



Book work

Staff Photo by Rick Rycroft

The move was on at the old library yesterday where Tamy Graydon (left) and Michelle Whaley stack boxes filled with books as high as they can reach. All the shelves should be empty by today, ready to be moved to the new facility later this week. The new library opens to the public on March 13.

Fun summer for immigrant kids

By **STEPHEN FLETCHER**
Herald-Tribune staff

They played Tug of War with Latin American rules, dubbed their afternoon walks The Reebok Express and tried a multinational approach to 'Duck, Duck, Goose.'

It was a short, hot and absorbing summer for many of Grande Prairie's young immigrant children.

Peace Area Settlement Services (PASS) first-ever recreation program ended its season on Wednesday after two months of city-based activities. The program was designed to ease the difficulties facing new Canadians who often feel isolated when they first arrive in their adopted country.

"Even after two months their confidence went up and the social skills went way up," said Joelanne Sarrasin, the program's co-ordinator.

Sarrasin, a fourth year education student at the University of Alberta, joined PASS in June to run the program, which involved four afternoons a week of healthy fun.

The program's unique goal was to open doors for the children of immigrant families by grooming friendships and showing them what's available in Grande Prairie.

The varied itinerary included library visits, mini-golf, bowling and joining up with Friendship Centre activities or taking part in the Sunbusters travelling playground program.

At its peak, 22 youngsters between the ages of five and 12 spent their afternoons with Sarrasin.

The fun proved to be addictive.

"The objective wasn't to get the families involved but that's what happened," she said. "Mom and Dad and older brother and sister started coming along."

The kids would meet each day at Lions Park. Because of the small budget, Sarrasin's troupe was only able to journey as far as their legs would take them. One of the youths dubbed their travels the 'Reebok Express.'

Michelle Whaley, who's entering the regional college this fall, volunteered her time to help Sarrasin deal with her gang of excitable, multinational youngsters.

"It was enjoyable," she said. "There were some days you when you didn't want to come but there were a lot of days when you did."

The language barrier was the biggest challenge – most spoke either Spanish or Polish and had only a rough knowledge of English.

Any language impasse, however, was usually quickly resolved by an interpreter, hand signs, or the easy international appeal of summertime fun.

Most important, said Sarrasin, the kids developed lasting friendships and better skills with English – good preparation for life in the Canadian school system.

"It was really interesting to see the difference in them (at the end of the season)," she added. "I miss the kids already."

Peace Area Settlement Services Society For Immigrants

would like to thank the following businesses and organizations for their valuable contributions towards our summer recreation program for children:

Grande Prairie and District Multicultural Association
Liland Engineering York Hotel
David Richardson, C.A. United Way

Special thanks to volunteer **Michelle Whaley** for her countless hours of work and dedication to the program.

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Swan City Rotary Club president Doug Bain presents \$500 to Michelle Whaley of the GP Association for the Deaf.