

Addictions specialist speaks this week

Sage Birchwater
Tribune Staff Writer

As a guest of School District 27 and Toosey First Nation, addictions recovery specialist Lee Mason is speaking to youth, parents and educators from across the Cariboo Chilco- tin all this week.

Mason, who works with drug addicted people in the Downtown East Side of Vancouver, has been to Williams Lake before, when he brought his hard- edged, Scared Straight, drug awareness program to town. This time around he is presenting his workshop, Path of Honour.

Joan Gentles, director of instruction for First Nations Education for School District 27, says the purpose of the sessions is to work on creating harmony amongst all students in a healthy way.

"We hope to touch over 900 students," Gentles says. "And we hope to see many adults there as well. We all have to work together to change the climate of fear in our community."

Luke Doxtator, health director for Toosey Band,

originally put the proposal together to bring Mason to his community. But then he figured he'd reach way more kids by partnering with the school district.

Buses brought grades seven to nine students all the way in from Anahim Lake, Tatla Lake, Nemiah Valley, Redstone, Alexis Creek, Dog Creek and Esket for the session yesterday in Williams Lake Secondary School gym, with all the Grade 8 students from both local high schools.

Today, Sept. 23, the session will be for all the Grade 9 students in both high schools. Tomorrow, Sept. 24 the venue shifts to Columneetza Secondary School gym for a session with all the Grade 7 students from schools in the Williams Lake area.

Parents, teachers and community members will have two opportunities to attend the workshop. On Thursday evening, Sept. 25, a session will be held in the WLSS commons area from 6:30 to 9 p.m., and on Friday morning, the public can attend a session in conjunction with

the teachers Pro-D activity Friday morning, Sept. 26, from 9 a.m. to noon at Columneetza. People are asked to sign up through the professional development registration.

Mason describes Path of Honour as a workshop of education and empowerment for youth of all ages. He says it focuses on helping youth rebuild their self-esteem, and regain their personal pride.

"It's a workshop that relearns the importance of respecting females and bringing honour and pride back to the community," Mason says.

Mason is critical of today's music and videos for their serious negative effect on youth forming healthy attitudes. He says rap music young people listen to causes them to get drawn into destructive lifestyles portrayed in the music.

He says his workshop is presented in a non-shaming, non-blaming manner. The sessions are very interactive involving all participants through open discussion.

"Through this type of interactive teaching, the

participants are empowered to stand together to end the self-defeating and self-destructive behaviours taking place among each other," he says.

Using First Nations imagery, Mason says the participants learn the value of walking the path of the peaceful warrior.

"The peaceful warrior movement teaches that a warrior's greatest weapon is the mind, not fists and violence."

He says use of the mind in a good, healthy way is important to developing a mind that is free from the ravages of alcohol and drugs.

Mason says one of the aims of the workshop is to encourage youth to become role models.

"By standing up as a role model for our community, we become a true warrior — humble, brave, generous and respectful."

Mason begins the workshop showing a brand new documentary, *Tears*

For April, produced by the Vancouver Police Odd Squad.

"It's not released yet," Mason says. "It's a hard-core look at the Downtown East Side."

He says the objective of the film is to give kids a good look at the tragic life of addiction and prostitution that young people get caught up in.

"We want to give the kids a good look at this so they can make better choices before they end up down there," he says.

To make his point, Mason asks three young people Stevie, 13, Kole, 14 and Kayla, 12 to join him at the microphone.

"There are children your age down there in the survival sex trade, trapped on the skids," he says to them. Kids are getting younger and younger down there.

"We're going to talk about drugs today."

For further information contact Joan Gentles at 250-398-3822.