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Community Literacy of Ontario

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Community Literacy of Ontario

Family Literacy Partnerships

Community Literacy of Ontario received funding from the National Literacy Secretariat to deliver *Foundational Training in Family Literacy* via a series of online workshops from January to June 2005. In addition, CLO is researching and writing two bulletins on effective family literacy partnerships. This is the second of the two bulletins; the first was published in January 2005. If you haven't already seen it, you can find it at www.nald.ca/PROVINCE/ONT/CLO/NEWSLET/family/jan05/jan05.pdf.

In this bulletin, you will have an opportunity to hear about family literacy partnerships and initiatives all across Ontario. Let's start in Wawa, where there are a lot of partnerships going on.

WAWA

- ⇒ Parents and Children Together (PACT) groups were held in the dining room of several local restaurants.
- ⇒ Space for parent/child groups at a geared to income housing complex is provided at no charge. An outreach program from the Ontario Early Years Centre meets there weekly.
- ⇒ Local school boards support family literacy week by paying for double sided bookmarks that promote literacy.
- ⇒ Local school boards provide space for Fractured Fairy Tales and Spring Fling events at no charge.
- ⇒ Local doctors, public health nurses and nurse practitioners deliver Books for Babies packages.
- ⇒ The local tourism centre allows the community-based literacy agency to sell used books to support family and adult literacy programming.
- ⇒ The local public library is a partner in several events and they provide children's books for the reading tent.
- ⇒ The local library also hosts a book draw during family literacy week.
- ⇒ Ontario Early Years and the community-based literacy program partner for the Borrow a Book reading program in local elementary schools.
- ⇒ Eat to Learn (Breakfast for Learning program) provides an Alphabet Soup lunch for all elementary school students.

Midland and Temiskaming Shores

MIDLAND

Family Rhyme Time – A Family Reading Circle Program is sponsored by the County of Simcoe, the Midland Area Reading Council, the Ontario Early Years Centre Simcoe North and the North Simcoe Community Action Program for Children.

The program is targeted for families with literacy issues (parents and their young children ages 3-6). It is designed to:

- ⇒ Help improve children's reading skills
- ⇒ Help participants use a computer for reading
- ⇒ Share the importance of literacy in a family setting
- ⇒ Show how improved literacy provides a better quality of life
- ⇒ Provide a safe, supportive and confidential environment to help adults who have literacy concerns and issues.



This free program was held in Midland on Monday nights from November to January at the Ontario Early Years Centre. The evening started with a dinner, followed by family literacy activities and then a breakout session where children and parents separated into different groups. The children were cared for by Early Years and Community Access Planning staff who organized fun and educational activities. Parents, children and staff rejoined for closing ceremonies.

The parent program lasted 20 minutes and consisted of:

- ⇒ Staff, tutors, students and volunteers sharing information about the Midland Area Reading Council
- ⇒ Computer specific sessions
- ⇒ A variety of literacy related topics (numeracy, employment, health, education)
- ⇒ Questions, answers, brochures and handouts

You can find out more about the Midland Area Reading Council by visiting their website at www.nald.ca/marc.htm.

TEMISKAMING SHORES

The Early Years Centre in the recently-amalgamated Temiskaming Shores (formerly the towns of Haileybury, New Liskeard and Cobalt) has worked hard to establish local partnerships. They have successfully partnered with a bookstore, a children's educational supplies store, local libraries and daycare centres to offer reading tents, story hours and to promote family literacy day.



The success to establishing these partnerships, reports Brigitte Auger, Early Literacy Specialist, is to approach other organizations and businesses in a spirit of cooperation rather than competition. If you come with an idea, be prepared to follow it through and to provide concrete ways to make the idea a reality. Everyone is busy, and most of us feel overworked, so clearly laying out who will do what and how it will get done can be very helpful. Brigitte also suggests that having a partnership agreement in place can be very helpful if problems arise.

Dr. Seuss' Birthday Bash—Lambton

In the first partnership bulletin, we reported on what was happening in Lambton. One of the things they mentioned was a birthday celebration for Dr. Seuss. That piqued our curiosity, so we asked for more details, and this is what they told us:

March 2, 2004 was Dr. Seuss's 100th birthday. To celebrate this event the Organization For Literacy in Lambton threw an all day party at their office and invited families to join them for cake, a story circle and a photo opportunity with The Grinch. The community embraced the opportunity to shake off the winter blues and join in the fun, with around 40 families coming and going throughout the day.

