

The District Literacy Plan 2013

Renfrew-Collingwood Community

Reflections on the current year:

1) Task group:

Who takes part in the task group?

- Heather Brown, Collingwood Community Policing Centre
- Gavin Clark, Community Schools Coordinator, Windermere Family of Schools
- Angela Evans, BIA Coordinator, Collingwood BIA (Business Improvement Area)
- Jennifer Gray-Grant, Executive Director, CNH
- Kulwant Kaur, Director of Operations, CNH
- Lea Laberge, Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House
- Marie Manansala, Collingwood Neighbourhood House
- William McMichael, Former Language Education Coordinator, UBC; Renfrew-Collingwood resident
- Timothy Shay, Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Collingwood Neighbourhood House
- Vincent Vezina, Library Technician, Vancouver Public Library Collingwood Branch

b. How is the work of this group organized? (See the following section “Reflecting and Renewing: Ways to review and set priorities for the community literacy plan each year” for information about how task groups are organized.)

- Service providers and active members in the community are recruited onto the committee. The task group meets every other month to set priorities for the literacy plan, keep track of the current projects, and share highlights from their work. Several new members were recruited this year, bringing new ideas on improving literacy work in the neighbourhood and providing additional support from community service providers.

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.

Some successful initiatives started last year have been well maintained and attended despite the loss of our previous LOC. Our former LOC left very quickly (and moved to another continent) so our new LOC had a bit of a learning curve. He had already been involved with the Collingwood Tower project, a weekly conversational English class for tenants of the Collingwood Tower, a low-income senior’s residential building, and so that project has continued successfully. (It started in September 2010.) Seniors from a range of linguistic backgrounds enjoy informal English classes and

conversations. The seniors take a leadership role and modify and direct aspects of the program as they see fit. For instance, this spring, (2013), a growing number of Mandarin speakers are attending and one multi-lingual senior has participated in making a simpler 'practical phrases' lesson plan as most of the group speak little or no English. Other seniors continue with a more advanced set of lessons and exercises. Other activities, such as pool, ping pong and Chinese mah-jong, potlucks, and outings to the local library branch and the neighbourhood house have been incorporated into this project. Several seniors, previously isolated, have become increasingly involved in community events outside their building. One senior started with the conversation group, escalated her volunteerism and now participates in various neighbourhood activities; for example she sits on the Renfrew-Collingwood Seniors' Advisory Council and the CNH Board of Directors. In addition the weekly homemade snacks and camaraderie facilitate the meeting of neighbours for the first time in their own building

- The ESL Read On! Page in the *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News* was renewed for another year. Every month, 5,000 copies of the *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News* are printed and distributed to local residents. Each monthly issue has an ESL Read On! page with teacher resources and a podcast for learners on the website. The ESL Read On! Page is a very good resource for local ESL teachers, students and new immigrants. Over the past year we learned from the new Statistics Canada findings that our neighbourhood continues to be very diverse and has a population that overwhelmingly speaks English as a second language. This has taught us that we need to continue to make efforts to reach out to those who do not speak English as a first language. Only about 30 percent of residents speak English as a first language.
- We wanted to get more engagement from residents of the Collingwood Tower. The new LOC has been organizing full-page legacy interviews that have been published in the *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News*. Based on the idea that our personal life stories are our most valuable legacy for our community and our families. Members of the CNH community are encouraged to share highlights of their lives through an interview. Subjects are asked to write their own version of the most important or memorable event in their lives. The published article, shared with the community creates intercultural bridges and a deeper perspective on the diverse global experience of our immediate neighbours.
- We have a number of family programs in Renfrew-Collingwood but we wanted to find ways to more easily enhance programs with increased opportunities to improve literacy. Figures from Statistics Canada have shown us that education levels attained by residents are lower than the city's average. Renfrew-Collingwood successfully received \$10,000 in Raise-a-Reader funds from the *Vancouver Sun* through Decoda Literacy Solutions. The money will be used in family literacy programs at CNH. The participants in the family programs (parents and children attend together) Families Branching Out, the First Nations Am'latsi Program and Family Place will benefit from increased family literacy initiatives such as more First Nations themed books and storytelling experiences. With the funds we will enhance the literacy component in these existing programs.

