

# Puppets help kids deal with life's challenges

BY ANNA-CHRISTINA DI LIBERTO  
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**T**his isn't any ordinary puppet show. Concerned Kids helps educate more than 63,000 young children every year about social issues through puppetry.

It was in 1989 that Concerned Kids — Communicating Through Puppetry began.

Since then, the group has captured the attention of 306,000 young people in York Region schools, educating them about HIV/AIDS and substance abuse through interactive puppetry.

"This program is beneficial for all young people. It provides them with information to make proper choices when they are faced with lifestyle decisions," said Joyce Attis, executive director for Concerned Kids.

This year, the organization has added two new programs that target young people in grades 4 to 6 — one on bereavement and another on violence, gangs and prejudice.

The programs target different age groups ranging from kindergarten to Grade 9 depending on the topic.

Organizers say interactive puppetry as a medium for delivering these messages to young people has a high impact because participants feel comfortable with puppets and are not threatened, as they might be with an adult.

Concerned Kids provides pre-presentation materials for teachers, interactive life-size puppet performances 45 minutes long and follow-up materials to promote further discussion.

This non-profit organization does not charge for its performances, therefore it is reliant on donations, fundraising and sponsorships.

Funding is needed so more puppets can be purchased, more troupes can run and new programs can be introduced.

The organization is currently looking for 30 volunteers with either drama experience or dramatic flare.

Organizers suggest being part of this organization would be a valuable experience for those interested in teaching, as well.

Volunteers will begin an eight-week training course Aug. 30.

The course will enable them to participate as puppeteers. They will learn various techniques, such as characterization, lip synchronization, manoeuvring, dealing with the social issue program and about team and troupe work.

Volunteers are required to commit one half-day a week for



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Puppeteer Livia Pravato (left) brings hospice nurse Abbie Lynch to life as she introduces a doggie to puppet Kenny Montgomery, held by Joyce Attis, a boy who suffers from a brain tumour.

the whole school year.

Livia Pravato has been with the organization for six years. She started as a volunteer puppeteer and now works full time as the office co-ordinator.

She considered volunteering for Concerned Kids after seeing an ad in a newspaper.

"I thought it would be a good way to gain a new skill in pup-

peteering and to teach children," said Pravato.

Organizers are also looking for a new member to join the board of directors. Anyone with fundraising experience is invited to apply.

For more information, call (416) 636-1656. A website also has been set up at [theconcernedkids.com](http://theconcernedkids.com)

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