

# District Literacy Plan

Quesnel, BC

School District No. 28

July 15, 2013

*Literacy Outreach Coordinator: Rebecca Beuschel*



*District Literacy Contact: Cynthia Bernier*





## Reflections on the current year:

### 1) Task group:

#### a. Who takes part in the task group?

- ◆ Vicki Esplen, *Retired SD 28 Literacy Teacher*
- ◆ Sandy Meidlinger, *Supported Child Development Coordinator, Child Development Centre (CDC)*
- ◆ Karen Grunau, *private tutor and community volunteer*
- ◆ Chrystal Ingliss, *volunteer adult literacy tutor*
- ◆ Elizabeth Hunter, *Manager and Curator, Quesnel & District Museum*
- ◆ Janet Brooks, *Chief Operating Officer, Literacy Quesnel Society*
- ◆ Rebecca Beuschel, *Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Literacy Quesnel Society*

#### b. How is the work of this group organized?

The task group meets once per month to discuss outreach activities and to support the work of the LOC. The individual members assist with activities such as story time events and public presentations whenever possible. We also have a Board of Directors and the Board meets once every two months or as necessary. The Board focuses on the decisions pertaining to the society, while the task force (which we call the “working committee”) focuses on the activities and outreach.

Our current Board of Directors are:

- ◆ Vicki Esplen, *President, Retired SD 28 Literacy Teacher*
- ◆ Sandy Meidlinger, *Vice President, Supported Child Development Coordinator, CDC*
- ◆ Poonam Miglani, *Secretary, Community volunteer*
- ◆ Kiley Sales, *Treasurer, Academic Advisor, Continuing & Adult Education SD28*
- ◆ John Havens, *Director at Large, Mental Health Physician & Retired Family Physician*
- ◆ Beverlee Barr, *Director at Large, Dietician, Coordinator, Pregnancy Outreach Program*
- ◆ Rita Atake, *Director at Large, Assistant Regional Director, College of New Caledonia*

### 2) Community context:

#### a. 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? Consider both positive and negative impacts.

Economically speaking, Quesnel remains reasonably stable. Our main industry is forestry so there is always the potential for closures and shut downs that could affect the economy and the community, but for the present time, there does not seem to be any danger of that happening.

There is on-going speculation around mining development that would boost the local economy and possibly alter the demographics of the community but so far, nothing concrete has changed from last year's reporting period.

Fundraising for the Multi Centre (a sports and arts complex) continues until the end of June 2013 and then a decision is due as to whether the development of the centre proceeds. Many people feel this would attract more people to Quesnel because of the range of activities and events that a complex like the Multi Centre could host.

The decision by the provincial government to withdraw financial support to Decoda caused a great deal of anxiety for literacy groups across BC. Our board met with Maureen Kehler and expressed our concern for the groups whose financial situation was impacted. We also contacted our MLA with our concerns. Even though we were not negatively impacted by the decision and felt grateful for our on-going financial support, we felt strongly about supporting literacy organizations in their time of distress.

### **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?**

Literacy Quesnel Society has a broad outreach in terms of collaborations and partnerships. In the past year, we have written support letters for North Cariboo Aboriginal Family Program Society (included in their CALP application), Quesnel Tillicum Native Friendship Centre Society (for their application to New Horizons for Seniors) and for a facilitator who came to offer training here in the realm of emotional literacy (Jason Cressey). We have also supported the activities of the Quesnel & District Child Development Centre – CDC - (Language and Literacy program for children on the waiting list for speech therapy) and the development of the multicultural activities through the Welcoming Communities committee.

The LOC sits on several committees that meet monthly and this provides invaluable opportunity to network and share important information about activities, training and community feedback to events. These committees include Success by Six, Adult Services Team, Parent Child Resource Team, Quesnel Rotary Club Executive Committee, Better At Home Steering Committee, Pregnancy Outreach Program Advisory Committee (meets twice yearly) and our own literacy committee.

An important collaboration that developed last year saw the work come to fruition this year. Members and staff of School District 28, Quesnel Rotary Club and Literacy Quesnel Society came together to purchase and distribute new classroom books to every grade 2 class across the district. We also struck new partnerships with the two private schools as we included their grade 2 classes in the gifting of grade 2 books. The LOC and different members of SD28 staff attended the "When Vulnerable Readers Thrive" conference. This experience allowed us to share in the understanding of the powerful influence of summer reading for vulnerable readers.

