



B.C. First Nations Head Start **Snuneymuxw's Playgroup**

(BCFNHS *Growing Together* newsletter, ISSUE 10, Winter 2004, cover)

OUR PLAYGROUP STARTED IN THE SPRING OF 2003 TO BRIDGE A GAP in services between Building Beautiful Babies and the Head Start pre-school program. When it first started up, it was not well-attended and we had a discussion about whether to continue. But after an advertising campaign which included knocking on doors to personally invite people, families decided to check us out and have been attending ever since.

For two hours every Wednesday afternoon, Cynthia and I meet in the Health Centre kitchen with moms, dads, grandparents and children between the ages of 0 and 6. We pick up families in our daycare van if needed. The families (sometimes both parents) come and have a nutritious lunch with their children and two of our staff.

After we eat, the tables are set up for the ever-popular arts and crafts, which are age-appropriate for families to participate in together. Lots of friendly chatter goes on around the table as busy hands create great works of art! Seasonal events are recognized, as well as birthdays of the children and their parents. We have a great selection of toys, puzzles and books and there is lots of time for free play with the adults and children enjoying each other's company. We close each week with a group circle, learning and singing the children's favourite songs.

As the families leave, they receive a bag of nutritious food, which also includes a book. We occasionally add relevant parenting resources, such as nutrition information, dental hygiene notes and new toothbrushes. At the families' request, we continued the group over the summer and enjoyed a couple of picnics at local parks.

Cynthia and I have really enjoyed developing relationships with the families. We both work in the daycare and it is a natural progression for the children to move from playgroup to daycare or pre-school. Parents are finding it easier to go back to school feeling confident that their children are in a safe and nurturing environment. For those who are on the waitlist for daycare, it is an alternative for positive peer interaction. The parents tell us that their children love playing with the different toys and having the peer interaction. Many of them graduated from Beautiful Babies together, so they are developing great friendships, which can carry on through to school.

When asked about what they enjoyed about playgroup, mom and D.J. said, "the joy of doing art with my son." Dad, Gord, who spends a lot of time enjoying playtime with his children and others, acknowledged that he likes the toys too! We look forward to many more happy times together and welcome new families to join us on Wednesday afternoons.