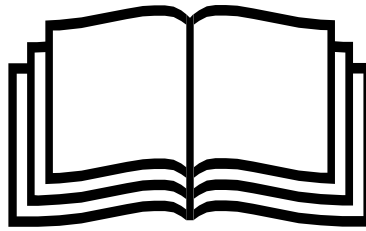


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**School District #22**  
**District Literacy Plan Update**  
July, 2010

**Vernon, Coldstream, Lumby, Lavington,  
Cherryville**



“We honour and respect the diversity of our communities.  
Our vision is to meet the literacy needs of all.”

Facilitated by the Vernon Literacy Outreach Coordinator  
and the Literacy Plan Task Group

# 2006 and 2008

## Literacy Plan Focus Areas

1. Increase **awareness** of literacy issues.
2. Improve **access** to and **communication** between programs and service providers.
3. Address **funding** and other supports.
4. Establish a **Literacy Centre**.

## Reflections on the 2009-2010 year

### Factors that Contributed to Success

#### 1. Literacy Champions

**Tom Christensen** – retired MLA and previous Minister of: Education; Aboriginal Affairs; and Child and Family Development. Tom has joined the Nixon Wenger law firm in Vernon. He negotiated with them to provide \$50,000 over 5 years to the Junction Literacy Centre to support programs that help parents support their children’s literacy development. The funds will be used to re-start the *Books for Babies* program and expand the *Come Read with Me* and *You Can Count on Me* workshops for parents with children in grade 1. Tom has also joined the Board of Directors of the society that manages the Junction Literacy Centre.



“As minister in three ministries while in government, I routinely saw the negative impact of the lack of good literacy skills. It is important that parents are informed about how they can help their children develop good literacy skills.”

Tom Christensen, Vernon Morning Star interview, April 2010

**Doug Becker** – 57 year old resident of Cherryville who recently revealed that he is “functionally illiterate”. Doug worked with the Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Debbie Schiller to become comfortable sharing his secret with a group of people he knows well. Debbie provided a presentation about literacy to the group, and Doug used it as his “coming out” platform. Since then, Doug has offered to speak to anyone and everyone about his struggles with literacy and the stigma he has lived with all his life. His next public appearance will be an interview with the Vernon paper for International Literacy Day.



“I feel there’s a reader inside of me, trying to get out.”

Doug Becker

2. Development of true **partnerships** or collaborations and strong **relationships** between service providers and community agencies.

This is particularly evident at the Early Childhood Development Coalition (ECDC) tables in Vernon and Lumby. Agencies that provide services to families with children from birth to 6 years meet once a month to celebrate successes and share best practices. This includes agencies serving Aboriginal families, and representatives from government ministries. Several sub-committees are struck each year to address specific areas of concern. The Vernon table works from a Strategic Plan and has a paid coordinator who focuses on the goals and objectives of the plan. She also works with each sub-committee.

The main focus area for the coming year is to address the issue of **screen time** for young children. Other strategic plan focus areas:

- grandparents who are parenting their grandchildren
- ensure summer programs are available for families
- increase availability of early identification and screening for developmental delays (Ages and Stages Questionnaire)
- ensure outreach home visits to isolated families and childcare providers
- provide training opportunities to parents

The Literacy Outreach Coordinator (LOC) is an active participant at ECDC and sub-committee meetings. The Director of Student Learning and the Literacy Coordinator of School District 22 (SD 22) sit at the ECDC table and host the Early Learning sub-committee. Other community agencies are involved in sub-committee work.



Other significant **partnerships/meetings** in which the LOC is involved:

- **Youth table** – service providers meet monthly to discuss youth issues
- **Poverty table** – broad range of community services meet monthly to share concerns and take action on poverty and homelessness issues. The monthly meeting is hosted by the LOC at the Junction Literacy Centre.
- **Administration Network** – quarterly meetings of Executive Directors discuss their programs and services, gaps in services, etc. Many partnerships form from these meetings as agencies identify ways they can support each other.
- **Literacy Task Group** meetings – quarterly meetings hosted by SD 22 help to spread knowledge of community literacy practices to existing and new members

- **Junction Literacy Centre Board of Directors** meetings – the LOC provides a report of her work once a month to the Board. Members represent:
  - business (car dealership, consignment store, retired businessman)
  - education (retired Director of Student Services, Administrative Assistant)
  - public library (Branch Head Librarian)
  - early childhood development (Coordinator)
  - provincial and municipal government (ex-MLA, ex-Vernon Councillor)
  - service clubs (2 Rotary Club members)

An important role of the **LOC** is to help service providers understand how they can and actually *do* support the literacy skills of the clients they serve. Her regular attendance at meetings helps to build relationships and to:

- highlight the Junction Literacy Centre’s programs and services
- improve awareness of other literacy services through the Junction’s website
- identify gaps in services and connect traditional and sometimes non-traditional partners to work on filling the gaps
- share articles, research and best practices from other communities and provinces through her associations with other LOCs, 2010 Legacies Society, the Ministry of Education, etc.

