

NUNAVUT

The clown princes of suicide prevention

Igloolik circus troupe wins global friends, but can it influence federal minister?

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An abandoned swimming pool, old mattresses rum-

maged from the dump, and a circus trainer are odd ingredients indeed from which to fashion a successful suicide

prevention program.

But that's all it's taken to turn bored, disaffected teens and young adults from Igloolik into acrobats, clowns and jugglers who, during a tour that visited Iqaluit,

years ago.

"When you perform, you give."

The big question will be whether they had a similar affect on Jim Prentice, minister of northern development,

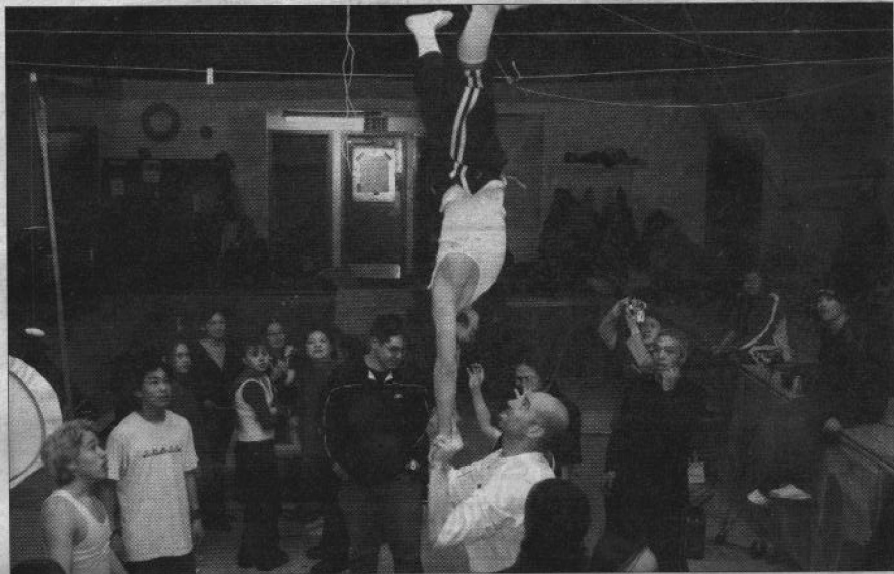
for them.

Now, troupe members have global ambitions.

Artcirq has been invited to perform in Mexico for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural

learn from Yamoussa Bangoura, an African dancer and acrobat, who visited Igloolik in January.

Artcirq has received plenty of support from Igloolik's film giants, Igloolik Isuma



Guillaume Saladin, a graduate of L'Ecole Nationale de Cirque, Montreal's renowned circus school, helped start Igloolik's Artcirq eight years ago. Here, he helps one of the troupe's 25-odd members with acrobatics inside the unused swimming pool where they practice. Lately, troupe members have gained enough confidence to perform without Saladin's supervision.



Members of Artcirq show off their moves on ice floes near Igloolik.



Artcirq's latest routine is titled Oaraya, or "can't wait." While performers wear traditional Inuit garb, and at times writhe on the floor like seals, they also draw from international influences, with Chinese music playing one moment, and African beats during the next.

Puvimituq and Montreal last month, left their audience wet-eyed and emotional.

"A lot of people came up with tears in their eyes, and gave the performers hugs after the show," says Guillaume Saladin, a graduate of L'Ecole Nationale de Cirque, Montreal's renowned circus school, who helped start Igloolik's Artcirq eight

when they performed for him last week at the headquarters of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development in Gatineau, Quebec.

They were to meet with Prentice to make the case that such community groups are much-needed across the North, and that more federal money ought to be available

Organization this winter, Saladin says.

And they plan to visit Timbuktu, the capital of Mali, to attend the Festival in the Desert in January 2008.

"It's not a dream. It's already coming," Saladin says.

Last year, the troupe began taking their show on the road.

In April 2006 they visited Dublin Project Arts Centre in Ireland to perform, and to show two documentaries made by Artcirq members: one on what it's like to be a teen in Igloolik, one on their circus performances.

Since then, another film has been produced by Artcirq, on Inuit attitudes towards climate change.

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The international scope reflects how the Arctic isn't such an isolated place anymore, in some ways, now that television and broadband Internet have reached Nunavut's communities.

As well, Artcirq's 25-odd members had the chance to

Productions, who produced Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner.

During Isuma's recent tour of Nunavut to show The Journals of Knud Rasmussen, Artcirq tagged along, with members screening some of their documentaries and demonstrating some of their circus moves.

Artcirq has also collaborated with the Eskies, a rock band from Igloolik.

And lately, Inuit members of the troupe has carried on without Saladin's oversight.

They performed without him for the first time in Christmas in Igloolik, and for the first time outside their homes when they visited Iqaluit last month.

For all their global aspirations, Artcirq's new performance remains distinctly Inuit. The routine even features "a real polar bear," Saladin promises. Well, a real polar bear hide, anyways.

Some Artcirq members were caribou hunting last year, Saladin explains, when a polar bear approached, so Terry Uyarak shot it.

Now Uyarak plays a polar bear in front of the audience, re-creating the event, with the hide draped over him as a costume.

"The guy who killed the bear, is now inside, making him live again."