- Renfrew-Collingwood has the highest number of seniors of any neighbourhood in Vancouver. Community Action for Seniors' Independence (CASI), a pilot project aiming to help seniors live in their homes longer in Renfrew-Collingwood, has been running since fall 2010 providing non-medical supports to seniors. CASI provides local seniors with services from a community shuttle for seniors, and a light housekeeping service to a seniors walking club and a written guide to seniors' services in Renfrew-Collingwood. Seniors from the Collingwood Tower used the CASI shuttle to go on tours to the Collingwood library branch and to CNH to join programs such as the twice weekly community lunch.
- Renfrew-Collingwood was one of the first communities to complete a literacy plan. We finished the last year of implementation in 2011. With no further implementation funds and very little money for coordination, we find it challenging to keep all our initiatives sustainable. Luckily, more money for coordination and more funding opportunities were made possible, and with these funds we have been able to sustain our current projects, and also to support some new initiatives in the following year.

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?**
 - Collaborating with our task group members and the organizations they represent, such as the school board, the Windermere Family of Schools, the Collingwood Community Policing Centre, the Collingwood and Renfrew library branches, Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House and CNH, we are able to bring out more ideas and discussions on how to support literacy in Renfrew-Collingwood. In-kind resources brought by them made it possible for us to maintain existing initiatives even with very limited funding. It also made it easier for us to spread information about initiatives and opportunities throughout our various organizations.
 - Financial support from Decoda Literacy Solutions, and free space provided by Collingwood Neighbourhood House, Collingwood Community Policing Centre, Evergreen Community Health Centre, and the Collingwood Tower helped us maintain the ongoing literacy programs. Help from the BIA allowed us to work with local business to coordinate a local business walk.
 - Cultural Connectors and the CASI program at CNH helped us reach out to more local seniors. Cultural Connectors are local residents from different cultural backgrounds who were recruited by CNH as volunteers to reach out to isolated individuals from a variety of cultural backgrounds to tell them about and welcome them to programs and events in the community. Without the help of the Cultural Connectors, the ESL class at the Collingwood Tower would not be so successful.

b. What are the essential ongoing collaborations?

- We highly value the support brought by our literacy task group members and the collaboration established among those organizations they represent. The task group members give us different lenses to look at literacy in our community, and bring more ideas to the table. New members from the Collingwood BIA and the local policing centre joined our task group this year. Our library and Windermere Family of Schools contacts have been key participants. With more service providers gathered together, more collaboration will be built around literacy.
- Our collaborations with Cultural Connectors, CASI and other projects at CNH are also essential ongoing collaborations. Those collaborations help to build and expand the capacity of local residents and seniors and make use of local resources and network. They are the key to building accessible, sufficient and sustainable lifelong literacy programs for Renfrew-Collingwood residents.

c. What makes collaborations work well?

- In Renfrew-Collingwood, we believe that literacy is more than mere reading and writing, more than the ability to calculate numbers or read charts and graphs. Literacy empowers people with the ability to express their thoughts, ideas, and feelings, with the opportunity to pursue personal dreams and build confidence, and most of all with the ability to access to social interactions. Our vision of literacy as a community building tool guides our steps and makes our collaborations more effective.
- In Renfrew-Collingwood we have a very strong culture of collaboration. We have a large group of service providers who meet every two months to share news and information and collaborate on neighbourhood initiatives. We also work with other services providers on a number of smaller initiatives. This culture of collaboration has served us well with the literacy project because we are comfortable and have a lot of experience working together on projects.
- Our literacy programs depend highly on the support of local residents and resources; in the long-run they also contribute back to local projects and events. The residents' capacity building and service network expansion both benefit and are benefited from our literacy programs. Take the Collingwood Tower Project for example: the CASI program gave us the opportunity to reach out to isolated, non-English-speaking seniors, the Cultural Connectors Project gives us the volunteers and ongoing support, and Collingwood Tower provides the space for activities. As the program goes on, over 70 seniors who live in the apartment have attended our literacy activities, and many of them also became active participants in other community programs, such as the walking club organized by CASI, the Renfrew-Collingwood Seniors' Advisory Council and supportive volunteerism at CNH and in the neighbourhood.

