

# Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan 2013

Literacy Matters Association Abbotsford



# Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

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## **Definitions of learning:**

**Formal learning** takes place in education and training institutions, is recognized by relevant national/provincial authorities and leads to diplomas and qualifications. Formal learning is structured according to educational arrangements such as curricula, qualifications, and teaching-learning requirements.

**Non-formal learning** is learning that has been acquired in addition or alternatively to formal learning. In some cases, it is also structured according to educational and training arrangements, but more flexible. It usually takes place in community-based settings, the workplace and through the activities of civil society organizations.

**Informal learning** is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through interests and activities of individuals. In some cases, the term experiential learning is used to refer to informal learning that focuses on learning from experience.

Decoda Literacy Solutions 2012

## **Reflections on the Current Year**

### *1) Task group:*

#### *a. Membership in the task group:*

- i) Literacy Matters Abbotsford (LMA) comprises a broad representation of community perspectives through a variety of associations. Current members include:
  - Community Members
  - Fraser Valley Métis Association
  - Business Community Member
  - Fraser Valley Child Development Centre
  - Abbotsford School District #34
  - University of the Fraser Valley (UFV)
  - Fraser Valley Regional Library (FVRL)
  - Community Aboriginal Centre Representative
  - Abbotsford Community Services (ACS)
  - Children First/Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee
  - School Trustee
  - Central Abbotsford Community School Society
  - West Abbotsford Community School Society
  - Abbotsford Works

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*b. How is the work of this group organized:*

- i) Literacy Matters Abbotsford Task Group is comprised of a voluntary committee, an elected board and the Literacy Outreach Coordinator. LMA is represented at the Child and Youth Committee (CYC). As per the goals of the previous Community Literacy Plans, two working tables, the Aboriginal table and the Adult table have been established. They meet regularly and have members that differ from those on the Task Group. Both tables report back to the Task Group.
- ii) The Aboriginal Literacy table is comprised of membership from the following organizations:
  - Community members
  - Fraser Valley Métis Association
  - Matsqui First Nation
  - Sumas First Nation
  - Abbotsford School District
  - United Way
  - Reading Buddies Coordinator
- iii) The Adult Literacy table is comprised of membership from the following organizations:
  - University of the Fraser Valley
  - CALL Program (Community Access to Literacy and Learning)
  - Abbotsford Community Services
  - New Beginnings
  - Community Corrections
  - Fraser Valley Regional Library
  - Temples of Abbotsford
  - Abbotsford School District
  - Seven Oaks Alliance Church
  - Elizabeth Fry Society

As needed various "ad hoc" groups are formed; they report back to their table of origin as well as to the Task Group. Current ad hoc tables include:

- i) Community Reading Challenge
- ii) Family Literacy Project
- iii) Adult Literacy Networking
- iv) Community Literacy Plan
- v) Website Development

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## 2) *Community context:*

Early learners in Abbotsford benefit from a well-established and functioning network of support services for children ages birth to 6 years with the establishment of at least one literacy program in each neighbourhood. Yet, opportunities remain to increase community capacity and strengthen the provision of literacy supports, particularly in communities with vulnerable families.

Abbotsford School District delivers literacy programming for school aged children and, according to provincial exam outcomes, is doing a commendable job. The School District continues to explore diverse ways to support the development of literacy in this community of learners. The district has expanded its focus beyond the traditional school age with a School District goal of Early Learning, which encompasses children birth to eight years. Community programming can offer multi-modal ways to embed, enrich and enhance literacy development for this age group and we support these efforts.

The Child and Youth Care table (CYC) is currently defining its role in the community by examining its vision and identifying outcomes to children, youth, and families. This committee is exploring opportunities to work regionally. There are a number of subcommittees forming including Children and Youth Special Needs and Community of Practice. As this committee continues to build, the potential to support literacy skills of children and youth exists.

The Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement effectively addresses the literacy needs of local Aboriginal children from kindergarten through to grade twelve. The primary provider of literacy supports for early and adult Aboriginal learners is the Community Aboriginal Centre, which is operated by the School District. This centre is home to a Strong Start program.

Abbotsford is making significant strides in its effort to meet the learning needs of the English as an Additional Language (EAL) community. For example, additional capacities have been developed through: expanded levels and locations of the English Language Services for Adults (ELSA) program; individual tutoring with the CALL program; regularly scheduled Conversation Circles and Life Skills training sessions throughout the community; and the Moving Ahead Program for vulnerable youth, families, and seniors. While these programs increase opportunities for community members to become more active in community life, workplace literacy and essential skills training for the EAL population remains limited and challenging to access.

Most programs for formal adult learning and essential skills training are provided by the University of the Fraser Valley. However, the current system of program delivery falls short of meeting the learning needs of many local adults not accessing formal programs. Although community-based literacy programs offer

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services that target adult learners, they face ongoing sustainability challenges due to a lack of core funding. Further inquiry into the bridging of formal versus non formal learning will be critical.

*What has happened in the community over the past year that impacts people in the community and the ability of organizations to support literacy development?*

i) Positive

1. Raise a Reader funds: The funds have been dispersed through a collaborative process of determining community needs. These funds have provided the ability for programs to increase their capacity to serve families.
2. Increased face-to-face meetings: The creation of the Adult Table and the Aboriginal Table has brought together services providers and community members with interests in specific areas of literacy. The membership at all tables has increased throughout the year. Meetings are held on a regular basis with meeting dates determined in advance in order to ensure maximum participation.
3. Increased networking: Newspapers have been contacted regarding LMA events. The creation of a display board, increased participation in a variety of community events, and presentations to the community (Abbotsford Connect; Winter Festival; Family Literacy Day; Rotary International; Matsqui/Sumas Rotary; Family Fun Day; Abbotsford City Council; Family Gatherings; National Aboriginal Day) has resulted in a greater community awareness of Literacy Matters. In turn, more community members and service providers sit at the various tables as well as volunteer in various capacities such as literacy tutors.
4. Branding of Literacy Matters: Development of a website is in process. The website will provide space to share resources, post minutes from meetings and enhance communication. It will also provide links for prospective learners to access resources.

Brochures have been developed to create community awareness of Literacy Matters Abbotsford. Post cards, with clear language and minimal text, have been developed to

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attract the attention of both prospective learners as well as future volunteers.

The above mentioned are critical activities for strengthening the ability of organizations to support literacy development and impact people in the community.

ii) Negative

1. The unemployment rate in Abbotsford hovers around 7%, demonstrating a need to examine workplace skill enhancement projects.
2. Uncertainty of funding affects the ability of community service providers to offer literacy programs. Funding is unstable and programs struggle with downsizing or the possibility of being eliminated.

3) *Community development and literacy collaboration:*

a. *What are the important collaborations that have taken place to support literacy and the work of the task group?*

- i) An Aboriginal library has been created at the Community Aboriginal Centre in collaboration with the University of the Fraser Valley Library Technology Program and Fraser Valley Regional Library. Under guidance and leadership from FVRL, a partnership with UFV was developed. Students from the UFV Library Technology program reviewed existing resources, chose a cataloguing system, and made recommendations. A grant from Success by Six, and implementation money from Literacy Matters financed room renovations, shelving, furnishings, and books. A mural was painted in the Library and incorporated Aboriginal themes from across North America. The library opened in the fall of 2012. The implementation of the following programs is being discussed: Reading Buddies; Aboriginal Parents as Literacy Supporters (APALS); Early Learning Program in the evening; drumming; and pow wow dancing. FVRL is available to support programming at the centre; this will be based on learner interest within the community.
- ii) Community Reading Challenge: In conjunction with the Abbotsford Family Literacy Day Celebration, co-hosted by the Clearbrook Library (member of FVRL) and The Reach Gallery Museum Abbotsford, the second annual pancake breakfast took place in January of 2013. The launch of the Community Reading Challenge occurred at this event. Community partners participating in the breakfast included: Clearbrook Fire Fighters; FVRL; Abbotsford School District; Abbotsford

