



photo courtesy of Denis Raymond

**Denis Raymond, right, a Beaver volunteer, gives guitar lessons to Jessica Clillie and Hailey Moses at Chief Julian Yendo School in Wrigley.**

# Experiencing the Deh Cho as a volunteer

## Beaver volunteers help in three schools

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Deh Cho

The gift of music is one aspect of what four volunteers have been giving to the Deh Cho communities they've been calling home since September.

The volunteers, including Denis Raymond in Wrigley, Geoff Solomon and Melanie Lyn in Fort Providence, and Masha Denisenko in Fort Liard, are informally known as Beaver volunteers. The volunteers, who have been assisting in the community's schools, are part of the Northern Education Program organized by the Frontiers Foundation. Based in Toronto, the foundation is a non-profit aboriginal volun-

tary service organization that promotes the advancement of disadvantaged communities.

Music has been a common theme with three of this year's volunteers. Denisenko, from Novi Sad, Serbia, has a Masters degree in piano performance.

In the lead up to Christmas, Denisenko was helping students at Echo Dene School prepare for the Christmas concert by providing piano accompaniment. In January, she hopes to offer individual piano lessons to students.

Denisenko said she was

drawn to the Northern Education Program because it offered a lot of things she wanted to do and experience. Denisenko said she has always been interested in First Nations in the United States and Canada and wanted to learn more about their culture.

Since moving to Fort Liard, Denisenko has been learning the Dene Zhatie language. At the school she also helps students in the first and second grade with language and math and students in the second and third grade with language arts.

### COFFEE Break

"At times it's very interesting," she said about volunteering.

At Chief Julian Yendo School in Wrigley, Denis Raymond started a music program offering guitar and fiddle lessons to students in grades 6 to 9 as part of his volunteer experience.

"The kids seems to be very musically inclined," he said.

"It's become the best part of their day."

Raymond, a certified teacher from Ottawa, Ont., said becoming a Beaver volunteer gave him a chance to explore aboriginal culture and Northern living while working in his field. Raymond, who lived in Wrigley from September to

December, said the community is in a beautiful locale and he appreciated the opportunity to explore the local culture at events such as the school's cultural camp at Fish Lake.

"The people were very friendly," he said.

#### Keyboard lessons

At Deh Gah School in Fort Providence, Melanie Lyn, an elementary school teacher from New York City, started an after school keyboard club as well as one-on-one keyboard lessons for students. In addition to helping in the Grade 4/5 class, she's also been leading a choir with another teacher.

Lyn said she chose the Northern Education Program

because she wanted to try something new and have a volunteer experience where she lived in a community.

"I think it's nice to have a slower pace of life," she said.

Geoff Solomon, from Halifax, Nova Scotia, is also volunteering at the school. In addition to helping high school students with literacy, math and social studies, Solomon opens the school's computer lab approximately five nights a week so students have a place to go.

Solomon has trained some older students to run the lab as a part-time job.

"It works out really well and gives them some responsibility," he said.