**3. There is a heightened awareness of and sensitivity to literacy issues** within the region.

Literacy service providers (Okanagan College – Adult Tutoring program, Learning Disabilities Association, Junction Literacy Centre – Skills Boost program) have more community referrals than ever before and waitlists for tutoring are common.

Stories about literacy programs, advertising and articles about special events are featured regularly in newspapers, on TV and radio. The *Morning Star* newspaper has become an important literacy partner. Free ads were provided for Family Literacy Week and the Spelling Bee Challenge. The paper has also started a “Writers’ Corner” column that features the writing of students in SD 22.

Excellent attendance at **special events** that feature guest speakers:

- Boys and Learning (Barry McDonald) – 900 parents attended
- Downside of High (panel and video presentation about marijuana use) – 200 youth, parents and service providers attended
- Investing in the Early Years (Charlie Coffey) – 50 people attended – opening remarks from the Vernon Chamber of Commerce, representation from business, education and early childhood development

**Business interest** in providing staff with paid time-off to volunteer for literacy programs. Kal Tire Administration office and VantageOne Financial Services have approached the LOC to discuss how their staff can become **volunteer tutors** with the One to One Children’s Literacy Program. Meetings are planned for the fall.

6 – 3 hour **Plain Language** workshops were provided by the LOC this year and more have been requested. Participants included:

- Interior Health Networks staff (editing services also provided)
- Community Policing and RCMP staff
- Foster Parents Association coordinators
- Not-for-profit and employment agencies
- Chamber of Commerce staff and member businesses

Incorporated into the workshop is information about literacy issues, adult literacy statistics and how to provide a literacy-friendly environment for staff and clients.

**4.** There are signs that “**capacity building**” is happening. Examples include:

- loss of a Boys & Girls Club (B&GC) Mother Goose program at **Lavington** Community School - parents in the community have continued the program on their own!
- 2 Mother Goose facilitators **volunteer** their time in Vernon at:
  - a weekly program at the Food Bank
  - a program for families whose children have speech delays

- budget cuts meant the loss of the LOC in Lumby/Cherryville. In **Cherryville** literacy programs have continued:
  - story time at the school library with the school Principal
  - family literacy day special story time at the Cherryville branch library
  - PALS and Come Read with Me/You Can Count on Me workshops for parents
  
- **Lumby**
  - Women of Wellness website established to help area women connect to supports in the community
  - the Lumby “WonderCafe” discussion group invited the Vernon LOC to speak to them about literacy issues
  - Lumby’s community resource centre has held a number of practical workshops that support the community’s small business, service and resource sectors (Running an Effective Meeting, Board training, Plain Language, etc.)
  
- more **training opportunities** are available than ever before, with trainers who live and work in the region:
  - LEAP (Literacy, Education, Activity and Play) and HOP (Health Opportunities for Preschoolers) for childcare providers, parents, early childhood educators and parenting groups
  - Ages and Stages Questionnaire (0 to 6 years) for service providers



5. **Financial support** from business, community groups and the public has improved each year. Fundraising events also build awareness of literacy in the region.

**Family Literacy Week - Fill the Honda Fit, Community Challenge**

The LOC and partners (Vernon Branch Library, Child Care Resource and Referral, 6 elementary schools) celebrated by collecting gently used and new children's books and re-distributing them to agencies that provide services to less fortunate families.

Thousands of books were donated – to *Fill the Honda Fit* – and more than 20 agencies took away boxes of books. This year the event raised \$6,000.



The Cat in the Hat visited businesses and schools that collected donated books.



