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Children enjoy holiday crafts during a recent ParentShare meeting at the West Shore Community Library.

Lakeside ParentShare celebrates the holidays

By Jacob Doran
of the WSN

This holiday season, the Lakeside ParentShare program has continued to reach out and embrace mothers of children from birth to five years of age. Throughout the month of December, ParentShare has celebrated the season with activities focusing on both the coming winter and the Christmas holiday.

The group meets on Tuesdays from 10-11 a.m. Instead of meeting in the family center at Lakeside Elementary, the group presently meets in the West Shore Community Library under the direction of Lisa Perrine.

Perrine began attending the Lakeside ParentShare last year, when the group was still

meeting at the elementary school. In August of this year, she also assumed the responsibility of leading and organizing activities for the group.

On Dec. 7, Perrine led the ParentShare group in making Christmas ornaments. On Dec. 14, they decorated gingerbread houses and holiday cookies. The group had hoped for snow on Dec. 21 to be able to enjoy a planned sledding outing. Fortunately, the snow arrived just in time and left a white covering on the ground early that morning. And two days after Christmas the group began a project to make clay pot snowmen.

The goal of ParentShare is to provide opportunities for parents of young children to connect with other parents who share common challenges, interests and concerns. The meetings

sometimes include speakers and discussions on such topics as nutrition, building self-esteem and various approaches to managing a child's behavior.

"It's a great way to meet young mothers or fathers and get out of the house," Perrine said.

ParentShare is sponsored by the Nurturing Center, which is located in Kalispell. The organization is a non-profit community-based, family-resource center that supports families and childcare professionals in meeting the challenges of parenting in today's world. The Nurturing Center celebrated its 25th anniversary in November of last year.

The ParentShare program came to Lakeside over five years ago, when the family center first became available at Lakeside Elementary. Tina

Jo Lerum and Jennifer Rogge had attended the ParentShare meetings in Kalispell prior to the room opening up at the school. Lerum believed it would be a good place to begin holding the ParentShare meetings and volunteered to head up the local chapter.

In response to Lerum's interest, the Nurturing Center donated \$200 toward the purchase of materials, including a number of books and videos on parenting, which parents were allowed to check out. The United Way donated furniture to make the family center room more parent-friendly.

"We started a ParentShare down here for Lakeside, Somers and the West Shore, so that new moms could have a closer location to meet with other new moms from their

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own area and make connections with other mothers so that they can then meet outside of ParentShare," Lerum said.

The group continued to meet in the family center until the school decided they needed the use of the room in order to accommodate the continuing influx of student enrollment, particularly in the area of kindergarten age children. At that time, the ParentShare meetings relocated to the library, where they were welcomed with open arms.

Another group member—Vicki Lewis—led the group for about one year after Lerum, whose daughter had outgrown the program. Last year, Rogge stepped in as group leader, but her schedule prevented her from attending the meetings when the present year came. At that time, Perrine assumed leadership of the group.

The group leader is responsible for organizing and planning activities for group meetings. The leader also greets new people and lets other parents of young children know about the group whenever the opportunity

arises.

Susan Christofferson is executive director of the Nurturing Center and is actively involved in its many outreaches to parents and the community. "I would have love to have had a group like that when I was a new parent," Christofferson said. "Mothers need be around other mothers who they can call when their having a tough day. Part of what we do is to provide information for positive parenting and help build the relationships that are important to parents."

When Rogge moved to Lakeside from Bozeman, she did not know any parents in the area. At that time, she was relatively new at parenting and felt she knew very little. After a while, Rogge found ParentShare in Kalispell.

"I started going when my oldest daughter was about three months old. I found a lot of good friends there—lots of people who have continued to be good friends until now. My daughter is seven and a half years old, so seven years later we're still friends."