

# **Adult Literacy Committee Report**



**The Rotary Club of Calgary**

**Working Together With**



**Report Dated May 1, 2014**



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## **Rotary Club of Calgary Supports Adult Literacy**

In the 2013-1014 fiscal year, The Rotary Club of Calgary provided \$15,500 to support Adult Literacy through Bow Valley College.

This included \$9,000 for Rotary Adult Literacy Bursaries. These Awards in the amount of \$500 each were made to 6 students in each trimester. Dean Gjertsen, the Chair of the Adult Literacy Committee presented the Awards at the Awards Ceremonies held at Bow Valley College.

An additional \$6,500 was provided to support the ABLE and SARAW Programs at Bow Valley. These Programs provide foundational learning at Grade 1 – 7 levels.

## **Why Invest in Adult Basic Literacy Education**

Literacy affects people's lives. Literacy skills can enable individuals to fulfil their potential, achieve their goals, and take advantage of opportunities. When individuals do well, so do their families, communities and employers.

Chicago Times columnist Mary Schmich, who was the 2012 Pulitzer Prize winner for Commentary, is well known for her quote "reading is a discount ticket to everywhere." The trouble however is that a limited number of people possess that ticket, when it should be available to all. Data from the 2003 Adult Literacy and Life Skills study found 42 per cent of Canadian adults have low prose literacy skills, and 20 per cent have serious problems with reading and comprehension. It would appear that four out of 10 Canadians lack that discount ticket to everywhere.

For the 15 per cent of Canadians living with disabilities, many have a lower educational attainment than those without disabilities. In fact, Statistics Canada reports 50 per cent of Canadian adults with disabilities experience literacy barriers. People with disabilities make up a disproportionate amount of Canadian adults who function at the lowest literacy levels, and many face discrimination in getting a good education.

Consistent with Rotary values, Bow Valley College is committed to an inclusive, barrier-free learning environment in which all learners, including learners with disabilities, have access to education and feel included and valued.

## **Foundational Learning – ABLE/SARAW - \$6,500**

As there are few adult literacy programs in Calgary that serve adults reading below grade 4 level, and often these programs do not or cannot serve adults with disabilities, Bow Valley College created the Adult Basic Literacy (ABLE) program. It has operated since 2008 and offers small class sizes and is free of charge to students who face financial barriers. The



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program is a collaboration of the Speech Assisted Reading and Writing (SARAW) and Intermediate Literacy Tutoring programs.

The ABLE class is based on input received from a survey of Calgary agencies that serve adults with physical and developmental disabilities, about how to provide more inclusive adult literacy programs. The classroom has a paid facilitator, plus volunteer tutors and support workers as required, and includes group work plus individual work.

ABLE is learner-centered and competency-based, focuses on learner-identified goals, and works from, and acknowledges, the skills and life experiences a learner already possesses. Students can attend two semesters (one year) with the possibility of a third semester. It is still Alberta's only inclusive adult literacy classroom.

The SARAW program uses the award-winning SARAW talking computer program to provide reading, writing and math skills upgrading for adults who read at or below grade 7 levels. It combines a one-on-one student/tutor programming model with computer-based learning, and received Honourable Mention from the Conference Board of Canada for the Community Learning Award. The program has grown to serve 35 students in 2013 and currently has 45 prospective students on the wait list.

### **Rotary Adult Literacy Bursaries - \$9,000**

The Rotary Club of Calgary awarded 18 Rotary Adult Literacy Bursaries at ceremonies in the fall of last year and the spring of this year. These bursaries are awarded based on nominations by instructors and a review by the Adult Literacy Committee for each nominated student. Bursaries are available to Calgary campus students who are registered in a Basic Education literacy program (Grades 1-9). They are based on financial need and are awarded to students who exhibit a real commitment to continue their education.

In thank you letters, students have told us:

- "This is the first award I ever had in my life."
- "I would like to thank all of you guys who work on this wonderful award. Thank you for working hard for us."
- "The award will mean a lot to help me pay my bills that I couldn't afford."
- "Winning this award means a lot to me because I am trying to be a good example for my daughter."

The Rotary Club is making a difference in adult literacy. We deeply value the successful relationship we have with Bow Valley College. We have worked together with Bow Valley College on behalf of adults with disabilities and low literacy skills. We appreciate our partnership with them in promoting our ongoing support of adult literacy learners.



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### **Our Commitment to Adult Literacy**

Improving literacy skills for individuals with disabilities can have a positive impact on their lives in areas such as employability, income, and increased self-esteem. The Rotary Bursaries and the ABLE and SARAW Programs continue to support students with physical or developmental disabilities and provide an opportunity for these students to study alongside their non-disabled peers.

Respectfully Submitted By the Adult Literacy Committee, The Rotary Club of Calgary

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