

## **District Literacy Plan Richmond 2013**

### **Community Context**

Richmond is an ethnically diverse, growing and dynamic urban centre. According to city statistics the 2012 population was 199,302. The estimated population for 2013 is 205,133. Since 2006 this represents an increase of 9.2%. More than 65% of the population is from a visible minority with 44% of these being of Chinese descent. Life expectancy on average is 83.4 years. Richmond's economy supports 135,000 jobs mostly in the hospitality, retail, light manufacturing, fishing and agricultural sectors. Twelve of the top 100 high tech companies in BC are located in Richmond with MacDonald, Dettwiler & Associates ranked ninth. 56.47% of Richmond's population both reside and work in Richmond with 26.82% living in Richmond but working in Vancouver. The average price of a single family home in Richmond is just under \$1 million. The proportion of rentals is 39.1%. Census statistics list the average family income as \$74,700 with the median income being \$67,627. According to the 2011 census, 84% of Richmond's families are either married or living common-law. 16% are lone parent families. 64% are couples with children.

As in previous reports the statistics generally indicate a vibrant and wealthy community. However, Richmond has two statistics, which are a continued source of concern. Richmond has an overall poverty rate of 22% with the second highest poverty rate in Canada. Increasing use of the Food Banks and Community Meal Programs, are evidence of these statistics. Average attendance at each of the Community Meals is 140-180. In addition the 2008 Canadian Health Literacy study listed more than 60% of Richmond residents have a health literacy level below level 2. Seniors, new immigrants and the unemployed are the most vulnerable in the population. These statistics create a distinct challenge in enhancing the literacy levels of Richmond's population beyond the basic functional level of English.

### **Task Group**

The central task group for Literacy Richmond consists of representative of a variety of community agencies, the City and the School District. They oversee the work of the Literacy Outreach Coordinator, ensure that the goals of the Richmond Literacy Plan are being addressed, make suggestions for further literacy work and monitor the spending of the community grants. Meetings are held on an as needed basis. Members of this group are:

Margaret Dixon	Literacy Outreach Coordinator
De Whalen	Women's Resource Centre (Financial Steward)
Lee Ann Smith	Richmond Public Library
Barbara Fitzpatrick	Sunrise Rotary Club, Chair of Task Group
Anne Swann	Vancouver Coastal Health
Pinky Dang	SUCCES

In addition, a Community Partners Meeting is held bi-monthly. Participation in these meetings varies from 16-24 people representing the wide spectrum of not-for-profit organizations in Richmond, the City and the School District. At these meetings progress on the Literacy Plan is discussed and suggestions for further enhancements are made. Each group that has received community funding reports on the progress of their project. Various guest speakers dealing with a particular aspect of literacy are often received at these meetings. This past year topics reviewed have been financial, health and emotional literacy.

### **Community Development & Literacy Collaboration**

The culture of collaboration is well established in the Richmond context. With respect to Literacy, all community funds expended require a partnership between at least two community groups. In almost all partnerships, the Public Library is one of the links. Some of the best partnerships have happened when intergenerational collaborations are established. An example would be the Richmond Family Place (young children) and the Women's Resource Centre (adult women). In particular it is evident that the issue of poverty is emerging, as a crucial factor in the literacy needs of Richmond residents. Consequently the Food Bank and the Poverty Response Committee have established a strong bond with the Women's Resource Centre and the Richmond Family Place. The Literacy Outreach Coordinator has become a member of the Poverty Response Committee and the Richmond Homeless Coalition. This year a strong partnership has developed with Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

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

The majority of the work of Literacy Richmond this year has been focused on the following goals:

- Organizations in Richmond will work together in a collaborative fashion to increase the literacy skills of Richmond residents.
- Develop the level of literacy with vulnerable adult populations.
- Continue to support an emphasis on early access to literacy for pre-school age children and their caregivers.

The goal of working together in a collaborative fashion to increase the literacy skills of Richmond residents has been developed by expanding the community partners' network to include representation at a variety of tables. The definition of literacy is all encompassing including the traditional print literacy as well as financial, health, physical and technological. Examples of these collaborations are:

Poverty Response Committee and TD Canada Trust; Financial Literacy, Learning Together and Vancouver Coastal Health; Health Literacy, First Society and Kwantlen Polytechnic University; and Technological Literacy.

