

District Literacy Plan 2012-13

Literacy Matters Association Abbotsford



Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

Table of Contents

<u>Reflections on the Current Year</u>	3
1) <u>Task Group:</u>	3
2) <u>Community Context:</u>	4
3) <u>Community Development & Literacy Collaboration:</u>	6
4) <u>Goals and Actions:</u>	9
5) <u>Indications of Success:</u>	10
6) <u>Challenges:</u>	11
<u>Thinking About the upcoming Year</u>	11
1) <u>Challenges and Opportunities:</u>	11
2) <u>Continuing Goals and Actions:</u>	12
3) <u>Requirements to Meet Goals & Employ Actions:</u>	12

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

Guiding Questions

Reflections on the Current Year

“Literacy is about more than reading and writing - it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. Literacy ... finds its place in our lives alongside other ways of communicating. Indeed, literacy itself takes many forms: on paper, on the computer screen, on TV, on posters and signs. Those who use literacy take it for granted - but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today's world. Indeed, it is the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of "literacy as freedom" (UNESCO, Statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003-2012; italics added).

1) Task group:

a. Membership in the task group:

- i) Literacy Matters Abbotsford (LMA) comprises a broad representation of community perspectives through a variety of associations. Current members include:

Community Members
Fraser Valley Métis Association
Business Community Member
Abbotsford School District #34
University of the Fraser Valley (UFV)
Fraser Valley Regional Library (FVRL)
Aboriginal Advisory representative
Abbotsford Community Services (ACS)
Community Aboriginal Centre
Children First/Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee
City of Abbotsford, Councillor
School Trustee
Correctional Services Canada
Central Abbotsford Community School Society
West Abbotsford Community School Society

b. How is the work of this group organized:

- i) Literacy Matters Abbotsford is organized through a voluntary committee, an elected board and the Literacy Outreach Coordinator. LMA is represented at three other community tables, the Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee (AECC), Abbotsford

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

Early Childhood Committee Partners Table (AECCPT) and the Child and Youth Committee (CYC).

ii) An Adult Literacy table has been established

iii) An Aboriginal literacy table has been established.

As needed various “ad hoc” groups are formed; they report back to their table of origin as well as to the Task Group.

2) *Community context:*

Literacy Matters Abbotsford has been in operation for the last eight years. The organization has formalized its efforts through incorporation as a society since 2008. Over the last few years the committee has consolidated its work in early learning and school age literacy. The last three years have seen a more concerted effort toward improving adult and Aboriginal literacy.

Early learners in Abbotsford benefit from a well-established and functioning network of support services for children ages birth to 6 with the establishment of at least one literacy program in each neighbourhood. Yet, opportunities remain to increase community capacity and strengthen the provision of literacy supports, particularly in communities with vulnerable families.

The Abbotsford School District delivers literacy programming for school aged children and, according to provincial exam outcomes, is doing a commendable job. The School District continues to explore diverse ways to support the development of literacy in this community of learners. Community programming can offer multi-modal ways to embed, enrich and enhance literacy development for this age group and we support these efforts.

The Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement effectively addresses the literacy needs of local Aboriginal children from kindergarten through to grade twelve. The primary provider of literacy supports for early and adult Aboriginal learners is the Community Aboriginal Centre, which is operated by the School District. This centre is home to a Strong Start program.

Abbotsford is making significant strides in its effort to meet the needs of the English as an Additional language (EAL) community. For example, the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program enhances pre-existing multicultural services at Abbotsford Community Services. While these programs partially mitigate the obvious needs, neighbourhoods with a high

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

proportion of EAL residents remain under-serviced relative to their literacy needs and based on socio-economic indicators. Similar concerns are echoed throughout all age strata in the EAL community, but gain prominence in the adult sphere due to the additional dimension of workplace literacy, since the latter services are scarce and challenging to access.

