



Coastal Community Credit Union Funds the North Island Infant Development Program's "Healthy Snacks Initiative"

Children in Port McNeill and Port Hardy playgroups are enjoying healthy, nutritional snacks thanks to a \$2,000 grant from the Coastal Community Credit Union (CCCU).

"Good nutrition is important to child development," says Kate Pinsonneault, program coordinator at the North Island Infant Development Program (NIIDP), which offers playgroups that focus on early childhood development. "The Healthy Snacks Program promotes health food choices for young, growing children."

Nutritious, age-appropriate snacks are prepared and served at each playgroup session. A variety of foods from each food group are available. Children enjoy new foods, and parents are often surprised to find that their children will try foods even if they have never seen them before.

"I've never given him vegetable juice before," said one surprised mother as her child asked for more. "This is the first time he's ever tried a kiwi," a mother commented as she watched her son eagerly take another piece of the bright green fruit.

"It's wonderful to have the snacks, and so nutritious," Trish agrees. The Infant Development Program encourages children with developmental challenges to come out and participate. When a family first hears that their infant has developmental delays, they often feel worried and alone. Parents living in small communities may not know where to go for help. The NIIDP provides a variety of community and at-home services for these families free of charge.

"Our consultants respond to the unique needs of each family," says program coordinator Kate Pinsonneault. "Parents take the lead and decide on the level of involvement they desire. One family may need information to better understand their child's diagnosis; another may want regular assessments to track their child's developmental progress. Some may ask for paediatric therapists to design a program specifically for their child, others may need to borrow special therapeutic toys or equipment."

The play groups in Port McNeill and Port Hardy are open to all families with children from birth to school age.

"Playgroups are a fun and informative social experience for parents and their young children," says Pinsonneault. "It is a time for parents to connect, ask questions, and participate in a variety of fun activities such as stories, songs, crafts, games and healthy snacks that enhance child development and social skills.

Parents attending playgroups receive information about child health, development, safety, behaviour and nutrition. Topics discussed can range from toilet training to positive discipline. They can even ask the IDP consultants to provide developmental screenings. Specialists from Sunny Hill Hospital visit the playgroups to see children and answer parents' questions related to speech and language, physical development, or self-help skills.

"I really enjoy my time at playgroup," says Karen. "The IDP consultant is really good at providing a well-rounded program. She is very knowledgeable and the information she offers is always very useful."

"An IDP consultant provides information about feeding and nutrition for infants, toddlers and preschoolers," says Pinsonneault. Topics are diverse and have included breast-feeding, teething, choking hazards, dehydration, and facts on sugar, food allergies, and dental care. Parents learn from discussing their experiences and sharing their successes.

For children who have been referred to the NIIDP, consultants can administer the Gesell Developmental Assessment. This assessment tool is more involved than the developmental screenings. It provides an accurate summary of the child's abilities and strengths as well as identifying specific developmental delays. All IDP consultants have received training to administer this standardized developmental test. "The Infant Development Program helps connect parents whose children have similar conditions," says Pinsonneault. "For example a parent who has a child who is blind or has Down's Syndrome can be connected with experienced parents who can help provide practical suggestions and encouragement. The IDP can also introduce parents to associations that provide medical information, resources, newsletter updates and parent support."

"We are grateful to Coastal Community Credit Union for funding for our Health Snacks Program for the second year in a row," says Pinsonneault. "Our provincial government funding covers salaries, training, administration and travel costs for the home visits across a large territory, but it doesn't cover the cost of the snacks for playgroup. We need corporate sponsors to offer this valuable program."

Coastal Community Credit Union, the largest credit union based on Vancouver Island, serves communities from Victoria to Port Hardy through 21 financial service branches and 19 insurance offices. Passionate about Vancouver Island, Coastal Community's 500 employees strive to make their communities better. Through the community investment program, the credit union works to provide financial, in-kind and other resources to support charity and not-for-profit groups in each community.

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