
Red Deer College embraces family research project

By **SUSAN ZIELINSKI**
Advocate staff

Red Deer College is now on board to assist in a three-year research project to support families and their young children as they prepare for schooling.

Faculty from the geography department will use technology to map where current services are available, along with social and economic factors of the community.

Family Services of Central Alberta is running the \$358,660 project called Understanding the Early Years, which was announced in June.

Red Deer was one of 50 communities across Canada to receive federal funding to help communities better understand the needs of young children and families, and identify existing programs and gaps in services.

A diverse sampling of people, including refugees, aboriginals and children from disadvantaged families, will be sought in the second year of the project.

The purpose of the project is to develop a strategy plan by 2010 for Red Deer. But project co-ordinator Laurie Lafortune said information will start flowing to parents as soon as February or March.

A list of existing services for children up to age six and their families will be made

available for parents through social and health agencies, and parenting groups, Lafortune said.

"There is a lot of research that says the very earliest years are important," said Lafortune.

Thirty-six of the projects across Canada were started in 2004 and are now at the implementation stage.

Lafortune said some communities are looking at new playgrounds in neighbourhoods where more children are located, more pre-school programs, addiction programs for parents and literacy programs.

A community steering committee for the Red Deer project includes representatives from Red Deer public and Catholic school jurisdictions.

Susan Parkins, vice-principal of intervention services with the Red Deer Public School District, said the district's pre-kindergarten enrolment has increased to 90 students, up from 60 last year.

"It's obviously meeting a need that's out there," Parkins said.

She hopes research will determine if more could be done to connect immigrant families to services.

For more information on the project go to www.hrsdc.gc.ca.

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