

TITLE SLIDE

My name is Renee Tougas. Welcome

Technology as a tool in your Homeschool: The Potential & Possibility

FAMILY PHOTO SLIDE

Husband Damien

Three kids, ages 19, 17 & 15. We've homeschooled our kids since the beginning and last year we graduated our oldest daughter from homeschooling.

CELINE SLIDE

- Celine has been working part-time in web development and design, at home, for the last year.
- Dad's clients & contacts
- Recently settled on the intention to pursue costume design for theatre and cinema and is planning to attend university in 2019.

LAURENT SLIDE

- Laurent is a high school student, entering his last year of homeschool high school studies this fall.
- High school studies have been geared around his plans to be professional artist and illustrator.
- Right now, he's intending to pursue that path at Concordia university.

BRIENNE SLIDE

- Our youngest Brienne is also in high school and she enjoys theatre, singing and acting.
- No post-secondary plans yet so her high school education is an eclectic mix of some of the usual high school subjects along with personal projects and lots of physical activity, which she enjoys.

KIDS HIKING SLIDE

A little bit about our Homeschool Philosophy and Family Life

- Focus on self-directed, project-based, and interest-led studies
- Since the beginning of their home education our children have explored life according to their own interests and desires, within a few parameters and basic guidelines.
- Wanted our kids to have basic foundation in reading, writing, arithmetic, creative pursuits, physical and outdoors education in elementary and middle school years.
- To gain competency and experience in higher level science, math, history, English, technology literacy, fine arts, etc. *according to individual need and interest.*
- We're open and flexible as to how they acquired those competencies and skills.
- We focus our energies on providing the structure and support for the learning process more than telling our kids what to learn and how to learn it.
- Our goal is to help our children establish good life habits through participation in family life and home.
- Guide our children in their own self-awareness and self-knowledge of personal desires, dreams, and goals and to help them figure out how to pursue and achieve those goals.

AT KATAHDIN SLIDE

As a family, we love being active in the outdoors, we have done a lot of hiking, backpacking, and winter skiing with our kids. Our biggest outdoors project was thru-hiking the Appalachian Trail 4 years ago, 6 months of hiking a total of 2,180 miles along the Appalachian mountain range in the eastern United States.

- Damien and I are originally from Alberta.
- Lived for 11 years in the United States, first NJ and then Maine before returning to Canada in 2011.
- We lived on the Gaspé Peninsula for 4 years and in Montreal for the past 3 years.

I share this bit of our family history with you because people's stories and life values give context to their particular point of view and perspective.

POTENTIAL & POSSIBILITY SLIDE

My presentation today is telling stories & highlighting experiences of homeschooled kids and their families who are using technology tools to:

- create stuff
- connect with the wider-world,
- collaborate with others

I knew kids were doing this with technology because my own kids do this.

But I knew there must be more.

Social Media request for stories of kids and tech

YOUR KIDS & TECH SLIDE

Contacted by and corresponded with 6 families - in-depth personal, skype, and email interviews with 5 of those.

Compiled stories and experiences in this presentation to inspire and educate.

Every family's story and experience is unique, family values are different, different philosophy and practice of education.

KID SLIDE 1

You are your own unique family. Do what works in your context. Your home, your marriage, your family, your children.

This is not a prescriptive how-to presentation. I'm not teaching you how to replicate these ideas your own home or a sequence of steps to follow for how to incorporate tech in your homeschool.

I'm not going to talk a lot about specific software, websites, apps, and hardware. I'm going to tell the stories of how families and individuals are using tools available to them, in their context, to create student-directed and interest-driven meaningful learning opportunities in their homeschool context.

This isn't about using technology to complete school assignments. This is about technology as a tool to support self-directed learning.

This presentation is about "real world" tech tools. By that, I mean, not education K-12 programs, apps, etc.

KID SLIDE 2

The tool itself is not the focus nor what I'm presenting. I'm not going to teach you how to use garage band or drawing software, or explain how to start a youtube channel but I'm going to share the stories of students who use these tools in their education and life experience.

In putting together this presentation I've felt a bit like an anthropologist. Studying a digital native culture and observing new and unfamiliar things and coming back to report on those. Going to the frontier and bringing back reports of what I've seen.

I don't understand all the ins and outs of the tool itself, I'm not an IT person and in our home I'm not the chief technologist but I am passionate about self-directed education and kids creating, connecting, and collaborating with all manner of tools. I try to create that environment in my own home and seek out those stories. And that's what I'm sharing with you today.

If you want more information on specific tools: I can put you in touch with the family or student so you can find our more information.

