

Study praises Head Start program [CA-NT] ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Children in Ndilo and Yellowknife are benefiting from the Aboriginal Head Start Program, according to a study released Jan. 18.

According to tests using the Brigance Preschool Screen, which looks at school readiness skills, Ndilo children in the program improved by an average of 14 per cent between 2000 and 2007.

"It's an early intervention program," said Dr. Jennifer Chalmers, an author of the study as well as its principal investigator.

Students taking part in Aboriginal Head Start attend the program four days a week for half a day. It is for children who are four-years-old and the focus is improving number skills, social skills as well as reading and language skills, said Chalmers.

"We have been very fortunate to have a Head Start program," said Reanna Erasmus of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, the Ndilo Aboriginal Head Start program manager and also an author of the study, titled Empowering Our Children's Futures.

She said the program is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada and given a budget of \$256,000 a year.

According to Chalmers, the Head Start programs began in the United States in the 1960s, but has existed in Ndilo for 10 years.

There are eight Head Start programs in the NWT and 130 across Canada.

Talking specifically about the program in Yellowknife, Chalmers said, "The program has continued to improve and now surpasses a lot of American programs."

Cecilia Beaulieu, a counsellor in Ndilo who works with the program, said she was impressed with how the children taking part have shown considerable improvement. Beaulieu said three things she would like to see changed include a bigger and better bus for the children in the program, more funding for special needs children and room made available for the more than 20 kids currently on the waiting list.

Children who went through the program and are currently in Grades 2 to 6 are currently to be tested.

The findings of the study are available to the general public.

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