

District Literacy Plan

Quesnel, BC

June 2011



Literacy Outreach Coordinator: Rebecca Beuschel

District Literacy Plan

School District #28 Quesnel

Reflections on the current year:

Community Context:

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?

Two years ago, three community mills, Tolko, Canfor and North Star Lumber ceased operations. This closure led to great uncertainty throughout the community in regards to the economy and the trickle effect of people losing their jobs, eg. families leaving town. Fortunately, the start of 2011 has brought more stability to the community.

September 2010, Literacy Quesnel Society (LQS) moved from its original office space to a new location. LQS is now established in a much larger space that is easily accessible by the public. This has significantly improved our community profile and through a series of events (open house, adult learners week, AGM, training & professional development) a greater number of people are aware of our literacy society and the supports it can offer.

There seems to be a strong interest from Service Clubs to participate in and support literacy activities through volunteering and/or contributing funds. The Lions Club members have been enthusiastic supporters of our One-to-One Literacy Program in the schools and the Rotary Clubs are actively participating in community visits to local First Nations Reserves with BC's Lieutenant Governor, Stephen Pointe. The President of the Quesnel Rotary Club has recently joined the Board of Literacy Quesnel Society.

Task Group:

Who takes part in the task group? How is the work of this group organized?

The present members of the Task group are:

Cari Charron, Child Care Resource & Referral Society
Doris Kemp, Aboriginal Early Literacy Resource Teacher, School District #28
Eleanor Dimler, senior advocate
Karen Grunau, private tutor
Janet Brooks, business owner (facilitator of the original community literacy plan)
Sandy Meidlinger, Child Development Centre
Vicki Esplen, Early Literacy Resource Teacher, School District #28

The Task group meets monthly. At each meeting, the Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Rebecca Beuschel, presents a report of her monthly activities and circulates ideas for future opportunities and events. Rebecca records the minutes of each meeting. Working teams are created at this level and members of the community are invited to participate.

The Task force directly reports to the Board of Literacy Quesnel Society. The Board meets three to four times per year. LQS has recently contracted a Chief Operating Officer (COO). This person works directly with the Board. Both the COO and LOC attend LQS Board meetings.

The current Board members are:

President: Vicki Esplen, Literacy Resource Teacher, School District #28
Vice President: Sandy Meidlinger, Supported Child Care Development Coordinator, CDC
Member at large: Beverlee Preston, Program Coordinator, Pregnancy Outreach Program
Member at Large: John Havens, family physician & President of Q. Rotary Club
Member at Large: Kiley Sales, Instructor, Continuing and Adult Education
Member at Large: Poonam Miglani, Family Support Worker

A reorganization of our Board and Task Force structure has come about as we have become more familiar with and educated about the Societies Act and the roles for which each group is responsible. This new structure has enabled us to feel more competent in our ability to move forward as a group and to work with greater efficiency.

Community Development and Literacy Collaboration:

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

Collaborations are on-going. We have found that once a relationship is established the collaborative efforts flow naturally. Presently each of our task group members sits on a wide range of committees through their own workplace. This range enables a substantial network of connections which have led to partnerships and collaborative work. Collaborations with our Literacy Quesnel Society include but are not limited to:

- Amata Transition House (for women and children)
- Child Development Centre
- Children and Youth with Special Needs
- Community Living Association
- Ministry of Children and Family Development
- New Focus Society
- North Cariboo Aboriginal Family Program Society
- Northern Health – Public Health
- Pregnancy Outreach Program
- Quesnel Child, Youth and Family Network
- Quesnel & District Recreation Centre
- Quesnel Employment Services
- Quesnel Family Network
- Quesnel Public Library
- School District #28 (staff, individual schools, administration, programs are all involved)
- Seasons Homeless Shelter
- Seniors Advocacy Centre
- Several community based businesses

What are the essential on-going collaborations?

Presently, working with the North Cariboo Aboriginal Family Program Society, School District #28, various programs housed under the Child Development Centre, our two Rotary Clubs and the Lions Club are our essential collaborators.

All of the groups listed above (our network of collaborators) have a distinct connection to literacy and the work that we do. We hope to nurture these connections in order to build stronger

partnerships and solidify the collaborations. We recognize that a much stronger relationship with our Public Library is essential but at the present time we have been told that they are unable to release any staff to take part in any of our initiatives or attend any task force meetings.

What makes collaborations work well?

