

Local kids star in independent film

Movie tackles bullying, being a Darfur refugee

By **TRAVIS ROEMHILD MARICOPA TRIBUNE**

Kids from all over the Valley got their acting debut in an independent movie that wrapped up shooting last week.

The unique thing about the production was that director, writer and producer, Scott Kirschenbaum, said he only cast children who did not have any acting experience.

Kirschenbaum said he wanted the acting to be as natural as possible in his film that deals with what kids go through when they are getting bullied on the playground.

"I wanted the children to blend with the story," he said. "I wanted them to improv. It turned out amazing." The plot focuses on a Darfur refugee that has moved to suburban American where she deals with bullying, fitting in and finding friends. She meets a fellow classmate who also is having a hard time finding friends.

"I wanted to do a study, a story of a Darfur refugee," Kirschenbaum said.

More than 20 kids from across the Valley were selected to create realistic playground situations for the film, Elementary Cool.

Maricopa resident Briana Loyd, 10, said just being in the movie made her reflect on what it's like to be the new kid in school.

"(My character) helps other kids out when they need help with bullies," she said. "I got to see what it was like." Loyd said she played a "background" character for the film and had several scenes with the star from Darfur.

"I'm in the background, I'm funny," she said. "I get to play on the playground and act like a regular kid." The film was shot on location at Cherokee Elementary School in Paradise Valley. Kirschenbaum chose that particular school because it was the one he attended growing up.

"I wanted to make a movie for Phoenix and bring it back to the roots," he said. "I like making movies that I believe in and care about." Kirschenbaum said he has finished other films in the past, but this is his first large-scale production. The film is currently in post-production and when it's completed in September, he will submit it to all major film festivals across the world. He hopes to have sneak preview for the families and possibly the city of Phoenix before it is submitted.



Jennifer Salman/Special to MaricopaTribune Maricopa resident Briana Loyd, 10, is among a group of Phoenix-area kids starring in an independent movie being filmed in Arizona.