

## Educator & Parent Testimonials

### [Cold Lake High School – Dustin Walker, Principal](#)

December 8, 2015

To anyone considering having Dwayne Peace work for their organization:

Over the past six years Dwayne Peace has been part of a school improvement process at Cold lake High School in northern Alberta, Canada. He has presented to the full school of 600 students on two occasions, to our full Grade 9 cohort five times, to two groups of parents, and over eighteen workshop groups. All of the sessions, with the exception of the parent nights, were a half day in length. As you can see his involvement has been extensive at CLHS.

Our purpose for having Dwayne work to this extent at CLHS was to provide a basis for the school-wide culture change we were looking for. We wanted common language and action among students and staff, and Dwayne delivered. His experience, insight, courage and skill with kids results in close engagement for every minute that he is working with groups large and small. They hear his message, and we know this because we hear it from them months after he has presented. His message that 'everyone has a story' really hits home with kids who have 'tough stories'.

Our high school has come a long way in the last five and a half years; we have undergone some fundamental changes in how we work with students. It has been a careful, thoughtful, and sometimes difficult process that has had several important parts. After the first year we decided that as a grade 9 – 12 school we needed to build strong bones at the bottom, and so we redesigned how grade 9 was done at CLHS. We wanted kids to have a great start so we created a 'grade 9 only' teaching team who focussed on building relationships with students and with each other. They also became specialists in grade 9 curriculum and needs. With each year that has gone by we have narrowed Dwayne's scope from full school and at risk students to all the Grade 9 students. This year we had him do half-day, small group, intensive workshops with over 80% of the

grade nine students.

We were also very intentional about making logical changes to our timetable that placed students first. Grade 9 students and many other students in our high school struggled to stay engaged for during the full 84 minute blocks. Four years ago we changed to a 5 times 67 minute block system. At the same time we did a lot of work on changes to how (and why) we assessed student outcomes, and found that this had a huge impact on student achievement. We also vastly increased our option class selection to find out what kids wanted because we know that they had to be motivated to be here.

Attendance rates have increased significantly, and suspension/expulsions are only a fraction of what they were 5 years ago.

We also developed a cohesive Student Services Department that consists of a Special Education Coordinator, a Personal Counsellor, who is also a Social Worker. and an Academic Counsellor. While these positions existed before, they did not function as the cohesive unit they are now. This department has become the first stop for most student concerns. Dwayne works closely with them when he is in our building as many of the issues he deals with bring serious student issues to the surface.

CLHS has seen an improvement in academic results that is nothing, if not remarkable. Five years ago just over 56% of our Grade 9 students were reaching the acceptable standard on our Provincial Achievement Tests. Now over 75% reach this level. We have also doubled the number of students who reach the Level of Excellence. Five years ago 23% of aboriginal students reached acceptable—last year 64% percent reached this mark. Only 1 student out of 161 students who wrote a grade 12 English PDE (30-1 or 30-2) which is graduation requirement did not pass the exam! In 9 out of 10 Provincial Diploma Exams CLHS students beat the provincial average. We have many statistics that show that what we have been doing is working. A full presentation is available at the Cold Lake High School website.

We know that kids who feel safe at school, who feel like they belong, who feel like they have support from their friends and from staff, will be more successful than those who do not. This is part of Dwayne's message. His expertise rests with helping kids understand how they feel, helping kids understand how others feel, and helping kids to deal with the feelings that scare them, and that prevent them from doing well in life. This idea has been central to all that we have done at CLHS for the past 5 and a half years. We have tackled the tough structural issues at the school, we always working on the instructional improvements, and Dwayne has helped us build strong bones at Grade 9 to carry the school cultural changes into the high school grades. These strategies have all worked together, combined with great staff and a common purpose to help kids get the results they are now getting at CLHS. Dwayne Peace has been an important part of this journey. We have made a long-term commitment to Dwayne and he has returned that commitment to the students of our school. We appreciate that year after year he has shown up ready to deliver the same passion

and wisdom that makes a difference for kids, and on a larger scale, for CLHS.

Please do not hesitate to call me if you would like more information.

Sincerely,

Mr. Dustan Walker

Principal

## [Teacher – Bonnyville](#)

The Dwayne Peace small group session was definitely one of the most powerful and eye-opening experiences I have been through in my teaching career. Being exposed to each student's personal story was truly an amazing opportunity, which allowed me to grow both personally and professionally. As I enter the school each morning, the small group sessions act as a constant reminder that each and every student has their own story to bring to the table, and as an educator, that recognition, has the potential to move mountains.

## [Grimshaw Jr./Sr. High School](#)

Dwayne, Thank you so much for your efforts, caring and support for GHS. It is always an amazing week with you here. I know that the year will now be off to a good start and that many conflicts are on the way to being resolved. Much has changed here at GHS in the last ten years and it is because of people like you who do all you can to support and appreciate teenagers. Aren't they truly wonderful beings – exasperating at times too! Please know that your words will live on this year as we get our new group going and have our reminder posters around the school. Do let us know when you are in our area again...we would love a visit and a reminder session! I will definitely remind our administrators of your amazing work.