The celebration was very "Seussish:" noisy, fun, delightful and surprising. The day started with a large group of parents, caregivers and children arriving to light 100 candles on the cake and sing happy birthday to Dr. Seuss. After a break for cake and juice, it was time to choose the first of many Dr. Seuss books to read.

Before leaving, the children were given the opportunity to have their photograph taken with a six-foot Grinch. The children watched in wonder and delight as their image developed on the blank Polaroid paper they were holding. The Polaroid picture was an unexpected source of joy for the children. The literacy program chose to take Polaroid pictures simply because they are "instant" and they wanted to give the children something they could take with them to remember the day. For the children, however, it was like magic, so it was an added bonus to an already great day.

All in all it was the perfect way to celebrate a wonderful writer.

The celebration was made possible thanks to the following:

- ⇒ A photo shop donated the Polaroid film
- ⇒ A bake shop donated the cake
- ⇒ A department store donated Dr. Seuss paper plates, napkins and hats
- ⇒ Literacy program staff donated the juice
- ⇒ A community member loaned the model Grinch

You can find out more about the Organization for Literacy in Lambton by visiting their website at www.readsarnia.com.



Reading Circle: All Welcome! (Frontier College)

By Dave Page, Frontier College

Since the mid-1980s, across Ontario families have gathered on a weekly basis to share books and stories. The Reading Circle program developed by Frontier College is a simple, yet profoundly effective program that continues to engage children, parents, and other family members.

Even on Saturday mornings, despite the plethora of cartoons beckoning on cable, children are eagerly bursting into rooms displayed with the latest and greatest of children's books. Eric Carle, Dr. Seuss, and Ezra Jack Keats compete against the newest Kids-Lit by Robert Munsch, Dav Pilkey and Barbara Parks.



Frontier College continues to support community Reading Circles across Southern Ontario. We provide workshops on how to set up a Reading Circle, training for volunteers, books, and moral support along the way.

After supporting dozens of Reading Circle programs over the past decade, I have a few observations about what works, and new trends.

One crucial key to success remains the same: have a large, well-chosen display of books. I always make sure that I bring plenty of Scholastic I Spy, some Captain Underpants books, as well as books on animals, the planets, dinosaurs and the oceans. Easy-to-read books are a must, yet we also must have books for children who are looking for more challenges. Animalia by Graham Base is a winner (ask children to find a set number of items for each letter), and the Eyewitness non-fiction series from Stoddart is popular. For older kids, Archie comics are as popular as ever. Optical illusions, weird facts, and world records attract interest also.

Lately, we have noted that a greater percentage of Reading Circle programs are catering to parents and children aged two to five. This is a wonderful age for exposure to quality book time. Best of all, it is an age where it is most common for younger children to be accompanied by parents. So the family participation at reading programs occurs readily, and the emergent literacy of the child is nurtured at home as well as at the program. Pre-school Reading Circles are usually shorter than programs for older children. They include rhymes and songs as well as stories and books. But the primary elements remain the same. The focus is on fun, a simple format, and parental participation.

With family literacy being such an important and developing concept, our resources always feel limited. However I am proud that Frontier College can continue to bring practitioners, groups and volunteers together to share ideas and resources at our annual Reading Circle Conference. Anyone interested in attending is welcome. Typically, we have an exciting mix of program leaders, parents from programs, volunteers, librarians, and early childhood educators.

At the Twelfth Annual Reading Circle Conference, last October, Kym McQuat of the Barrie Public Library led a workshop at which she shared games and activities she uses at their Reading Circle. Said McQuat, "It is very important that the program fosters self-esteem, as well as a lifelong love of reading. By the end of a term, we want to see that children sit a little bit taller, and their smile is little bit

brighter. We have families with special needs who come. Parents and siblings and even extended family such as aunts and cousins help make the person with special needs feel at home. We also have blended families (mom this week, dad the next week) and the Reading Circle is the constant for the child - whoever they are with, they know they go to Reading Circle on Thursday nights. We also see that families are using other library programs. Circulation has risen due to parental involvement. Also, people who were not library users are now signing out books."

Also in Barrie are Reading Circles at four Barrie Municipal Non-Profit Housing communities. The first program began eight years ago. Ann Harvey, who has been the passionate voice of these programs, has noticed that "parents in the community not only volunteer, but they promote the programs to the local schools. Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Barrie have also taken on an increasingly important leadership role for our literacy programming".

