

The Sky Works Newsletter

Fall 2005



Starry Night at Kids Care World Premiere

On September 25th, 2005 an event as magical and moving as it was hopeful and helpful took place inside Toronto's Isabel Bader Theatre: the world premiere screening of *Kids Care* and the launch of its Canada-wide tour.

This compelling documentary takes the deeply personal stories and profound insights of 23 amazing young people who have lost a loved one to cancer. In doing so, *Kids Care* not only gives those kids a voice for their own grieving, but also sets the framework for other kids to do the same. As *Kids Care* Executive Producer Pat Davidson expressed, "This is a documentary by kids, who will take the film to communities to support kids, where screenings will be facilitated by kids. It's about kids helping kids."

Award-winning Laura Sky's thirtieth documentary film is an extension of Sky Works' deep commitment to creating opportunities for people to speak to audiences with their own voices, to stimulate discussion and to inspire both community and personal change.

We all have something in common. We've all lost a family member or friend to cancer. We are all at different ages and stages of our lives. We've come to understand that by helping each other, we've been able to help ourselves. We hope this film will help others too. – *Kids Care* participant Kerri Ford, age 16

Over 450 people filled the theatre on the evening of the premiere, but the most important audience

members were the young participants themselves – the true stars of this important film. There was an exciting energy of anticipation and celebration as the screening time drew near.

Asked to describe the hours leading up to this moment, which had been 18 months in the making, Laura exclaimed, "I was incredibly excited. I knew we had something wonderful. I love this film. All my other films contributed to the strength of this one. To make these films, people need to bring their heads and hearts into it – *Kids Care* is the pinnacle of that."



Pat Davidson and Laura Sky

Just what does make this film so special and important? For starters, it addresses an unmet need. Pat Davidson recalls, "No matter what community we were in when we traveled with the film's inspiration *How Can We Love You?* (a previous Sky Works film about two women living with terminal cancer), people so often asked us, 'What about the kids?'"

Sky Works realized that young people who have lost a parent, sibling or friend to cancer need a chance to

voice their feelings and frame their issues in their own terms. “This film is not about adults telling kids how they ought to feel or what they ought to do during the grieving process,” explains Laura. “We’re not saying you always have to be strong and noble; we’re saying it can help to talk to other kids and especially those in the same situation.”

Social worker Ruth Krongold who worked closely with the kids to provide them with emotional support and counselling (and trained the kids as facilitators with Jenny Marino), describes the power of this film another way: “*Kids Care* and the process used to develop it taught the kids that they have permission to stay connected to the loved one they lost, versus feeling that they must let go and move on which is what society traditionally tells them to do. *Kids Care* is a very different, much more healing approach.”

Another aspect that makes this film exceptional is how the kids themselves guided Laura and her team. The 17 young people who made up the Kids Advisory Group advised the research. They also participated in the production, appear in the film and most are now traveling with it as peer facilitators. The kids gave tremendous direction and “they were always right!” Laura provides the example of two of the kids asking her if they could be filmed again because their feelings had changed from when the first filming was done. “We wouldn’t have thought to do that without their suggestion,” she offers.



Laura with Scott, Leslie, Aubrey and Rachel

The “update” section of the film is a powerful one. As a viewer you start nodding your head in understanding of the new, wiser position these two young people are now at as a result of participating in the *Kids Care* group. Right before your eyes, you see the benefit of what the film is proposing, and you can

start to imagine the incredible potential it has to touch other young people in need.

Kids Care participant Leslie Giddings expands on the documentary’s healing potential, adding, “When kids who have lost a loved one see this film, it may not be the right time for them to voice all that is going on inside, but just knowing the film exists and that other kids talked about their feelings will get them thinking about opening up too.”



Kristina and Aubrey Miner with Ruth Krongold

This documentary is very thought provoking as it truly outlines the multitude of emotions children experience when they travel the grief journey. So many things that were said in the documentary are words that I have heard from the adolescents in our group. – Alison Serrao, Guidance Counselor, Teacher and Bereavement Facilitator, Ajax, ON

Filmicly, there are many memorable moments. The most compelling happens during a campfire ceremony where each young person lights a candle in memory of a parent, sibling or friend they have lost. In the quiet stillness of the evening, they set the candles afloat on the calm, almost reverent water. When that sequence is on screen, there is only the quiet of the night: no music, no voiceover. Just pure, natural silence for two full minutes. The need for silence in the healing process was another important tool that the kids taught the adults during the filming. And in the silence of these moments, the film respects the need for viewers – kids and adults – to pause and be with their emotions.

Before the final credit had rolled through, audience members were on their feet applauding. Few eyes were dry, but the tears were not all for sadness and

sorrow; they were also for admiration and awe of the strength, courage and wisdom of the young people in the film. The applause was not just for a film well done, but also in appreciation of the kids for how far they had come in what was truly a transformative experience.

