

star editorial

Three weekends: \$325K



Kelly Clemmer

There's no doubt that this community is a generous one. There are fundraisers on top of fundraisers and many local businesses get hit up for donations for silent and or live auction items all the time.

In fact, many set a limit, because every day they could donate something for an event, fundraiser or auction. The key is, to reciprocate that generosity. If you see a business or company that donates to a fundraiser you're involved in, or that you've attended, that's your cue to support that business when it comes time to make your own purchases.

If a business is generous enough to support a cancer fundraiser, a bike rally or a charity golf tournament, then we all in turn, should support them.

When purchasing a widget or a dingle, we generally look at a couple of major factors when making that purchase. Price, service and selection,

and not necessarily in that order. We should add community support to that trifecta.

Being involved with a few fundraisers, you see certain names over and over, and some new ones depending on the event, or the cause, which may be close to that donator's heart.

It's extraordinary that in February, March and April, during the fundraiser "crunch" our community raised tens of thousands of dollars, from the Community Health Foundation to Habitat for Humanity, or the Cash for the Cure. It's amazing how much these events annually can bring in to help their organizations fund projects and research.

Then this June came along and there were three major events, the inaugural Relay for Life, a cancer society fundraiser, the 5th annual Fire 'n' Wheels, and the 22nd annual Bumper to Bumper Charity Golf Tournament. Between these three events, they

raised in excess of \$325,000 for their various causes. That's amazing.

Sometimes funds come from different pockets, as someone who supported the Relay may not be the same person that supported the Rally, but there were some that did both. The Bumper to Bumper charity golf tourney may attract a whole other supporters, golfers and businesses, then again, some of them were most likely the same for all three events. We saw riders that were golfers and golfers who were walkers in the Relay, and vice versa.

It may take a community to raise a child, but it also takes caring, generous people to make a community. And that's what we have.

Kelly



Circulation 6,324 Published by Star News Inc., 1027 - 3 Ave., Wainwright, AB T9W 1T6 Phone 780-842-4465 Fax 780-842-2760 website: www.starnews.ca

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Stacy Thomas

Now's the time for a smarter tomorrow

Alberta Education's Early Child Development Mapping study, with its findings that many MD of Wainwright

children are struggling with language and thinking skills and emotional maturity, could be shrugged off as yet another doom-and-gloom government funded study, to be ignored except by those whom it directly affects.

But it affects everybody, because according to Dianne Souveny of Alberta Education, there have been direct correlations drawn between ill-preparedness at the kindergarten level and non-completion of high school.

Twenty-seven percent of children in Alberta, or one in four, are arriving at kindergarten with developmental delays that set them behind the game, but not far enough to warrant the extra attention that a diagnosed learning disability would.

That's one in four kids who, without the funding available to allow for the extra staff and time to identify and help them, will fall through the cracks each year to land farther and farther behind their classmates.

One in four kids who will hit adulthood without a high school diploma, in a time when not even a bachelor's degree guarantees a solid career.

"Kindergarten teachers tell us it's not the academics; they can teach the kids the ABC's and the 123's. It's the children that come to kindergarten who have poor social and emotional skills—they're already behind their peers," Souveny said.

So what's going on with these kids? Why are they entering kindergarten with low social and thinking skills?

Psychologist Janine Nelson, who specializes in children's therapy and

play therapy in Wainwright, thinks neuroplasticity, or brain plasticity, holds the key.

For hundreds of years, popular scientific belief has held that once the brain passed the growth period of early childhood, its structure was fixed for the rest of its life, but this notion has been proven to be untrue, as the brain is not fixed throughout its life at all, but can be altered by stimulation and learning; it can keep growing in different ways, essentially learning new ways to experience and react to the world, up to and throughout adulthood. Even exercise can increase the brain's capacity to change its cellular structure.

While this is a very exciting prospect for those with disabilities or brain injuries, Nelson says that neuroplasticity can also work the other way. The brain can devolve, in a way, from a lack of stimulation, and this, she ventures, could be the cause of the setbacks young children are experiencing.

"Society has changed in the way that kids play, and play is a really pivotal aspect of development," said Nelson.

So much play time is now screen-based, she says, and even if the messages conveyed in a movie or video game are positive ones, with moral lessons and good outcomes, the fact that they are being watched passively means the brain doesn't do the work and doesn't learn the lesson.

"It's almost like a third party witnessing. Whereas if it's one-on-one, with a caregiver or another child, they're having to do the work, their brain has to do the work, so I wonder if that has an impact. . . . Maybe, based on whatever's happening for our families and in our community, perhaps kids are at risk for too much exposure, and not a good balance of the other stuff that comes

from that human being one-on-one connection."

It is a community issue. Schools, parents, service providers, neighbours and families need to get together now to support parents who are ever more strapped for time and finances, in order to give kids the one-on-one human engagement that they need, not only from parents but from everyone.

The consequence isn't someone else's child, it's a future one-fourth of this population under-educated because they didn't have a chance to begin with. What kind of a future populace do we want to have—dynamic and intelligent, or disordered and dysfunctional? Now is the time to decide, and to act.



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