

# **DISTRICT LITERACY PLAN RICHMOND**

## **Community Context**

Richmond is a diverse population with approximately 65% being of Asian background. It has an estimated population of 190,000 which represents a 2.2% increase over the previous year. Of particular note is in the past year the noticeable increase in refugee families who have become resident in Richmond. The Community Meal programs report that 12 new refugee families regularly attend the weekly meal program. Although the average price of a home in Richmond now lists at \$1.1 million, Richmond still has the second highest child poverty rate in Canada. This fact from Statistics Canada is supported by weekly evidence from the usage of the Food Bank, the Community Meals Programs (now expanded to 4 weekly meals) and the Richmond Poverty Response Committee. As there is no defined central poverty housing area, there is great difficulty in identifying and assisting this somewhat hidden population. The challenge for the organizations supporting literacy development is to identify this population and access their literacy needs which often go well beyond the basic requirements of learning English.

## **Task Group**

The central task group for Literacy Richmond consists of representatives of a variety of community agencies. They oversee the work of the Literacy Outreach Coordinator, ensure that the goals of the Richmond Literacy Plan are being addressed, make suggestions for further literacy work and monitor the spending of the community grants. Meetings are held on an as needed basis. Members of this group are:

Margaret Dixon	Literacy Outreach Coordinator
De Whalen	Women's Resource Centre (Financial Steward)
Dace Starr	Richmond Public Library
Barbara Fitzpatrick	Sunrise Rotary Club, Chair of Task Group
Ann Dauphinee	Vancouver Coastal Health
Audrey Truth	SUCCESS

In addition, a Community Partners Meeting is held bi-monthly. Participation in these meetings varies from 16-24 people representing the wide spectrum of not-for-profit organizations in Richmond. At these meetings progress on the Literacy Plan is discussed and suggestions for further enhancements are made. Each group which has received community funding, reports on the progress of their project. Various guest speakers dealing with a particular aspect of literacy are often received at these meetings.

## **Community Development & Literacy Collaboration**

The culture of collaboration is well established in the Richmond context. With respect to Literacy, all community funds expended require a partnership between at least two community groups. In almost all partnerships, the Public Library is one of the links. Some of the best partnerships have happened when intergenerational collaborations are established. An example would be the Richmond Family Place (young children) and the Women's Resource Centre (adult women). In particular it is evident that the issue of poverty is emerging as a crucial factor in the literacy needs of Richmond residents. Consequently the Food Bank and the Poverty Response Committee have established a strong bond with the Women's Resource Centre and the Richmond Family Place.

All of our Richmond Schools host a Ready Set Learn event sometime between November and May. The purpose of these events is to help preschoolers and their families become familiar with their neighbourhood school as well as some of things associated with school success. Our Ready Set Learn events partner Public Librarians, Public Health nurses, Touchstone families, Richmond Parks and Recreation, StrongStart, Settlement Workers in Schools and school district staff and Principals.

Richmond School District has 7 StrongStart programs at 5 elementary schools. Our StrongStart programs are located at Grauer, Thompson, Errington, Woodward and Mitchell schools. Our Strongstart programs provide opportunities for preschool aged children and their parents/caregivers to participate in many experiences in a safe and nurturing environment. Our programs work in partnership with the public library, the public health nurse, Family Place and Touchstone families. We value the contributions of all our partners as building strong families benefits everyone.

## **Goals and Actions for the Current Year**

The majority of the work of Literacy Richmond this year has been focused on the following goals.

- Coordinate and streamline Richmond Literacy activities and resources
- Organizations in Richmond will work together in a collaborative fashion to increase literacy in Richmond
- Promote the importance of literacy and life-long learning to all residents in Richmond
- Capitalize on the strong family structure in Richmond to promote literacy in the community

The development of the name "Literacy Richmond" reflects the focus of the community partners in that we are all working for the benefit of literacy in Richmond. The development of the mission statement, "To provide all Richmond

citizens with the ability to read and the skills necessary to participate” and the motto, “Working together to promote the power and enjoyment of literacy” are both reflections of the way we are addressing the stated goals. The building of the Neighbourhood Learning Centre, scheduled to open in September 2011 will be an integral part of coordinating Richmond literacy activities and resources. The following guiding principles which have been adopted by School District #38 (Richmond) and the Community Partners reflect the strong partnership that exists between those groups.

### **Guiding Principles**

The Neighbourhood Learning Centre will house programs and services that:

- Serve the Richmond Community
- Encompass the broad spectrum of literacy
- Be of mutual benefit to both Samuel Brighthouse Elementary School and the community at large
- Preference given to not-for-profit organizations
- Be open year round
- Provide an array of services, supports and resources for individuals from infants to seniors
- Provide programs that reflect the priorities in the Richmond Community Literacy Plan

In promoting lifelong learning for all Richmond residents a number of the community funded projects were developed around involving both caregivers and children. In many instances, the caregivers were grandparents. Another successful program, sponsored by SUCCESS, involves conversational English to elderly Asian residents who have been in Canada for many years and are just now beginning to reach out to learn English.

As the year progressed, one area of need that emerged was the area of Financial Literacy. A partnership was established with VanCity to offer free courses on a variety of financial literacy topics. These covered areas such as:

- credit vs debit
- chequing vs savings
- understanding debt
- building a tax free savings account

A strong partnership has evolved with the Richmond Sunrise Rotary Club. A Christmas project undertaken was to provide books to the Food Bank with particular emphasis on the needs of young teenage readers. This project has expanded and at the recent District Rotary Conference with over 300 participants, each delegate donated books to this particular cause. To date several hundred books have been collected.

## **Indications of Success**

Each community group which receives funding is required to submit a final report detailing their expenditures and an evaluation of the success of the initiative. In each of the projects funded there were common themes:

- more time for the sessions
- more sessions for more participants
- repeat or extend the sessions
- increase the frequency of the sessions

Many of the projects used participant surveys or interviews as a way of assessing success. Some quotes from a variety of surveys are:

“I learned how to teach my child”

“It’s a great way of learning”

“I am learning to speak”

“My child started to listen more to the stories and she’s only 18 months old”

For many projects the intergenerational aspect of the program was a major component of its success. In particular, caregivers especially elderly ones, benefitted greatly from learning with the children. They felt that it was a safe environment in which to learn literacy skills.

## **Challenges**

As usual sustainability is a major challenge. The need to provide child minding is often an issue. Many of the initiatives do not run year round and so gains in learning may be lost. We continue to find ways the address each of these challenges and for many the increased partnerships have resolved some issues.

## **2011-2012**

For the coming year, the goal of coordination of services and cooperation will continue to be addressed. The opening of the Neighbourhood Learning Centre will be a major focus for this goal. The increase in refugee families will be addressed through cooperation with the School District Settlement Workers. The needs of the First Nations population in Richmond is being partially addressed through the signing of SD #38's first Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. An investigation into the provision of Aboriginal Parents as Literacy Supporters (APALS) will also be explored. The possibility of no further community funding will be examined through the community partners network and the reaching out to more service organizations.