



## Teaching Tots Through Toddler Time!

Libraries have always been centers of learning and discovery for people of all ages. Now, thanks to a partnership between The Aroostook Medical Center (TAMC) and the Mark & Emily Turner Memorial Library, some of the areas' littlest residents are learning all about the human body and how to stay healthy.

The Presque Isle-based library's Toddler Time provides an opportunity for children between the ages of two and four to come together for a story and activity each week. In early 2010, TAMC and the library began collaborating on bringing basic health-related information to toddlers and their parents. Since then, Darcy Kinney, TAMC's community health educator, has attended Toddler Time with a "TAMC friend" on the first Wednesday of each month. Her friends have included managers, technicians, pediatricians, hospital leadership, and others.

"Toddler Time gives children an opportunity to get excited about health by learning through a fun environment before they are exposed to more formal learning in school," said Darcy. "I look forward to the first Wednesday of every month. I feel that we are helping to build a foundation of healthy living for these young children."

The day begins with the Youth Librarian introducing Darcy and her friend. Then, the children participate in a brief discussion about the topic of the day. After that, Darcy or her friend read a short story. Toddler Time always ends with a fun and creative activity related to the topic of the day. Topics have included healthy eating, the human brain, bones, hand washing, germs, and more.

Feedback from parents has been positive. "I take my kids to Toddler Time because books bring children together and they can be part of a positive shared experience," said Renee Guerrette, a TAMC employee who regularly brings her daughter to Toddler Time. "The stories and activities shared by TAMC staff are highly educational and experiential. My kids can learn about many health-related topics that will make them more aware of their own health."

Attendance varies, but as many as 20 children attend on the busiest months. According to Dianna Leighton, youth librarian, having TAMC employees attend Toddler Time has been beneficial for both the children and their parents. "The Toddler Time group has really enjoyed having regular visits from TAMC over the past year," she said. "The children are able to receive age-appropriate health information in a safe and fun environment, which is especially helpful when covering a "scary" topic such as receiving immunizations or a subject that raises mixed emotions such as welcoming a new brother or sister. I believe that the parents enjoy the sessions as well since they provide an opportunity to meet with health professionals who can answer their questions regarding child safety/development and community resources."



*Joy Barresi Saucier, TAMC vice president of Organizational Advancement and Darcy Kinney, Community Education coordinator read a colorful book to the Toddler Time group about outdoor activities in the winter and how playing outside helps keep the body healthy.*



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