It's hard to put into words how much I gained from being part of the Kids Care project. It helped me to get through the situation with my Mom. I always felt alone and secluded and at first I didn't want to talk about it. Then after hearing the other kids' stories I started to open up and it became less painful. Then I felt good because I felt free and lighter emotionally. – Kids Care participant Rachel Serrao, age 17

After many heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in the making of *Kids Care*, the stars of the film took the stage and geared up for their first taste of being in the spotlight, answering questions about their own loss and offering support to those also grieving. The audience experienced the true goal of the film, as it is for all Sky Works documentaries: an open dialogue on a vital social issue leading to personal and community growth.

The work on the film *Kids Care* is done; now the community work with *Kids Care* has begun! Most of the kids who were on stage that night will travel with the film to communities across Ontario and Canada. "I think it's amazing that the film is going to tour the country," exclaimed *Kids Care* participant Kerri Ford. "There are so many kids who need support and now we're able to go to them."

Every tour stop will involve two of the young participants, one counselor from Camp Oochigeas (a camp for kids affected by cancer) to support the young facilitators, and a skilled adult facilitator. In each community there will be a free public screening of *Kids Care* followed by a discussion led by the *Kids Care* team. *Kids Care* is designed to be used by parents and parents groups, and as a professional development tool for teachers, social workers, hospice staff and volunteers, and health care providers. The team will also train members of the community and interested professionals - using the guide that accompanies the film.

It really is an amazing documentary to show to educators as it helps them readily understand the important issues facing the young people in Kids Care. It certainly touched all [the teachers] and they learned so much from the participants of the film. It is a valuable teaching tool! – Fran King, Educational Consultant and Grief Therapist, Whitby, ON

Thanks to an exceptionally generous donation from The Lawson Foundation, *Kids Care* will tour extensively throughout Ontario for two years, reaching communities large and small. Within a week of the premiere, we had 18 invitations from communities right across the province.

Your 'kids' are an inspiration. You have created a healing tool for children, their families and their communities.... We are proud to support Kids Care to travel across Ontario. – Angie Killoran, Executive Director, The Lawson Foundation



The Lawson Foundation's Karen Shelstad, Linda Swift, Angie Killoran with Pat

The national tour of *Kids Care* is being generously sponsored by Ronald McDonald House Charities who also contributed to the production of the film. After recently showing a clip of the documentary to their board of directors, the support in the room was palpable. Board members offered the involvement of their 12 Ronald McDonald Houses across the country (they provide accommodations and compassionate support for families who have children with life-threatening illness) and the involvement of their owner/operators nation-wide

The challenge with the Canadian tour is that ours is a large country. Sky Works is already receiving requests for screenings from the Pacific across to the Atlantic spawned by the impressive media coverage

following the *Kids Care* premiere.

On September 29th a Canadian Press wire story featured interviews with Kerri Ford and Rachel Serrao and was carried by 14 newspapers across Canada. Other calls came from former *How Can We Love You?* hosts who were interested in Kids Care.

“Our goal is not simply to arrive in a community, screen the film, and then leave,” explains Laura. “Our long term goal is to bring a valuable tool to communities across Canada. A tool they can use to support young people in a long term and sustainable process.”

I hope that this film can travel as far as possible and that as many people as possible can see it because even if you haven't lost a loved one, there are many lessons to learn from it – like about relationships and helping people. – *Kids Care* participant Robert Pavan, age fifteen

Asked if he had a message for people who have lost a loved one, Robert exclaimed without hesitation, “Watch the film!” Sage advice from one of *Kids Care*'s young stars.



Friends of Brendon deSouza: Robert Pavan, Neal McKinnon, JR Farmer, James Fernihough & Corey Lourenco

Kids Care Coming to a Theatre Near You!

Would you like the *Kids Care Tour* to come to your community? Do you know a group of kids who have lost a loved one to cancer and would benefit from the powerful message of this documentary? Or any parents, young friends, teachers, medical staff, or social workers that would be helped knowing how to support kids who have lost a loved one? Sky Works would welcome the opportunity to arrange a

screening plus facilitated discussion and, if desired, a *Train the Trainers* workshop in your town. Our only criterion is that there is a grief support network in place for the kids (or that you are actively planning one.)

To schedule a screening in your community, please call the Sky Works office at 416-536-6581 or e-mail them at skyworks@sympatico.ca

To buy individual copies for your own personal or professional use, contact our distributors: V-Tape at 416-351-1317 or distribution@vtape.org

A Poem for my Friends

Brendon deSouza wrote this in May 2002 before he passed away. He was 11 years old. Brendon's six closest pals, who are featured in the documentary, and trained as facilitators, designed and built a peace garden with their school in his memory.

*Friends are truthful,
for truth is the special bond between friends.*

*Friends listen,
for the time to listen to one another is golden.*

*Friends care,
not just when times are good
but especially when times are difficult.*

*Friends are helpful,
they help carry the load of any burden.*

*Friends are reliable,
they are always there, rain or shine.*

*Friends forgive,
because friendship is more important
than just being right.*

*Friends are kind,
for they give when they have so little to give.*

*Friends are lucky,
I'm very lucky to have you all as my friends.*

Thank you all very much.

