

District 7070 Literacy Newsletter

Issue # 11 – May, 2016

Chairman's Message

A Concise Look at First Nation's Literacy

As a direct result of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, there is currently a sharp focus on the welfare of our First Nations people. Some of these concerns relate to literacy and basic skills. This newsletter touches on some of the issues involved in developing solutions to these problems. As these issues relate to our province, they have been studied for a long period of time, including by both the United Nations and the Province of Ontario. Much of the information involved in this newsletter comes from a report written by Priscilla George at the end of the "UN international literacy decade (2003 -2013). The full report is available at <http://www.chiefs-of-ontario.org/sites/default/files/files/First%20Nations%20Literacy%20in%20Ontario.pdf>.

The United Nation's Literacy Decade Goal

In declaring the ten-year period starting January 1, 2003 an International Literacy Decade, the United Nations had this to say about literacy: "...it is convinced that literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century..."

These goals obviously were never reached and the problem remains to be addressed by all levels of government and by Canada's citizenry as a whole. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission also outlined some specific recommendations regarding native education which our current national government has committed to implement.

The Challenge

Aboriginal Literacy Levels - Adults

Presently, there are no statistics on literacy levels for First Nations adults. In the meantime, First Nations use educational attainment levels to identify trends in First Nations literacy. The 1991 Aboriginal Post-Census Survey indicated that 26.9% of adults, aged 15-49, who identified as Northern American Indian on-reserve in Ontario, reported no formal schooling or less than grade 9 as their highest level of education (as compared to the Canadian total of 6%). In Ontario 31% of Native people living on reserve have no formal education or less than Grade 9 compared with 10% in the non-Native population – more than triple the rate.

Native youth living on-reserve have an extremely high drop-out rate between Grades 9 and 10 because there are often no high schools to attend in their community.

Currently, learners in First Nations literacy programs may be described as people from all age groups (youth, adults, even Elders) seeking to develop their skills with the written word in English for a wide variety of reasons, most notable of which is the desire to improve their quality of life. They may want to get jobs, better jobs or start their own businesses. They may want to help their children in school. They may want to be able to handle their business affairs themselves rather than relying on somebody else to do it for them.

The Financial Factors

Currently, most Native literacy program budgets are less than \$50,000. Those amounts cover both administration and delivery. The amount that remains for practitioners' salaries is often less than \$30K annually. Depending on the size of the practitioners' families (including extended family), wages are either at or slightly above the poverty level." Yet, these very same practitioners work with the casualties of the institutional educational system where teachers and administrators often make over \$50K or \$60K. The woefully underfunded First Nations literacy programs are expected to succeed and they are succeeding where the education system has failed. First Nations literacy practitioners carry out many functions. They are administrators, teachers, counsellors, advocates, life skills coaches and fundraisers, to name but a few.

The Current Mandate of Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Programs

The current focus of LBS (Literacy and Basic Skills) is to prepare literacy learners for the workplace/workforce, by enhancing their facility with the spoken and written word in the official languages of this province – English and French. First Nations literacy practitioners believe that literacy is much more than a workplace/workforce issue; rather, it's a quality of life issue. They concur with the United Nations stance in "...acknowledging the importance of a holistic, life-long and life-wide approach to literacy..." Further, the First Nations believe that there are many skills necessary for effective functioning in life. The spoken and written words are but two. The predilection of the funding agents to emphasize cognitive learning outcomes only exacerbates the stigma attached to participating in literacy programs. First Nations literacy practitioners teach learners to recognize their other skills/strengths and to see that literacy is only another skill that they can learn.

In order to continue to receive their LBS funding, Aboriginal literacy programs must adhere to certain criteria. They must document contact hours in each of the following categories:

1. Information and Referral
2. Intake and assessment
3. Training Plan Development
4. Training
5. Follow-up and Evaluation: Each learner in the program must have a Training Plan, in which their progress is documented according to success and transition markers.

The Issue of Administrative Control

Simply, these principles do not allow for First Nations control of First Nations literacy. To paraphrase Marlene Brant Castellano. "The revitalization of Native communities has been

linked closely to control over education (read literacy). That is, it is crucial that First Nations literacy be defined by First Nations on First Nations terms, along with the decision as to what constitutes success. The Government of Ontario, mainly through the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Branch, controls the definition of literacy. This is contrary to the concept of "Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education."

Some attempts by Rotary clubs to assist

If your club is or has held an event or been involved in an event or project, please email Julie Dunaikis (julie@eccgroup.ca) a brief summary so she can post it on the Honouring Indigenous Peoples (HIP) website and provide an update in upcoming newsletters. This will help other clubs and provide a sense of how we are involved.

Approved Projects

Check the HIP website ([Rotary HIP - Approved projects](#)) to see full project descriptions. In her latest newsletter Julie notes that she "hopes you or your club can support any of the projects mentioned as follows. We need much more financial support. Please join in. Not only will you help the project become reality and assist with the educational needs but you will learn a lot as well."

The Pen Pals' G.R.A.N.D. Project - Grand River Arts: Neighbourhood Dialogue.

In 2006/2007, a teacher from Six Nations began a relationship project reaching out to a class in Caledonia to begin a pen pal initiative between the youth. Organizations, schools, teachers and students have supported and have approximately 1800 youth involved annually. Young people will come together to co-create reconciliation-themed artwork, in the spirit of mutual respect, friendship and peace. Art teachings will be taught by a group of volunteers, guest artists and paid alumni of the program. It is hoped that the Two-Row Wampum relationship will build into creating a space for arts-based relationship building. The final exhibition will travel to local communities through an offer by OCAD who will play host to the final exhibition. The young artists' team and Pen Pal Alumni will compile questions to ask select peers who have participated in the project. This is a wonderful learning and reconciliation project.

The Ask: \$5,000 will cover art supplies, space rental and honorariums for the elders, teaching artists and alumni. Please contact Chris Snyder (snyder@eccgroup.ca). The Rotary Club of Toronto has made an initial contribution.

Better Hearing in Education for Northern Youth - The Rotary Club of Guelph

Dr. Lynne McCurdy, an audiologist along with other audiologists is co-ordinating a project that hopes to improve the lives of Inuit youth in Qikiqtani(Baffin) region of northern Canada.

Hearing loss in aboriginal populations can be 32-40% higher than non-aboriginal Canadians. The inability to hear, whether caused by hearing loss or poor acoustic environment, can interfere with a child's development of spoken language, reading, writing and academics.

Children with hearing loss are unable to fill in gaps when they don't hear exactly what is said so miss necessary aspects of learning. The use of Soundfield amplification, when used as an educational tool, allows the speech of the teacher to be accessible to all children in the classroom and be heard at a uniform speech level.

The Ask - \$240,000 over 2 years for equipment and networks of support to ensure sustainability. Over \$70,000 has been committed to date. Please contact Dr. Lynne McCurdy [519-766-HEAR\(4327\)](tel:519-766-HEAR(4327)).

Update

Congratulations to Dr. Lynne McCurdy and her team. They are one of three finalists for the Arctic Inspiration Prize and will receive \$300,000.

The Rotary Club of Belleville has available one "First Nation Personal Development" Bursary for a university student and two bursaries for college students during 2015/2016. Applications are available on the club website <http://www.rotary-belleville.org>.