There are a limited number of programs in the community that are targeted at adult learners. Most programs for further learning and essential skills training are provided by the University of the Fraser Valley; however, the current system of program delivery may not be conducive to the learning needs of many local adults. This reveals a significant shortfall in academic attainment levels as compared to provincial averages in relation to both secondary and post-secondary achievement. The challenge of meeting the literacy needs of adults grows as local literacy programs and services struggle to accommodate a large aging demographic. Although community-based literacy programs offer services that target adult learners, they face ongoing sustainability challenges due to a lack of core funding.

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?

i) Positive

1. Raise a Reader funds: The funds have been dispersed through a collaborative process of determining community needs. These funds have provided the ability for programs to increase their capacity to serve families.
2. Increased face-to-face meetings: The creation of the Adult Table and the Aboriginal Table has brought together services providers and community members with interests in specific areas of literacy. The membership at all tables has increased throughout the year. Meetings are held on a regular basis with meeting dates determined in advance in order to ensure maximum participation.
3. Increased networking: Newspapers have been contacted regarding LMA events. The creation of a display board, increased participation in a variety of community events, and presentations to the community (Family Literacy Day; International Women's Day; Child and Youth Care Forum; Family Fun Day; Abbotsford City Council; International Association of Lions of Abbotsford; National Aboriginal

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

Day) has resulted in a greater community awareness of Literacy Matters. In turn, more community members and service providers sit at the various tables as well as volunteer in various capacities such as literacy tutors.

4. Branding of Literacy Matters: Development of a website is currently underway. The website will provide space to share resources, post minutes from meetings and enhance communication. It will also provide links for prospective learners to access resources.
Brochures are being developed to create community awareness of Literacy Matters Abbotsford. Post cards, with clear language and minimal text, are being developed to attract the attention of both prospective learners as well as future volunteers.

The above mentioned are critical activities for strengthening the ability of organizations to support literacy development and impact people in the community.

ii) Negative

5. Three Literacy Outreach Coordinators (LOCs) in three years: The change in LOC's has limited continuity as well as public awareness of Literacy Matters. With consistency in this position the community profile of Literacy Matters should continue to increase and relationships will continue to develop.
6. The unemployment rate in Abbotsford is significantly higher than the provincial rate (i.e. the unemployment rate for BC January – April 2012 ranged between 6.9 – 7.3%; in Abbotsford, it ranged between 9.5 – 11.4%). With the increase in unemployment rate, there is a need to examine workplace skill enhancement projects.

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?*

- i) Creation of an Aboriginal library space at the Community Aboriginal Centre: The idea for a library space at the Community Aboriginal Centre, a School District site, evolved in the fall of 2011. When examining how to bring a Reading Buddies program to the centre, it was determined that the primary need was a space to house the program. This idea quickly gained momentum. Under guidance and leadership from the FVRL, a partnership with UFV

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

was developed. Students from the UFV Library Technology program sorted the current resources, chose a cataloguing system, and made recommendations. A grant from Success by Six, implementation money from Literacy Matters, and funding from School District 34 allowed for room renovations, and the purchase of shelving, furnishings, and books. Plans for a mural are underway and discussions have been held around incorporating the logos of the Fraser Valley Métis Association; Sumas First Nation; Matsqui First Nation; and the Community Aboriginal Centre. The library space is scheduled to open in the fall of 2012 with a number of new programs being planned at the Community Aboriginal Centre. The programs include: Reading Buddies; Aboriginal Parents as Literacy Supporters (APALS); Strong Start in the evening; drumming; and regalia making. FVRL is available to support programming at the centre; this will be based on learner interest within the community.

