

Will Keeps: Starts Right Here

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Musician and inspirational speaker, Will Keeps has recently created his own alternative school called Starts Right Here.

Starts Right Here is a school to give students a chance to learn in a place different from the typical school environment. Keeps said, "I didn't know I was going to have my own school or have a building where kids were going to come and want to come. That's the beauty of it. We are not chasing kids they want to be there." He has high hopes that Starts Right Here will give at-risk students a chance to be successful both in school and in adult life.

The idea of Starts Right Here came from the now VP, Stoy Hall, asking him if he ever thought about having his own school. After thinking that thought through, he came to the conclusion that it would help the youth, "see a black man who actually built relationships to do something big and positive in our community and I want people to understand that its possible." Creating Starts Right Here was to show the youth that anything is possible no

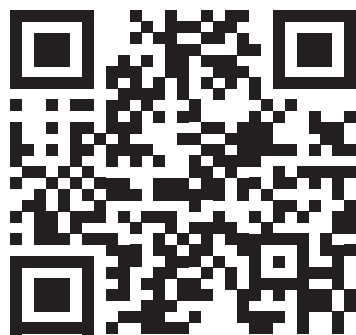
matter what someone grew up with or what they look like.

Keeps has had past partnerships with the Des Moines Police Department's Second Chance Program being an inspirational speaker. The Second Chance Program will be joining Keeps in his school's building. Keeps said that having the Second Chance Program in the same building will try to help teach the students that cops are here more to help them than to hurt them. "You just to have to let them know that all police aren't bad, you know what I mean, and that there are some police out there that will love you and give you chances," Keeps said.

With people on his team like Chief of DMPD, Dana Wingert and Governor Kim Reynolds, Keeps is optimistic of the successes his program will create for the lives of the students. Kim Reynolds has been a huge supporter from the beginning. "Kim Reynolds is the one who wanted me to get this building downtown and she is the one who convinced me to get a nonprofit," says Keeps.

Since not every kid who wants to go to the school will be able to attend, he wants to teach everyone that "It's not about what you have been through, but how you get through." When referring to past life experiences, Keeps explains, "If I stayed there, would I be doing what I'm doing right now? Or would I let that empower me to be able to help others be strong when they think they are weak?" Clearly choosing the latter, Starts Right Here is for exactly that.

Through the journey of building Starts Right Here from a simple idea brought up in a conversation to an alternative school, Keeps has one big thought in mind. He said, "I just want the youth to understand that this, that this is huge for our city." Keeps says the most satisfying to think about the whole process is that, "it feels good to know that the work that I'm doing is actually working."



For more information, use your camera to scan this QR code or visit www.startsrighthere.org

