

Community Based Literacy Programming
(Geographical region: SD64)
2011 Progress Update

Community Context:

The recession continues to have a growing impact on our community. The rise in unemployment and poverty is more marked than previous years. Many businesses have closed, relocated or are for sale, or are making staff cutbacks. Our partners at Community Services, Copper Kettle and CARE all continue to report increasing demands on their services. CARE was also recently faced with budget cutbacks which means they can no longer open on Fridays.

Although the situation is currently bleak there are positive responses community wide. Salt Spring Literacy (SSL) secured funding to conduct an in-depth, six-month research study into the employment problems on island. A number of other community organisations joined the project as steering committee members including Community Services, CARE, the CRD, and Islands Trust amongst others. After the data was collected these groups worked together to devise a list of recommendations to help address the problems identified. At the time of writing, SSL is about to move into the implementation phase of those recommendations, the Chamber of Commerce has already included one recommendation in their AGM as a priority for this year, and the local Connecting Generations program has adapted next year's programming to reflect the findings.

There is also further hope in regards to the economic problems in the community; the CRD created a Community Economic Development Commission to develop a long term strategy for improving the economic outlook of the community. The LOC is one of the commissioners and it is hoped that the commission will be in a position to further the recommendations of the employment research and to generally work towards managing the economic problems of the island.

The unmanageable costs of housing is also being addressed with the Islands Trust and CRD working together to form an affordable housing society to work on meeting housing needs. Although this is a long term solution fortunately in the short term the Land Bank's latest housing project is well underway and will result in affordable housing for a number of local families.

It should also be noted that Community Education, a local organisation which provided courses at a fee to community members is currently not offering further programs. This too may be an indication of the financial hardships faced in the community; even subsidised courses are too expensive for many budgets.

Task Groups and Collaborations

Community consultation of the LOC occurred in many ways in 2010-2011:

- Salt Spring Literacy Board
The board currently consists of a mixture of retired educators, business owners, financial advisors, learners, tutors, government workers and general community members.
- The ESL Committee
This is comprised of ESL experts from a number of universities, ESL tutors and interested community members
- The LMP Committee
Representatives from a number of community organisations sat on the committee to discuss community employment needs; Salt Spring Literacy, Community Services, CARE, the CRD, the Islands Trust.
- The weekly update
This weekly email containing local literacy news is distributed to around two hundred subscribers.
- The mental health/addiction committee
This group is comprised of staff and volunteers from SSL, Community Services, Community Ed and other interested community members.

As we live in a small community many members of one working group also sit on other boards or are affiliated with other organisations- this enables further networking.

Perhaps the most crucial collaboration of 2010-2011 was the project steering committee of the labour market partnership project. Early in 2010 SSL applied for funding to conduct a study into the employment problems on Salt Spring Island. This was a response to increasing numbers of learners requesting literacy help to improve their employment prospects. This project both solidified existing bonds between organisations and forged new ones. CARE, Community Services and SSL previously had good working relationships with one another but the collaborations with the CRD and the Islands Trust was new for SSL. These groups have committed to working together to implement some of the solutions proposed in the final report.

Collaboration between organisations is notoriously challenging, with collaborations often becoming competitions. However the main reason this group functioned so well was that each member actively looked after the best interests of the others. Each member looked at ways they could support the others activities and conscious effort was made to avoid duplication of services. Each organisation's expertise was acknowledged and respected. In a project requiring emotional and psychological support, Community Services took the lead. In a project involving learning and education, SSL took the lead, and likewise CARE in a project involving connecting employers and employees. Effective collaboration requires a deep understanding that each partner plays a vital role and the boundaries for each role are respected by the others. This respect and recognition neatly avoids the usual pitfalls of collaborations where groups feel competition due to limited funding.

Goals and actions of the current year

Goal: 2010 DLP?	Action taken?	Reason?	Collaboration?
One to one tutoring	Continued and expanded	It is estimated that there have been between around 150 matches in the last twelve months. This continues to be the predominant literacy support on SSI.	Although the program is run by SSL referrals from Community Services, CARE and the library are in invaluable.
Online programs for upgrading	The SSL Learner Fund can now pay the deposit for SIDES on behalf of financially struggling learners.	Although we initially viewed this as developing a local system in collaboration with SD64 in the end this seemed an unnecessary duplication of services. The programs offered at SIDES meets our needs and so this was developed instead.	
ESL mothers	Friday Family Drop-in program was established	Every Friday a drop-in program for ESL families is available. The SD64 ELF program offered the use of their specialist venue to support this project.	SD64 and the ELF program have supplied the venue in addition to referrals.
ESL Movie Night	The program was cancelled	The program was cancelled due to attendance. The time restrictions on ESL learners means the flexibility of one to one works better than a set class time.	
Workshops	Know Your Rights, Hard of Hearing, Tutor Training and Development and ESLSAP workshops were held.	In addition to the workshops listed the Hard of Hearing resulted in an ASL course which is now offered every week. The workshops for the homeless have received funding for 2011.	Community Services was a partner in the Know Your Rights and will partner for the homeless workshops.

Goal: 2010 DLP?	Action taken?	Reason?	Collaboration?
Financial Literacy	None	Although the program was developed- without funding the project could not move ahead.	
Homework Club	Program cancelled	Although this program was launched the library had to put it on hold until the new library is built. The space in the temporary facility is too limited.	Salt Spring Public Library and SSL.
Learning Difficulty Support Group	Development in progress	SSL is building a new website, it is hoped that it will contain chat rooms for parents and children with learning disabilities.	
Expansion to the outer islands	None	This continues to be the biggest challenge for SSL. Additional staff have been hired and it is hoped that this will allow time for staff to visit the outer islands and develop a plan for supporting literacy beyond SSI.	SD64 has repeatedly expressed its willingness to support the expansion
* NEW *	LMP Project	This was not in the plan but when funding was secured it became a major focus of 2010-2011. It has many benefits. It created partnerships throughout the community. It collected valuable data which those services can use to improve their programming and gave SSL new directions for 2011-2012.	SSL, CARE, Community Services, Islands trust, CRD, Copper Kettle and other community members.

