

Abbotsford District Literacy Plan 2011

(An update of the 2010 Plan)

Literacy Matters Association Abbotsford



Abbotsford District Literacy Plan

June 2011

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Reflections on the Current Year

President Clinton on International Literacy Day, September 8th 1994: "Literacy is not a luxury, it is a right and a responsibility. If our world is to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century we must harness the energy and creativity of all our citizens."

1. Community Context:

This document is the fifth District Literacy Plan for the Abbotsford Community. While the Literacy Matters Association has been in operation for the last seven years, only recently has the organization formalized its efforts through incorporation as a society and developed a strategic plan. While membership in the association has fluctuated in recent years, there continues to be a core group of participants who remain committed to the literacy development in our community. Over the last few years the committee has consolidated its work in early learning and school age literacy. The last two years has seen a more concerted effort toward improving adult literacy.

Early learners in Abbotsford benefit from a well established and functioning network of support services for children ages 0 to 6 with the establishment of at least one literacy program in each neighbourhood. Yet, opportunities remain to increase community capacity and strengthen the provision literacy supports, especially in lower socioeconomic communities.

The school district delivers the vast majority of literacy programming for youth and according to provincial exam outcomes is doing a commendable job. However, community literacy supports and programs for this age group are noticeably lacking. Furthermore, they are non-existent in some neighbourhoods.

While the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement effectively addresses the literacy needs of local aboriginal children from kindergarten through to grade twelve, it does not include the literacy considerations of aboriginal early and adult learners. Nonetheless, the primary provider of literacy supports for Aboriginal learners is the Aboriginal Education Center, which is operated by the School District. Abbotsford supports the lone Aboriginal Strong Start Program in the province.

The adult population represents the largest age demographic in Abbotsford, yet is offered the least variation and quantity of community-oriented learning opportunities. Most programs for further learning and essential skills training are provided by the University of the Fraser Valley; however, the current system of program delivery may not be conducive to the learning needs of many local adults. This reveals a significant shortfall in academic attainment levels as compared to provincial averages in relation to both secondary and post secondary achievement. Thus, this suggests less than favourable comfort levels with formal education systems by a large proportion

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of the local adult populace. The challenge of meeting the literacy needs of adults grows as local literacy programs and services struggle to accommodate a large aging demographic.

Abbotsford is making significant strides in the effort to meet the needs of the ESL community with the School Settlement Workers Programs (SWIS), both of which enhance pre-existing multicultural services at Abbotsford Community Services. While these programs partially mitigate the obvious needs, neighbourhoods with a high proportion of ESL residents remain under-serviced relative to their literacy needs and based on socio-economic indicators. Similar concerns are echoed throughout all age strata in the ESL community, but gain prominence in the adult sphere due to the additional dimension of workplace literacy, since the latter services are scarce and challenging to access.

2. Task Group:

a) Members of the Literacy Matters:

- i) Literacy Matters Association Abbotsford comprises a broad representation of community perspectives through a variety of associations. Current members include:
 - Abbotsford School District (#34)
 - University of the Fraser Valley
 - Valley Regional Library
 - Aboriginal Advisory representative
 - Abbotsford Community Services
 - Aboriginal Education Centre
 - Abbotsford Youth Commission
 - Children First/Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee
 - City of Abbotsford, Social Planner
 - School Trustee
 - Correctional Services Canada
 - Abbotsford Community Schools
 - Mentoring Works

b) Organization of the task group:

- i) Literacy Matters is organized through a voluntary committee, an elected board and the Literacy Outreach worker.
- ii) There is a Child and Youth Committee and an Early Childhood Committee.
- iii) An Adult Literacy Committee is in the process of being established.

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3. Community Development & Literacy Collaboration:

- a) **An important example of collaboration to support literacy and the work of the task group is:**
 - i) The Reading Buddies program:
FVRL and Literacy Matters worked together to deliver this program.
 - ii) FVRL, Hand In Hand Child Care Society, Literacy Matters and the Community Aboriginal Centre are also working together to deliver Reading Buddies to the Centre.

- b) **The essential ongoing collaborations include:**
 - i) Regularly meeting through Literacy Matters to share information, develop ideas for future initiatives, identify gaps and increase further collaborative possibilities.
 - ii) Development of a community resource directory.

- c) **What makes collaboration work well:**

Community development efforts that focus on designing structures to facilitate the collective coordination of action and the development of mutually beneficial relationships will have the greatest potential for success. Through the understanding of the issues in Abbotsford we can improve the adaptive capacity of our community by designing collaborative structures that facilitate the flow of information and the development of communication networks; connecting diverse assets and resources to one another; decentralizing power and decision-making; and increasing resilience in times of economic stress, hardship or downturn.

4. Goals and Actions:

- a) **The work plan priority for the year:**
 - i) Aboriginal and adult literacy.

- b) **Actions taken and organizations and groups that participated:**
 - i) Aboriginal Literacy

The strategy for this focus was to support the delivery of sustainable, culturally relevant literacy programs for Aboriginal learners by increasing the engagement of aboriginal learners and families in literacy programs and services.

Funded through the Abbotsford Community Foundation, Reading Buddies (a reading mentorship program that focuses on Grades 1-4 students who are mentored by secondary school students or adults) started in the fall of 2010. The focus is on children who struggle with reading, in particular reaching out to the Aboriginal and ESL community.

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Literacy Matters funded and hired a coordinator for this initiative, and for the most part it has met with great success. However, participation within the Aboriginal community has been limited, despite presentations made by the coordinator, both within schools and at the Family Gathering held by the Community Aboriginal Centre.

