

# SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

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## **Bishop Diego student recognized for drug awareness rap**

**By NIKKI GREY, NEWS-PRESS CORRESPONDENT**

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Santa Barbara teen Christian Pearson has been recognized in a national music contest to promote youth substance abuse awareness. Christian was selected as runner up for the Grammy Foundation Teen Substance Abuse Awareness Through Music Contest, and his picture and music have been posted on MTV's website.

Christian's song, titled "Spread your Wings," encourages young people to fight through hard times and not give up on their dreams, rather than turning to drugs.

The 15-year-old Bishop Garcia Diego High School sophomore said he thinks it can be more effective to spread the drug-free message to teenagers through music, rather than preaching to kids.

"I think that nowadays it's really hard for kids to stay away from drugs, especially in high school, because it's always there," he said, "but I feel that expressing it through music, they would actually listen to it."

Christian, who is also on the varsity football team and the junior varsity basketball team at Bishop Diego, says he raps as an outlet to express his emotions. Christian used music to work through some of his feelings when his young cousin died from leukemia.

That experience led Christian, who raps by the name of "C-Rush," to volunteer with the Teddy Bear Cancer Foundation, often bringing blankets and books to children who suffer from cancer at Cottage hospital.

As a holiday gift to the kids at the foundation, Christian said he is writing and rapping two to three songs that will incorporate a few of the patients' names and interests. He said he has been blessed with many gifts in life, including a loving family who supports him, and wants to use his talents to bring joy to others.

"I think it's going to be cool just to see that smile on a kid's face and know that I helped with that," Christian said.

Christian, who maintains a 4.03 grade point average, has been recording music since he

was 12 years old at Notes for Notes, a Santa Barbara-based organization that builds, equips, and staffs recording studios that provide youth free access to musical instruments and recording equipment.

Other than recording at Notes for Notes, Christian has performed at fundraisers for the nonprofit, including rapping as part of an opening act for the Steve Miller Band.

He also performed for and spoke to children at a summer camp last year about the power of music, according to Philip Gilley, founder and executive director of Notes for Notes.

"At 14 (at the time), to have that mentality that even I can give back, that I can be a role model to other kids, is amazing," Mr. Gilley said. "That will take him farther than anything, no matter what path he actually chooses, be it music, sports or academics."

Christian says his dad, Brian Pearson, has been a huge influence on him in his life and in his music. The two frequently listen to rap lyrics together and discuss what the message of the song is.

Many rap songs have positive messages, but they are difficult to find or lost entirely because of "unnecessary cussing" or "degrading women," Christian said.

Christian hopes his music — which doesn't only focus on being drug free, but other things Christian goes through as a teenager — can help battle the stigma associated with rap music.

"All the radio music today is the same thing," he said. "It gets annoying hearing people saying rap is bad, so I try to keep it good."

Mr. Pearson said he thinks his son worries about being pigeonholed as a "don't do drugs" rapper, especially in high school, when the opinions of older peers are very important to a teenager. Mr. Pearson said he and Christian's mom, Leanna, encourage their son to "follow his heart.

"He does what he loves... and we back him up on that," Mr. Pearson said.

Christian, however, said there are many people who support and appreciate his music, and he won't let being criticized by people who want to do drugs stop him from pursuing his passion.

"I don't get down about it, because I feel they're just scared to be different, be unique," he said. "I won't follow others and go down that road."

After being selected as the runner up two years in a row for the national music contest, Christian has set his sights higher for next year.

"I'm hoping for first," he said.

To learn more about the contest or hear Christian's song, visit  
<http://act.mtv.com/posts/grammy-contest-winners-pen-killer-songs-from-the-heart/>.

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