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Early Childhood Committee; Tim Hortons; Pricesmart Foods; Costco; and The Mad Butcher. The Community Reading Challenge partners included: FVRL; School District 34; Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee; Abby News; and The Bookman. Participation in the pancake breakfast and the reading challenge doubled over the previous year. The public was receptive to this initiative and positive feedback was obtained, "I had fun filling out my reading log after reading 15 minutes a day". Plans are in place to continue this initiative for 2014.

- iii) Exploration of a multi-agency vision to develop a Family Literacy Program for adults wanting to upgrade their skills for personal, employment and/or further education and training goals continues. Current partners include Abbotsford School District; University of the Fraser Valley; and Abbotsford Community Services. As this program becomes a reality there will be further partnerships with community members developed.
  - iv) Distribution of Raise a Reader funds: Through discussion at the various tables of Literacy Matters, it was determined that funds would support the following existing programs:
    - 1. Parents and Children Together (PACT): this will allow PACT to provide child care during the adult component of this program.
    - 2. Reading Rascals: housed at West Abbotsford Community School, this initiative will enhance their program by adding an adult learning component
    - 3. Family Education Parenting Program: for low income families, the funds will enhance the program by allowing them to purchase resources
    - 4. Aboriginal Library: this will allow for the purchase of more books and supplies for the library. Future plans for this library include running an APALS (Aboriginal Parents as Literacy Supporters) program; establishment of an Aboriginal Reading Buddies program; computer classes; skills classes as requested by the Aboriginal adult community.
- The following new initiative will receive Raise a Reader monies:
- 5. Pajama Playtime @ Dormick Park: emphasis on story time before bed, held weekly for 10 weeks



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*b. What are the essential ongoing collaborations?*

- i) Engagement with the various community members at the various tables of Literacy Matters are key ongoing collaborations
- ii) Reading Buddies (partners include FVRL and Literacy Matters)
- iii) Aboriginal Library at the Community Aboriginal Centre (partners include School District 34; FVRL; UFV; United Way; Fraser Valley Métis Association; Sumas First Nation; Matsqui First Nation)
- iv) Adult Literacy Networking Group

*c. What makes collaborations work well?*

- i) Through understanding the issues in Abbotsford we can improve our community collaborative structures that facilitate the flow of information and increase resilience in times of economic stress.
- ii) Collaboration
  1. Allows us to be mindful of community donors
  2. Allows for a coordinated approach
  3. Is mutually beneficial - people have an obligation to service the community and may not know where to go
  4. Enhances services, improves access, and increases appropriate referral networks

*4) Goals and actions for the current year:*

*a. What priorities, goals or objectives have you addressed this year?*

- i) Aboriginal literacy
- ii) Adult literacy
- iii) Reading Buddies (ongoing project)

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*b. What actions were taken to reach these? What organizations and groups participated in these actions?*

i. Aboriginal Literacy

1. The focus for the Aboriginal table is to support the delivery of sustainable, culturally relevant literacy programs for Aboriginal learners. Partnerships have been developed with the Matsqui First Nation, Sumas First Nation, and the Fraser Valley Métis Association. The vision for the Aboriginal Community Library was established in the fall of 2011 and came to fruition by the fall of 2012. Partnerships included the Abbotsford School District, the Aboriginal Table of LMA, University of the Fraser Valley, Fraser Valley Regional Library and Success by Six.
2. The Early Learning Families program was initiated to increase the number of Aboriginal families that participate in early learning programs. This late afternoon/evening early learning program, Early Learning Friends (ELF) was initiated at the Community Aboriginal Centre. The time was chosen in order to meet the needs of families that may have commitments and obligations during the day. While some family members attended ELF, other activities took place to meet the needs of other family members.

