

CHILD POWER

By Anne Clasper/Donna Hughes - Community Coordinators

The Canadian High Commission in New Delhi has fifty-four children. They range in age from nineteen years to three weeks and the vast majority are under the age of six. How do we keep them occupied? Well...Anne Clasper and Donna Hughes, the Community Co-ordinators, have started a mothers and toddlers play group that meets once a week, and those of us with older children have found that school and extra-curricular programs (sports, drama, boys & girls scouts, music, arts & crafts, etc.) occupy a great deal of time. After that, and on the weekends, we have tended to gravitate to the pool and play ground area of the High Commission Compound.

Before long, given the ages and number of children, accidents started to happen - two chipped teeth, one broken arm, stitches, cuts, bruises, banged heads, cries and howls - all things that make parents stand-up and take notice.

We saw a swing set with wooden seats that banged heads (no baby swings), a teeter totter that trapped feet, a jungle gym that had no opening big enough for adults to reach through to rescue fallen children, a baby pool surrounded by cement that burned tender feet, a slide that was too high, too narrow and (being metal) too hot, as well as an under-used storage shed. The trouble was that in this time of austerity, refurbishing play grounds was not Ottawa's priority.

So, we decided to do it ourselves! The Community Coordinators convened a meeting of 20 interested parents. Thus was born the Playground Committee. The first order of business was to travel around to a variety of school and embassy compounds. To our surprise, we found we were not as badly off as we had thought. Some facilities were much worse, and those with 'state-of-the-art' equipment had spent a lot to install it and still found that upkeep was high, especially in a tropical climate.

We held a meeting with the PPMO, who explained exactly where the Post's responsibilities lay. They could change the wooden swing seats for ones of fine hosing, they could cut an entrance to the jungle gym and they could paint the sandbox, but by this time, we had much higher aspirations!

The result was that the Playground Committee split into two sub-committees; the financial and the design committee, the later is charged with a variety of projects from transforming the old slide into 2 slides, a climbing frame and house, to adapting the storage shed to become a teen hut.

So far, we have not had a report from the Design Committee, but the Financial Committee has held two very successful events. The first was a raffle of a side of smoked salmon and a bottle of champagne that raised Rs.2000. The second event was a Book and Bake Sale that raised Rs.2900 and left enough books to sell again at a Cabana Open House later this summer. Plans are under way for another raffle after the holiday season and for a program of lunches for summer 'bachelors'.

The whole community is proud of these people whose spirit and initiative will no doubt provide us with the best playground in New Delhi, and with 18 more children coming in this season, we will surely put it to good use!