

# BRANDON SUN

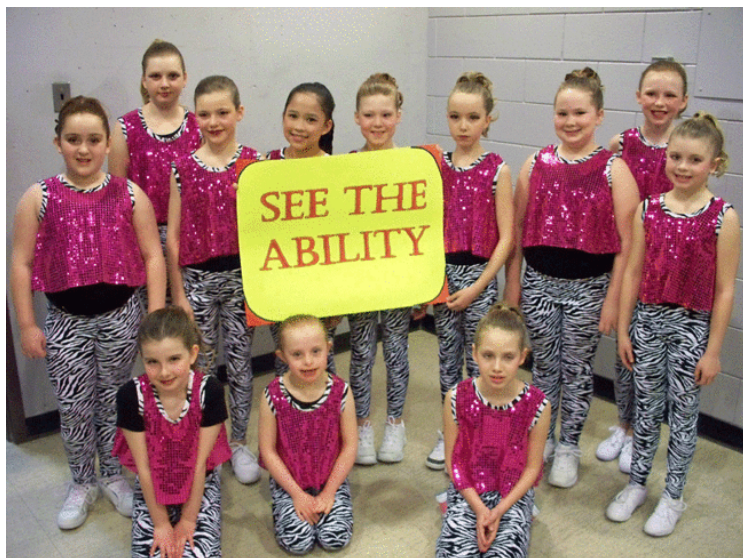
## LOCAL

Brandon Sun - PRINT EDITION

### Dancing helps girl with Down syndrome blossom

By: **Lindsey Enns**

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Adam and Marina Grabowski's 11-year-old daughter Mikayla has been dancing at the Mid-West School of Dance in Hamiota since she was three. Now she takes jazz, ballet, tap and hip-hop classes twice a week and recently competed with the rest of her dance team in Brandon.

Mikayla was born with Down syndrome, but that has never prevented her from feeling like apart of the group.

Kelsey Keilback, Mikayla's dance instructor for the past five years, said that over the years she's watched Mikayla's confidence grow.

"I've definitely seen a growth with her and for sure it's the kids that she has in the class with her that make a big difference."

Mikayla has also helped Keilback see how rewarding teaching can be.

"I've learned over the years more about patience and stuff but with her I've learned how rewarding it is," Keilback said.

"It's just so rewarding that even though she doesn't get everything perfect, she just understands it and enjoys it so much."

Marina volunteered to help Mikayla for the first year and a half during classes. But eventually Mikayla decided that she

was ready to be on her own.

"She kind of patted me and pointed to the door and told me to leave. It was kind of cute," she said. "She really hasn't looked back since."

Today is World Down Syndrome Day and the dance team wanted to celebrate Mikayla by submitting a picture to the Canadian Down Syndrome Society's "See the Ability" photo montage that will be posted on the World Down Syndrome Day website, [worlddownsyndromeday.org](http://worlddownsyndromeday.org). The dance team hopes that their photo will make the cut.

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(<http://media.brandonsun.com/images/130321-inclusive-dance-group-c.gif>)

*Mikayla Grabowski, front centre, poses with other members of the Mid-West School of Dance team. The Hamiota group entered the photo in the Canadian Down Syndrome Society's "See the Ability" photo montage that will be featured on the World Down Syndrome Day website, [worlddownsyndromeday.org](http://worlddownsyndromeday.org).*

Adam attributes the inclusion Mikayla feels at dance for giving her that extra boost of confidence to try new things.

"As a parent, what we really like to see is that Mikayla is seen as a girl first, not a girl with Down syndrome," Adam said. "They know Mikayla is a little girl who's capable of doing whatever she sets her mind to."

Mikayla also attends Hamiota Elementary School and is currently their only student with Down syndrome.

"She's involved with every aspect of the classroom, she's in class all day long except for when she needs to do some speech or physiotherapy," Adam said. "It was very important for us that she stayed in the class because we didn't want her being seen as someone who just can't do things."

Both of Mikayla's parents come from teaching backgrounds, so they had high expectations when it came to their daughter's education.

"I think it was somewhat intimidating, but they have risen to the challenge and in my opinion they've really been wonderful with her. She's had a very good elementary school experience," Marina said.

The school also gave Mikayla an iPod so that she could interact better with her classmates and say her lines during the Christmas concert with the rest of her Grade 5 class.

"They got her an iPod and they programmed her lines into it because she has trouble speaking," Adam said. "So when it came time for her lines, she just pushed the buttons but she had to do all the finger gestures."

Adam said one of the main things that they're focusing on right now is ensuring that Mikayla continues to gain more independence. He said they often go to Brandon for ice cream and not only does Mikayla order for herself, but for her brothers as well.

"It's great because it shows her that she's got the independence and she'll be able to do stuff when she's older."

Although Marina admits that Mikayla can be difficult to handle at times, she's just like every other girl her age.

"We just like to have the chance to tell people how it's not a terrible thing to have a child with Down syndrome," she said.

"You don't like getting that diagnosis, I mean nobody does, but the horrible thing that you initially think it is, once you calm down and do some research and meet other people ... it's not nearly as bad as what people think."

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