



early childhood community development centre



Young Children Priority First

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KIWANIS CLUBS OF NIAGARA LAUNCH NEW PROJECT TO GET KIDS HOOKED ON READING

The Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara are hosting a special Interclub Dinner Meeting this evening to celebrate the launch of **Young Children Priority First**, a region-wide initiative aimed at enhancing children's early learning and development. Working with the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC), Kiwanis Club members have adopted over 130 licensed child care programs in Niagara and will be providing these programs with new books and learning materials designed to foster children's literacy. The members will also perform minor repairs on child care equipment and spend time in the centres reading with the children.

The **Young Children Priority First** kick-off dinner will be held from 6:30 to 9:00 p.m. at the Renaissance Hotel, Fallsview Boulevard, Niagara Falls. Local dignitaries, including Regional Chair Peter Partington and St. Catharines MPP Jim Bradley are expected to attend, along with representatives from the business community and from the child care programs involved.

"Once again, Niagara has led the way in children's early learning and care," says Tammy McCormick-Ferguson, Executive Director of the ECCDC, an independent, non-profit charitable organization committed to helping individuals and organizations achieve their child care goals. *"With Young Children Priority First, Niagara is doing something that few other Canadian cities or towns have tried. We're bringing businesses and child care programs together to create experiences that foster children's literacy in our community. By working centre-by-centre and child-by-child, I know we can get the job done."*

McCormick-Ferguson is keenly aware of the challenges facing children who enter school without the benefit of early childhood experiences that foster their literacy and language skills. For more than five years now, the ECCDC has facilitated Niagara's participation in a federal research project aimed at measuring the factors that affect children's readiness to learn when they enter school. *"The results of the Understanding the Early Years research certainly seem to underscore the importance of initiatives such as Young Children Priority First. The ECCDC is proud that child care programs across the region have teamed up with the Kiwanis Clubs to make such a positive difference."*

Robert Ykema, President of the Stratagem Group and Project Chair of the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara's Young Children Priority First initiative sees raising the region's literacy level as critical to its economic growth. *"So often, I've had to turn eager jobseekers away because all of the positions in my company require some degree of computer proficiency. Without literacy, proficiency in mathematics, science or computers is very unlikely. It's going to take a highly skilled workforce to attract and keep information and technology-based companies and higher-wage jobs in the area. Getting kids hooked on reading at an early age is a great place to start. We're grateful that the Trillium Foundation has given us this opportunity."*

For more information or interviews, please contact Tammy McCormick-Ferguson at 905•646•7311 extension 301, or email tferguson@eccdc.org.

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