

**LITERACY NOW NORTH ISLAND COORDINATOR'S MEETING
APRIL 13TH and 14th, 2010, HELD IN THE COMOX VALLEY**

**Meeting Notes from April 13th, 2010
10:00 am – Noon, Held at the
North Island Women's Resource Centre, McPhee Avenue, Courtenay**

Lynn Joseph, Principal of Aboriginal Education, Courtenay School District #71, welcomed those in attendance and acknowledged that the meeting was taking place in the traditional territory of the K'omoks First Nation. She noted with appreciation Leona Gadsby and Lori Walker from 2010 Legacies Now who are able to be with the group over this two day session. Those in attendance included:

- Leona Gadsby, Director, 2010 Legacies Now
- Lori Walker, Program Mgr 2010 Literacy Now
- Danielle Hoogland, Literacy Now Project Coordinator
- Martin Petter, retired VP, Ed at NIC and current CV Steering Committee member
- Ed Carswell, World Community
- Lynn Joseph, Principal Aboriginal Education, Courtenay School District #71
- Jane Hughes, Comox Valley Family Services
- Tom Weegar, Principal, NIC Port Alberni; President, Literacy Alberni
- Vivian Hermansen, Acting Dean, Developmental and Aboriginal Education, NIC
- Theresa Gereluk, Literacy Outreach Coordinator, West Coast
- Sandra Reynolds, Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Gold River
- Joanne Keeling, Comox Valley Transitions Society
- Kat Eddy, Adult Outreach Coordinator, Campbell River
- Anne Boyd, Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Campbell River
- Robin Beaton, Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Quadra Island
- Ann Vansnick, Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Sayward
- Laura Thiessen, Sayward
- Bev McQueen, Valley Links, CV
- Janet Hansen, CV Welcoming and Inclusive Community
- Gabrielle Day, Comox Valley Adult Literacy and Learning Centre
- Karen Barr, Comox Valley Adult Literacy and Learning Centre
- Bruce Brautigan, Comox Valley Employment Society
- Emma Larocque – Literacy Outreach Coordinator, Powell River
- Karen Rowe, North Vancouver Island
- Kassandra Dyke, Women's Resource Centre, Comox Valley
- Deborah Ross, Service Canada Employment and Labour Market Services
- Dorica Skobalj – Immigrant Settlement Office
- Roger Kishi, Wachiay Friendship Centre (representing Wedlidi Speck)
- Bunny Shannon, Comox Valley Planning Society
- Bethany Scott, BD World Community
- Judy Brooks, Literacy Now Steering Committee, Comox Valley

Danielle Hoogland introduced Leona Gadsby and Lori Walker from 2010 Legacies Now who will discuss provincial literacy infrastructure and how our community initiatives are connected to the larger provincial initiative.

Leona Gadsby highlighted that work has been undertaken provincially with regard to a communications campaign that talks in different ways about literacy and which may be more compelling than what has taken place in the past. She asked the question: “What do we mean by Literacy?” Initially, she had thought it was about reading and writing - principally in terms of adults who didn't have the skills and who would be provided with the remediation to acquire these skills. Over time, she has come to realize that when people work on reading skills, whether they be children or adults, other things are learned at the same time. Literacy skills are developed over a lifetime and never stop developing. No matter where an individual is located in the world, in order to function and participate, what matters is the ability to contribute, to participate, to belong in order to be a part of society. The key competencies required include reading, writing, numeracy, problem-solving, teamwork, thinking, computer use, continuous learning, and oral communication. We communicate for participation and it gives us the ability to understand and use information in daily activities, at home, at work, and in community. It is the nature of our beings to learn – and thinking is something we require in our communication age. Communication has to be very broad and practically anything can become literacy so we need to be cautious that we provide people with those skills that will allow them to learn other things.

A power point presentation entitled “The Velcro Effect” was distributed in hardcopy as well as being viewed. Literacy makes learning stick, it makes meaning and applies lifelong learning skills that are transferable. It was noted that we live in a world now where we have to figure out what is truth – what is reliable. In order to make these determinations, literacy skills need to be honed.

Leona Gadsby noted that an IELTS study conducted in 2004 shows that, 43% of our population has less than a secondary school education; 19% have post-secondary but not a high enough literacy level to get by in society. More recent studies are indicating that about 30% of high school graduates do not have the literacy skills required. It was noted that literacy happens in all areas of life – reading, home, work, volunteer participation, sports, teamwork. We support the development of literacy skills throughout our communities and the entirety of our lives. What happens at home and during the early years of development is critical.

Literacy matters for individuals and for communities. While economic success is probably the most important at the moment; higher literacy levels help people make better health choices and it has been proven that those with higher skills live longer. Leona noted that the health budget is at 40% of the provincial budget and continually rising. One way to reduce that budget is to provide stronger literacy skills. It has been proven that people with higher literacy skills are more likely to participate in their civic areas, to vote, and to be involved in their community. It is also a known fact that 80% of people in prisons have low literacy skills. Leona suggested that we need to move from talking about literacy as an issue to using it as a strategy that provides a cohesive approach – make plans, form policy and develop programs in a cohesive way. Presently, in terms of the Literacy Now process across the province, there are 104 task groups, representing more than 400 communities - virtually the entire province – developing and implementing literacy plans together. It is no longer just about school, college or literacy organizations, but includes all facets of life within community. Both Hazelton and Surrey have had their municipal governments recognize the priority of identifying the needs in order to build stronger, healthier communities.