The LOC worked with the principal of the Aboriginal Centre to apply for additional funding for the Reading Buddies program, so that it might also be located at the Centre. The Fraser Valley Library will work with the Centre to begin the process of cataloguing the books and setting up a library for the program.

The Hand In Hand Child Care Society will be offering support to facilitate the establishment of the program in the Centre.

ii) Adult Literacy

Adult literacy has been a strong focus for the Literacy Matters Association this year. The goal is to facilitate the provision of seamless, integrated literacy programs and services for adult learners throughout our community literacy and support systems.

- (1) A regular schedule of networking meetings has been established.
- (2) A directory of adult literacy services and assets for adult learners is being developed. Literacy Matters, in collaboration with Literacy BC, is currently updating the BC Literacy Directory. Once this is done, the Principal of Abbotsford Virtual School has agreed to develop a website dedicated to the Abbotsford Directory.
- (3) To work at developing seamless adult literacy tutoring supports for Abbotsford. This priority recognizes that many efforts are fragmented and this will move to coordinate adult literacy tutoring and enhance recruitment, training and outreach efforts for adult literacy tutors.
The Chairperson of Literacy Matters Association, along with the LOC, has investigated how we can facilitate the coordination of our services through Community Access to Literacy and Learning (CALL) Abbotsford.
The CALL Coordinator attended one of our meetings and we are working on ways we can increase collaboration.
One challenge will be the recruitment of volunteers and tutor training.
- (4) New initiatives relating to aboriginal and adult literacy are being considered and the initial research has already taken place to determine logistics and practicality.

Two examples under consideration are:

- A learning hub in the mall to connect people with literacy resources and programs in the community.

This has been implemented in the North Shore.

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The LOC from North Vancouver attended a Literacy Matters meeting to answer questions about the project.

- A Father's Story Telling program that has been established in Agassiz. Fathers who are incarcerated read and record stories and have them sent to their children. These recordings, along with a copy of book the story came from are delivered to the families, so they can be read to their children.

The LOC from Chilliwack attended a Literacy Matters meeting to explain the concept.

c) **Adjustments to the plan:**

The Abbotsford School District has amended its Achievement Contract process, and the LOC had less involvement with this planning process. However, since the School District is well represented on Literacy Matters Association, we continue to have access to updates on the work of the district in improving literacy.

The LOC contract is for fewer hours, so it becomes increasingly important to prioritize our focus.

5. Indications of Success:

a) **How are the actions taken working to support literacy:**

Success is difficult to measure, however these are several indicators of how we do our work:

- i) A solid foundation of literacy in the Early Childhood Committee
- ii) Ongoing partnerships with organizations to collaborate on new initiatives
- iii) Expanding and challenging perceptions of literacy

b) **Supporting literacy work:**

i) The Child and Youth Committee:

Literacy Matters Association funded the purchase of Razz Readers (an interactive computerized reading program) for Godson Elementary School and Abbotsford Community Services for ESL learners.

ii) The Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee:

Consists of a highly invested, expert, and passionate group of professionals with the interests of children and parents at the center of their work.

This committee meets monthly to identify needs, and set priorities for meeting the needs of pre-school aged children and their parents.

Through the partnerships created, and information shared at this table it is their intention to provide comprehensive support for children and families that includes, but is not is not limited to, meeting the learning needs of children and to prepare them to thrive both in and out of school.

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iii) Fraser Valley Regional Libraries

Literacy Matters supported and participated in two events that the Library initiated:

The 5th Annual Literacy Fair

The Read for Life Campaign

6. Challenges:

a) **The difficulties:**

Community-based change initiatives often have ambitious goals and so planning specific on-the-ground strategies to those goals is difficult. Likewise, the task of planning and carrying out evaluation research that can inform practice and surface broader lessons for the field in general is a challenge.

b) **What will help:**

Literacy Matters Association will need to find creative ways to resource its plan and initiatives. This will assist in expanding the literacy conversation in the community.

Thinking About the Upcoming Year

1. Challenges and Opportunities:

a) **Challenges:**

- i) Sustainability will be the biggest challenge as we move forward with the Literacy Plan.
- ii) Although the Ministry has continued funding for the upcoming year, we need to strategize about how we do things within the funding criteria.
- iii) Maximizing limited funding and resources will also remain a challenge.
- iv) The solution lies within collaborations and relationship building with the different organizations and their respective programs.

b) **Opportunities:**

- i) We need to continue to improve our ability to work collaboratively. Upcoming initiatives will lend themselves to more collaboration.
- ii) Work in this type of collaborative environment has the ability to:
 - Connect people to the backgrounds, cultures and personal identities of each citizen;
 - Develop multicultural values;
 - Provide a wide range of positive male and female role models;

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- iii) Provide opportunities for citizens to be engaged in their community and develop social responsibility and leadership skills.
- iv) Offer strong school-family-community partnerships that can profoundly influence the literacy learning of all citizens.

2. Continuing Goals and Actions:

- a) Aboriginal and Adult literacy will continue to be our focus.
 - i) Increase the collaboration among community service providers to address the needs of Aboriginal learners
 - ii) We hope to continue to support and expand the Reading Buddies program.
 - iii) The Learning Hub and Father Story Telling Time are initiatives that we will continue to research and hopefully move forward with.
 - iv) An “Adult” subcommittee will be organized.
 - v) The Resource Directory will be updated.

3. What will be Required:

- a) To meet the goals and effectively employ actions the continued participation of the members of Literacy Matters within a collaborative environment is imperative.
- b) The continued funding and support for the LOC position is also key to Literacy Matter’s ability to plan, organize and implement any action items.