ii. Adult Literacy

1. The focus for the Adult table is to facilitate the provision of seamless, integrated literacy programs and services for adult learners throughout our community
  - a. A regular schedule of networking meetings has been established. Currently there are 24 service providers, organizations, and individuals represented at the Adult Table. The meetings provide an opportunity to discuss current issues, concerns, and projects while linking programs together.
  - b. Work on the establishment of a website is continuing. The website will provide information related to the Adult Table's development of a community literacy directory.
  - c. In partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society, support of the women's reading program at Fraser Valley

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Regional Institute has been implemented. When this program has a solid base of volunteers we will work toward re-establishing the program at the Matsqui Correctional Institution.

- d. The Adult Literacy Networking Ad Hoc Committee facilitates meetings and information sessions for a broad range of service providers to discuss roadblocks to services for adults.

c. *What adjustments were made to the plan? Were there new opportunities or were there changes that did not allow for some actions to be taken?*

- i. Family Literacy Project: Further stakeholder consultation is required therefore the Family Literacy Project will be deferred to the 2014 Community Literacy Plan.
- ii. Fathers' Reading program: The objective of forming a reading program at Matsqui Institute is on hold until the Mothers' Reading Program at the Fraser Valley Institute has adequate volunteers to sustain its program. Once that program is sufficiently staffed then the re-establishment of the Fathers' Reading Program will be undertaken.

5) *Indications of success:*

a. *How do you know that actions taken are working to support literacy? What impact have the literacy initiatives had? It is important to include examples to illustrate the impact*

- i. Reading Buddies Program: The goal for this year was to match 100 Little Buddies, up from last year's number of 64 Little Buddies. This year there were 103 Little Buddies matched with over 100 Big Buddies, an indication of high interest in this successful program. The Reading Buddy coordinator has conducted a satisfaction survey of both the learners and the volunteers to assure accountability of this program.
- ii. Library at the Community Aboriginal Centre: Library resources have been used by community members as well as teachers in the Abbotsford School District.
- iii. Early Learning Families: This early learning program has had a positive impact on a small number of families that were able to attend the evening sessions. Families that attend are those who are unable to participate in early learning programs run during the day.

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- iv. The ongoing face-to-face meetings within the various tables have allowed for networking of services as well as the dissemination of information. By keeping community members abreast of services, organizations, and opportunities learners' needs are more effectively met.
- v. This year's information sessions hosted by the Adult Networking Ad Hoc Committee included a presentation on general learning disabilities as well as a presentation on trauma informed practice. Service organizations who work with adult learners have had the opportunity to hear speakers who are experts in various areas of adult learning. Another area of impact is the opportunity for the adult service providers to network.
- vi. Solidification of relationships results community capacity building within Abbotsford. There have been numerous opportunities to learn about and respond to needs in the community, thereby removing roadblocks for learners. Some examples of capacity building include:
  - 1. Fraser Valley Regional Library is providing The Fraser Valley Institute Book Club with repurposed book club sets of novels and discussion materials.
  - 2. Because of the establishment of relationships among members of different agencies, service providers have been able to successfully assist the bridging of learners from non-formal to formal learning contexts.
  - 3. Interagency sharing of information and distributing of materials for broader dissemination has been available to the Abbotsford community. For example, Fraser Valley Regional Library program guides are distributed to table members who in turn share the guides with their organizations.

*b. What are the things that support literacy work?*

- i. Having a LOC who encourages collaboration by supporting, monitoring, and following through on needed actions and delegating responsibilities appropriately;
- ii. Maintaining the momentum of collaborative work by having regular Task Group meetings and reporting on actions taken;

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- iii. Having Task Group members sit at community tables to raise awareness of literacy issues when these arise;
- iv. Having the LOC make presentations to various service clubs, organizations, and businesses has broadened the awareness of literacy issues and initiatives within the Abbotsford community.

