

# It's Drama and Arts for Sagkeeng

**By Kevin Chief**

It is quite typical that many First Nations communities have limited recreational opportunities for children and youth. Many communities place emphasis on various sports with opportunities like the Manitoba Indigenous Summer Games and the North American Indigenous Games motivating sporting competition at the community level. This is very valuable because it instills many positive attributes like physical activity, strong work ethics, and good sportsmanship. However, not all children are interested or can excel in sports and usually there are no alternatives within First Nations communities. The community-based school systems have limited resources and are unable to expose children and youth to options such as music programs and drama classes. Community volunteers and parents in Sagkeeng recognized this deficit and worked together to make new opportunities available for children and youth in their First Nation community.

In January 2006, Sagkeeng began offering programs such as fiddling lessons and drama classes. Success was apparent with nearly 70 children and youth registering for these initial programs. Through the support of community volunteers and parents Sagkeeng enhanced existing initiatives by offering art,



jigging, square-dancing, and guitar lessons in January 2007. The number of participants consistently grows, and it is expected that in January 2008 singing and vocal lessons will be added to the list.

In First Nations traditional beliefs, when children were growing and developing, it was the responsibility of the community to recognize children's strengths and help foster their talents. Children in Sagkeeng now have new outlets to express themselves, develop confidence, increase self-esteem, and discover untapped potential. In May 2007, the program participants showcased their new abilities in a recital. Community pride was apparent and the audience was enthusiastic with toe-tapping and smiles all around.

The Sagkeeng Arts and Drama

program is possible through volunteer fundraising initiatives and donations from community organizations. It is through the efforts of caring individuals in the community that this initiative has become a reality. The Sagkeeng Arts and Drama program has enlisted the support of talented community members who share their expertise in areas such as square-dancing, guitar lessons, art classes and community development. The renowned Clint Dutiaume conducts the fiddling component and Erin Hammond from the Prairie Theatre Exchange offers her gift for drama.

This is a credit to community volunteers, and the collaboration of talents and expertise. The result is happy children learning and growing. You never can tell, there may be the next Adam Beach amidst the group of young talent from Sagkeeng.