4) Goals and actions for the current year:

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

Priority 1: Connect Residents and Service Providers

- Encourage the active participation among local service providers in the task group.
- Ensure service providers and residents within Renfrew-Collingwood know about and have access to community mapping information.
- Link service providers to resident gifts and skills.

Priority 2: Expand Capacity

- Work together to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of existing resources and reduce duplications of resources and service.
- Develop an accessible, comprehensive and sustainable set of program options.
- Foster resident leadership and the collaborative development of local initiatives for sustainable lifelong learning.

Priority 3: Maintain Existing Programs

- Address expressed needs for literacy, numeracy and social skills for Canadian-born adults and new immigrants with a focus on seniors, adults and immigrants.
- Sustain programs through concrete resources and in-kind support from public, private and community organizations.

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

Priority 1: Connect Residents and Service Providers

- Maintained the existing Renfrew-Collingwood Community Services Database and the Renfrew-Collingwood Community Maps website (<http://www.cnh.bc.ca/communitymap/>).
- New members from the Collingwood BIA and community policing centre were recruited onto the literacy task group.
- Many local residents who participated in literacy programs are linked to programs and events offered by other service providers. Two participants in the Collingwood Tower have become Advisory Group members in the discussion around seniors in Renfrew-Collingwood and one senior joined the CNH Board of Directors.

Priority 2: Expand Capacity

- Literacy programs for seniors like the Collingwood Tower Project aim to give seniors accessible and convenient literacy activities.
- Reading Circle activity develops increased language confidence and competence in a cross section of community members.
- Literacy interviews with emphasis on the value of the personal story act to illustrate the universal human experience and to connect diverse members of the community.
- Tours to the library and the neighbourhood house were well attended by local residents. These tours introduced local facilities and services to the participants.
- Cultural Connectors from CNH support the sustainability of many literacy programs and are all local residents who become leaders and facilitators in community work.

- Book kiosk at CNH offered families that are living in poverty the opportunity to conveniently access free books for their program participants. It also offered them opportunities to enjoy story-telling sessions.

Priority 3: Maintain Existing Programs

- With the support from many task group members a new ESL teacher was hired to continue to publish articles and compile resources for the ESL Read On! Page in the *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News*. The ESL Read On! Page has been successfully running for over two years now.
- With help from the Cultural Connectors, the Collingwood Tower Project provides local seniors with more accessible and friendly English learning opportunities. Started in September 2010, the Collingwood Tower Project has been well maintained and attended for almost three years.
- The Renfrew Collingwood Community Maps website: (<http://www.cnh.bc.ca/communitymap/>) and the Renfrew-Collingwood Community Walks website (<http://sites.google.com/site/rccommunitywalks/>) are well maintained and accessible to the public. Articles in both English and Chinese were published in the *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News* to introduce those websites to residents.

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?

- We were successful in keeping track and making progress in all the priorities we set for this year. Priorities from the previous years, such as to know our neighbourhood, and to connect residents, were also well addressed in our literacy work, because those priorities are interrelated to each other around literacy building.

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.

- Improved interpersonal communication and intercultural understanding has resulted in increased participation in literacy programs. Local residents from different cultural, language, and economic backgrounds participate in our literacy projects. For example, seniors, who participate in our Collingwood Tower English conversation sessions, are from Russia, Hungary, Romania, Kazakhstan, China, the Philippines, and Canada. They come to the weekly conversation group not only to learn English, but also to share their own culture, values, and traditions. The seniors now organize monthly literacy potlucks at the Tower as an approach to encouraging the participation of more building residents. This has inspired a newly launched Recipe Book Project which will involve seniors, children, students in the Culinary Arts Program at Windermere Secondary School and the whole Renfrew-Collingwood neighbourhood. Other activities like festival celebrations and board games are

incorporated into our literacy projects to enhance English language skills. English learning provides local residents with ways to express themselves, to share their beliefs, and to build social connections.