Clear communication is the key to well functioning collaborations. Clear communication is achieved through regular emails, phone calls and face to face meetings. When everyone shares a common goal, or similar goals, a relationship is built and there is a willingness to share ideas, interests and program information. Leaders who embrace collaboration and are not afraid to open up their programs to feedback and ideas, help facilitate this process.

Goals we've addressed this year:

- Move into a larger more publically accessible space
- Establish our Bright Red Bookshelf program
- Initiate the One-to-One Literacy tutoring program in collaboration with SD#28
- Build upon our family story time program
- Increase the public profile of literacy
- Expand training opportunities
- Make connections with service providers and service groups
- Continue our community's Books for Babies program
- Open the community up to recognizing that literacy is not just reading and writing

Actions and participants:

We opened our new literacy office in downtown Quesnel and hosted our first official open house. The space is more accessible to the community and is a bright, welcoming space for meetings, training and networking. Several of our task force members and our LOC worked diligently to get the space ready for the public.

The Bright Red Bookshelf program is now located in 5 businesses/public spaces in Quesnel. The locations include Super Suds Laundromat, Kwik Kleen Laundromat, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Quesnel and District Recreation Centre and the North Cariboo Aboriginal Family Program Society. These participants are now partnering with us by sharing the task of replenishing and maintaining the contents of the shelves. Their commitment and enthusiasm is great feedback to the success of the program.

The One-to-One Literacy Tutoring Program was implemented in three of our elementary schools. The Lions Club funded one of these programs and is actively involved in tutoring students in one of the schools. Other trained tutors include volunteers from the Salvation Army, parents/caregivers and task force members.

We continued with our successful (free) Family Story Time events. Members of the community read, tell and present stories to families.

To celebrate Family Literacy Day, we co-hosted a family games day with the Public Library.

We hosted two training sessions for the One to One Tutoring Program. Participants and trainers included Debbie Schiller, Rebecca Beuschel, members of the Lions and Rotary Clubs, SD #28 support workers, parents and interested community members.

We facilitated several tutor training sessions, in collaboration with the Adults Learning Together (ALT) program at North Cariboo Aboriginal Family Program Society.

Indications of success:

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.

We have received positive feedback from many of our community members in response to our new Literacy Quesnel office (especially our eye catching sign!) The LOC met an acquaintance on the street and started talking about the Literacy Society that has been established. The other person knew exactly where the office was because of the strategically located sign – they had not been familiar with the Society but they certainly knew about the sign. The open house generated a lively buzz as we had members of City Council, the manager of the Aboriginal Family Centre, many business owners and community folk attend. Our LOC has also received feedback from folks who have seen our “spots” on our local Shaw Cable station.

Employment, housing and women’s support organizations have connected with us to request our help and assistance with supporting their clients.

The Bright Red Bookshelf initiative has shown success through a constant need for books to replenish the shelves. The hosts of the bookshelves have embraced this initiative by sharing the task of replenishing and maintaining the contents of the shelves. From our Recreation Centre: “We thought we would give the Bright Red Bookshelf a try but were worried that it might just get messy and become a garbage or paper collector. We are thrilled to see the folks using the books and magazines as was intended. Our own staff is now bringing in new books to add to the shelf.”

Public Health calls on a regular basis requesting our ‘Books for Babies’ bags. The public health nurses have specifically told us how much the families appreciate and enjoy receiving their bag. We are excited to partner with public health, encouraging that first connection with a baby, a parent and a book.

We have had immediate success with our One-to-One Literacy Program. One of the participating schools graduated more than 30 students through the reading program with the help of more than sixteen community volunteers. Student, volunteer and teacher feedback at this school was heart-warming. One teacher felt that the experience for one of her students was “life-changing”. The relationship that was built and the success that was achieved made a real difference for that child.

We are starting to see our Literacy Society as a tree growing within our community. The members of the Society are the roots that set themselves into the ground – laying the foundation for literacy work. The Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Task Force and Society Board are the trunk that holds the tree upright and enables the branches to receive the energy they need to grow. Each connection we make or collaboration we embrace adds another branch to the tree. Some branches grow on their own with the support of the trunk, while other branches sprout new branches, and so the tree grows. We are thrilled with the growth our “tree” is making!

What are the things that support literacy work?