CASE STUDIES SLIDE

My presentation is 6 case studies focusing on 6 different stories of children and families using technology tools in their homeschool education.

Looked for different projects, tools and skills learned in these contexts.

And I'm highlighting three recurring themes from my personal experience and interviews.

CASE STUDY 1 CELINE TOUGAS

Friends, Forums & Travel

Who: Celine, 19

Homeschool graduate

Celine uses technology tools in many ways, she works part-time as a website developer and graphic designer. She been using tech tools quite heavily since she was about thirteen.

Learning how to use these tools, mentored by her dad, has enabled her to learn a valuable income-earning skill.

But the story I want to share is:

Making friends, networking, having expanding worldview and life experience because of technology tools.

CELINE GASPE SLIDE

Before we lived in Montreal we lived on the Gaspé Peninsula in a much more isolated and rural community than here in Montreal. No homeschoolers.

Forums and online community were a great tool for an introverted and geographically isolated teen to make friends.

Using tech tools to find online forums - started in Christian teen forums and branched out from there.

One of Celine's interests is RPG and finding online communities over the years to play with.

CASE STUDY 1 CELINE TOUGAS

These connections and opportunities fuelled Celine's desire to attend a Comic Con (Comic Convention) in spring 2015, 3 years ago. A project that necessitated getting a part-time job, which was the

- start of her work as a website developer
- project planning, budgeting, travel arrangements, etc.
- On this trip to Chicago with her dad, she also met an online friend.

CELINE BLACK WIDOW SLIDE

Since that time Celine has participated in other forums and online communities around shared interests of video gaming and RPGs where she meets people and then is able to meet people in real life.

The Modern Penpal. Recently met the father of one of her online friends and this summer she'll connect with her friend Sophia in person, visiting her in Ontario or coming here to Montreal.

Celine is my most technologically-savvy kid, has been mentored and taught by Damien and uses her technology tools and skills to earn money. But one of the things that technology has really enabled for Celine is connecting with other people, finding people that share her unique interests, becoming a leader in those online communities as a trusted moderator.

Skills/Gains Summary:

Her interest and connections in this medium have motivated

- income earning
- travel

And helped her develop skills:

- communication & online etiquette
- critical thinking and strategy
- goal setting & project completion

CASE STUDY 2 LAURENT TOUGAS

Case Study 2 Laurent Tougas

Art & Instagram (Social Media)

Who: Laurent, 17

Homeschool Highschool student

Laurent has been an artist since he was a child. All children seem to start as artists and he loved art and just kept doing it

LAURENT DRAWING SLIDE

Throughout his childhood we supplied the analog tools - paints, brushes, paper.

Started using computer programs and iPad tools when he was around 11 or 12 years old.

When we was 13 started bought a tablet to create digital art. He worked with my dad in construction to save money to buy this tool.

LAURENT DRAWING SLIDE

This tablet is the same brand that professional artists use.

Laurent's goal is to be a professional artist and illustrator and so for his teenage years he's been using the tools of the trade, the hardware and software, to grow this skill.

CASE STUDY 2 LAURENT TOUGAS

Creating digital art and sharing art, digitally.

Social media is a great tool for artists, musicians, etc. to share their work. Self-publish.

Laurent shares his art mostly on Instagram.

Go back to:

CASE STUDY 2 LAURENT TOUGAS

Through this he has:

- Improved artistic skill
- connected with other artists
- Received paid commissions

- Built a portfolio

Sharing his work has motivated him to study artists, styles, practice every day, to develop his skill.

Laurent spends hours a day, self-directed and self-disciplined, working on his art, using digital and traditional tool but sharing and publishing his art with simple tech tools.

Skills/Gains Summary:

- Learning a necessary skill and tool, both hardware and software for professional art
- Learning how to use software, learning how to learn
- Improving skill because of sharing and publishing
- Improved communication skills
- Goal setting for art and for communication of his art. 30 day challenges.

HIGHLIGHT: COMMUNICATION SLIDE

Highlight topic: Communication Skills

Developing communication skills is one of the recurring themes in my personal experience and interviews around this topic.

One family I interviewed are unschoolers, kids currently 9 & 12, based in St. Lazare but traveling often around the world including Australia and currently visiting/living in Paris, France.

For a family that travels, technology tools help kids stay connected to friends via Skype but online gaming and creating and sharing art have motivated kids to learn to read, write and develop skill in that area.

Technology tools and access can help children who don't like books and traditional means of reading to learn to read and write for the purpose of communicating with people. You have to learn when you can't use spoken language.

