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For Immediate Release

## **Spring Into Action**

Classes are out for Spring Break, but some kids are still going to school.

A pair of programs are keeping local children busy and engaged under School District 57 roofs during the vacation.

“It’s really exciting to be able to offer opportunities to kids, keep them busy and learning, even with Spring Break going on,” said Harmen Kailay, principal at Nusdeh Yoh Elementary School (NYES), involved in both these programs even though one of them is held over at Duchess Park Secondary School. The three conjoined gymnasiums there were perfect spaces to host more than 50 kids for a set of sports experiences.

About half of the kids in the sports camp normally attend NYES, (most others are from Ron Brent Elementary School) and the first faces they saw at the big school’s entrance to the gym were two of their regular Education Assistants.

“Louella and Susan are superstars at our school. The kids come running to them,” said Kailay. “The kids have a connection, a rapport with them, so that’s integral to their comfort coming into a new situation in a new setting, with a lot of new kids and new adults. Those familiar faces are critical.”

Safer Schools Together and Game Ready Fitness were the provincial designers of the sports camp. In Prince George, they partnered with SD57 for venues and operational support, and the Prince George Kodiaks Football Club was brought in to run the daily sports activities.

Sponsorship support was generously provided by Dave Mothus, Telus Prince George and Save-On-Foods to provide healthy snacks. The Prince George Youth Soccer Association’s Impact Soccer Club donated a soccer ball to each of the participants. T-shirts were also in their introduction package.

“Kids thrive on structure and activities during break times,” said Kodiaks general manager Ryan Bellamy. “We’ve had them playing basketball, some football, we’ve had them playing dodgeball, we just expose them each day to new sports and let them get a feel for new activities, and see what sticks.”

Although the Kodiaks are the newest franchise in the Canadian Junior Football League, the approach with the kids was to offer a smorgasbord of sports and other activities.

“Most of us in football are multi-sport athletes,” said Bellamy, who was also a lacrosse player. “Those abilities to learn other sports and work different parts of your mind and your muscles is

complementary to your primary sport. It's all about passing on physical literacy and just letting them play. Kids deserve to just have fun."

The children were channeled into three age-based groups. One was for Kindergarten through Grade 3, one for the Grade 4 and 5 kids, and the third for kids in Grades 6 to 8. They were sometimes blended, depending on the activity. The Kodiaks team provided guest coaches from within their organization to supervise and carry out all the action.

It was a chance for those young athletes to also gain some experience as mentors.

"They say it only takes one coach, or one day of exposure to an activity to ignite a kid's interest for life," said Bellamy. "You hear it all the time about great athletes who were given that one chance, that one access point back in their youth, something clicked, and that's what sparked them to go on to great things. We have an awesome opportunity here to make a big impact. And if the only thing that comes of it is all this laughter and excited voices, that's a big win, too." Over at Nusdeh Yoh Elementary School the kids were chanting "more slime! More slime!" as Veronica Wiebe and Sam Teed mixed a new batch of the colourful goo they were all kneading through their fingers and rolling on the art table.

These kids were gathered by Carrier Sekani Family Services who partnered with School District 57 to have a safe, engaging space to do their daily activities during the vacation period.

"We have a different activity every day of Spring Break," said Wiebe. "It's all about showing these kids different things to stimulate their thinking, get their hands busy, show them new things, and really it's about how to connect with community."

The two UNBC psychology students will be taking the kids swimming, to play mini-golf, a visit to Chinook Yoga, learning the process of making a button blanket, rock climbing at OverHang, roller skating, cross-country skiing at Caledonia Nordic Ski Centre, and every day some attention paid to how different food is prepared.

The program is an offshoot of their year-round Equine Program, where kids get to spend time with horses, learning how to move and behave around creatures sensitive to sound and movement, learning how to care for another living being, and all the sights and sounds of being around such physically impressive animals that have a close working relationships with people.

"It's just to have fun and connect with other people," said Wiebe.

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