

**Name of Community: Burnaby**

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## **School District 41 Literacy Plan**

### **1. Community Context**

Burnaby is a highly diverse community continuing to face unique challenges. It is the third largest city in BC and has a population estimated to be 227,000 in 2010. (BC Stats)

In the 2006 Census, 38% of Burnaby's population reported speaking a language other than English in their homes. In terms of Mother Tongue (i.e., the language first learned in childhood and still understood), 56.5% of Burnaby's population had a mother tongue other than English.

Burnaby is also an economically diverse community with 22.1% of children and families living below Canada's before-tax Low Income Cut-offs (LICOS). In 2005, 26.8% of children under 6 years of age lived in households with incomes below Statistics Canada's before-tax LICOs.

Recent Early Development Instrument \*(EDI) findings for Burnaby show that school readiness has declined by more than 5% overall in 9 neighborhoods since the previous study. This drop in school readiness adds to education challenges in an already very diverse school population.

(\*EDI - a population-level measure of children's development on five scales or domains of development, including: Physical health and well-being, Social competence, Emotional Maturity, Language and Cognitive Development and Communication Skills and General Knowledge.)

Close to 39% of all residents live in rental housing. The recent downturn in the economy and increases in the cost of living are adding to the already challenging economic situation for many in Burnaby, with families struggling to pay for the necessities of food, housing and childcare.

School District #41 and Literacy Now Burnaby strive to provide comprehensive education programs to meet individual needs and interests of this large and diverse community of early childhood, school-age and adult learners.

## **The Plan**

The Community Literacy Plan, written in 2007, supports learners across all age groups, cultures and socio-economic groups. The Plan, developed with broad-based community involvement, identified the following key priorities:

- Program sustainability;
- Support for and enhancement of programs that provide effective services and intergenerational literacy to the homeless, immigrant families and Aboriginal children and youth; and
- Support for community-based multi-service hubs.

The Plan also acknowledged that there was a need to remain open to emerging needs.

In mid-2010, the Steering Committee undertook an assessment of Literacy Now Burnaby, in preparation for an updating of the **Community Literacy Plan**. The assessment posed three questions.

- How well had the Literacy Now Burnaby Steering Committee delivered on the original **Community Literacy Plan**?
- To what extent has this committee reached the community, affecting residents and service providers?
- What directions need to be taken in the future to continue the work of Literacy Now Burnaby?

Out of the results of the assessment, and the community forum that followed in November 2010, came a clear Statement of Purpose and Values as well as a new set of strategic directions that will guide the work of Literacy Now Burnaby through the next three years.

## **PURPOSE**

Literacy Now Burnaby promotes literacy and learning for all in Burnaby and celebrates Burnaby as a community that reads, in many different ways and in many different languages.

## **VALUES**

**Working in Partnership:** Literacy Now Burnaby is committed to working in partnership with other community groups and organizations in Burnaby.

**Respect and Equality:** Literacy Now Burnaby values the voice of each partner and each partner has equal voice in decision-making at the Literacy Now Burnaby table.

**Stewardship and Accountability:** Literacy Now Burnaby is accountable to the community for how it uses its funding and practices effective stewardship of its resources. Literacy Now Burnaby's decision-making processes are open and transparent to the community.

Burnaby's **Community Literacy Plan** and **District Literacy Plan** continue to complement each other in support for Burnaby learners. Together, we strive to meet the needs of each learner in Burnaby.

## 2. The Task Group

Community partnerships are the foundation of Literacy Now Burnaby. The Steering Committee has 14 active members from the following groups: the school district, community organizations, the public library, Douglas College, CUPE, local business, the Burnaby Board of Trade, RCMP, Burnaby City Social Planning Department, Literacy practitioners, and Rotary Club members.

The Steering Committee meets on average once a month except for July, August and December. Additional meetings are called if needed.

The 2011-2014 Strategic Plan also calls for the formation of "Action Teams" to be in place by September 2011. The Teams will meet monthly or more frequently if needed and each team will have responsibility for and authority to develop and plan activities that deliver on Literacy Now Burnaby priorities.

## 3. Community Development and Literacy Collaboration

### a. Capacity Building

In 2010, the Steering Committee focused on building the capacity of community organizations, staff and volunteers through hosting six workshops. Topics were Project Sustainability, Proposal Writing, Program Evaluation, Train the Trainer Clear Language, Clear Language and Clear Language and Design. These workshops had a combined attendance of 151 community agency staff from over 40 agencies.

