

# Parents as Teachers Program Gives Kids a Strong Start

*The latest story in our SMART Fund series*

Parents as Teachers (PAT) is an early learning program that empowers parents to give their children the best possible start in life, with support from our VCH SMART Fund,\* the United Way and the Vancouver Foundation.

“Our philosophy is that parents are the most influential teachers in a child’s life,” says Program Coordinator **Irene Clarence**. “PAT uses a set curriculum, based on the latest research in early brain development, to help parents understand how children grow and learn, from birth to age five. We teach parent-child activities that encourage language development, intellectual growth, social development and motor skills.”

Once a month, four parent educators (who speak 11 languages) visit 120 families in central Vancouver. The educator, parent and child do fun activities on the floor with a kit of materials and toys appropriate for that child’s age. For example, educators show parents how to encourage sleep patterns, a common developmental issue in the first six months, and to make books a big part of kids’ lives right from the start, in addition to reading stories before bed.

“Speech and reading are connected to kids’ experiences long before they do either,” explains Irene Clarence. “Books for young children should be tough enough, possibly plastic or



*“The PAT program has helped my son to be a happy and confident boy; it has also helped us as parents to understand our son and guide him in his development.”*

squishy, so parents can encourage kids to touch them and turn pages. Gestures, singing, voice tones, charades are all part of language development.

“We explain how activities teach skills and why they’re important. Parents learn what’s healthy and realistic in their child’s growth. And kids are often waiting at the door for the teacher to show up, because they know they’ll be the focus of attention for an entire hour.”

PAT also provides developmental screenings and referrals if needed. Families in the program can attend monthly parent meetings on themes such as messy play or safety. And a Parent Advisory Group meets regularly to help direct the program.

Parents as Teachers began in the U.S. 25 years ago, and studies show the program helps prepare children for success in school and life. Children enter school more prepared and eager to learn and parents stay more involved in their education, which lead to better results for students.

PAT is offered in more than 2,400 locations around the world, including 22 sites in Alberta. At present, PAT in central Vancouver is the only program in B.C, although other areas have expressed interest.

For more information, visit the Vancouver PAT website at [vanpat.go.cc](http://vanpat.go.cc), or the international site at [www.patnc.org](http://www.patnc.org).

## current

is published monthly by Communications and Public Affairs. If you have story ideas or feedback, please email [current@vch.ca](mailto:current@vch.ca) or call 604-708-5281.

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