

Circle of Voices reveals the healing power of Kihew

BY AMANDA WAPASS-GRIFFIN

What happens when you have seven passionate young people, a talented playwright, and a theatre company with a vision? The answer is easy: Magic.

This year the Saskatchewan Native Theatre Company's Circle of Voices (COV) production of *Kihew*, by Saskatoon playwright, Curtis Peeteetuce, is hitting the stage at the end of this month. *Kihew*, which means 'eagle' in Cree, is a play that deals with pertinent issues such as cultural identity, healing and the intergenerational effects of residential school.

The story circles around Patricia Kihew and her three grandchildren, Terry, Joel and Winter. This is a family with secrets from the past that are beginning to resurface as Patricia struggles with the decision whether she should accept her settlement cheque or not. The play is poignant, humorous and, at times, eerie, as it explores how Patricia and her grandchildren are affected by their family's residential school experience.

This play could not have come at a better time as this fall residential school settlement money will pass into the hands of over 80,000 former students who attended the 130 residential schools across Canada.

This year's COV participants, Deidre Badger, Jaired Henderson, Daniel Knight, Demitrius Knight, Nicole Morin, Aaron Shingoose and Cory Standing, breathe life into *Kihew* and the message

it bears. Henderson, who plays Terry, describes *Kihew* as "a wake up call."

It is a 'wake-up call' that is necessary

"The characters in *Kihew* are strong and real," asserts Standing, "and people will relate to that."



Aaron Shingoose, Cory Standing, Demitrius Knight, Daniel Knight, Jaired Henderson, Deidre Badger and Nicole Morin (seated) are this year's Circle of Voices participants.

as the issue of residential schools and their intergenerational effects are prevalent in Aboriginal communities in our province and across the country. *Kihew* provides a powerful glimpse into what many individuals, families and communities are dealing with.

Kihew is about making choices and the power of right choices. The young people in this production talk frankly about the choice they made to be in Circle of Voices which challenges them to live alcohol and drug free during the eight month program. They acknowledge

it is about making one choice at a time.

"Everyone is capable of change, they just need direction," states Badger, who plays Patricia and spent a year in a residential school herself.

All agree that what they have had to sacrifice pales to what they have gained – self-respect, self esteem and getting back in touch with their culture.

As rehearsals for *Kihew* continue in full force and opening night looms on the horizon, some expressed anxiety and questioned the impact the play would have on audience members.

Their fears were put to rest when they performed a staged reading of *Kihew* for the Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat in Regina last week.

After the reading, the cast and crew received a standing ovation and many in the audience had tears in their eyes as the message hit close to home.

Past COV productions have not shied away from the big issues and *Kihew* is keeping true to that spirit. Badger sums it up perfectly, "If we are going to heal, we have to heal as a people."

Kihew opens Oct. 27 and runs until Nov. 4 in Saskatoon before embarking on a province-wide tour.

Call SNTC at 933-2262 if you are interested in having the production come to your community