

Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara and the Early Childhood Community Development Centre Join Forces to Enhance Science and Technology Experiences for Young Children



By Andrea Hannen and Lorrey Ariel Bonilla

Children's science and technology learning has been enhanced in over 150 licensed early childhood programs thanks to the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara and the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC). The ECCDC is a not for profit, charitable organization dedicated to providing early learning and child care programs with affordable access to the specialized resources, training and supports they require to deliver outstanding experiences for Niagara's young children. The Science and Technology project, which began in 2012 and took two years to complete, is the most recent of a series of initiatives the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara and the ECCDC have undertaken together, with the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Louise Kool & Galt, Niagara Region Children's Services, and other local organizations.

In 2007, the Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara and the ECCDC began working together as Young Children Priority First (YCPF). YCPF builds on the success of Kiwanis International's Young Children Priority One initiative. It is aimed at enhancing children's development before they start school. YCPF is an Advisory Board that is comprised of several members from the Welland, St. Catharines and Kiwanis Clubs in Niagara and members appointed by the ECCDC. The ECCDC provides the resources, training and support to the early learning and child care community and the Kiwanis Clubs provide the necessary volunteer, fundraising and business resources.

The first project rolled out by YCPF was its Early Literacy project, which provided 140 licensed child care programs with over 5000 new books and learning materials designed to foster children's literacy. Kiwanis members also volunteered countless hours making minor repairs to toys and equipment and reading and interacting with over 6000 children enrolled in these centres. In 2008, YCPF provided a kit of hands-on numeracy materials to these same child care programs; while the ECCDC delivered training to offer educators strategies for facilitating early learning experiences to support children's development of mathematical behavior.

The Science and Technology project involves the design and delivery of science





and technology resource kits to licensed child care classrooms across Niagara and training for 1,000 Registered Early Childhood Educators. Each kit contains learning materials to promote young children's awareness and understanding of science concepts and processes such as understanding their natural world, cause and effect, observation, prediction, recording results, making predications, asking questions and drawing conclusions. Kiwanis volunteers have been involved in compiling the kits, distributing them to the training sessions and volunteering at the sessions, while the ECCDC designed and delivered the workshops. YCPF developed a community advisory committee representing a variety of licensed child care agencies, Quality Child Care Niagara and Niagara Child Care Sector



Executive Committee to offer guidance for the materials selected for the kit and the training concepts.

"We're very excited to be working with the ECCDC on another project that meets the specific resource and training needs of Niagara's early learning and child care community," says Bill Irwin of the St. Catharines Kiwanis Club. Lorrey Arial-Bonilla, Executive Director for the ECCDC acknowledges the value of the long-term partnership between Kiwanis members and her organization. "It allows us to identify and meet specific community needs, so we can make a real difference for children. In 2012, we surveyed Niagara's child care community to ascertain where educators felt



there was a pressing need. Overwhelmingly, they wanted play-based learning resources for their classrooms and some additional training on facilitating science and technology experiences for young children. The Kiwanis Clubs of Niagara were our partner every step of the way.”

YCPF’s mission is to enhance early learning and care for Niagara-area children age six and under, by building a network of volunteers and developing a fundraising vehicle for projects, resources and practitioner training. YCPF takes a holistic approach and seeks to enhance all aspects of children’s development, including their physical, social, spiritual and emotional well being. YCPF undertakes activities that support improvements the environment, structure and resources of child care programs; and that provide learning opportunities for early learning and child care staff and for the children in their care.



For more information about YCPF, including photos of the Science and Technology training sessions and comments from participants, please visit www.eccdc.org/YCPF. For more information regarding the ECCDC please see www.eccdc.org.

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