

# Facing Forward



A B O U T F A C E

## Making faces by Michael Williams-Stark

...continued from front page

making faces is a non-profit organization that provides workshops that teach acting skills and improvisational games to children with facial differences to both build confidence and develop important life skills.



A number of years ago, Michael Williams-Stark and his brilliant pal Abby Thomas saw a television program on AboutFace, an organization that helps people with facial differences. Through Abby's encouragement he decided to see what he could do to help kids dealing with the same challenges and struggles that he went through as a kid.

Michael made himself available to help out at special events and participated in support meetings and talks, but he really found his place when he facilitated a workshop on humour at AboutFace's first Family Day in Toronto.

Since then, Michael's workshops have become a regular and popular item. The original one-day program evolved into an eight-week workshop series called making faces.

making faces ran for four years at the Hospital for Sick Children's Bear theatre as well as at the Children's Rehabilitation Centre of Essex County. Ultimately, Michael hopes to offer the program to every AboutFace chapter in North America.

The children practice eye contact, voice projection, public speaking and creative storytelling and are encouraged to use their voices and express themselves in a fun, creative and safe environment. The games build their confidence and make them feel good about who they are and what they can achieve.

Parents and children complete a questionnaire at the start and end of each workshop to assess the program and monitor changes and attitudes. "Parents tell us they can see the changes in their child. Teachers see it too. A child who rarely spoke before attending classes starts asking questions and entering discussions. It's wonderful to hear," says Michael.

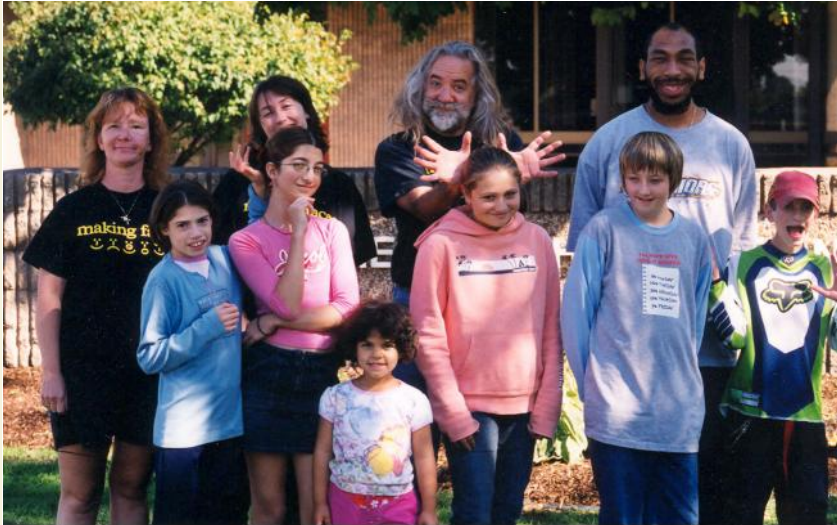
The workshops also offer the opportunity for children to meet other children with facial differences and provide a safe, caring environment where they can discuss differences, teasing and related issues. Michael Williams-Stark, the workshop instructor,



# Facing Forward



A B O U T F A C E



was himself born with a severe cleft lip and palate. During the workshops he shows the children a photograph of himself as a child, "then I see the acceptance, their sense that I am one of them", says Michael. At one picture-sharing session, a little girl put her head on Michael's shoulder and said, "So you understand." "They know I've walked in their shoes and taken the same journey. If I can achieve my dreams, so can they. I want to inspire and nurture those dreams."

To join the making faces mailing list and to stay informed of upcoming workshops and events, please contact Michael at [michael@makingfaces.ca](mailto:michael@makingfaces.ca) or 416-875-3223. [www.makingfaces.ca](http://www.makingfaces.ca)