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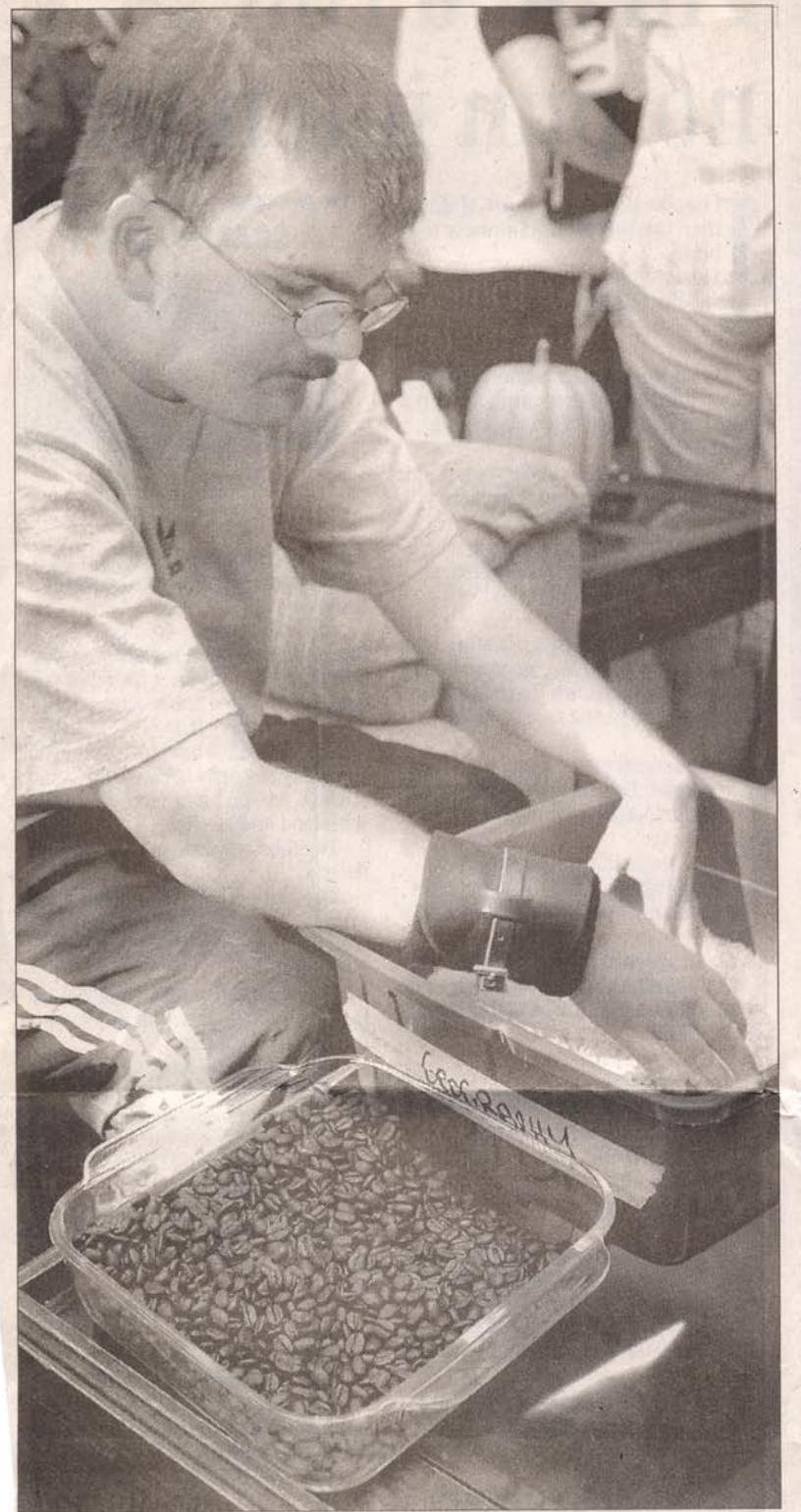

Adam Barry, a participant of the PADDLE (Providing Adults with Developmental Disabilities Lifelong Education) program, enjoys sensory activities at Chippewa Secondary School. DENIS DUBOIS, THE NUGGET

Adults 'thriving' in new program

Caters to people with developmental disabilities

BY JENNIFER HAMILTON-McCHARLES
THE NUGGET

When Sara Rick, Bryan Ceppetelli and Melissa Rutherford arrive in the morning with smiles on their faces, organizers of the PADDLE program know it is a success.

Since opening its doors at Chippewa Secondary School three weeks ago, parents have already seen a difference in their children's behaviour.

David Rutherford said his 20-year-old daughter is "bubbly and giggles and squeals" when asked about her day at school.

"This is a different program than anything we've seen. It's a program that is based on the kids enrolled, not the other way around."

Rutherford said his daughter, who suffers from cystic fibrosis and can't communicate verbally, still loves being involved in activities.

"She doesn't want to be pushed out of the way," he said, adding before PADDLE (Providing Adults with Developmental Disabilities Lifelong Education) was launched he was worried about what she would do, because she had finished high school in June and there was nothing else available.

Rick, 29, is also happy a group of concerned parents brought the program for disabled adults to North Bay.

"This is really awesome. It's amazing. We really have a good time here," she said Thursday during an official open house.

"It gives me a chance to get out, because I'm pretty isolated at home."

Rick said before PADDLE she spent her days watching movies and taking care of her husband.

"It gets a little boring and now I have a chance to meet new people. This has been a real blessing for me and my mom," she said.

Students work on computers, plan menus, cook and grocery shop. They also take trips to the YMCA and Memorial Gardens, football games and the library. October's schedule includes travelling to Leisure Farms in Sturgeon Falls, Science North in Sudbury and the North Bay Fire Department.

Megan Sunstrum, program co-ordinator for PADDLE, said parents have told her their children are "thriving, smiling, energetic and have an increased amount of self worth.

"They're accomplishing something every day and at the same time spending time with friends. They're part of our community and it's important to integrate them into it. We don't want to be a program where they're alone."

Lisa Pitt said it's refreshing to have a program where she doesn't have to "drag" her client to participate.

"Adam (Barry) was getting tired of doing the same activities in the community," she said.

"I've noticed he's enjoyed being here. Last year when he didn't want to go someplace he would tell me by physically hurting himself."

ABOUT PADDLE

- PADDLE (Providing Adults with Developmental Disabilities Lifelong Education) is $20 per day.
- Students can choose to attend on a full-time or part-time basis.
- Students who need one-on-one supervision are required to bring their own support worker with them.
- PADDLE is offered Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. and is closed two weeks at Christmas and four weeks in the summer.
- For more information call 493-2401.