Another family I spoke with has a son with ADHD, dyslexia and other learning disabilities. He has a self-directed book review blog that has allowed him to learn how to write and share ideas about what he's reading.

Communication example: in Abby's words, "I used to be a terrible speller and always hated writing but YouTube made me work at those things and get better".

The families I talked to their kids made amazing progress in their communication skills by being online

CASE STUDY 3 BRIENNE TOUGAS

Fashion & Flair (Self Expression)

Who: Brienne, 15

Homeschool Highschool student

Each of our children uses technology in different ways, according to their interests and needs. Brienne has a strong need to share her experiences, she loves fashion and flair and so she gravitates to video.

We introduced her to video years ago as a means for her to communicate her ideas with a wider audience.

Her first solo video was a review of a children's herbal education curriculum.

BRIENNE HERB FAIRIES SLIDE

Now she has her own YouTube Channel where she vlogs family adventures, does make-up reviews, talks about her vegan diet: an outlet for expression & ideas.

BRIENNE TRIP BLOG SLIDE

BRIENNE MAKE-UP SLIDE

She uses my camera or her iphone to record video and free software for editing.

She has transferred these skills to school work. Share short video clip.

WW1 FASHION VIDEO

Skills/Gains Summary:

- Communication
- Learning how to use tools, camera, software
- Skills transferred to other contexts: communication and content

CASE STUDY 4 KEVIN

Music Making

Who: Kevin, 14

Kevin is a student in our homeschool co-op.

Kevin comes from a very musical family but wasn't interested in learning music himself. He didn't uncover his own passion and interest in making music until he discovered digital music creation around 12 years old.

He discovered an alternative, electronic, hip-hop band and discovered an online community of people using digital tools and was inspired to make his music.

Inspiration followed by action.

IPAD GARAGE BAND SLIDE

Kevin started making music on an iPad and connected with the online community in order to learn how to do it himself.

Realized he needed to upgrade his tools so one month after buying his PS4 gaming console, sold that so he could purchase a refurbished computer to support his music making.

Kevin is learning how to use music-making software and how to publish to YouTube & Soundcloud.

MUSIC VIDEO SLIDE

Listen to music clip, stop at 2:40

I didn't realize till after interviewing him that he and my son Laurent have been collaborating. Kevin is creating musical soundtracks for Laurent's artwork.

Skills/Gains Summary:

- music, piano
- Music making software
- budgeting, financial skills

Listen to music clip, stop at 2:40

HIGHLIGHT: CHARACTER SLIDE

Another recurring theme in my observations and interviews is how the kids using technology tools in their self-directed and interest-led learning projects are challenged to set and achieve goals.

I've seen this over and over in my own home, parents I talked to in my interviews and kids themselves talked about how using tech tools and seeing what other people are doing with tech inspired an idea in the student, and then they had to rise the challenge of figuring out how to make that idea happen.

All along the way kids are setting goals and working towards them, small goals nested in larger goals.

Goals:

- Goal setting for learning art skills
- Saving money for new tools
- Challenged to learn new tools
- Making choices about values, PS4 gaming console vs. New computer for music making

And some of these goals require overcoming significant time or financial challenge.

Kevin sold a gaming console to buy a better tool for making music.

Kids get part-time jobs to buy the tools they need.

Kids might overcome a particular academic challenge or skill, a time management challenge, financial challenge.

Put in the work to create what they were inspired to make.

The things people are able to create with technology, the collaborations and connections they make motivate them to do difficult things to achieve their goals.

CASE STUDY 5 ABBY GUNN

Educate & Earn

Who: Abby, 18

Abby is an 18 yr old homeschool graduate who lives in New England. I've know her mother online for years, which is how I learned about her story and was able to interview her.

Abby raises rabbits on her family's small farm. She started a YouTube channel five years ago, when she was 13 to share videos on rabbit care.

STORMY RABBITS SLIDE

Her YouTube Channel Stormy Rabbits is about rabbit care, cute rabbit videos.

StormyRabbits has 74,000 subscribers.

Abby's videos are viewed by thousands of people, videos range from 2K to over 1.2M views.

She tells me this isn't significant but it seems impressive to me.

When Abby started her YouTube Channel, 2013 she was using a little point and shoot camera that she had worked and saved for, and a little HP laptop her grandfather helped her buy. She used free editing software until her brother purchased her better software.

What's interesting about Abby's story is that her family didn't have internet at their rural Maine home. So Abby would film and edit at home then upload when we went to the library on Tuesday and Thursdays. The family now has internet at home and Abby enjoys the freedom to upload and reply to comments whenever, but she started without internet access.

