

Literacy classes help newcomers

By Stacy O'Brien - Red Deer Advocate

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It looked like any graduation. The students were dressed in caps and gowns in yellow and blue.

Parents, siblings and family friends eagerly waited with cameras at the ready as each name was called.

But in this case the graduates were all under four feet tall. The youngsters — between age three to four — were the first group through the literacy program for preschoolers.

Known as Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters or HIPPY, the program has been running since January through the Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association and is offered to parents who have immigrated to Canada.

Each week home visitors drop by for about an hour and give the parents ideas for 15-minute lessons for each day throughout the week, everything from colouring and drawing to cutting and pasting.

On Saturday at Rotary Park, the children and parents got a tangible reminder of all the work they had done, with each child receiving a certificate and a binder with their photo on the front that was filled with their projects and photographs of them working.

Halima Ali, executive director of CAIWA, said the program empowers parents to teach their children and helps build the special relationship between them.

The program also helps youngsters get ready for kindergarten.

The HIPPY program received close to \$260,000 in funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to run until 2010. It starts again in September. Patricia Romo was at the graduation ceremony with her three-year-old son Mauricio Romo.



Patricia Romo photographs her son Mauricio Romo, 3, during the HIPPY graduation at Rotary Park in Red Deer Saturday. On the right is Susana Perez. The Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters is an international program designed to help improve their family literacy skills.
by STACY O'BRIEN/Advocate staff

She said child psychology suggests it's good for students to begin to learn early on and in Mexico, where she is originally from, students are already in school at her son's age.

"It's really good for me. I'm an immigrant," Romo said. "With this program my baby learned a lot."

She said it also gave them some special time together. "It was a special minute for him."

The HIPPY graduation and annual CAIWA barbecue were organized by the civic participation class at CAIWA, which encourages immigrants to become involved in their community and allows them to find out where the services they need are available.

Named Stand Up to Be Counted, the eight-week class took place in the winter, with 10 students — mostly from Africa and South America.

For more information on the HIPPY program or other CAIWA programs drop by the office at 120 4818 50 Ave., go online to www.caiwa.ca or phone 403-341-3553

sobrien@reddeeradvocate.com