

Runner motivates students to find 'purpose and passion'

Marathon winner Tarrant Cross Child says running helped his recovery from alcoholism, depression

GREG SAKAKI
NEWS BULLETIN

NOTE: This story discusses attempted suicide, which may be distressing for some readers.

Tarrant Cross Child's rehabilitation centre in Saskatchewan was in the middle of flat fields of wheat, and he could see for kilometres.

He could see a farmer's shed in the distance, so he ran there and back. Another day, he ran a little farther, making it to the highway turnoff and back. Eventually, he ran all the way to the train tracks.

"With running, I realized setting goals for myself that I was a goal setter and a goal achiever," he said. "That really gave me that purpose to be able to get up every day, to have those goals."

Eight years later and eight years sober, the

45-year-old was in B.C. this past weekend to take part in the Vancouver Marathon on Sunday, May 1. He was in Nanaimo on Friday, April 29, to speak with students at two local elementary schools.

"My message is one of hope and restoration," said Cross Child, who is Niisitapi, a member of the Blackfoot Confederacy. "I want to be able to share my story, hoping that I could help at least one individual."

Cross Child, in addition to motivational speaking and charity work as an ambassador for New Balance Canada and Brainsport, founded Prairie Run Crew to share his passion for running with at-risk youths.

He talks to young people about finding "purpose and passion," he said, and it's a message he can tailor to his audience. When speak-

ing to primary students, he'll say he was sick, and he'll tell them about what it meant to his recovery to see that far-off shed in the wheat fields, and reach it, and run farther the next time.

When speaking with older students, he doesn't gloss over the details. He'll tell them how his alcoholism "shackled and chained" him, and how he stole money from his own children for booze and missed their soccer practices and music recitals. He'll tell students how he wrote farewell letters to his four children, then tried to die by suicide.

Rehab came with realizations for Cross Child. He found that through it all, he still had the support from his family. His kids were young enough that he saw an opportunity for "a new life," one in which their father wasn't



Tarrant Cross Child laces up a pair of running shoes at Frontrunners Nanaimo on Friday, April 29, before heading to speak to elementary school students. (Greg Sakaki/News Bulletin)

an alcoholic. Individuals are products of their past, but don't need to be prisoners to it, Cross

Child learned. And there was running. He had been fast in his youth and had

even won the Saskatchewan Marathon in 1998, but he went a decade without running while

consumed by his addiction.

"Within a week or two after [starting rehab] I started running. I couldn't make it the equivalent around a city block, but I had that desire and that passion to be able to start running again," Cross Child said. "I knew I needed something."

He's worked his way back up to marathons, and a month after the Vancouver event, will run the Saskatchewan Marathon. He's not competitive the same way he was in his prime, but he competes against himself, which he said is harder, in a way.

Cross Child thought once that there was no way out of the "deep, dark" place he was in, but he ran away from it, to the shed, to the highway turnoff, to the train tracks, and has kept putting one foot in front of the other.

"I've never been out for a run and regretted it," he said.

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