

ents with two and three year olds who live in the area of the school community to come to meetings once a month in the library. Choosing a specific day and keeping it consistent throughout the year makes it easy for all to remember.

Each meeting has the same format, which gives a sense of security to the children. Parents also can relax with the routine. The young children visit with the school librarian for a storytime and the parents move to another area in the library to relax over coffee and talk to guest speakers arranged for the meeting. At the first meeting, parents fill out an information sheet so that they can be added to the library checkout system to enable each child to sign out a book on the first day.

Storytime with the librarian is full of songs, action stories, chime in, pattern books and puppets. It's helpful to have older students come and model listening and participation for the younger ones. A quick-paced storytime keeps these young children focused and involved. Don't forget to include juice and cookies after the story.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Guests that are invited for these sessions have a chance to talk to parents about concerns or information specifically aimed at community contacts and parenting information. Local police, firefighters, public librarians, community health nurse, politicians and child-find personnel are more than willing to come and spend time over coffee discussing services available and to answer questions.

The administrators in the school should be at your initial meeting to field any questions about registration or general school policy. They should be encouraged to come to as many of the community outreach meetings as possible. The guests for one of the very last meetings of the year are the kindergarten teachers for the following school year. This is a wonderful opportunity for them to discuss questions or concerns they might have for the following September.

In the event that the school has a high population of ESL students, it is a good idea to include in the school newsletter a message written in the prevalent language.

Translators or support staff are more than willing to give up an hour every month to come and assist. The isolation because of the language barrier can be easily broken and community services that are available can be utilized.

SENSE OF SECURITY

A sense of security and comfort will develop with each meeting, not only for the young child but also for the parents. Encourage them to visit the library on a regular basis and promote the importance of reading at home. Young children get to know the library very well and even start to build a favourite collection of stories. Parents may realize that the gift of a book is just as important (if not more important) than the latest toy. They may begin to value or affirm the importance of reading at home.

Leave some of the meetings unplanned so that last-minute guests can be invited. Parents may indicate that they would like to explore other issues. This leaves you flexibility in scheduling any visitors that have to miss for reasons of illness or weather.

At Russell D. Barber Public School, the community outreach program started as a small snowball, but has grown and become the entire snowman with all the trimmings. The library has daily visits from the preschoolers. They are showing off their favourite books to library volunteers and other students in the library. Parents utilize books from the Parent section in the library and feel free to ask for information as the need arises. The preschoolers are developing a sense of comfort in the school and certainly will be ready for kindergarten next year. Interaction with older students in the school is a positive experience for all.

Parents enjoy the library outings just as much as the preschoolers. Conversation with adults is important when you are a stay-at-home caregiver, and they enjoy the conversation and contacts that are made in the library.

The foundations built in this type of community outreach program are an important link between the communi-

Photo courtesy of Russell D. Barber Public School in Mississauga.

President's comments:

OLA's Summit on School Libraries

The OLA Board of Directors also believes that we must advocate beyond our own communities. On May 26-28, the OLA Summit on School Libraries is featuring researchers and authorities from around the world to talk to parents, principals, superintendents, business people, school library educators, government officials and many more to find new solutions to