The workshops had an additional benefit in that they offered a natural opportunity for program staff from various organizations to meet, get to know each other, and share information and ideas. These new and growing staff connections are increasing community collaboration and the ability of agencies to work together at all levels. Workshop evaluation results verify the value of the workshops and new connections.

b. Community Dialogues

Late in 2010, Literacy Now Burnaby took part in a Burnaby-wide Intercultural Planning Table initiative. *Looking In – Reaching Out* was a collaborative project aimed at opening up dialogue and establishing Burnaby as welcoming and

inclusive community for new immigrants. A series of three broad-based community forums brought together long-time residents, newcomers, businesses, First Nations, government representatives, service providers and others to share their expertise and experiences.

One goal of the talks was to produce a forward-thinking report, as well as visual and narrative profiles of individuals contributing to our cultural diversity. These publications were distributed to BIPT members and a wide range of community stakeholders. Research results were written in English suitable for research and for submission to the funders. Literacy Now Burnaby provided a clear language version that would be inclusive of the participants, many of whom speak English as an additional language and/or have low literacy levels. The inclusive Clear Language version was sent out to thank residents for their time and effort.

c. Book Launch

On Saturday March 12<sup>th</sup> Literacy Now Burnaby and the Burnaby Public Library held a special book launch for a literacy success story, author John Mills. John came from a very difficult home environment, went to school hungry and stressed and did not learn to read. He dropped out of school early, became addicted to drugs and was homeless for most of his youth. He is now married, the father of one child and recently completed his Bachelors Degree. His book "I Could and I Did" speaks to John's hard work and. John's story was published in the local newspaper, the Burnaby Now, complete with a photo of John and his son, reading a book.

d. Conversation Cafe

This project, a collaborative effort by BC Housing, the Canadian Mental Health Association staff, Burnaby Public Library and Literacy Now Burnaby, takes place at Hall Towers in Burnaby and was launched at the beginning of 2011. Hall Towers has 335 suites in two towers and its over 235 residents face a number of challenges, including low literacy, that results in their often being isolated in their suites. The conversation group takes place three Thursdays per month and is led by a librarian. Topics are chosen in advance by the group and researched by the librarian who selects material to be shared and discussed by the group.

A formal evaluation of this project will take place after the first 6 months and the format may be changed if necessary.

e. Later to Literacy

In 2010, Literacy Now Burnaby provided funding support for a pilot program for at youth at risk. "Later to Literacy" is a School District 41 program that teaches secondary aged youth with limited literacy skills to read. There was a big gap in reading levels for some students including those who have come in

as refugees and others with significant learning challenges. Some of this work is being done through connections with a new Youth Hub that opened this year.

The Burnaby School District offers educational programming to meet the individual needs of a community of learners from pre-school to adult learners. Collaborative community initiatives include:

- *StrongStart Centres* continue to be a valuable resource to families and community in Burnaby. They also provide an excellent opportunity to develop intergenerational and cultural connections.
- Full Day Kindergarten will be established in all Burnaby elementary schools in September 2011. We continue to follow the *Early Learning Beliefs and Values* statement developed by kindergarten teachers and StrongStart facilitators as a foundation to inquiry and play-based learning.
- Burnaby School District hosted a successful *Early Learning Conference- In Full Bloom* in September 2010. It was attended by teachers, StrongStart facilitators, student teachers, administrators and community members such as members of the Early Learning Table. This provided a wonderful venue for community networking among early learning educators and early childhood service providers.
- The *Welcome Centre* continues to provide initial language assessment for students entering the Burnaby School System. Settlement workers at the Welcome Centre connect new immigrant families with community agencies and services in the City of Burnaby. Over 4,000 students and families have been served by settlement workers of the *SWIS Settlement Workers in Schools* program funded by WelcomeBC Branch of the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation.
- *Immigrant Youth in Schools Project*, funded by the WelcomeBC Branch of the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation is a project designed especially to meet the needs of refugee students at the secondary level. Twenty students with low literacy levels work to accelerate their literacy skills and build other workplace essential skills. With employment support from *MOSAIC*, the Youth and Family Worker assists students in preparing and searching for employment. Eight of these students are currently employed in part time jobs at retail and fast food outlets. Additional support for nine of the students in this project was offered through B.C. Children's Hospital by a trauma counselor.

