

Outreach benefits immigrant families

Preschool program helps parents, too

BY REBECCA WIGOD
VANCOUVER SUN

Four-year-old Wilson Yan is the son of Chinese-speaking immigrants, but he already has a sense of how the English language is put together and what schoolwork is.

Every week since January, he has been sharpening his wits with activity sheets, answering such questions as, "Which boy is tall?" "Draw a small apple," and "Here are two dogs. Show me the dog that is under the ladder."

The learning materials come into the Yan family's east Vancouver bungalow with Rebecca Tan, a home visitor from Britannia community services centre's Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPI) program.

She helps Wilson's mom, 36-year-old Carrie Yan — formerly a garment worker in Guangdong, China — to support her son's learning.

HIPPI, a beneficiary of funds from CanWest Global's Raise-a-Reader campaign, began more than 30 years ago in Israel. A program for three-, four- and five-year-olds, it's offered in several Canadian cities, including Montreal and Toronto. Britannia's program is one of two in Vancouver and, in place for seven years, the oldest of them all.

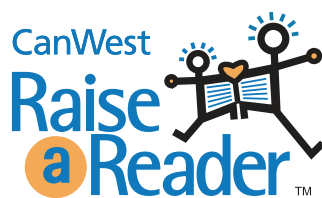
HIPPI helps parents prepare their children for school. It's especially valuable to immigrant families, giving children like Wilson Yan a tremendous head start.

Carrie, who also has two school-age children with her husband, a machine operator originally from Hong Kong, finds that the activity sheets strengthen her own English. When she tells Wilson, "I'm



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Carrie Yan (left) goes over schoolwork with home instructor Rebecca Tan while four-year-old Wilson Yan works on an exercise.



going to mark these pictures with the same colour because they are the same," she gets a deeper understanding of English-language patterns.

Tan, previously a client of the program, works with 15 Chinese families in east Vancouver and is passionate about the job. She says: "Most of my parents never drop [out]. They stay in the program for two years, even three years. They love it."

Southeast of the Yans live Rita and Carlos Arciniega, with their children, Carla and Julio. Their home is Spanish-speaking, and so is their HIPPI home visitor, Miriam Chandia, formerly of Mexico City.

Chandia has known the Arciniegas for three years. Six-year-old Carla took part in the program when she was three.

Now she's in Grade 2 and, according to her mother, doing wonderfully well because of the enrichment she received at an early age. "Her personality is shy, but she's very confident at school. I think HIPPI helps produce confident kids," says Rita Arciniega, a 39-year-old stay-home mother.

Having come here from Gua-

najuato, Mexico, eight years ago, she is now preparing three-year-old Julio for school, using the HIPPI learning materials.

She translates them into Spanish because, she says, "I really believe we have to keep the heritage language at home." Her husband, who comes from Venezuela, agrees.

She has found that "Carla learns at a different pace than Julio. This program has allowed me to know that kind of thing. The materials, the facilitator — it's very professional."

Chandia says the best thing about the program is "the contact, the relationship" it nurtures between parent and child.

In east Vancouver, a third home visitor works with Vietnamese families, while a fourth — who comes from Africa — has an international caseload.

Britannia HIPPI, which once served 120 families, now serves only 60. "We're working on getting sustainable funding," says coordinator Bonnie Soroake.

Delivering its services, which are free to the families, costs about \$1,200 per family. The money comes from several sources, including B.C. Technology Social Venture Partners and Raise-a-Reader grants.

Donations made Thursday, which is Raise-a-Reader Day, will help programs like this to stay alive.

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