Know that I so appreciate your positive nature and your optimism. You touch so many lives in such a remarkable way! Thank you for making a difference in all of my passion and efforts at GHS

– Aleeta Ploc, Principal

## [George Wood Learning Center](#)

Our school is a small, special-setting school for students who are struggling with issues such as addictions, family conflicts, damaging peer pressures , and/or a variety of illnesses. During the past ten years, we have invited Mr. Dwayne Peace to speak to our students many times, and his presentations have always had a powerful impact on the youth. he talks to students about their choices and the effect those choices will have on their lives. Dwayne connects effortlessly with students, and they find it easy to listen to Dwayne's message because of his dynamic and inclusive speaking style. Following a presentation, I frequently hear students around the school or in classrooms cuing each other on behaviour and choices by using some of the very same vocabulary used during the presentations. I am confident that Dwayne has been responsible for positive changes in the lives of many of our youth and that they will remember his words well into adulthood. [More](#)

## [Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique \(SD93\)](#)

We invited Dwayne Peace to one of our schools in 2012 and in 2013 to speak with our grade 7 to 12 students. The three hour presentation was interactive and thought – provoking. What a positive impact on the students ! On top of that, the small group sessions were professional and solution-focused. The whole process has enabled the staff and students to have more authentic conversations and as a result, we established structures and processes in place to ensure regular student feedback and involvement. Students have demonstrated a higher degree of involvement and commitment to their school life and they are taking ownership of their learning. Thanks Dwayne!

[More](#)

## Parent

I just want to thank you (and school council) for having Dwayne Peace speak tonight. I was shocked and amazed by some things, I laughed and I cried (alot)... He is a wonderful speaker, and I really think that you should have him speak again. I wish I knew how great he was going to be, I would have brought friends. It is an incredibly tough topic but he presented it so well and I am glad the kids saw and heard what they did today too. Drugs are not something to sugarcoat or step around. My son, Erik, came home and was very emotional talking about the presentation. He said it really "hit his heart", and it took a lot for him not to cry at school – but he sure did when we were talking... Thank you... so much.

## Teacher

Hello, just a quick note to say I appreciated the presentation. It is good to let the kids know that we as adults realize the difficulties of growing up in a complicated world and we acknowledge the challenges but we do not have to bend under these pressures if we are willing to recognize these situations and we are willing to change or get involved in making our school better than it was as we found it. Your presentation had high energy, laughter and music, 3 components that are essential in holding your audience's attention.

## Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School

Dwayne was able to create an amazing response within our entire school and especially within the groups of students that we worked with in the small-group sessions.

The program format that Dwayne uses is very simple, but as it is with many large-scale operations, these good results only come with a set of comprehensive and very carefully laid-out plans. Dwayne was involved in preparing us for what he hoped to accomplish in his week at Lindsay Thurber, for putting on an amazing week of work with the kids, and for answering questions and providing post-program support.

Our teaching staff reported a number of positive results that they were able to observe from this presentation. As an example, one teacher wrote, "Please know your efforts are appreciated. Working as I do with a minority population in our school, I am so proud you have chosen to take action. I am just a bit protective of 'our kids' and know that a lot of what Dwayne talked about affects them. We would be silly to think all of the things he talked about don't happen in our school and within our community." This program rings true with teachers and kids because the things Dwayne talks about DO happen.

Following the school-wide presentation, Dwayne worked in a small group format for the next four days. In groups of 25 students, which were prepared mostly in advance of Dwayne's arrival, the main message of, "You don't need to know someone's story to have compassion, understanding and respect for that person," was promoted. One participating student wrote me a note after spending a day with us in the small-group session, "First I want to say thank you from the bottom of my heart! Today was really amazing! Feeling the group dynamic switch from strangers to friends was phenomenal. I feel such a connection with everyone who was in our group today, and I am really glad they've been brought into my life." As a further testament to the power of these sessions, I had over one hundred student-contacts, looking for my counselling services, as a follow-up to these sessions. Remarkable!

If the results of the good work which was done in our small-group sessions was limited to impacting the small-group participants only, then this program might not have the potency that I am attributing to it. In contrast, I believe meaningful school-wide change came from this activity. In a follow-up to the program we had hundreds of "Random Acts of Kindness" recorded in our school, as we took note of what could happen in a community of 1700 students and adults if a positive focus was made.

Just as powerful was our student body's reaction to a disgusting act of callousness which was promoted on the internet as kick-a-ginger day. On a school-wide announcement, one of our small group participants read the following words, "Yesterday we congratulated the students and staff of our school for recording 113 Random Acts of Kindness. Yesterday, as well, we are saddened to say that one student in our school reported that he was kicked by a multitude of students in what has been promoted as kick-a-ginger day. These acts of violence remind all of us that it is of utmost importance to RE-THINK our actions on a daily basis. Today, in the final day of our RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS campaign, we ask that you continue to promote kindness in our school, and that you take the time to record the wonderful things students and staff do for each other on a regular basis." The school responded by recording over 200 acts of kindness.

I continued to receive a great number of e-mails, comments, and feedback from students, teachers, administration, parents, and staff about the differences that were being noticed in the students' behaviours, demeanour, and in their choices. Following the Remembrance Day ceremony, it was noted that because of the work which was done with Dwayne Peace that our students' behaviour at the assembly was better than ever. I cannot remember a presentation receiving so much

feedback from such a wide array of staff, students, or parents.

– Brian J. Madill (B.Ed.; M.A.C.P.)

Counsellor Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School

## Corporate

I just wanted you to know, that today's safety meeting was an absolute success!! Your presentation was incredibly touching, informative and eye opening. I believe his inspiring passion for this topic, was felt by all that listened to him today. I wish you could have been there! Dwayne, just a personal thank you from me, and from all of us who were lucky enough to hear you speak today, thank you very much.