

Building Brains Together offers summer outdoor play program

BY AL BEEBER - LETHBRIDGE HERALD ON JULY 20, 2022.

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Herald photo by Al Beeber Trish Mangone hands out a container for an activity at the Holy Spirit tent during the Family Outdoor Play event Tuesday at Nicholas Sheran Park. The program runs again there today from 3 until 7 p.m.

Building brains together – that’s the focus of a family outdoor play program running at different parks in the summer through early August.

The Building Brains Together organization is aimed at developing healthy and resilient children, families and society. It aligns closely with the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative.

The family outdoor play program staged by BBT runs Tuesday mornings and Wednesday afternoons at different parks across the city until Aug. 12.

The program is free for families and features activities for all school-aged children.

The Family Outdoor Play events include participation by Lethbridge School Division, Holy Spirit Catholic School Division, the Family Centre, Building Brains Together and the Lethbridge Public Library.

Multiple programs are involved with Building Brains Together including Holy Spirit Catholic Schools, Alberta Family Wellness Initiative, the Family Centre, Lethbridge College, Lethbridge Public Library, Lethbridge Early Years Coalition, Lethbridge School Division, Lethbridge Housing, Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society, Parents as Teachers Affiliate, University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge Family Services and the City of Lethbridge.

The organization was created after the provincial government collected early developmental data on kindergarten children in Alberta and identified those in Lethbridge scoring below Alberta norms. It also showed Alberta children scored below Canadian norms.

A committee was formed with representatives from the two school divisions here, the U of L neuroscience department and other early-learning age groups to equip families and improve kindergarten readiness for kids. A curriculum was then developed that was aimed at improving executive function skills.

The events in July and August feature pop-up tents with free outdoor play activities and outdoor facilitated games. Parents can then take home an activity kit.

Tuesday's events run from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. while Wednesday's in the same venue run from 3 until 7 p.m.

This week's activities were being staged at Nicholas Sheran School in West Lethbridge, Tuesday and today. There is also an outdoor play event scheduled for Helen Schuler Nature Centre Friday from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. in which kids can engage in free games and activities with the Building Brains team.

The program moves to Lakeview Elementary School next Tuesday and Wednesday again from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. on the first day and from 3 until 7 p.m. the second day. There will also be a program at Helen Schuler Nature Centre on July 29 running from 10 a.m. until 2 p.m.

Jenny Cofell of the Lethbridge Public Library said Tuesday the event started during COVID and looked quite different two years ago. By mid-morning numerous parents and youngsters were participating.

Cofell said each table has an activity with this week's theme being music. After families engage at each tent, they collect tickets and after getting all five they are handed the activity bag.

The sessions are well-attended and an effort is made to hit different parts of the city so residents across Lethbridge can attend, she said.

"We really try so all families are able to access it. If it's in their neighbourhood they can come and don't have to try."

The afternoon and evening session accommodates people who are working.

When COVID started, people couldn't congregate so families would pick up activity kits and go, Cofell said.

Trish Mangone of Holy Spirit said each week is a different theme.

Shelly Kruger of Holy Spirit said the program offers different experiences for different ages from zero to 18.

Depending on a booth's mandates, the program will include youth up to high school age, she said.

In August, the program moves to Chinook Lake Park on Aug. 2-3. The program moves to Coalbanks Elementary School Aug. 9-10.

Outdoor play events in August at Helen Schuler run Aug. 5 and 12.

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