- Improved confidence of local residents in daily communication and capacity sharing. Knowing more English gives people confidence to participate in community activities, e.g. at our Christmas Party, Chinese New Year Party, and local Collingwood Days celebration we are seeing higher numbers of participants from multicultural and multi-lingual backgrounds. Some seniors who participate in our literacy programs have become volunteers in other programs at the neighborhood house. The ESL Read On! page and Literacy Outreach Legacy interviews in the *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News* also give local residents space to share their own stories and read about things happening in the community in simple English language. Recently, when Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson was at CNH for a press conference the senior whose story was in the most recent *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News* asked to be introduced to Mayor Robertson and then presented a copy of the paper - folded over to the page showing her story - to him. That showed the confidence she had acquired because her story was out in the world.
- We have seen improved connections built between residents and service providers. Participants of literacy programs are introduced to services available to them. Coordinators at Collingwood Neighbourhood House, the Vancouver Public Library, and the Community Action for Seniors' Independence (CASI) project have come to share highlights of their services with participants in our literacy programs. Tours to the library and the neighbourhood house were also successfully organized and well attended by our participants. The Collingwood Branch of the VPL is now partnering with the Literacy program to offer weekly creative writing sessions, presented by the LOC to adolescents in the neighbourhood. The Collingwood Library also regularly donates books it has culled from its children's collection to our children's book kiosk. We regularly see a parent and one or two children cross-legged on the floor in front of the kiosk, quietly reading a book. The joy in their faces when we remind them that they can take the book home to enjoy is wonderful to see. We also enjoy having to straighten the very messy shelves quite regularly as that tells us that lots of people are combing through the free books!
- Different dimensions of literacy were appreciated and celebrated in the community. In our programs, we want to address as many aspects of literacy as possible. That is why our programs range from English classes, through the ESL Read On! page, legacy interviews, reading circles, recipe books, youth creative writing, community resource maps to community heritage walks. The acquisition of English proficiency is never treated as the ultimate goal in our programs. We want to incorporate English learning into our community building process. We most value the improved capacity and confidence of our participants. For example some of the participants from our literacy projects became involved in an EmbraceBC project called, "On the Table". The project pulled together several groups of seniors to work with artist leaders to create table cloths that tell the participants' stories. Through learning various artistic techniques and sharing stories and photos of their lives -which were incorporated in

various ways onto the table cloths - the seniors practiced literacy skills, learned some artistic techniques and celebrated their life stories.

b. What are the things that support literacy work?

Local Residents

- Cultural Connectors, active local residents in the community from a variety of cultural backgrounds, are important contributors and facilitators for many of our literacy projects.
- Local residents who agreed to sit in our task group made great contributions to our discussion about the literacy needs, and ways to meet those needs, in Renfrew-Collingwood.
- Local residents who participated in and benefited from our programs offered inspiration and reward to our literacy work.

Local Resources

- Representatives of local service providers who sit in our task group provided guidance for literacy work.
- Local service providers like Collingwood Neighbourhood House, Collingwood Community Policing Centre, Evergreen Community Health Centre, the Collingwood Tower and the Collingwood Library, provide in-kind facilities for literacy projects.

Financial and Intellectual Support from Decoda Literacy Solutions and the Vancouver School Board

- The money we received for literacy coordination and the Raise-a-Reader funds will be used in building and supporting literacy-related projects.
- The literacy-related materials we received from Decoda, and the books borrowed from Decoda Literacy Library are very helpful in our work.
- Training sessions and meetings organized by Decoda Literacy Solutions and the Vancouver School Board give us valuable opportunities to share highlights of our work, hear from stories from other communities, and reflect on literacy and community building.

6) Challenges:

a. What are the difficulties?

