

## Comox Valley songwriter helping kids keep their WITS about them



KEISJA COX has written a song about the WITS program, which teaches elementary school-aged children how to deal with bullies.

*Lindsay Chung*

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Like any singer-songwriter, Keisja Cox hopes the songs she writes become stuck in people's heads.

But with one particular song called WITS, the 13-year-old has even more reason to hope people keep singing her words — it could help someone deal with bullying.

WITS stands for Walk away, Ignore it, Talk it out, Seek help, and it's a program that supports students in kindergarten to Grade 7 who are dealing with bullying and peer victimization.

About six months ago, Cox wrote a song about WITS with Susie McGregor of Highland Music Multimedia Productions.

"The WITS program had been in my school from when I was in kindergarten to Grade 7," said Cox. "How I came to writing the song was I was getting bullied in Grade 7 pretty bad. Since I grew up with the WITS program ... when I was getting bullied, the WITS program helped me a lot."

Cox went to her principal at Valley View Elementary School, Bill Green. He knew she was a singer-songwriter, and told Cox, who was in the school's leadership program, that she should write a song about WITS.

Cox started working with McGregor to write the song.

"I kind of used my background knowledge of WITS and what was going on and kind of put them together," she said.

Cox, who is now in Grade 8 at Mark R. Isfeld Secondary School, says writing the song gave her another way to deal with the bullying.

"Whenever I'm really going through something, I guess songwriting kind of helps, too," she said. "It's kind of my way of venting as well."

Cox believes the WITS program works because it gives people a way to deal with bullying instead of treating bullying as something that can be done away with.

"I think it works because a lot of people out there, some of the programs say their goal is to completely get rid of bullies, but you can't completely get rid of bullies," she said. "What WITS does is teaches kids at a really young age how to deal with bullies. At such a young age, I guess it just stuck in my head; every year, we would do our assembly about code of conduct and WITS, and it really helped."

Cox sings the WITS song at assemblies in local elementary schools.

"It's cute because you're up there, and they just stare at you," she said. "I guess they kind of look up to me, and that's a really cool thing. After the assembly, I'll be sitting on the side, and they say, 'Hi Keisja.' The little ones in kindergarten are really excited, and that's kind of what I wanted."

Cox, who has also written a song about the Purple Ribbon Campaign urging Comox Valley residents to take a stand against domestic violence, hopes her song will help students when they're being bullied.

"What I want to do is just bring awareness," she said. "(Students) seem to get really excited about it. WITS is a song that kind of sticks in their brains; the chorus is a pretty simple tune, so maybe when they get in a situation, they will sing it ... I want it to help them."

Cox's mother Terri saw Cox use her WITS and saw how the program helped her and ultimately led her to seek out help.

"There's definitely value in the program," she said. "I think it's not so much that there will never, ever be bullies or that bullies will ever go away, but that we need to get to kids at a young age, kindergarten and Grade 1, to use their WITS.

"I'm almost a bit of an advocate for it now because it has shown me there are tools that need to be established at a young age. Because there are always going to be bullies, if we can get it into schools and get educators on board, it's like anything — you start young, and it builds a foundation."

The WITS programs bring together schools, families and communities to help elementary school children deal with bullying and peer victimization.

The programs are evidence-based and include two components. The WITS Primary Program is for students from kindergarten to Grade 3. WITS stands for Walk away, Ignore, Talk it out and Seek help and provides a common language that children and the adults in their environments can use to talk about and respond to peer victimization.

WITS LEADS Programs are aimed at students in Grade 4-6. LEADS stands for Look and listen, Explore points of view, Act, Did it work? and Seek help.

The program promotes leadership and social responsibility and encourages children to deal with peer conflict situations using these five problem-solving steps. It targets relational victimization — such as gossiping and social exclusion — and aims to increase children's understanding of their peers' internal worlds.

Both are literature-based programs that use lesson plans to integrate WITS messages with curriculum guidelines in a variety of subject areas. They also involve families and community leaders, such as emergency services personnel and university or high school athletes, to create responsive communities for the prevention of peer victimization.

Cox's WITS song was released on iTunes Nov. 1.

To listen to the song — with lyrics — go to [www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAnNTQQm1w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAnNTQQm1w). There is also a version of the song on the virtual piano at [www.thevirtualpiano.com](http://www.thevirtualpiano.com).

To learn more about WITS, visit [www.witsprogram.ca](http://www.witsprogram.ca).

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