A Standing Ovation

Sky Works would like to express its immense gratitude to the following supporters who made the production and touring of *Kids Care* possible:

The Lawson Foundation 2005/2006
Ronald McDonald House Charities
TD Financial Services
The Henry White Kinnear Foundation
Arnold Massey and Jane Stodgell
St. Paul's Guarantee Insurance Company
The Royal Bank of Canada Foundation
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Robert & Jilla Williams
Mo & Pat Bent
Peter Douglas

And to all the many other families and friends and thoughtful donors – we couldn't have done it without your belief and generosity.

Sky Works would also like to applaud and thank the many enthusiastic, committed volunteers who helped make *Kids Care* a reality.

Unique Tour Funding Opportunity

We want to get *Kids Care* into as many communities as possible. The more places we visit, the more young people dealing with the loss of a loved one we can reach and the more parents, educators, social workers, grief counselors, medical staff we can support in their work with kids and families.

While Ronald McDonald House Charities' and The Lawson Foundation's wonderful support will enable *Kids Care* to meet current tour requests, fundraising will be ongoing to ensure that Laura and her team never have to say "no" to a community because it

doesn't have the necessary financial resources. Every penny donated to *Kids Care* will take the film another mile.

You can help! So please consider donating to Sky Works' *Kids Care* Project and help us to expand the tour. The number of requests for screenings is growing each day and your donation will make a difference!

Please fill out the donation form on the back page or contact the Sky Works office at 416-536-6581 or e-mail us at skyworks@sympatico.ca for more details on how to become a *Kids Care* Tour Sponsor.



The Douglas Family at the Launch

Sky Works in Review

While this issue of *The Sky Works Newsletter* is dedicated to the world premiere of *Kids Care*, we wanted to keep you abreast of the recent goings-on of three other very strong, very important documentaries.

Mary Coyne Rowell Jackman: A Person in Her Own Right offers a candid, intimate and thought-provoking look at a remarkable woman born in the lingering shadow of the Victorian era who chose to embrace the modern world. The goal of this film is not only to paint a vivid and realistic portrait of Mary Coyne Rowell Jackman, but also to create a framework to help audiences develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of the role of our mothers, grandmothers, and women who came before us. This richly textured documentary, commissioned by Mary's daughter Nancy Ruth, is being released on November 30th at Toronto's Isabel Bader theatre.

Prescription for Addiction is a compelling documentary about the benefits *and* the health and social risks of prescription opiate use. The film's goal is to enhance community awareness of the issues surrounding opiate misuse and dependency. Commissioning sponsors for this powerful educational resource are the Ontario Federation of Mental Health and Addiction Programs in partnership with St. Joseph's Care Group. *Prescription for Addiction* had its debut screening on October 25th in London, Ontario.

Crisis Call, released in 2003, a unique documentary that asks if there is any way to prevent a mental health crisis from escalating into violence, continues to travel throughout Ontario. *Crisis Call* was the catalyst for the development of the **Mental Health and Criminal Justice Project** in Thunder Bay Ontario. This pilot project, co sponsored by Sky Works and the Thunder Bay branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association, has been functioning for more than a year and includes more than 40 stakeholders. Our goal is to reach across sectors, (police, community service, mental health and consumer/survivors) to develop alternative practices to address the needs of people dealing with mental health issues, and to prevent the criminalization of psychiatric survivors.

Also noteworthy...

In June, Laura Sky was awarded her second **Media Award** from the Canadian Mental Health Association. This award honours a media representative who has made an outstanding contribution to the coverage of mental health issues.

Sky Works was granted an **Award of Excellence for Fighting Crime** by the Toronto Police Service and the Ontario government for our "commitment and success at developing community outreach and public education initiatives for groups at risk, specifically for persons suffering mental illness."

In Toronto **Now Magazine** has just recognized Laura as one of the city's five "great documentary filmmakers"

It has been a great year! We're thriving, growing and reaching wider and greater audiences.

What We Do and Who We Are

Sky Works is an independent, registered non-profit documentary organization. We make documentaries that deal with contemporary issues and then use the documentary as a community development tool to help concerned communities create strategies to deal with the issue. Our documentaries are designed to encourage audiences to see the value of their own experience and to take action on their own behalf. They raise questions, stimulate discussion, and encourage the audience's participation in social and community processes. We work closely with community groups, educational organizations, and peer support groups, including them in the formulation, editing and distribution of our documentaries.

Skyworks Board of Directors

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Sky Works Charitable Foundation Donation Form

Name: _____

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Amount: \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 \$5,000

A dollar a kilometer will send the *Kids Care* team to more screenings and workshops across the country. Number of kilometers I would like to donate _____.

Please make cheques payable to: **Sky Works Charitable Foundation**. To pay by Visa or MasterCard, please fill in:
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