CASE STUDY 5 ABBY GUNN

I asked Abby how she grew her channel: time and consistency. She has almost 400 videos.

At the time she launched there wasn't many pet channels, and part of growing her viewership was collaborating with other channels.

Abby earns 400-500/month through advertising on her channel. It's a part-time job.

Her Costs

- Bunny care
- Purchased a DSLR in 2014, new computers and professional editing software
- iPod for doing instagram, mics, headphones.
- Started with what she had and upgraded as needed

Her hobby has allowed her to learn a skill, earn money and then invest that money in better tech tools (tools that can be used for more than just video making)

Abby has met people, made friends. She's received feedback on her work that motivates her to create and improve.

Like getting graded without grades. External motivation and feedback on your work

Talking with Abby's mom, Abby is quite reserved but has gained confidence through her YouTube Channel

STORMY RABBITS VIDEO SLIDE

Skills/Gains Summary:

- Video making, technical production, software & hardware
- Viewers all over world, geography
- Communication: in Abby's words, "I used to be a terrible speller and always hated writing but YouTube made me work at those things and get better".
- budgeting, financial skills, she specifically mentioning learning how to prepare a tax return.

CASE STUDY 6 WARFEL FAMILY

Family Movie Making

Who: Warfel family is David, Abby and their two boys Sam -17, Joe - 11 from Central Illinois.

WARFEL FAMILY PHOTO SLIDE

Abby and David have been reading my blog for years and that's we connected. And when I wrote on my blog this spring that I'd be presenting on this topic they were the first to respond and share their own story, and their experience is really the piece d'resistance of this presentation.

The family has always been interested in Star Wars movies. A couple years ago after playing light sabers in their homeschool PE group the boys had the idea to create fan film about 2 kids sucked into the Star Wars world and saving the day.

FAN FILM SLIDE

Fan Film: is a film or video inspired by a film, tv show, comic book or similar source, created by fans rather than by the original source.

VIDEO TRAILER SLIDE

SKILLS PHOTO SLIDE 1

To create something like this takes a lot of work so it wasn't like the family just jumped on it. They sat on the idea but it kept coming up and so they decided to take the plunge.

SKILLS PHOTO SLIDE 2

Large scale family project taken almost 2 years to complete.

SKILLS PHOTO SLIDE 3

The film is still being edited and will hopefully be released this summer.

SKILLS PHOTO SLIDE 4

SKILLS & APTITUDES SLIDE

- Script writing
- Casting & filming
- Set building & costumes

- Finances & budgeting, fundraising
- Editing & special effects
- Musical score
- Promotion and website development

FORCE THIEVES TECH MOVIE SLIDE

CASE STUDY 6 SLIDE

Big Project with Big Gains

- skills development in the kids, one example Joe (younger son) played violin for 2 years but it never grabbed him, but making music for this production has lit his musical fire. Found something he's interested in and likes.
- Skill development and inspiration for future: Sam: his editing and technical production skills are entry-level professional and he is inspired about career options.

HIGHLIGHT: CHARACTER SLIDE

Interviewing David, the father and the thing that impressed him the most about this project, the biggest reward was how much it drew everyone together. So much social time because of making a film together.

Satisfying social endeavour.

Not what you expect with technology tool.

HIGHLIGHT: CONNECTION SLIDE

Technology tools in our homeschool can connect with people.

Every case study from these presentation is about people connecting with each other.

- Making friends in forums
- People connecting within families, working on projects together,
- kids connecting with existing friends, using technology to stay in touch while traveling, playing games together online
- kids connecting with people around the world, making new friends and acquaintances & networks.

I know we have fears about dis-connection and dis-engagement around technology, but technology is a tool that also brings people together.

CONCLUSION SLIDE

I purposely have not focused, drawn attention to or addressed the fears and negative aspects of technology. They exist for sure, but I feel those get a lot of airplay in our conversations.

Not so much about the specific tools, lots of software is free. You can start with tablets and smart phones.

Families need to make their own decisions about what and how their kids will use technology tools.

But I think it's important for us to see and hear the stories of the potential and possibility of technology in our homeschool before we respond to the unknown out of fear.

I hope that I've communicated to you the opportunities made available through technology in a variety of circumstances. Each family is different.

THANK YOU SLIDE

I want to thank the students and families who allowed me to share their experiences with you.

For me, the joy in this presentation was talking with people and learning about so many new things. I didn't know you could do all these things with technology tools. Watching people talk about things that excites and motivates them is very rewarding. I really enjoyed learning from these families.

My presentation doesn't do justice to each person or family's experience, it's simply a zoomed out view of what's possible.