- Adequate funding: It takes time, patience and maintaining a presence in the community for growth to happen and success to take hold. Initiating and sustaining meaningful programs and initiatives relies on adequate funding.
- A Literacy Outreach Coordinator position: This position enables the work to be focused, thorough and delivered with passion.
- Collaboration and strong relationships: Literacy is deeply rooted throughout so many areas of life. Working together with a shared understanding of the community's needs and goals, makes things happen.
- Dedication: Dedication is a characteristic of people who see literacy as an important element of life. This dedication supports individuals and organizations in achieving their goals.
- A supportive structure: A structure that encourages and supports community involvement allows for folks to contribute however they able.
- A literacy space/centre: It makes literacy visible, accessible and gives value to the work being done.
- Finding ways to break down or deconstruct barriers: If we are to support the individuals or groups that require/ may need/ are looking for assistance with any type of literacy issue, we must find ways to reach those people and let them know that we are here to help,

Challenges:

What are the difficulties? What would help?

One of the greatest difficulties/ challenges in our work is making a connection with the individuals or groups that may need some kind of literacy support to help them achieve a healthier, happier life. Our work is to deconstruct the barriers that prevent those folks from accessing the programs and people that could support them. This work is not easy and requires dedicated effort by the Literacy Outreach Coordinator as well as the Task group and Board members. What would help? Continued support to keep the LOC position intact and the Literacy Quesnel Society operational would be most helpful.

An ongoing message that we need to take to the public is that literacy is not just about reading and writing. As stated on the Decoda webpage – Literacy is ... “A key strategy which can help solve fundamental societal issues and economic challenges. At all stages of our lives, literacy is essentially about decoding information, events and situations so we can succeed and prosper. Now, more than ever before, literacy is about making sense of the modern world.” We need to find ways to support members of our community in making sense of our modern world. What would help? Continued support for the LOC position.

Diversifying the Task group and Society Board to include a wider range of representation is a challenge we want to address. We would welcome regular participation from the Public Library and Public Health but limited staffing and large workloads do not allow them to take part. What would help?

Dedicated staff time for these groups to be able to take part – but not at the expense of the other work they need to accomplish.

Another challenge that we continue to work on is building greater community awareness of the Literacy Quesnel Society and the services and supports we offer. Although we have been working hard at spreading the word, many community members are still unaware of our existence. Often the events held to raise awareness preach to the converted instead of informing the uninformed. Again, support to keep the LOC position intact would help with this task.

It can be difficult to be patient but we know that the work we are doing takes time. There needs to be time to make connections, time to build relationships and trust and time to establish supports and programs that can become sustainable. What would help? Patience and support from the funding groups.

For the coming year:

Are there new opportunities, challenges, or issues in your community?

How will you respond to those?

What goals, objectives and priorities will you work on in the coming year?

New opportunities include improving and expanding the One-to-One Literacy Program in the elementary schools. We have built the foundation this school year. Our next goal is to encourage more community volunteers to participate in training as tutors. We will also approach the Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) to invite them to partner with us in sponsoring the program in their school.

The opportunity to work with seniors in a more meaningful way exists. As there are several seniors groups in our community and collaboration is not always on their “radar” our challenge is to find an advocate or representatives from each group who will work with us to assess the needs of all seniors and develop suitable literacy links and programs for all. We see this area as a goal for the coming year.

We will continue to build and nurture our relationship with local Aboriginal groups. The North Cariboo Aboriginal Family Program Society currently coordinates the Adults Learning Together (ALT) program and the Aboriginal Literacy And Parenting Skills (ALAPS) program. The Quesnel Literacy Society and specifically the Literacy Outreach Coordinator actively supports these programs. As well, a relationship has been initiated with the Nazko and Kluskus Indian Bands through the meetings with the Lieutenant Governor Stephen Pointe, and the recent visits to each of the reserves (respectively 120kms and 200kms West of Quesnel).

Working with the Lions Club and with our community’s two Rotary Clubs is proving successful. We have built relationships with each club and will continue to lobby their support and participation as they work on their goals of improving literacy in the community.

We will continue to encourage the Public Library to be a part of the Literacy Society in whatever capacity that they can. We may need to find more creative ways of enlisting their support.

We will be expanding our Bright Red Bookshelf into at least three more businesses this coming year.

Our new Board was elected at our Annual General Meeting in May. In the fall, we will be reviewing our strategic plan together to determine the role of the directors, evaluating the direction of

our activities and selecting our focus for the coming year. At this meeting we will be setting specific goals, objectives and priorities.

We are proud of and pleased with our achievements and feel both comfortable and confident with our growth as a literacy society. We approach our challenges with enthusiasm - as we see challenges as opportunities. We look forward to the continued growth of our literacy work.

This updated District Literacy Plan document was prepared by:
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