## Adult Spelling Bee Fundraiser for the Junction Literacy and Youth Centres

Presenting sponsor - New Car Dealers of Vernon (\$5,000)

17 tables were formed this year – 136 participants (\$1,000 per table)

Groups included:

- City of Vernon – 2 tables (16 staff and council members)
- Literacy:
  - Okanagan College,
  - SD 22 (Administrators and Principals)
  - Retired Teachers (2 tables)
  - Canadian Federation of University Women
  - Book Clubs
- Business:
  - Kal Tire
  - Sunshine Honda
  - Interior Savings Credit Union
  - Nixon Wenger LLP
  - ReMAX
  - *Morning Star* newspaper

2 Grade 11/12 student tables were sponsored by businesses and individual donors



## Priorities/objectives/actions from the 2009 District Literacy Plan

### Major Impacts or Outcomes

Please Note: The original District Literacy Plan was written based on 4 Pillars (Early Learning, School Age, Adult and Aboriginal). This report incorporates the Aboriginal Pillar into each of the 3 age-related Pillars. Following are the NEW programs or services that went from planning to reality over the past year.

#### Early Learning Pillar (birth to 6 years)

1. **Wonders on Wheels (WOW) Bus:** After a great deal of planning, the WOW bus was on the road in October as a mobile Strong Start Centre. The bus was donated by SD 22 to the B&GC. The Kalamalka Rotary Club donated \$10,000 to help outfit the bus. It visits locations that don't have school Strong Start Centres (Lumby, Cherryville, Mission Hill Elementary, Ellison Elementary and the Okanagan Indian Band Reserve).

**Outcome:** attendance during the winter months was low at all locations

**Impact:** hard to reach families were able to access the WOW bus programs and early learning information.

#### Changes for 2010/2011

- funds were not available to cover the costs of a bus driver each year (\$17,000). Consequently, the bus will no longer be an outreach Strong Start Centre. A new centre will be opened in an elementary school in Vernon.
- B&GC (through Child Care Resource and Referral) will take the bus to a variety of parks in the region when weather permits. This supports the need for neighbourhood programs that are easily accessed by all families.



2. 2 new **Strong Start Centres** (for a total of 3)

**PILOT:** Weekly Mother Goose sessions were provided by the B&GC at each location. This pilot was not successful (poor participation and funding issues) and Mother Goose programs will not be offered at Strong Starts next year.

**Impact:** more parents are visiting Strong Start Centres with their preschoolers

3. **Loss of funding for Mother Goose** programs led to cancellation of 10 programs.

**Outcome:**

- program fees were instituted for the birth to 1 year program
- participants declined from 70 moms with babies to 10 or less

**Impact:** parents unable to pay the program fee have missed this valuable service

**Plans for next year:** Funds have been secured to add some MG programs to neighbourhoods that don't have a Strong Start Centre nearby. Free infant programs at the library have been re-instated.

4. **Mother Goose Program - Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) Reserve**

**Outcome:** extremely popular, excellent attendance, a band member is one of the facilitators. A Speech and Language Pathologist joins the weekly sessions to help parents understand how to support their children's language development.

**Impact:** The OKIB has a high number of children with speech delays. This program is expected to help address this issue and provide a support group to families living on the reserve.

**5. Summer Programs, 2009**

**Boys & Girls Club** – Mother Goose in the Park

**First Nations Friendship Centre** – Playtime in the Park

**Outcome:** very large numbers (90 +) of families participated, which indicates there is a need for summer programming

**Impact:** families connecting in a local park throughout the summer. Program leaders provide valuable information and fun programs.

**6. Books for Babies** program re-started:

- funding support from Nixon Wenger LLP

**Partnership:** Junction Literacy Centre, Vernon Branch Library, Public Health Nursing

**Impact:** Public Health Nurses have a tool that supports their message to mothers with new babies: “reading to your baby supports good brain development, is good for you and your baby”!

**Outcome:** 800 baby board books and fridge magnets have been ordered:



Fridge Magnet



Book Label

**7. Baby Naming Ceremony – First Nations Friendship Centre**

- celebration that included storytelling, elders, creating photo albums and a potluck meal

**Outcome:** 10 babies were celebrated by more than 50 people

**Impact:** positive reinforcement of healthy childhood development, community coming together to value and celebrate children, several literacy activities including oral storytelling, writing and scrapbooking.