In addition to the above activities we have increased collaboration and connections with community agencies and organizations through a presence and active participation in community tables, interagency meetings and in the development of Burnaby's new Social Sustainability Strategy, which includes a section on learning for life.

The City of Burnaby and many of its departments are now more aware of, and very interested in, the use of Clear Language and Design. Staff members from City Parks, Recreation, Cultural Services Department and Planning Department have attended Clear Language workshops.

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

In 2010, the Steering Committee focused on building the capacity of community organizations, staff and volunteers through hosting of Professional Development Community Development workshops, as outlined above. This remains a high priority with the community and will continue for the next year or until there is a decrease in interest and requested topics.

Increasing literacy awareness through community activities will continue to be a high priority in the coming years.

While Literacy Now Burnaby will develop a web presence for literacy information, news and events in the coming year, we have updated the SD 41 section of the Literacy BC "Literacy Resource List" and contacted all of the Literacy Providers to ensure accuracy. The "Literacy Resource List" is on the Library Website with an easy to find link. It is also accessible on the Community Connections Website and there will be a link to it from the newly updated Burnaby City website soon.

Literacy awareness activities in 2010 included DEAR (Drop Everything and Read), an event in support of School Librarians Day. Funding was provided for community agencies to hold reading and games family events. Although helpful for the agencies and families who participated, it did not create nearly the impact of the "Burnaby Reads" campaign held in 2009. For 2011 we plan to return to the "Burnaby Reads" approach.

Awareness activities this year will also include a great push for a media presence. We will identify "Literacy Champions" in the community who can raise the issue of literacy, prompt literacy events in the local media and garner political interest. We will also explore strategies for more regular communication with the broader community regarding literacy and the work of Literacy Now Burnaby.

The community wants to see more of a focus on adults who lack basic literacy skills. Literacy Now Burnaby also needs to advocate and support literacy programs not just for families but for single parents, teens, youth, the poor, the isolated and the homeless. One Action Team will focus on Adult Literacy.

We will continue to promote the use of clear language by providing workshops and holding meetings for community staff and volunteers who want to improve their documents and communication.

The clear language initiative will include outreach to public service providers, including the Police, Fire, Ministries, and Medical Offices to promote the use of clear language.

We will continue to work together with Tri-Cities and other Lower Mainland Literacy Outreach Coordinators to share information and ideas and look for areas of possible collaboration.

Collaboration between agencies, School District 41, the Public Library and the City of Burnaby continue to be extraordinarily successful in this community due to community history and a practice of working together and supporting each other.

## 5. Indications of Success

The community assessment conducted in late 2010 showed that our literacy awareness activities have had an impact and have improved the general understanding of literacy.

Having a Literacy presence at community meetings has created interest in the topic of literacy. Literacy statistics never cease to surprise people. These statistics always generate discussion about the impact it must have on individuals and families. We have also been able to bring into the discussion the impact low literacy has on health, employment, workplace safety and the economy in general.

People at community meetings are now very aware of, and interested in, the challenges facing people who can't read. They understand that low literacy affects a person's ability to understand and to fully participate in society. They are also more knowledgeable about ways to identify the signs of low literacy and how to help people get support.

The importance of clear language as a way of including all people is accepted much more readily now than it was in 2009 when the Literacy Outreach Coordinator started to attend community meetings. For some reason there was a lot of resistance to the idea and that is no longer the case as can be seen by the amount of interest in our Clear Language workshops.

Clear Language and Communication has been included in the City of Burnaby's Social Sustainability Strategy. In the "Learning for Life" section, one of the goals identified was advocating to senior governments, and adopting a clear language policy for all public documents and information.

One of our local papers published an article about a literacy success story on its front page. Without the awareness campaigns held over the past two years, in which they took part, it is unlikely that they would have been interested.

Several of the projects funded in Year One have sustained the literacy activities they started.

- Boys & Girls Clubs continue to incorporate literacy activities into their programs.
- Burnaby Multicultural Society has continued its English Conversation for Immigrant Seniors. Currently they have participants from 12 or more language groups.
- Burnaby Family Life's "Play and Learn" lending kits continue to be on loan to families and children who are in the day care programs.
- Homeless Drop In Learning Table, a collaboration of Progressive Housing Society, Douglas College I CARE, and Tommy Douglas Branch, Burnaby Public Library, provides a very popular monthly outreach to homeless and marginalized people in Burnaby.

## 6. Challenges

### **What are the difficulties?**

One of the big difficulties is deciding on which of the many literacy gaps to focus on and how to go about making a difference in those areas.

