

Leadership expert impressed with Ponoka youth programs

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David Irvine, an expert on leadership development in Canada, was in Ponoka to talk about mentorship and how inspired he is about what is being done in Ponoka on April 11 at the Ponoka Youth Centre. It was a part of Volunteer Appreciation Night for BBBS and the Boys and Girls Club. / PHOTO BY JORDIE DWYER

One of Canada's top experts on leadership and personal development heaped praise on what is being done for youth in Ponoka.

David Irvine, a leadership development expert from Cochrane, was the guest speaker at the Ponoka Youth Centre on April 11 as part of the Volunteer Appreciation Night put on by a pair of organizations — Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) of Ponoka and the Boys and Girls Clubs of Wolf Creek.

Irvine brings more than 35 years experience as a family counselor, workshop facilitator, professional speaker and is recognized as one of this country's authorities on developing leadership skills.

He spoke to a crowd of around 40 people about mentorship, a subject both organizations have been working hard on.

"My talk is really about stressing the importance of mentoring and this is where it starts — mentoring young people to prepare them for life," said Irvine.

"I'm here to give this wonderful community some support because they know how to build a mentoring community. I think we, as a whole, are realizing the importance of relationships and of impacting, influencing and inspiring young people."

He added that the continued advancement of technology — from better cellphones and wireless communication to instant messaging around the world — has meant a loss of connection with the younger generations. However, Irvine sees programs such as the one in Ponoka is helping close that gap.

"There has been a resurgence in the awareness of how limiting technology actually is. We live so isolated and that's why I am so inspired by the Ponoka community in really fostering this notion of connecting and influencing young people," he explained.

"I look in this room and there is a whole community of people that are committed to young people. It is so inspiring."

Having been involved in the field of leadership development since 1989 and a family therapist for years prior to that, Irvine values just what the organizations and the volunteers here in Ponoka are doing.

"It really does take a community to raise a child," he stated.

"Parents can't do it alone. We all need support and I think this community is on the cusp of emerging, understanding and awareness of how to be that leading edge model of what a community needs to be doing for and with young people."

And the fact the mentoring program is going strong and continues to grow, it shows the community is building momentum for its future.

"(BBBS and the Youth Centre) have got a whole community where they support each other and celebrate together plus it's all built on sustaining, upholding and supporting the program. It isn't just a one-time event," he said.

"We have to build on that and what better way to do that than to build a community centred around the needs of kids and how to inspire and foster those relationships. That's our future and technology isn't doing it."