**8. Aboriginal PALS and a drop-in pre-school program hosted by the Metis Association**

**Outcome:** attendance has gradually increased for both programs

**Impact:** an opportunity for the Metis community to gather and provide early learning opportunities with aboriginal themes

**9. Okanagan and Shuswap language story books with DVDs developed with Success by 6 funds.**

**Outcome:** books and DVDs have been widely distributed to Okanagan and Shuswap families

**Impact:** More families are becoming familiar with reading and speaking in their native language

## Early Success in Schools Pillar (Kindergarten to Grade 12)

1. **Come Read with Me** and **You Can Count on Me** workshops for parents with children in grade 1. A facilitator explains to parents how they can support their child's early reading and math skills. Parents receive a take-home kit with a story book and activities to make at-home learning and practice fun. Our goal is to expand the program from 3 to 5 schools in 2010/2011.

**Partnership:** SD 22 and Junction Literacy Centre

**Outcome:** Parent attendance was not as strong as hoped, although evaluations of the sessions are very positive. Plans are underway to work with the schools to ensure workshops are well advertised and scheduled at times that are convenient to the parents.

**Impact:** Parent Comments:

This program rocks!

The way I was taught was very different. I know my math will improve as I help my daughter with hers.

It is so wonderful that you make this program available for us and our children.

Teacher Comments:

It communicates to parents more of what we know about learning, stages of development and best practices in teaching. It sends powerful messages to parents about the similarities and differences between their experience in the education system and their child's. It supports me as a teacher and my students as learners.

Every little bit helps, especially providing parents with tools, as many are unsure of what to do or what they can do.

**2. One to One Children’s Literacy Program** started at the OKIB cultural school

- 6 community volunteers (5 from OKIB) were trained and began reading with children in grades 1 to 5 in February 2010
- Partnership: Junction Literacy Centre, funding from Rotary International District 5060

**Outcome:** After 6 weeks (30 minutes of tutoring, 5 days a week) the children made significant gains in their reading. Rotary funding provided for the purchase of a small library of books, many with aboriginal themes, authors or stories.

**Impact:** 1 child improved by 4 grade 1 reading levels, another child improved by 5 grade 1 reading levels after 6 weeks in the program. Trained members of the OKIB who support children’s reading skills will help to develop a “literacy culture” on the Reserve.

**One to One Children’s Literacy Program**

“Our mission is to provide a supportive environment which builds the self-confidence and literacy skills of children, enabling them to become independent, competent learners.”

**3. 64% of** Aboriginal students in SD 22 graduate. This is one of the highest rates in the province. 80% of Aboriginal girls graduate – the district is working on how to keep more boys in school.

**Alexis Park** Elementary has the highest percentage of Aboriginal students in the district. The principal provides a welcoming environment that has built trust and a sense of acceptance for all families.

**Outcome:** This year and last, 85% of Alexis Park parents attended parent/teacher interviews.

**Impact:** Schools are building trusting relationships with Aboriginal parents and providing language and cultural support to Aboriginal students. The goal is that more Aboriginal students will graduate from high school. Okanagan Language programs are well attended at Alexis Park and one high school.



A **kekuli** is being constructed on the OKIB reserve and will become an outdoor classroom for all students in the district to learn more about the Okanagan people and their culture. Nature and ecology will also be studied in the kekuli.

- 4. Report cards** – a single template has been developed and introduced to staff and parents. It will be piloted in two secondary and 4 elementary schools for the 2010/2011 school year.

### **Adult Learning Pillar**

A primary goal of the District Literacy Plan is to establish workplace literacy programs. This past year, Vernon was selected to pilot two such programs:

- 1. Small Business Employee Training** program – a pilot program funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development and provided by Community Futures in Vernon. Employers were encouraged to enrol staff who had not completed high school (growth employees) and who would benefit from extra training. \$900 was available per employee. Most participants signed up for basic courses in computers, accounting, management and payroll. Funds were also used to improve reading, math and communication skills. One participant began with a computer course, then quit her job and decided to go back to school. Another thanked the coordinator for “giving her a second chance at learning”.

**Impact:** 60 employees received training.

Comment from the program coordinator:

“It’s a real leg up for many – the non-confident ones who thought they couldn’t learn, the ones who got derailed from school when they were young, the loyal employees who’ve never had an opportunity to grow through training before.”

Karen Heiberg, Community Futures

2. **Journey to Successful Employment** – a pilot “Aboriginal alternate learning” program provided by the First Nations Employment Centre. It takes a holistic approach and recognizes everyone has different learning styles that can be barriers to employment. Funding is from Service Canada and pays living, transportation, childcare and other expenses for participants.

**Impact:** The instructors report that the program has been extremely successful for all 15 participants. Two have secured high quality jobs part way through the program and the others are completing a work experience component.