The second part of the collaboration between SD 28, Quesnel Rotary and the Literacy Society is to initiate a summer reading club for identified vulnerable readers. These students will have the opportunity to choose books to take home for the summer. We hope this activity will begin to address the literacy gap that struggling readers experience.

The Forest Legacy Foundation chose Literacy Quesnel Society (LQS) as one of the recipients of the Raise-A-Reader funding (specific allocation of funding). This means LQS received just over \$12,000 for project support and development. With the \$12,000 we will focus activities on family literacy and parent and adult support. We will start these initiatives in September 2013.

The local branch of Tim Horton's (downtown location) has chosen Literacy Quesnel Society as the recipient of their Smile Cookie Week, which occurs in September. For one week, Tim Horton's will sell cookies and donate a portion of the proceeds to literacy in Quesnel! This came about because of successful networking. The manager of the local store asked her friend who works at the public library if she knew anything about local literacy or book projects. Her friend gave her the LOC's phone number. The LOC explained to the manager what literacy work is being done and described projects such as Books for Babies and the Bright Red Bookshelf program. The manager took this information back to the store owner who liked it so much that she contacted the LOC to confirm Literacy Quesnel as the chosen organization for 2013. This is reflective of the small community we work and live in but also of the network we have developed over the years. Community literacy work runs best through a drip filter model – slow and steady!

### **b. What are the essential ongoing collaborations?**

Below is a table explaining on-going collaborations and sample activities.

<b>Collaborating agency</b>	<b>Sample activity</b>
North Cariboo Aboriginal Family Program Society	Tutor training/CALP
Cariboo Regional District Library	Providing space & support
Quesnel & District Parent Advisory Committee (DPAC)	Sharing training information
School District 28 (and many individual schools)	One to One, Roots of Empathy, space
Quesnel & District Child Development Centre	B of D, support for events, rent freeze
Pregnancy Outreach Program	Presentations, Advisory board, B of D
Ministry of Children and Family Development	Committee collaboration
Quesnel and District Museum and Archives	Event support, working committee
Quesnel Rotary Club,	B of D, SD Literacy project
Quesnel Lions Club	One to One program support
Northern Health Authority	Public Health Nurses/ Books for Babies
Quesnel Employment Services	Referrals for literacy support
Quesnel Tillicum Society Native Friendship Centre	Story Time event space, networking
Quesnel Word Spinners Organization	Sharing space for events
College of New Caledonia	B of D
Continuing & Adult Education	B of D, in-kind use of space
Bouchie Lake & Parkland Rec Commission	Books for celebration events/rural areas
Quesnel Child, Youth and Family Network Society*	Committees & networking

\*Network Committees include Adult Services Team, Parent Child Resource Team & Children First, Success By Six  
B of D = Board of Directors

**c. What makes collaborations work well?**

Transparency and a willingness to share information makes collaborations work well. When groups or individuals keep information to themselves, it hinders community collaboration. In Quesnel, we enjoy a network of organizational sharing where information about training, funding and project development is shared openly with the intention of building a better and stronger community. Healthy collaborations take time, patience, empathy and understanding. People and groups need to have a sense of trust before meaningful practice and networking can take place. Trust comes with time and experience. Many of the groups we collaborate with have been meeting for years and have developed a strong sense of trust.

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

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

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

**c. What adjustments were made to the plan? That is, as the year progressed were there new opportunities or were there changes that did not allow for some actions to be taken?**

This year we continued offering and hosting a variety of outreach activities. We collaborated on training and followed up with additional training (emotional literacy) in response to community feedback.

We continued offering popular activities such as Books for Babies (filled and distributed over 230 book bags to new babies), Story Time (free family activity), Bright Red Bookshelves and the One to One Literacy program in two schools. We also presented stories at the annual Child Development Centre Variety Show and gave out free books to over 100 children. We continuously accepted book donations and then sorted and cleaned over 400 books for six bookshelves throughout the community. We coordinated Word Wizards game with downtown businesses and offered prizes from the local bookstore as incentive. We hosted a dinnertime AGM, a family literacy day open house breakfast and two separate tutor-gathering celebrations.

We expanded our Board of Directors to include Rita Atake, a representative of the College of New Caledonia. We have plans to expand our working committee/task force also and have two new members in mind.

No real adjustments were necessary apart from moving our strategic planning session from the Spring of 2013 to October 2013. The additional partnerships with Forest Legacy Foundation and Tim Horton's were exciting additions to our plans and future activities (see 3a for details).