- ii) Community Reading Challenge: The kick-off for the Community Reading Challenge started with a pancake breakfast. The breakfast was held in conjunction with the Clearbrook Public Library. Community partners participating in the breakfast included: Clearbrook Fire Fighters; FVRL; School District 34; Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee; Kiwanis of Clearbrook; and The Mad Butcher. The Community Reading Challenge partners included: FVRL; School District 34; Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee; Kidsbooks; and The Bookman.
- iii) Exploration of a multi-agency vision to develop a Family Literacy Program for adults wanting to upgrade their skills for personal, employment and/or further education and training goals has begun. Current partners include School District 34; University of the Fraser Valley; and Abbotsford Community Services. As this program becomes a reality there will be further partnerships with community members developed.
- iv) Distribution of Raise a Reader funds: Through discussion at the various table of Literacy Matters, it was determined that funds would support the following existing programs:
 - Parents and Children Together (PACT): this will allow PACT to purchase materials and equipment to support alternate learning methods i.e. Digital camera to allow at risk fathers to journal their learning
 - Reading Rascals: housed at West Abbotsford Community School, this initiative will enhance their program by adding an adult learning component

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

- Aboriginal Strong Start: will allow this program to run in the evenings in order support to families
- Immigrant Family Connections: will provide transportation to families to enhance their access to this program

The following new initiatives will receive Raise a Reader monies:

- Book Buddies Program: Central Abbotsford Community Schools are starting a program for at risk readers in grades 1 – 4. With the funds provided they will be providing an adult learning component to this program while the students are in session.
- Aboriginal Library: a room at the Community Aboriginal Library is being renovated to become a library. Future plans for this library include running an APALS (Aboriginal Parents as Literacy Supporters) program; establishment of an Aboriginal Reading Buddies program; computer classes; skills classes as requested by the Aboriginal adult community.

b. What are the essential ongoing collaborations?

- i) Engagement with the various community members at the various tables of Literacy Matters are key ongoing collaborations
- ii) Reading Buddies (partners include FVRL and Literacy Matters)
- iii) Aboriginal Library space at the Community Aboriginal Centre (partners include School District 34; FVRL; UFV; United Way; Fraser Valley Métis Association; Sumas First Nation; Matsqui First Nation)

c. What makes collaborations work well?

- i) Community development efforts that focus on designing structures to facilitate the collective coordination of action and the development of mutually beneficial relationships will have the greatest potential for success. Through the understanding of the issues in Abbotsford we can improve the adaptive capacity of our community by designing collaborative structures that facilitate the flow of information and the development of communication networks; connecting diverse assets and resources to one another; decentralizing power and decision-making; and increasing resilience in times of economic stress, hardship or downturn.
- ii) Collaboration
 1. Allows us to be mindful of community donors
 2. Allows for a coordinated approach
 3. Is mutually beneficial - people have an obligation to service the community and may not know where to go

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

4. Enhances services, improves access, and increases appropriate referral networks

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

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

- i) Aboriginal literacy
- ii) Adult literacy
- iii) Reading Buddies (ongoing project)

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

i) Aboriginal Literacy

The strategy for this focus was to support the delivery of sustainable, culturally relevant literacy programs for Aboriginal learners by increasing the engagement of aboriginal learners and families in literacy programs and services. To this end partnerships have developed with the Matsqui First Nation, Sumas First Nation, and the Fraser Valley Métis Association. The vision for the new Aboriginal Community Library was established in the fall of 2011 and will come to fruition by the fall of 2012 as a result of partnerships among the School District, the Aboriginal Table of LMA, University of the Fraser Valley, Fraser Valley Regional Library and Success by Six.

ii) Adult Literacy

Adult literacy has been a strong focus for the Literacy Matters Association this year. The goal is to facilitate the provision of seamless, integrated literacy programs and services for adult learners throughout our community literacy and support systems.

(1) A regular schedule of networking meetings has been established. Currently there are 27 service providers, organizations, individuals represented at the Adult Table. The meetings provide an opportunity to discuss current issues, concerns, projects and to link programs together.

(2) A directory of adult literacy services and assets for adult learners was completed. A website is being developed to provide information related to LMA.

(3) In partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society, support of the women's reading program at Fraser Valley Regional Institute has been implemented. When this program has a solid base of volunteers we will work toward re-establishing the program at the Matsqui

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

Correctional Institution.

(4) The Adult Networking event provided an opportunity for a broad range of service providers to discuss roadblocks to services for adults. Based on the response from this event, there will be a workshop in the fall of 2012 looking at learning disabilities and the adult learner.

