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Dene language part of international study

An expert from the University of Zurich in Switzerland is impressed with Clearwater River Dene Nation's desire to keep its people's language alive.

Dr. Dagmar Jung has been visiting both the reserve and La Loche to examine how parents are passing the Dene language on to their children. Her stay comes after a preliminary trip in November when she sought permission to launch the study and find suitable candidates.

"For linguistics, it's an exciting question how different languages are learned around the world," Jung said. "We know a lot about the big languages and there have been studies and hypothesis about how children univer-

sally acquire language."

Aboriginal languages, however, haven't been studied as much, which is why Jung or Dr. Olga Lovick – a professor of linguistics and Dene language from the First Nations University of Canada – will be returning to Clearwater regularly for.

The duo want to examine children who are two or three years old and how they acquire the Dene language from their caregivers. They'll also compile notes about the home environment and what families are doing to pass Dene from one generation to the next.

"We're on a good start," Jung said. "The community has a strong interest in the language. They have a good

balance of English and Dene, which is impressive."

The Clearwater River Dene Nation School is also the only facility to offer instruction in Dene at a young age. Principal Mark Klein described it as an immersion program where instruction gradually changes to English.

"Initially, all the kids coming to school were speaking Dene as their first language," Klein said. "Dene fluency is still really strong, but we've seen a shift where a lot of the kids are speaking English."

Klein went on to say the people who live in Clearwater are unique and have immense pride in their ability to speak the Dene language.

~ Cornet

0-100K VISITS