- Our community was one of the first communities to start visioning and planning for literacy. We finished the last year of implementation in 2011. With no further implementation funds and little money for coordination received, we found it challenging to keep all our initiatives sustainable. Luckily, more money for coordination and more funding opportunities were made possible by Decoda, and with the funds, we are able to sustain our current projects and also to support some new initiatives through 2013 to 2014.
- We still find it challenging to measure and evaluate some of our current projects. Every month, 5000 copies of *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News* with an ESL Read

On! page in it are distributed in the community. We cannot find out who the actual readers are. Since we view literacy from a broader angle, some projects we created are website-based. It is virtually impossible to get information like numbers and ages of participants. We tried to find ways to collect more information regarding those website-based projects by adding Google Analytics trackers to the websites. We are looking forward to finding out more ways to gather information on those projects.

- A close relationship is usually formed between participants and project facilitators. Sometimes if the project facilitator is replaced by a new person, we may face losing some participants as well. We find it challenging to attract more residents who can take on leadership roles without burning out the existing ones.

b. What would help?

- We would love to see more funding like Raise-a-Reader to enhance our existing projects and help us build new initiatives and increase resident capacity.
- During the past year, we received many literacy-related materials from Decoda. The Decoda Literacy Library also makes finding literacy-related materials a lot easier for us. We would like to have more resources like this available to our community.
- Meetings and training sessions for Literacy Outreach Coordinators and people who work to support literacy are very helpful. We would like to see more opportunities for these kinds of gathering and sharing.
- Improved access to lower-priced books with First Nations themes and stories as well as stories that feature immigrant children and families.

For the coming year:

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

- With funds received for family literacy programs, we need to collaborate with more programs. In the meantime, we will also sustain initiatives we have developed in the past. We may form new working groups to address different priorities in our literacy work.
- A new Literacy Outreach Coordinator (LOC) was hired in March 2013 to continue working with the neighbourhood to coordinate the literacy work in Renfrew-Collingwood. The former LOC left very quickly so members of the steering committee continue to mentor the new LOC.
- Some task group members left their positions, and new people who replaced them continue to sit in the task group. It is challenging to keep the same level of engagement and excitement within the task group, since such changes occur from time to time. Our task group members understand literacy as a tool to build our

community. It is very important to us that we keep people sitting together sharing ideas about literacy and guiding literacy work in the Renfrew-Collingwood community. Task group building is ongoing.

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

Priority 1: Connect Residents and Service Providers

- Outreach to more service providers.
- Connect residents to programs in the community.
- Link service providers to resident gifts and skills.
- Continue Read On! Monthly page in the *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News* for ESL learners.

Priority 2: Maintain and Develop Accessible Literacy Programs

- Address expressed needs for literacy, numeracy and social skills for Canadian-born adults and new immigrants with the initial focus on seniors, immigrants and families.
- Maintain and build on the ongoing success of the Tower project.
- Develop and maintain Legacy Interview project in conjunction with publication in *Renfrew-Collingwood Community News*
- Weekly Literacy Reading Circle. “Anne of Green Gables” Read out loud or listen. All welcome.
- Weekly Literacy Outreach creative writing sessions for adolescents at the VPL Library in partnership with the Collingwood Branch begin Sept 2013
- Recipe Project. Collection of popular neighbourhood recipes has commenced. Seniors will test, transcribe, and collate submitted comfort food recipes. Collingwood School catchment children will illustrate and write food haiku for the recipe collection. The completed recipe book is projected for publication during Spring, 2014.
- Make sure the programs are accessible to local residents.
- Sustain programs through concrete resources and in-kind support from public, private and community organizations.
- Open to new opportunities to expand and improve existing programs.

Priority 3: Review and Update Literacy Plan

- Review the Renfrew-Collingwood Literacy Plan, which was created four years ago.
- Learn from our achievements and examine literacy needs as they occur.

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

- Local residents to participate and help facilitate our literacy projects.
- Task group members and an LOC who support and take part in our work.
- Local facilities which provide space and resources for our activities and events.
- Financial and intellectual support from Decoda Literacy Solutions and the Vancouver School Board.