At Frontier College, we find ourselves in the position of acting as community catalysts – bringing together different community groups to support literacy. For example, in the past year we have become part of the Weaving Literacy Training Project – a partnership between FRP Canada (Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs) and MCL (Movement for Canadian Literacy). The aim of the Weaving Literacy project is to support and encourage collaborations between literacy organizations and family support programs and to promote a community building approach to literacy.

During the summer Frontier College, with several community partners, ran a five week pilot project in Toronto's Flemingdon Park community. Parents expressed their desire to see the program continue and we have since created two new Reading Circles in Flemingdon Park. One Reading Circle is primarily attended by newcomer families from Afghanistan, the other is a Tuesday night drop-in for children and their Moms. At the latter program, we have eight Frontier College volunteers involved, and we are working with families who are learning English as a second language.

From near to far, from far to near, Reading Circles are everywhere! Thanks to all the great people at Reading Circles who introduce children to the world of books.

For more information on the Reading Circle Program, or to order videos or booklets, check out the Frontier College website: www.frontiercollege.ca. For information about the Reading Circle Conference, contact Dave Page at dpage@frontiercollege.ca.



ACTION FOR FAMILY LITERACY ONTARIO (AFLO)

AFLO is a provincial working group of the Ontario Literacy Coalition. AFLO's vision is to see families learning and growing together in positive, literacy-rich environments. They see family literacy valued, encouraged, supported and sustained in homes and communities throughout Ontario. Their mission is to sustain, promote, and strengthen family literacy services in Ontario through advocacy, communication and research support. You can find out more about AFLO by visiting their website at

www.aflo.on.literacy.ca.

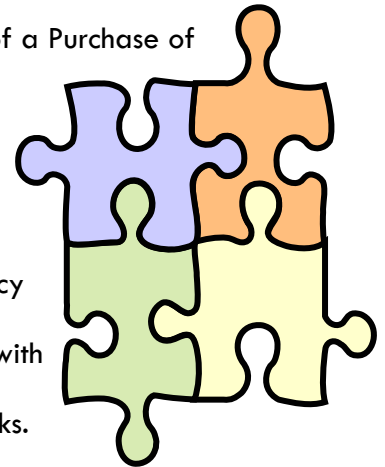
Kingston Literacy

Kingston Literacy is no stranger to either family literacy or to partnerships! Be sure to visit their website at www.kingstonliteracy.com for information about all of their activities. Here is just a small sample of some of the family literacy partnerships they have been involved with lately:

Family Learning Centre, West Kingston

Before starting this program, Kingston Literacy held consultation meetings with a variety of community groups including the Early Years, the YMCA, the Health Unit and others. These meetings helped them plan the space and develop guidelines for the program. Once this was done, they worked with local businesses and schools to market the Centre. After they opened the Centre, they were involved in a variety of activities including:

- ⇒ A Music Circle for Infants. This 10-week program took place as the result of a Purchase of Service agreement with the Ontario Early Years Centre.
- ⇒ United Way's Day of Caring. Volunteer did some repairs to the children's room.
- ⇒ Neighbourhood open house.
- ⇒ Child safety workshop presented by the Health Unit.
- ⇒ Dialogic workshop designed for people involved with early childhood education, co-hosted by the Early Literacy Specialist and the Family Literacy Coordinator.
- ⇒ From Lullabies to Literacy program was held for ten weeks in partnership with the Ontario Early Years Centre.
- ⇒ Reading and Parents Program (RAPP) drop-in group was held for ten weeks.



Volunteer Training

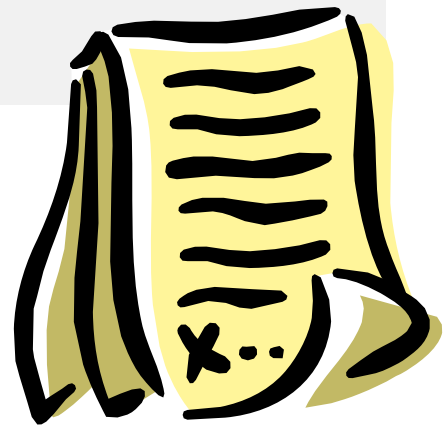
Grants from the City of Kingston's Health Community Fund and the Community Foundation of Greater Kingston supported the development of a family literacy volunteer training and coordination program that centred primarily on the Reading and Parents Program. The Family Literacy Volunteer Program consists of a volunteer training package and guidelines for volunteer coordination. It also introduces the range of volunteer activities available at the Family Literacy Centre.