Tom Weegar highlighted that in his community of Port Alberni, the issue of early childhood literacy is becoming more acute as 29% of children entering kindergarten are not ready and the concern for the long range is that they will be vulnerable to drop-out. Leona Gadsby informed that there are case studies indicating that an investment in literacy pays back for the whole

community and the priority is to continue to pay attention to those levels across the life span. She announced that the government has increased funding to Success By Six from \$2.5 million to \$5 million – so it is a priority to keep the pressure on. While it is proving true that it takes a community to raise a child, it was noted that we are not being successful with Aboriginal students. There is a priority to ensure we have the Aboriginal voices at the various literacy tables because we cannot assume we are speaking for them. While Leona noted it is a priority to engage the people who know and listen to what they have to say, it is also recognized that literacy is a long term strategy and not a quick term fix. Tom Weegar applauded the work that is being done and believes we are on the verge of a paradigm shift in many of BC communities as we move from issue to strategy – which is a profound change. Leona provided that along with the video “The Velcro Effect” the Surrey and Hazelton presentations will also be available to the Literacy Outreach Coordinators. UBC will be focusing on 6 communities to compile a series of stories and there will be a website that will be made available to all. Discussion took place on how to pool and use the various resources within the individual communities.

Danielle Hoogland highlighted that in 2008, a Community Literacy Plan was written that contained 5 objectives:

- Build a collaborative community
- Promote literacy in the Comox Valley
- Support new and existing work-based literacy initiatives
- Continue to support family and cultural initiatives
- To make the above happen – hire a Literacy Outreach Coordinator

In the Fall of that year, a strategic planning session was held to revisit the plan and draw out the priorities to determine where energy and resources would be placed. A couple of questions that came out of that session were:

- What is the focus of the work when continued funding remains uncertain
- How does Comox Valley Literacy Now remain true to its communities

Ron Faris from the University of Victoria, and a noted speaker with learning communities, was invited and addressed the importance and building of literacy. While we discussed literacy across the life span, it was determined that energies would be focused first into youth transitioning into adulthood – 15 – 25 years of age, post-secondary and the workplace. The second area of priority was to the unemployed and underemployed; thirdly, vulnerable and isolated families. The outcome was a successful micro-grant process where 10 organizations were funded to deliver service and/or create events around literacy. This year, through discussions with Leona Gadsby, we came to an understanding of why we should move away from the RFP process. (If anyone would like a copy of Danielle’s notes on the rationale, she would be pleased to provide them.) At the last Steering Committee meeting, feedback was provided on the process for allocation of funds to meet priorities. Martin Petter will outline further, the process.

Martin Petter noted that the Steering Committee built on the feedback that had been received at their last meeting with the intention of creating a process for organizations to connect and develop/write proposals together. The most promising approach was what is often referred to as a co-development model – where funders and those who will receive the funding work together from the beginning to create the proposals that come into being. Co-development is one term that is used, while Integrative and Collaborative are other terms for this model. He noted that this model has been used in various parts of Canada, e.g., Social Planning in Toronto, major family planning in Saskatchewan to name a couple. In British Columbia, five organizations in Williams Lake pooled their resources and are now doing quite innovative projects around literacy. We are

also hearing of effective partnerships taking place in Kamloops and within our own area there is the Mother Goose program for instance, where you have the School District and Adult Literacy Centre working together. The intent is for the Steering committee to invite all those who have a particular interest to a stakeholders forum – to a very open day long discussion intended to explore the creation of government projects together and identify partnerships. Following that session, projects would be fleshed out, key funding requirements identified and formal consideration for approval being sought. While this co-development approach will probably take longer – and some might see this as a disadvantage – what we do get at the end of the day is sustaining partnerships where potentially barriers could be dissolved, gaps could more clearly be identified, partnerships are built, resources are shared. This process would avoid some of the competitive elements that can be identified with the RFP model and the mutual second guessing that may occur.

Danielle suggested that while there would be an initial meeting and forum to gather minds and ideas, the first priority of youth in transition into adulthood would be addressed – so she was encouraging members of the CV Literacy Now group to participate. They will be discussing youth who are going to school perhaps part-time, those who are not completing as well as those who are experiencing challenges. The plan is also to address the parents of those youth. An email will be sent out in April announcing the dates and we would hope that youth could be a part of these discussions.

Leona Gadsby clarified that the Literacy groups are not funders and therefore cannot initiate an RFP process. There is no internal need to request proposals for this funding – it can just be used. Those interested in the goals of the Comox Valley Literacy Now group could refer to their model.

Those in attendance were thanked for their participation. The afternoon session including Literacy Outreach Coordinators and Facilitators is scheduled to be held in the Boardroom at North Island College, 2300 Ryan Road, Courtenay.

