



# YOUTH

## Preschool literacy program piloted in Vancouver

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### VANCOUVER

Parents now can help their children learn their ABCs before they start preschool with the assistance of a pilot program called the Aboriginal Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY).

HIPPY is an international literacy program providing learning tools and support for parents who want to give their children a head start. Originally developed in Israel, the program now operates internationally.

Less than 30 per cent of Aboriginal students finish high school in British Columbia, which caused community members and educators at the Chief Dan George Centre to start Aboriginal HIPPY in 2003. Approximately 50 families are enrolled. It is being delivered in five communities: Katzi, Musqueam, Tsawwassen, Sechelt and Tsleil-Waututh.

"I think many of the communities that launched this first program were really feeling that their children were hitting the school system unprepared for kindergarten, and that was leading to them falling more and more behind in school," said Tammy Harkey, the national manager for Aboriginal HIPPY.

"When they hit Grade 1. they

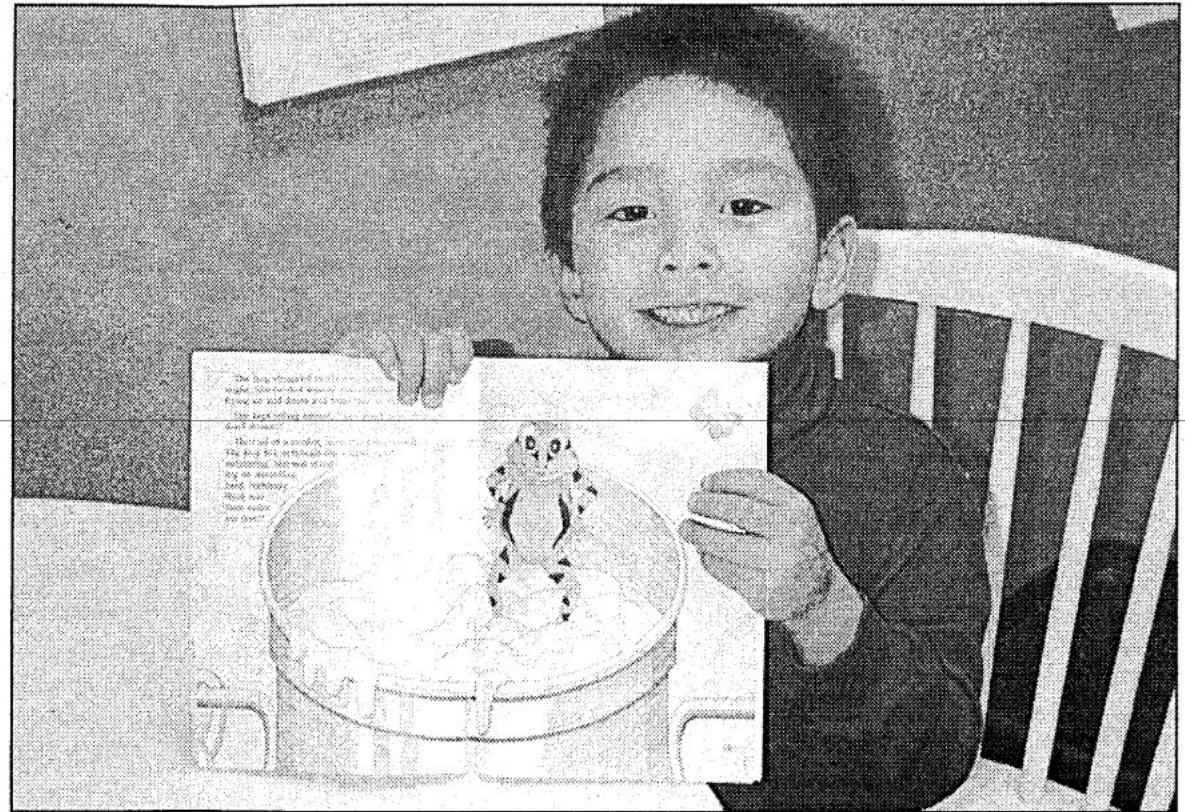
were still behind, and that gap just continues to grow. Also, there has been a lot of talk about the history of the residential school and it led parents to believe that they didn't have the skills to teach their children at home. I think the program has reinforced the fact that parents have the skills to educate their children."

Storybooks, puzzles and other educational materials are provided to enable parents to develop their children's cognitive skills.

"Those packages cover 30 cognitive skills that kindergarten teachers stated that a child needed to succeed in kindergarten. Following those materials are a set of storybooks that the children receive and they would be the home base kit that has the typical supplies like glue and scissors and pencils and paper, just to allow the children to explore different material," said Harkey.

She added that parents also attend biweekly meetings with other parents and with HIPPY Aboriginal staff, to discuss their concerns and their progress.

"This year, we were fortunate. We were a beneficiary of the Vancouver Sun Raise a Reader (program), and so they gave us a donation. What we did with that was we purchased First Nations' storybooks to augment the program. That was a huge hit with the chil-



ROBIN ADAMS

**Jacob Bailey from the Katzi Nation is proud of learning his alphabet in an innovative home schooling program for preschoolers.**

dren; they were in awe to see themselves basically in the storybooks within their lifestyle and things like that," said Harkey.

Robin Adams is a home visitor who works with nine families in the Katzi Nation

"They ask a lot more questions than when I first sat down with the kids and the parents. Their vocabulary was really low; they didn't like to talk to

people; they did not like to ask questions. But now, as a year went by, a year-and-a-half goes by, these children are asking the question, in full sentences too. So I can see the noticeable change. Their spirits are really high now. They're hungry for learning now," said Adams, who has become affectionately known as the "homework lady" in her community.

Harkey said that presentations are being made in conferences across Canada in order to raise awareness of Aboriginal HIPPY. She hopes that the success enjoyed by British Columbia First Nations will result in expansion of the program.

For more information on Aboriginal HIPPY, visit the Web site [www.hippy.org.il/html/index.html](http://www.hippy.org.il/html/index.html).