As well there are neighbourhoods in Burnaby where there is a great deal of need and few resources and common areas to meet and connect.

Statistics clearly show that a high number of adults do not have the literacy skills they need to manage and a high percentage of them were born in Canada. It is a challenge to find ways to identify them or get them to self-identify, and to provide learning opportunities that will appeal to them.

Another challenge is maintaining momentum in uncertain times.

### **What would help?**

A new set of strategic directions has been developed that will guide the work of Literacy Now Burnaby over the next three years and building on the energy and enthusiasm generated in the breakout discussion groups leading up to the development of the new strategic plan, we plan to add "Action Teams" to our group structure and use that model to increase our interaction, ideas and energy.

## 7. For the coming year:

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

A great new opportunity is going to be participating in the launch of the Burnaby Social Sustainability Plan and moving forward on the goals.

The new "Decoda Literacy Solutions" and new literacy structure for BC appears very positive and we look forward to working together on the initiatives that may result.

We will be working with two Burnaby Rotary Clubs.

A new challenge will be starting the Action Teams and maintaining momentum and action as we work with the new model.

**How will you respond to those?** With great enthusiasm & energy

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

### **Building Capacity**

The community placed a high priority on building the capacity of community groups, their staff and volunteers.

## GOALS:

Continue to deliver free workshops in Burnaby that focus on community development themes.

Look for ways of coordinating training so that groups that are willing can make spaces available to other groups' staff and/or volunteers in workshops they're offering to their staff.

Provide opportunities for networking and information sharing about programs and services and potential for collaboration.

## **Focus on the Vulnerable**

*The community wants to see more of a focus on adults who lack basic literacy skills. Literacy Now Burnaby also needs to advocate and support literacy programs not just for families but for single parents, teens and youth, the poor, the isolated and the homeless.*

## GOALS:

Continue to build the awareness of the many aspects of literacy.

Explore the possibility of developing a volunteer tutor program for low literacy adults and older youth.

Work with the City of Burnaby on achieving the goals around literacy included in the City's 2011 Social Sustainability Strategy.

Continue to work with *Patients as Partners* on the Health Literacy Initiative.

Continue to promote the use of clear language by providing free workshops, facilitating a regular get-together of staff and volunteers in the community who are interested in improving their use of clear language and modeling the use of clear language in all of Literacy Now Burnaby's documents and communications.

## **Sustainability**

*The community values the efforts of the Literacy Now Burnaby Steering Committee and wants to see it continue. The community would also like to see more opportunities for participation by the broader community on the Steering Committee and more communication about the ongoing work of Literacy Now Burnaby.*

## GOALS:

Refresh the Steering Committee by increasing representation from groups involved in the original planning process and others who have since joined the conversation about literacy in Burnaby in order to encourage broader community participation and collaboration, and expand Literacy Now Burnaby's ability to promote literacy awareness and improve access to literacy opportunities.

Look to the model created by the Early Childhood Development Table in Burnaby, and implement **Action Teams** that have responsibility for, and authority to, develop and plan activities that deliver on Literacy Now Burnaby priorities.

Develop a logo, promotional materials, and a web presence in order to raise the awareness and visibility of Literacy Now Burnaby and its work in the community.

Explore strategies for more regular communication with the broader community regarding literacy and the work of Literacy Now Burnaby.

Identify **Literacy Champions** in the community who can raise the issue of literacy in the local media and garner political interest.

Identify other sources of funding in order to expand the activities of Literacy Now Burnaby and its Action Teams and mitigate the impact should funding from *Legacies 2010/Literacy Now* come to an end.

Link up with other Literacy Now groups in the area to share ideas and successes.

## **8. What actions are planned against those goals?**

Continue to provide Community Development workshops for service providers.

Improve access to literacy information through better links on community websites.

Create a Literacy Now Burnaby web presence with literacy information, news and events.

Hold a Burnaby Reads event in one location with public participation and media coverage.

Identify Literacy Champions in the community who can raise the importance of literacy in the local media and garner political interest.

Participate in community tables and interagency meetings to continue to build more awareness and make connections in the community for new partnerships and activities.

Explore strategies for more regular communication with the broader community regarding literacy and the work of Literacy Now Burnaby.

## **9. What will be required to meet the goals and effectively employ actions for the coming year?**

We will need an active and energized Steering Committee and Action Teams and a strong commitment to our plan and actions to move forward.