## 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.

We continue to expand our circle of people who know us. This is important in communities because one sure measure of success is whether community members know you and feel comfortable using you for service. People regularly drop in to our office looking for books, resources or requesting information on tutoring help for their children. We know the organizations to refer these walk-in clients to and always follow up with the organizations in question.

This year two groups asked for letters of support as they work to expand their own literacy activities. We participated in two new events in rural areas that celebrated volunteerism – the organizers asked us. The LOC made a presentation to the Principals meeting (SD28) and four schools subsequently inquired about literacy initiatives for their community groups or their schools. People give us positive feedback about our activities but in particular about the Bright Red Bookshelves and the Books for Babies program. Our newest Board member, who is also new to Quesnel, was intrigued by the bookshelves that her sons “are constantly using” and joined our board. Work BC employees contact us any time they have a client with low literacy – to ask our advice and seek feedback.

Our relationship with the Lions Club and the Quesnel Rotary Club is very strong and continues to grow. We have developed a significant connection to a group of seniors called “Voice for Seniors” and are exploring opportunities for literacy development. The LOC is on the steering committee for a new community initiative called “Better At Home” which works to make it possible for seniors to stay in their own home for as long as possible. These examples illustrate the success of our society because they demonstrate that people are approaching us for help, for information and for support.

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

◆ Professional Development opportunities support literacy work. The LOC was able to participate in the regional training hosted by Decoda in Kamloops and this event helped connect the LOC to colleagues in the area. The opportunity to participate in “When Vulnerable Readers Thrive” was invaluable for understanding the perspective of struggling readers, their teachers and the school district working to address the issue. Our Board and working committee supported using our own funds for these activities because they believe professional development is important but some organizations may not see it that way. Professional development should be encouraged and supported financially (by the province) because smaller organizations have to make a choice of using limited funds for outreach or for professional development and this can be a difficult decision to make.

◆ Support from other service organizations helps literacy work well in Quesnel. We enjoy being part of a strong networking hub and when we need letters of support from service agencies, or use of space, or expertise, we know we can rely on each other. One clear example of support

was the Quesnel & District Child Development Centre (also the owner of the building - our landlord), deciding to hold our rent steady for a 3 year period, rather than subject us to fluctuating rates, so we can make realistic predictions in our budget discussions and continue doing the work we do in the community. This type of support is reflective of our good relationship but also shows respect and thoughtfulness towards our work and our presence in the community.

## **6) Challenges:**

### **a. What are the difficulties?**

The difficulties remain constant and they centre on funding. If we do not know how likely or how stable funding is then we cannot accurately estimate our growth or realistically expand our variety of activities.

Another difficulty is the lack of affordable networking and professional development opportunities for the LOC and the organization supporting literacy development in each particular community. In Quesnel, our board and task group values the on-going learning opportunities and allocates a piece of the budget towards LOC professional development but it remains expensive to access opportunities because of geography. There is always the question of "is it worth it?" to apply money to one person's development (the LOC in this case) when that money could be used for community-wide activities. We need to value this avenue for growth and development and sometimes it needs to be supported or required or even mandated from the top down. The potential for isolation and for working in a bubble is very strong in communities outside of the lower mainland.

### **b. What would help?**

Stable, predictable, on-going funding would be fantastic! If we knew what funding was available for a multi-year stretch then we could plan more accurately.

Provincial training and networking opportunities, funded by the province, on top of the Literacy Outreach funding, would help reduce the isolation and help invigorate LOCs.

### **For the coming year:**

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

Sometimes the opportunities present themselves unexpectedly and the key is to be ready. In Quesnel, we have a well-functioning group, supported by the community and we manage to respond to requests or needs within our current budget. If there is growth due to mining or other industry development, we will respond as best we can. We do not know of anything specific on the horizon so we will continue working at a steady pace to address literacy and the issues as they arise.

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

The Board and the working committee (the task force) will come together for a strategic planning session in October. This will help set the direction for our activities and growth for the 2013-14 year. We are working to increase the diversity of members on our working committee and have plans to initiate some new family literacy activities with our Forest Legacy funding.

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

We have had a consistent presence in the community for 5 years now and we can feel the difference it makes to be located in the same space with the same name for that time. Our aim is to continue to be present in the community, to network effectively with other service clubs and social organizations and to continue with our outreach. We will work within the confines of our budget, which means that the LOC works part time 10 months of the year so we have carry over funding to take us into the following year. The society remains stable and we have a committed board of directors who are competently guided by our Chief Operating Officer. We plan our activities to move at a steady and realistic pace and this has proven successful so far.