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by **Kevin Crush**

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All kids look forward to recess.

But the kids at Holy Redeemer Catholic school in Ardrossan have even more reason to look forward to recess, so much that they’re actually anxious to get out weeks in advance.

This year the school started up a program known as Positive Playgrounds. Once every couple of weeks rather than just let the kids run around during a normal lunch hour recess, parents, staff members and some of the junior students get together to hold organized games for the elementary students — and the kids absolutely love it.

“We haven’t had it for a couple of weeks since the Christmas break and I had a lot of kids — especially the junior high kids who help out — bugging me and saying, ‘When are we going to do it again?’” said Paul Berg, the school’s counsellor.

The idea behind Positive Playgrounds is that the kids interact with new people. Students are split up into numbered groups without respect to grade level or what class they’re in. The groups end up being made up of diverse kids who may never have met the other students any other way.

Volunteers then guide the groups through various zones, each of which has its own activity and gets the kids to play new games.

“The format is so that the kids get the chance to mix with the different grade levels so they’re not hanging out with the same kids that they always hang out with, and they get the chance to play new games, learn new games, and do something different at lunch time,” said Berg.

Each time the school holds Positive Playgrounds there are new activities, and sometimes there may even be themes. For instance, this week it was Hockey Super Skills seeing as how the school was also having Oilers week.

Positive Playgrounds started at Holy Redeemer when a couple of parents heard about it being done elsewhere and brought it to the school’s attention. Berg promptly contacted Pearl Marko, the teacher who had developed the program and created a manual filled with types of games that could be played.

The program is aimed at developing social skills amongst the elementary school children. Getting the students to be involved in cooperative play and meeting people outside their regular circle of friends can help them socialize with others. It’s an especially good program for some of the more shy children, says Berg.

“I think it’s especially good for any kids who is struggling or an introvert or is having a hard time with making friends because it is kind of organized sport.”

And the kids love it.

“It’s really fun. I really like it,” said Grade 1 student Brett Golka just after scoring a goal in one of the activities.

Katelynn Tulie, a Grade 9 student who helps out with the program, says it’s a great way for the kids to interact. It’s also great to pal around with the younger kids, she says.

“It’s just fun hanging out with the little ones.”

The parents have been behind the program the whole way with volunteers organizing Positive Playgrounds and coming out each time to direct the various zones of activities. It was also the school’s parents council which donated the money to buy equipment like parachutes, balls, and flags.

“The kids are having so much fun,” said parent volunteer