

Spirit Runner free activity app attracts Aboriginal youth

By Terry Lusty

Something new and novel can often pique the interest of young people no matter what cultural background they stem from.

Don Patterson and Janice Ryan have proven the point.

The two sports-minded individuals teamed up and after they had tossed around a number of ideas, they settled on the notion of developing an activity app that could encourage youngsters to adopt healthier lifestyles through sports and the inclusion of a specially-designed app, explained Patterson.

It is no secret that many of today's Aboriginal youth are far too idle, even obese. They are attached to all sorts of games and digital devices that deny them adequate physical activity and healthy lifestyles.

Both Ryan and Patterson are fine specimens themselves of what constitutes good physical health. Last year, as but one example, Patterson, an avid cyclist, travelled the entire breadth of Canada, a distance of over 7,200 kilometres and he did it all in just over 28 days at an average of 256 kilometres a day.

His cross-Canada tour raised much-needed funds to help kids who could not afford to take part in YMCA programs.

"Janice and I wanted to look at how to help Aboriginal kids in particular so we came up with the name Spirit Runner (for the app)," explained Patterson.

The device, he added, challenges kids "to achieve active and, therefore, healthier lives. "On a suggestion from Ryan, Patterson sought out some financial support and Ryan hired Fission Media in Edmonton to create an app that would "record kids' workouts, track their progress and tell them things like time, distances, and so on that they have achieved."

Once developed, the two-member team had Aboriginal youth aged nine to sixteen test it. The youth were from the Boyle Street Education Centre and Crystal Kids Youth Centre in Edmonton as well as Hobbema's Ermineskin Reserve, approximately a one-hour drive south of Edmonton.

Aside from the technical elements and on the advice of the youth themselves, said Ryan, "I gathered over 200 worthwhile quotes from notable sports figures and Aboriginal leaders, people like Wayne Gretzky, Mahatma Ghandi, Chief Dan George, Sun Bear, and even more."

Patterson had likewise expressed the "importance of having leaders" as role models. Adding their quotes gives the app that special flavour and the kids just love it, claims an excited Ryan.

The Spirit Runner app can be downloaded from iTunes or spiritrunnerapp.com

The app contains a number of activities and they can be changed or deleted as required.

To further entice kids to jump on the band wagon, a "reward system" was devised. Once a child has achieved, the reward pops up on the app. This tends to give the participating children a lift and inspires many of them to take things still further and achieve more rewards. Additionally, better health also lends itself to better academic performance and self-confidence as well as less possibility for criminal activity, substance abuse, or self-destructive patterns.

You can, for example, pedal a bicycle and track your progress with the use of the app, stated Patterson.

The app icon, a running hare and a running fox, was designed by Jessica Desmoulin, an Aboriginal artist. "The hare represents the female spirit, the fox represents a male spirit," Patterson explained.

Ryan and Patterson admit that more funding would be required for expansion of the program and that they'd approach potential sponsors/sources.

Professionally, Patterson is a lawyer; Ryan is a writer, author, media personality and actor.