



PotashCorp Children's Festival of SK
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April 18, 2013

RE: Martin Varallo and Dominique Major, Circus Arts Instructors

To whom it may concern,

It is my pleasure to recommend circus arts instructors Martin Varallo and Dominique Major. My colleague Neal Rempel, who is the Executive Director of the Winnipeg International Children's Festival and the Manitoba Circus and Magic Program for at-risk youth, introduced me to Martin and Dominique.

For the past several years, my festival has been building a program for children age 9 - 14 using social circus concepts and activities as the mode of delivery. This work is being done in partnership with the Saskatoon Public Schools division and the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools division. In February 2013, the opportunity arose for us to run a circus arts day camp for at-risk children during the April school break, and due to funding requirements we needed to source qualified instructors on short notice who teach in French and English.

Martin Varallo and Dominique Major were excellent instructors and program leaders for this project. Social circus is built around concepts of community development, using the acquisition of basic circus skills as a platform for cooperative, positive learning. It is particularly effective among marginalized and/or culturally diverse groups, as it puts everyone on the same plane. However, effective social circus training also demands more of the instructors than simple "how-to" interaction with students. Because participants have immediate quality-of-life needs that impact their everyday experience, successful teaching with social circus groups of all ages often requires more of the leaders. Qualities such as cultural sensitivity, knowledge of behavioural and/or health-related challenges, the ability to communicate in a positive manner while still maintaining firm boundaries of safe and appropriate conduct, and the instinct to adapt a lesson in the moment in order to set up steps for participant success are equally as important as the expert proficiency required to teach these very specialized skills to any group of beginners. To find instructors who are able to deliver at this level can be a test in itself.

Martin and Dominique are more than capable of meeting this challenge. Their years of work as solo artists and on tour with groups like Cirque du Soleil prove they are world-class professional artists in their respective fields; Martin is an excellent physical comedy, timing and character development specialist using balance and juggling as a performance and teaching format, and Dominique is not only a top-level tumbling and trampoline instructor/performer, but she is also one of the few German Wheel artists in the world. Their professional circus arts skills are unquestionable. They also demonstrate masterful talent in social leadership and program facilitation with children of extremely diverse and marginalized backgrounds. Owning and running their own circus school gives them daily practice as instructors. That they are also capable of immediately instilling structure and group management within the chaotic framework of a 100-child indoor camp setting was a boon to the other program leaders.

As performers and as educators, Martin Varallo and Dominique Major deliver high-quality work that would benefit any in-school or community-based program setting using circus arts and/or social circus modules as a means to engagement. They have my highest respect and recommendation, and I will not hesitate to call on them again as our own program evolves. In fact, I will next work with them in June, as I have booked them again as mainstage performers and workshop instructors at our 25th anniversary 4-day festival event. Should you require further information, please contact me at <directorchildfest@sasktel.net>, or by calling 306-664-3378 ext. 5. I would be happy to speak about the unique abilities of these remarkable people any time.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shauna Bradford-Wilson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Shauna Bradford-Wilson
Executive Director
N. SK. International Children's Festival
(PotashCorp Children's Festival of Saskatchewan)