



PHOTOS BY THE CHRONICLE-JOURNAL/SANDI KRASOWSKI

Edie Hashiguchi helps children make plates and bowls from clay coils during a pottery session at Thunder Bay's Underground Gym.

On an upswing

New programs at Underground Gym

BY BRANDON WALKER
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Destiny Shapwaykeesic, 11, spends a lot of time at the piano while her broken hip heals.

Destiny Shapwaykeesic broke a hip while jumping on a trampoline in May.

Since then, the 11-year-old has had a pin put in her left hip, and then a pin added to her right hip. But it hasn't stopped her from occasionally getting into the ring to wrestle other youngsters at the Underground Gym and Youth Centre on Simpson Street.

"I like wrestling sometimes," she said while sitting by a piano at the busy Thunder Bay youth centre, a safe place for young people since it opened 12 years ago.

Destiny has learned to play a few songs on the piano, including Twinkle Twinkle Little Star.

Underground Gym founder Peter Panetta said he is proud of the new programs, including wrestling, that have been introduced at the centre.

Pottery, native arts and crafts, drumming, guitar and piano lessons are available, and Panetta continues to give boxing lessons.

There were dozens of young people in the ring on Tuesday when wrestling coach Alynne Harel put them through various exercises before showing them some moves.

"In wrestling, if you're on your back you're pinned and that's game over," she said before flipping one young man on to his back.

Patrick McGuire, 14, said he's tried many of the centre's new activities, including piano lessons, but wrestling is his favourite.

One of his friends accidentally gave him a bloody nose while they were in the ring on Tuesday, but Patrick took it in stride.

"I took one piano lesson, we learned rhythm, but I quickly lost interest — it wasn't as fun as wrestling," he said.

If the Underground Gym wasn't open, Patrick said he would probably stay at home during the winter and not be as active.

He compared wrestling to life: "It's always scary until you get past the point of fear, and then it's fun."

Edie Hashiguchi of the Thunder Bay Potters Guild, who has been teaching the pottery lessons, said she wants to donate a kiln, but there's no space for it.

Panetta said he'd like to expand the centre, but he must first knock down an old building behind it.

He said he has been amazed by the support he's received from the community, including cash, clothing, footwear and food that have helped keep the centre open.



Damien Hernandez, 11, sharpens his skills on the speed ball.



St. Pat's Saints football player Reese Girardin, 15, lifts weights while taking a break from his duties as a volunteer at the Underground Gym.

He was disappointed to find out the donor who pledged \$24,000 a year in October has fallen through.

"Things didn't work out," Panetta said. "The intentions were good but it never came through."

He doesn't have to go to the City of Thunder Bay for funds right now, although he didn't rule out asking for help in the future.

Panetta said the people of Thunder Bay have made up the difference.

"That's how life works — one door closes and another one opens," he said.

The Underground Gym and Youth Centre, at 634 Simpson St., is open Monday to Thursday, 5:30-8:30 p.m. It is a registered charity and donations can be sent to Box 10606, Thunder Bay, P7B 6V1. Anyone who makes a financial contribution will receive a tax receipt.

Go to www.undergroundgym.ca for more information.



Kendra Moonias, 8, exercises on a rowing machine at the Underground Gym.