The Neighbourhood Learning Centre is continuing to develop as a hub for literacy activities. There are daily English development classes, sponsored through the Continuing Education department of the Richmond School District. Richmond

Family Place runs a weekly family literacy program working with preschool age children and their caregivers. The support of the Richmond School District has led to space being made available for free to non-profit organizations working in one or both, of the following areas:

- Promoting and enhancing literacy
- Improving learning for those who are economically disadvantaged.

These provisions are clearly designed to address concerns regarding both literacy and poverty in Richmond.

The goal of developing the level of literacy within vulnerable adult populations has been addressed through two new initiatives. A Community Adult Literacy Program (CALP) grant was successfully received for the first time in Richmond. This partnership between the Public Library, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, FIRST Society and Literacy Richmond has initiated two programs. One is working with pre-school aged children and their caregivers on family literacy activities. With the support of child-minders, the adults receive weekly adult literacy directed activities. This program is offered at both Brighthouse and Cambie libraries. At the conclusion of the foundational family literacy portion of the program, Kwantlen tutors are used to enhance and develop the skills of the adults in the area of vocational literacy. A second program within the CALP grant is working with live-in caregivers. This partnership with FIRST Society and the Public Library offers two weekly sessions to develop the literacy skills of the caregivers with a Canadian culture content. Again, once this foundational program concludes, Kwantlen tutors work with the caregivers to enhance their skills in the area of vocational literacy.

The second initiative is through the Vancouver Sun Raise-A-Reader program. This partnership with Richmond Women's Resource Centre and the School District Settlement Workers is working with vulnerable women as they aim to return to the workforce through developing their literacy skills.

The continued emphasis on early access to literacy for pre-school age children and their caregivers is illustrated by support to the following programs:

- **Get Ready for School**, a play based literacy program at the Food Bank where children have literacy activities supported by two volunteers while their caregivers pick up the weekly family food supplies
- **Gardening Fun for Families** community garden literacy based program working with the South Asian community.
- **Strong Start/Mother Goose**, offering support for Muslim families
- **Chai at Chaupal**, offering oral conversation circles at the Temple to Sikh women
- **Cook Early Learning Centre**, offering play based literacy activities to pre-school children and their families
- **Volunteer Richmond together with Family Place and the Public Library** delivering early literacy kits to families with young children

### **Indications of Success**

Each community group that receives funding is required to submit a final report detailing their expenditures and an evaluation of the success of the initiative. In each of the projects funded there were common themes:

- More time for the sessions
- More sessions for more participants
- Repeat or extend the sessions
- Increase the frequency of the sessions
- More conversation opportunities
- More individual tutoring
- The benefit of collaborative partnerships
- The bimonthly community partners' meetings which enhance networking and collaboration

For many projects the intergenerational aspect of the program was a major component of its success. In particular, caregivers, especially elderly ones, benefitted greatly from learning with the children. They felt that it was a safe environment in which to learn literacy skills. In addition this helped with childcare issues.

### **Challenges**

The following challenges are consistent with previous reports:

- Sustainability
- Child minding provisions
- Length of programs
- Consistency of program offerings

In addition the following challenges have emerged:

- Drop-in programs result in unpredictable and inconsistent attendance
- Partnerships and collaboration require extensive communication

We will continue to address each of these challenges as all service providers believe that the successes far outweigh the challenges.

### **2013-2014**

The Richmond Literacy Plan was reviewed and a needs assessment conducted with literacy service providers. The following goals were adopted for the coming year:

- Increase the literacy skills of entry level workers
- Increase the literacy levels of students in satellite families
- Investigate the need for literacy programs to expand throughout the City of Richmond
- Emphasize the importance of literacy in the public domain
- Emphasize the need for Richmond residents to enhance their health literacy

Raise-A-Reader funds will be used to enhance family literacy activities. CALP funding will again be sought and if successful will be applied to adult literacy and family literacy programming. The use of the Neighbourhood Learning Centre,

including the use of the attached Community Gardens will be actively pursued. Continued collaboration with service providers, the City and the School District will be emphasized. A new partnership will be sought with AVIA Employment Services in order to enhance the workplace literacy goal.