Over the years, elementary schools have contracted with Kingston Literacy to facilitate a training workshop series for volunteers who work with school-aged children having difficulty with reading and writing. Once the training is complete, school staff supervise and support the volunteers. In total, Kingston Literacy has provided thirteen training sessions at elementary schools. It has also provided a variation of this training to several other organizations as well.

Helping Parents, Helping Children Workshop Series

This workshop series was designed for parents who want to help their school-age children improve their reading and writing skills. In the past, the program was supported by the Community Foundation of Greater Kingston, the Kingston Whig-Standard Literacy Fund and the Davies Foundation. The training provides support, knowledge and tools for parents.

Partnership Agreements



At the risk of adding a level of bureaucracy to already busy family literacy programs, Community Literacy of Ontario encourages the use of a formal partnership agreement. While it might seem like just so much paper, many unsuccessful partnerships have reported that an agreement would have helped, and many successful partnerships have highlighted that it is an important element of their success. A documented agreement will clearly spell out who is doing what and can help avoid confusion and conflict down the road.

A partnership agreement should be clear, concise, straightforward and unambiguous. It should include the following components:

- ⇒ Statement of agreement
- ⇒ Purpose and goals including timeframes and anticipated outcomes
- ⇒ Program areas and activities
- ⇒ Areas of joint and individual responsibility (don't forget the details like financial record-keeping and reporting)
- ⇒ Resources that each partner will contribute
- ⇒ Evaluation plan including performance measures and reporting arrangements
- ⇒ Contact names and authorized signatures for each partner

Community Literacy of Ontario has developed a partnership checklist to help assess whether a proposed formal partnership is a good fit for our organization. Here are the questions we ask:

- ⇒ Has a formal business plan or project proposal been prepared by the organization requesting a partnership and shared with CLO?
- ⇒ Based on this business plan or project proposal, does CLO see an appropriate, manageable and beneficial partnership role for our organization?
- ⇒ Does the proposed initiative clearly fit with CLO's mission, business plan and goals?
- ⇒ Will a partnership provide significant benefits to both CLO and to our members?
- ⇒ Has a draft partnership agreement been prepared by the organization requesting the partnership? Does CLO approve of the terms and conditions of the partnership agreement?
- ⇒ Has CLO's proposed role in the partnership been clearly articulated in writing? Are we comfortable with that role?
- ⇒ Does CLO have the board and staff capacity and any other required resources to fulfill our proposed role in the partnership?
- ⇒ Will CLO's involvement in the proposed initiative maintain CLO's excellent reputation in the literacy field?
- ⇒ Does a high level of organizational trust exist between CLO and any proposed partners?
- ⇒ Will CLO receive adequate compensation (financial or otherwise) for its role/work in the partnership?
- ⇒ Do the proposed partners have complementary visions, philosophies, values, missions and priorities?
- ⇒ Does the proposed partner have a sound track record in managing their organization?
- ⇒ Is there clear evidence that the organization has the capacity to carry out this project/initiative?

Encouraging Boys to Read

For the past few years, Ontario students in Grade 3 and 6 have been completing reading and writing tests. The results from these tests show that boys are approximately 25% behind girls and 75% of children identified for intensive special education programs are boys. (Source: Ontario Ministry of Education New Release, January 26, 2005)

The Ontario government is working in partnership to help change these numbers. Earlier this year, they enlisted the support of the Toronto Argonauts to help reach boys who become discouraged about reading. They will continue to seek this type of promotional partnership with other community role models that appeal to boys.

The government also distributed 70,000 copies of a resource called “Me Read? No Way! A Practical Guide to Improving Boy’s Literacy Skills” to teachers across the province. It contains information on appropriate classroom resources for boys, understanding boys’ learning styles, bringing critical-literacy skills into the classroom, engaging parents in boys literacy and using technology to get boys interested in literacy. More information about this guide, including a downloadable PDF file, is available at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/brochure/meread/index.html.

Here is a great web site that include strategies for helping boys read. It also helps boys find books that might interest them. Check out “Guys Picks”!

⇒ Guys Read at www.guysread.com.

You can find tips for parents, recommended books for boys and information on enjoying a good book here:

⇒ www.geocities.com/talestoldtall/BoyParents.htm.

For an informative article on boys and reading, posted by the International Reading Association, be sure to visit:

⇒ www.reading.org/publications/reading_today/samples/RTY-0408-boys.html.

And finally, here is the web site of the Canadian Adolescent Boys and Literacy Project. This website provides a discussion of research findings and links to other researchers and practitioners interested in better understanding boys’ literacies and ways to support their success.

⇒ www.education.ualberta.ca/boysandliteracy.



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