## **What has changed in the past year that affects literacy in the region? What has been the impact of these changes?**

The Vernon region continues to suffer from high unemployment and poverty rates.

### **Impacts:**

- Okanagan College and SD 22 have unusually large numbers of adults returning to school to upgrade their English and math skills so they will qualify for retraining programs.
- Employment agencies are extremely busy with new clients who are seeking jobs.
- The Food Banks in Vernon and Lumby report more people than ever before are signing up for food hampers.
- To attract new jobs, the village of Lumby may provide a site for a new penal institution.

## **What have you learned about collaboration and the community development process?**

This report has outlined numerous examples of how our region collaborates and forms effective partnerships. Our experience is that organizations are eager to share the work load to get a job done. The North Okanagan region shines as an example of cooperative effort . As a result, we are often selected to pilot new programs and host training sessions because we work so well together.

Community development can be a slow process. It takes time to develop the relationships that are needed to bring a community together and care must be taken to maintain those relationships. This report demonstrates that communities in our region succeed in several areas of community development. They:

- build community networks
- participate in inter-agency meetings
- undertake needs assessments and plan programs and services to fit the needs
- define priorities
- increase people's skills, empower them and improve their quality of life

## Thinking about the 2010 - 2011 year

### New Initiatives

- 1. Rhymes, Songs, Stories and Play** – a program to support “All Day Kindergarten” teachers. This is a language enrichment program that meets the provincial requirements for physical exercise. SD 22 will partner with the Boys & Girls Club (Mother Goose coordinators and facilitators) to develop and facilitate the 3 year project.
- 2. Expanded use of Ages and Stages Questionnaires** - multiple partners especially ECDC table. Parents and child care providers will learn how to use the tool so they can identify children’s developmental milestones. Expected benefits are that more developmental delays will be identified prior to age 5, and children will receive support services before starting school.
- 3. Screen Smart** initiative - multiple and diverse partners. This is based on the Revelstoke model. The purpose is to provide parents of children birth to 6 years with information about the effects of screen time on their young children. We will also provide suggestions for child-friendly activities that can replace passively watching a screen.
- 4. Skills Boost!** – after school tutoring program for under privileged children and youth. There is a great demand for one-on-one learning supports by qualified tutors throughout the region. However, funds to pay for this service remain elusive. The Junction Literacy Centre coordinators will continue to work with funding partners to meet the needs of children whose families cannot pay for tutoring support. Extra work is required to recruit qualified tutors in Lumby and Cherryville.
- 5. Adult Literacy Initiatives at the Okanagan Indian Band** – the OKIB’s Education Director has expressed a need for literacy services for adults who attended *residential schools* and cannot read. Many are embarrassed by their inability to read a story to their grandchildren and would like help to improve their reading skills. Discussions with several literacy partners will begin in the fall to find the best way to support adult band members.

6. Adult Literacy support for men living at “**Howard House**” – provided by the John Howard Society. In 2009, a partnership was created to combine elements of literacy with works of art created by Howard House residents. The initiative was never funded. New funds that provide support for reading, writing and communications skills have been accessed.

## **Expanded or Continued Initiatives**

Literacy initiatives that were discussed in the 2009 – 2010 report have continued, thanks to good management and stable funding. Programs that were in jeopardy have been reviewed in this report.

### **What is needed to meet the goals and actions for the coming year?**

- secure funding, especially for pilots that have been successful
- trusting relationships and effective partnerships
- passion and commitment from all stake holders

### **How will you measure your progress?**

- documenting client participation levels
- written and oral evaluations
- open and honest evaluation and planning sessions with partners
- debriefing meetings after fundraisers and special events

### **Summary**

Literacy planning began in our region in 2005. From our first meetings to explore the potential for what this could mean, the Task Group has addressed the challenges, and defied the naysayers. We found a “home for literacy” at the Junction and formed a society to protect and manage it. Today, more people can access literacy services than ever before. More service providers and employers understand the role they play in supporting the literacy skills of their clients, staff and family members. Parents have access to a continuum of early childhood development programs and services long before their children enter school. In Kindergarten and Grade 1, parents can attend engaging workshops that help them understand how to support their child’s early reading and math skills. From there, the region offers an array of literacy support services for every age group and learning style. This work is never finished. However, the template we’ve developed will serve us well into the future. We have seen a “ripple effect” from those early beginnings. We can take pride in the ever-changing landscape of literacy development and awareness that has evolved in our region.