

Initiative designed to help parents work with their own children

By Paul Cowley

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A new literacy program for preschoolers offered through the Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association aims to bring out the teacher in every parent.

"When asked who is your first teacher, the kids will say, 'Mama. Mama was my first teacher,' " said association executive director Halima Ali on Tuesday.

"It will empower our immigrant community."

The Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is an international program designed to help parents of children three to five years old improve family literacy skills while creating a richer parent-child relationship. For new immigrants, the program can reduce social isolation, boost self-esteem and help children and parents adapt to life in a new country.

Ali heard about HIPPY through her sister in Minnesota and is proud that Red Deer is the first community in Alberta to offer the three-year program. It was officially launched on Tuesday at the women's association office in the Scott Block at 4818 50th Ave.

The first families got involved at the end of January and now 32 are participating. Up to 60 families can be served by the four staff members who visit homes to offer training.

The \$258,400 project has been funded to 2010 by Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

Through the program parents are provided with course materials and 40-minute weekly instruction sessions to give them the background on how to introduce their children to reading and writing. The program is built around 15 minutes a day of activities, games and other learning methods.

HIPPY Canada executive director Debbie Bell said the culturally sensitive program is based on the premise that parents will embrace the opportunity to help educate their children and reach their full potential.



Fenet Anbesa, 2, plays with other children as the Home Instruction for Parents of Pre-School Youngster (HIPPY) program is launched at the Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Centre Tuesday.

by RANDY FIEDLER/Advocate

“We know that all parents want the best for their kids.”

The program is successful because it is a long-term commitment, can be easily fit into the daily routine of child rearing, and improves the quality of life for children and their parents.

Bell hopes that Red Deer will be a springboard for offering the program in other communities, and she has already made contacts in Calgary. The program is already in eight communities across Canada and serves 2,500 immigrant and First Nations families.

HIPPY is also offered in about a dozen countries, including Israel, South Africa, Australia and the U.S.

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