## 6) Challenges:

### a. What are the difficulties?

- i. Time for Literacy Matters meetings and projects in addition to work commitments;
- ii. Funding to support ongoing collaborative literacy projects;
- iii. Uncertain Literacy Outreach Coordinator funding undermines the commitment of community stakeholders.

### b. What would help?

- i. Stable and ongoing funding to support the development and sustainability of programs to assist learner;
- ii. Stable and continuous funding would encourage stakeholders to engage in and commit to long term literacy projects.

## **For the coming year:**

### 1) *Are there new opportunities, challenges or issues in your community? How will you respond to those?*

- i. Based on unemployment levels in Abbotsford, workplace/employment literacy challenges may be of concern. Attention needs to be focused towards creative/alternative approaches to "pathways out of poverty".
- ii. There is a lack of awareness regarding Essential Skills in the community. The Adult Table will consider ways in which Essential Skills can be marketed to the community at large.
- iii. Interest has been expressed in re-visiting past efforts by LMA to build social enterprise options in collaboration with local businesses.

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2) *What goals, priorities or objectives will you work on in the coming year? What actions are planned against those goals?*

i. Goal: to increase literacy of adults in the community

Objective: Facilitate the provision of seamless integrated literacy programs and services for adult learners

Actions:

1. Continue to host adult literacy networking/workshop events with a greater focus on broadening the participation of community members
2. Continue to work in partnership with women's and men's service providers; family focused service providers; Corrections Canada i.e. Elizabeth Fry Society
3. Establish new partnerships with various community members i.e. health representatives and family wellness
4. Support establishment of adult reading programs within temples
5. Explore the creation of an adult learning centre where individuals can access support from a range of literacy service providers
6. Continue to explore how Abbotsford can provide more effective bridging to prepare low skilled adults to qualify for entry-level semi-skilled jobs or enter college occupational certificate programs

Objective: Explore ways to increase awareness of adult literacy in the community and engage the business community in workplace skills enhancement projects

Actions:

1. Continue to make presentations to various business organizations
2. Explore how to raise awareness of Essential Skills within the community

ii. Goal: increase literacy of Aboriginal people in the community

Objective: Continue the development of the library space at the Community Aboriginal Centre

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Actions:

1. Implement a letter writing campaign asking corporate donors to sponsor a library shelf

Objective: Continue the development of programming at the Community Aboriginal Centre

Action:

1. Explore ways to bring afternoon/evening programs to the Community Aboriginal Centre

Objective: Continue developing relationships and programming with the Aboriginal community (Matsqui First Nation, Sumas First Nation, and Fraser Valley Métis Association)

Action:

1. Sponsor Family Gatherings at the community centres on site
2. Collaborate with Sto:lo First Nation to explore the possibility of holding an early learning program at the community centre at Matsqui First Nation

iii. Goal: to increase literacy of families in the community

Objective: Continue to focus on supporting family literacy

Action:

1. Continue to engage family literacy providers/early learning at the Task Group table through dialogue around Raise a Reader funds
2. Explore alternate models/partners of the Family Literacy project
3. Continue to participate in community events i.e. Abbotsford Family Literacy Day Celebration
4. Continue to hold the yearly "Read What You Love" campaign

Objective: Continue to support Reading Buddies program

Action:

1. Continue to fund the Reading Buddies coordinator position while actively exploring other funding sources i.e. community grants
2. Expand Reading Buddies to other areas of the community

Objective: Find new ways to connect with the community re: literacy

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Action:

1. Display literacy information and distribute books during Abbotsford Heat games
2. Provide book bins in the community where families can take books away
3. Submit a series of articles to the local newspaper showcasing various service organizations
4. Explore new initiative i.e. a family/community initiative that gathers and publishes stories; youth, elders and families interview, transcribe, discuss, edit oral history to produce literacy materials

3) *What will be required to meet the goals and effectively employ actions for the coming year?*

Meeting the above goals and actions will require commitment; communication; relationship building; concrete partnership projects as well as continued engagement and support of new and existing projects.