



October 2008

Parenting programs strengthening families

Raising a one, three and five year old is full of giggles, games and cuddles but it can also come with challenges, frustration and parent doubt.

That's why mother of three, Tanya Slomp decided to sign up for the You Make the Difference (YMTD) course at her local Picture Butte Parent Link Centre.

"It was something to add to my parenting toolbox," says Tanya. She adds that having the program close to home and providing child care made it very accessible. "My kids were already familiar with the building and the caregivers so it made it really easy."

Grow Along with Me has been able to increase the amount of trained instructors in order to provide You Make the Difference courses in communities across the region. This is a nine-week, parent-child interaction program. Using a combination of small group sessions (8-10 parents) and individual parent and child practice sessions, YMTD helps parents learn how to foster and enrich their young child's social, language and literacy development during everyday experiences.

With a very busy schedule, Tanya was looking for ideas to make a small difference in their everyday activities. She got that and more from the YMTD course.

"It's been a blessing for our family," says Tanya. She feels virtually no frustration when interacting with her 17 month old, a notoriously difficult age as verbal communication develops.

Tanya is proud to share her daughter's success. "She communicates so well, people ask how old she is and are amazed when she talks in two and three word sentences."

She credits the YMTD course for helping her introduce some basic ideas around face-to-face communications. "It's really neat to see the changes. My youngest interacts differently with her brother and sister and even with her little friends."

Another important tip Tanya took away was to follow her kids lead and discover their interests in order to find every day learning opportunities. She says they don't rush to get supper done and cleaned up any more. Instead she tries to get the kids involved and interacting.

A unique component of the YMTD program is the video taping of the classes which Tanya now has as a keepsake. "As a mom, I'm usually the one taking the pictures and videos so it's really nice to have some that I am in with the kids."

Tanya would recommend YMTD to any parents. She has seen positive changes in her entire family and has become a more confident parent. The chaos has dissipated, the children are thriving and their home is a happy, healthy place.

For more information on YMTD and other local parenting programs visit www.growalongwithme.ca or call Community Links at 1-866-355-5465.

"It was something to add to my parenting toolbox."

- Tanya Slomp, mother of three.



Project Time Line

October is Occupational Therapy Month

May 2007

- Project receives approval
- Steering Committee initiated

Fall 2007

- Staff hired
- Training provided in core evidence-based prevention and intervention programs

Winter 2007/08

- Official Launch with Dr. Fraser Mustard, Dr. Bryan Kolb and Dr. David Gregory

Spring 2008

- Begin to pilot new method of assessment and follow-up services
- Begin to offer core prevention and intervention services
- Increase access to developmental checkups
- Launch Grow Along with Me website

Summer/ Fall 2008

- Full implementation of Grow Along With Me strategies

Fall 2009

- End of Grow Along with Me Project Funding

Occupational Therapy helps people of all ages with skills for the job of living. An occupation is anything that you do in a day. Children, like adults, have occupations too. Their job is to play, learn and care for themselves. Sometimes because of illness, injury, disability, or developmental delay, a child may struggle to participate fully in these day-to-day activities. An Occupational Therapist can help!

One area that occupational therapists assess and provide intervention for is the development of fine motor skills. Fine motor skills are activities that require the use of the small muscles in the hand. These activities include grasping small objects like beads, holding a pencil correctly, cutting, and buttoning. Fine motor skills are critical to every area of a child's life and they can directly affect a child's self-esteem and success at school.

The following activities can help develop your child's fine motor skills:

- Draw and color on an easel or a piece of paper taped to the wall. Vertical surfaces help develop the small muscles in the hand and wrist as well as the larger muscles in the arm and back.
- Make lines and circles by finger painting, painting with pudding or shaving cream, drawing in sand with your fingers, and using a Magnadoodle.
- Play with Play-Doh and use tools such as cookie cutters and plastic knives.
- Play with puzzles.
- Use small tongs to pick up cotton balls, pom poms, blocks, etc.
- Pour, ladle, and spoon water into different sized containers in the bathtub or at the kitchen sink.

Most importantly, have fun and remember that play is a child's work.

Grow Along with Me Project update

"...the early years of development from conception to age six, particularly for the first three years, set the base for competence and coping skills that will affect learning, behavior and health throughout life."
(McCain & Mustard, 1999)

It has been a very exciting 16 months since Grow Along with Me received funding approval. The Steering Committee has brought together professionals from health, social services, education and community-based agencies to build an integrated community partnership.

There has been a strong focus on creating awareness around the importance of early brain development, providing education and developing a collaborative approach to delivering services efficiently and effectively.

We have been able to provide increased opportunities for families to participate in developmental checkups and increased the number of prevention and intervention services available.

Focused on children 18 and 36 months, Grow Along with Me is just one part of a comprehensive child development program being put in place across the region. Already this year, parents of children from four to 60 months of age have completed 1,963 Ages and Stages Questionnaires. All of these families had the opportunity to learn more about their child's development and ways to continue to support healthy growth. For some, it provided the opportunity to talk about concerns and receive the appropriate assessment and follow-up services.

We are excited at how far we have come in a short time and know the work is just beginning. Over the next year, we will continue to provide information about the project and ways for families to support their children in their developmental journey.

Please check our website often for new parent information, research and upcoming parent groups.

Mark Moland, Project Coordinator