- c. *What adjustments were made to the plan? Were there new opportunities or were there changes that did not allow for some actions to be taken?*
- ii) Fathers' Reading program: The objective of forming a reading program at Matsqui Institute is on hold until the Mothers' Reading Program at the Fraser Valley Institute has adequate volunteers to sustain its program. Once that program is sufficiently staffed then the re-establishment of the Fathers' Reading Program will be undertaken.
 - iii) Learning Hub at a local mall: Upon exploring this proposed initiative there did not seem to be an appropriate location for housing the Learning Hub. Lack of volunteer/organizations to man this hub also was a concern. The Task Group decided to remove this project from its plan.
- 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.*
 - i) As an ongoing collaboration the number of participants in the Reading Buddies program has steadily increased throughout the year. The goal for this year was to match 50 Little Buddies, up from last year's number of 47 Little Buddies. This year there were 64 Little Buddies matched with 60 Big Buddies, an indication of high interest in this successful program. The coordinator has conducted a survey of both the learners as well as the volunteers to assure accountability of this program.
 - ii) Creation of the library space at the Community Aboriginal Centre – the library space will enable learners of all ages to have access to culturally relevant learning materials. The library space is scheduled to open in the fall of 2012. Planning meetings for the implementation of an early evening Strong Start program are being held. As some family members attend Strong Start, other activities will take place to meet the needs of other family members. The development of programs based on the needs of adult learners will take place as well.

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

- iii) A collaborative approach to the Family Literacy project has been developed by inviting interested members of the local community to come together. To date there have been three meetings as well as two on-site visits to examine a model ideal for our local community.
- iv) The ongoing face-to-face meetings of the various tables have allowed for networking of services as well as the dissemination of information. By keeping community members abreast of services, organizations, and opportunities learners' needs are more effectively met.
- b. What are the things that support literacy work?
 - Maintaining the momentum of collaborative work by having regular Task Group meetings and reporting on actions taken.
 - By having an LOC who encourages collaboration with her support and who then monitors and follows through on needed actions delegating responsibilities appropriately.
 - Having Task Group members sit at community tables to raise awareness of literacy issues when these arise.

6) Challenges:

a. What are the difficulties?

- Maintaining multiple responsibilities of Literacy Matters projects in addition to prior work commitments
- Time and funding in order to support ongoing collaborative literacy projects

b. What would help?

- Stable and ongoing funding to support the development and sustainability of programs to assist learner.

For the coming year:

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

- Based on rise in unemployment in Abbotsford, workplace/employment literacy challenges may be of concern.
- Recent provincial changes to Employment Insurance and Social Assistance programs will have the greatest impact on the adults with literacy/basic and essential skills. Under the new system, there has been a move from specialized services to more generic, self-serve

Abbotsford Community Literacy Plan

June 2012

programs. There need to be more creative/alternative approaches to “pathways out of poverty”.

- Interest has been expressed in re-visiting past efforts by LMA to build social enterprise options in collaboration with local businesses.

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

- Adult Literacy
 - Facilitate the provision of seamless integrated literacy programs and services for adult learners
 - Continue to work in partnership with the Elizabeth Fry Society
 - Continue to host adult networking/workshop events
- Aboriginal Literacy
 - Continue the development of the library space at the Community Aboriginal Centre
 - Continue the development of programming at the Community Aboriginal Centre
 - Continue developing relationships and programming with the Aboriginal community (Matsqui First Nation, Sumas First Nation, and Fraser Valley Métis Association)
- Family Literacy
 - Continue to focus on supporting adults through family literacy programs
 - Raise a Reader funded programs
 - Family Literacy Project
- Reading Buddies
 - Continue to support the existing program as well as expansion of this program to both the Community Aboriginal Centre and the Neighbourhood Learning Centre through application to the Priority Grant, United Way

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

- Meeting the above goals and actions will require commitment; communication; relationship building; concrete partnership projects; continued engagement and support of new and existing projects.