** <annette.bruisedhead@kainai.ca>

Date: Thu, Jan 28, 2016 at 4:31 PM

Subject: Re: We Need a Quote from YOU!

To: George Taven <gtaven@seedsconnections.org>

Cc: Corinne Craig <ccraig@seedsfoundation.ca>

It is always great chatting with you George.

Since our Kainai High School students have begun participating in the Connections program we have seen so much growth in each student. From within our first group, 2 of our students are successfully completing their first year in post-secondary. The other participants are continuing to pursue educational pathways, and they continue to see themselves in post secondary endeavors in the 2016-2017 school year. In our second group that attended last year, all of those students are on track to complete their high school diploma this year. This year's group of students are very active in their leadership roles here at KHS, which is one of academia. I believe that Connections allowed our students to find their voices and use them to create situations in their own journey to become who they choose to become. Connections allowed them to share their voices in an environment of safety and respect and they in turn have used those voices in a respectful manner in our school, and be heard by the staff. Lastly our students no longer have the sense of 'us' vs. 'them', that we are all one people who have struggles but are trying to make a difference in many facets, each worthy of pursuit.

Thank you George for your contribution to the greater good of Human kind.

Annette Bruised Head

Principal, Kainai High School

Via EMAIL:

On Mon, Apr 3, 2017 at 11:48 AM, Jordan Fenton <jofenton@rockyview.ab.ca> wrote:

Our students at Chestermere High School are an extremely diverse group both ethnically and socioeconomically. That said, we are very proud at how accepting our students are of one another in creating a safe and caring learning environment. Having some of our students participate in the Connections Program on an annual basis has been a foundational principle in helping to cultivate positive interactions amongst our students. We have seen great value in the "Be the Change" projects that our leadership students have facilitated as their culmination of the Connections Program. Our students have worked to create better experiences for students in our school as well as students from our feeder schools by taking their message to them. We are thankful for our student's opportunities to grow as leaders through their involvement in the Connections Program and we look forward to their continued involvement in the future.

Jordan Fenton – Principal
Chestermere High School

Via EMAIL:

From: **Sally Zerk** <SZerk@calgarypolice.ca>
Date: Thu, Jan 28, 2016 at 8:52 PM
Subject: FNMI
To: George Taven <gtaven@seedsconnections.org>

Dear George,
Please submit the following for an endorsement of your program;

To whom it may concern,

My name is Sally Zerk and I am a Calgary Police Officer. I work as a School Resource Officer in two Calgary High Schools.

I have had the privilege of working with FNMI students over the past three and a half years and have attended the Connections program twice with two different groups of students.

I observed amazing changes in students during the times I was there. Through this program attitudes were changed, eyes and hearts were opened and students became different people.

Through my attendance with the FNMI students, they saw me as a different person, a human being who cared enough to want to learn and spend time and space with them, and this had had phenomenal impact in the relationships we've continued back in school.

The camaraderie and bonding the students had at camp and then back in school set many of them up to stay in school and stick together, keeping each other accountable.

The activities and speakers at the program challenge and teach, I as an immigrant myself learned so much about FNMI and other cultures, but I was also challenged as a white female to walk a mile in their shoes.

One of the most impactful things at Connections that I saw was the campfire. I saw students who have had awful things happen in their lives laughing and being the children they hadn't been able to be. I saw them laugh, sing cheesy songs and feel safe and accepted, which unfortunately for many FNMI students isn't often the case.

I was so impacted by the program the first time I went, that the second year I would have been unable to have gone due to childcare issues, that I took my 10 year old son with me for a few days.

He was so touched too by being immersed into the FNMI learning sessions, and have heard him on several occasions since challenge various negative comments about FNMI people, as he now sees them as human beings and his friends.

I have nothing but the highest regard for this program and truly feel it to be one of the most valuable learning experiences I have seen, both for FNMI and non FNMI adults and students. I fully endorse this program and could not recommend highly enough the value of supporting the amazing work that happens there. I would welcome any phone call to clarify or discuss any of the points I have made on [4039986561](tel:4039986561).

Regards
Constable Sally Zerk 4836
Calgary Police Service

Via EMAIL:

From: Mann, Helen R <HRMann@cbe.ab.ca>
Date: Fri, Jan 29, 2016 at 2:09 PM
Subject: A little more
To: George Taven <gtaven@seedsconnections.org>

In my role as Assistant Principal in the high school designated to Tsuu Tina students, I found myself in a unique and amazing situation.

When my group of FNMI students was asked to participate in the CONNECTIONS program they were stunned that someone / some organization thought they had something to offer. The students had very little access to technology so the pre and post work was a challenge. We had to arrange time from classes however when teachers of Science and Social Studies classes dropped in to see what was happening, the teachers were in awe of the knowledge base and sharing the FNMI student were engaged in. The group shared the struggles of life on the Reserve while the off Reserve students shared their experiences at assimilation. The students had a forum to share the derogatory comments that they were subjected to in school and in the community and this sharing was very evident when the students attended the Bragg Creek location. They had an opportunity to talk with students from various areas in the province with diverse socio economic backgrounds. All of the young people involved grew to accept and understand. The presentations by speakers affected all of the students and each could relate to some aspect of their life and in some cases, mere existence. The opportunity at CONNECTIONS gave students hope. They felt valued members of the community and took that new confidence and knowledge back to school with them.

For me as an educator the experience has been life changing. I am extremely actively involved in the Calgary Board of Education FNMI programs. I have been involved with the Aboriginal United Way program as well as assisting in the introduction of Aboriginal Studies 10 course for both FNMI and other students. My learning curve has been huge – sharing with colleagues some of the students' experiences, understanding the "why" of the Cree and Blackfoot cultures. Our student graduation increased with students sharing that the opportunities they had at CONNECTIONS gave them a new approach to their learning and a knowledge that they could be successful. That there were people "out there" who would guide and assist them as individuals, as human beings. I learned about the various opportunities for students to access further education supports. I learned more about myself. I continue to pursue opportunities to support our FNMI students and their families. At my current school, we have embraced the CONNECTIONS program and are enthusiastic participants. We are incorporating much of our learning in to presenting information to the student population. We are becoming more aware of the needs of our Aboriginal families.

I feel fortunate and honoured to have been asked to be a part of the CONNECTIONS program to support our Aboriginal students, their families and their culture.

Helen Mann
Assistant Principal, Ernest Manning High School