Goal: 2010 DLP?	Action taken?	Reason?	Collaboration?
* NEW *	Computer Help	2010-2011 saw an unprecedented demand for computer help. In response to this SSL created three drop-in help sessions per week in addition to the one to one tutoring. Two of the sessions are late night/ evening openings.	CARE and the SS Public Library provide most of the referrals for this program.
FreeVoice	Website trial completed, and funding secured for further development.	The trial blogsite giving a voice to marginalised members of our community was well received and we have now secured funding to develop the site further and link this to a workshop series in a project where SSL will partner with Community Services.	
Travelling Book Box	Continued and expanded	The Travelling Book now attends Soups On, Let's Do Brunch and the Food bank, in addition to the free books being available six days per week at SSL.	The Anglican Church and Community Services allow the TBB to visit their programs.
NEW	The Learner Fund was established	In response to a generous donation from a community member and supplemented by securing additional funding SSL developed the Learner Fund to which learners can apply to for financial assistance to cover the associated costs of learning	

Indications of success

Clearly the strongest indicator that the actions are working to support literacy can be seen in the number of active, enrolled learners at Salt Spring Literacy. 2010 saw a significant increase in learners. Close to 150 learners enrolled during 2010. During the first five months of 2011 60 new learners enrolled suggesting that 2011 will have a similar number of learners to 2010. Given the official population of Salt Spring Island is 9,640 (BC Stats- 2006 Census) this represents 1.6% of the population receiving literacy assistance at SSL in a given year. In addition over 120 community members were involved as volunteers in the last year. In total that means 2.8% of the population was directly engaged in community literacy through SSL. Of course this number does not include other community literacy involvement such as private courses, at home development and community members who participate indirectly for example by referring others to various programs.

Clearly the numbers listed above illustrate an impact on the community as learners fulfil their ambitions and build their self esteem. There is also the far reaching impact of breaking the cycle of illiteracy for the children of these learners. Concurrent with the impact for learners is an impact for volunteers who are gaining the satisfaction and personal enhancement that tutoring and other volunteer activities provides.

There are three key supports to successful literacy work: community support, service collaboration and financial support. Gaining the support of the community results in increased learners, increased volunteers and increased donations. Collaborations between service organisations means resources can be shared, effective referrals between agencies can be made and programs can operate more efficiently. Financial support provides the necessary staff and material resources that are required to provide literacy services.

Challenges

Funding continues to be the major challenge for literacy services in this district. For example SSL is no longer eligible for almost 30% of its previous Legacies funding as of 2011. It is not clear at this point whether this will result in diminished services in the future unless alternative funding is secured. Moreover, many of the literacy goals and priorities from last year that were not achieved were due to a lack of suitable funding. Expansion to the outer islands, a financial literacy program and the lifeskills workshops for the homeless are three examples of programs which did not operate due to limited resources although funding recently secured through the United Way means the workshops will go ahead as programming for people with mental health and addiction issues.

2011-2012: the coming year

Goal/Priority/ Objective	Action proposed?	Why? new challenge/ opportunity/issue?	What is needed to achieve this?
One to one tutoring	Continue current program offered at SSL.	This continues to be the most popular, effective and cost efficient method of providing literacy support to the community.	The current daily operating costs of SSL must be maintained.
Employment support	That a number of the recommendations from the employment report be implemented.	With the high cost of living, low wages and rising economic hardship it is important to focus on supporting those seeking employment.	It is likely new sources of funding would be required before initiatives can be implemented. Collaborations with service providers will also be required.
Support for people with mental health or addiction issues	A lifeskills workshop series, Free Voice website and the appropriate recommendations from the employment project.	This demographic represents an above average portion of our community and therefore deserves special support.	It is likely new sources of funding would be required before initiatives can be implemented. Collaborations with service providers will also be required.
Outer island support	A realistic first step would be an assessment the needs of the outer islands and a recommendation for further action.	The geographic restrictions of this community means outer island residents cannot easily access the services available on Salt Spring Island.	It is likely new sources of funding would be required before significant initiatives can be implemented.
ESLSAP	Programs continued with a new emphasis on promoting community awareness.	The ESLSAP program continues to be the only service available to the ESL community. It therefore has to operate as one stop shop for language, social, visa and cultural support.	Continued ESLSAP funding is required.

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Tutor support and handbook	Adjust tutor support program to reflect changing needs of tutors and learners at SSL and develop a handbook for new tutors.	Because the SSL volunteer tutors range from some who are experts in their field to others who need basic training, generalized workshops are insufficient. They need to be supplemented with individualized training and consultation which will ensure that SSL tutors provide strong support to their learners. This is currently in operation but will expand and develop in the future.	This requires the continuation of the Educational Programmer at SSL.
Travelling Book Box	Continue and possibly adapt the program	Donations for this program in terms of books and magazines was greater than expected. Whilst we want to continue distributing free books SSL will investigate other uses for the surplus books.	
Literacy Centre	Continue the assorted services provided	The SS Public Library which currently provide the majority of public access computers is reducing its services due to the rebuild. The library will also no longer do exam invigilation and study space will be restricted. Therefore it is crucial SSL continues these services.	Continued funding.