

# Community Literacy of Ontario Family Literacy Partnerships

January 2005

## Community Literacy of Ontario

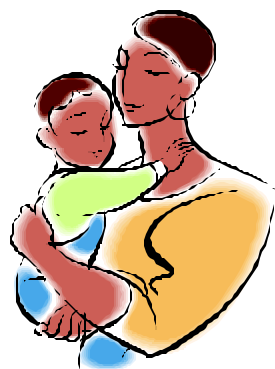
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Community Literacy of Ontario received funding from the National Literacy Secretariat to deliver *Foundational Training in Family Literacy* via a series of online workshops from January to June 2005. In addition, CLO is researching and writing two bulletins on effective family literacy partnerships and initiatives. This is the first of the two bulletins. Watch your mailbox in spring 2005 for the second!

In this bulletin, you will learn about exciting partnerships in various parts of Ontario: Waterloo, Sharbot Lake, Kingston, St. Thomas-Elgin and Lambton. We will even make a quick trip to Alberta and learn about partnerships there. Then we will tell you all about some successful partnership strategies. But first, let's go to Waterloo, Ontario!

## "LITERACY IS A FAMILY AFFAIR", WATERLOO, ONTARIO

This is the home of *"Literacy is a Family Affair"*. As the lead member of this partnership, Project READ Literacy Network runs two two-hour long family literacy workshops thanks to sponsorship from the local newspaper, *The Record*. The workshops are *"First Steps"* and *"Next Steps"* and are focused at parents and caregivers with children from newborn to five years of age and from ages six to eight (or Kindergarten to Grade 3) respectively. A pair of paid facilitators leads the workshops, the host site arranges child care, the Network provides snacks (sometimes Starbucks donates coffee) as well as a package of resources, and some resources are also donated by Kindermusik of Cambridge/Kitchener-Waterloo.

The *"First Steps"* workshop gives an overview of simple strategies that parents can use with their children at home to make it more literacy-rich. The *"Next Steps"* workshop is geared to helping parents support their school-aged children. It gives ideas on how to share information with the child's teacher.

Project READ is also involved in another family literacy partnership. This one is called *"Get Set Learn"*. Together with the Region of Waterloo, Employment Services Division, they offer an 8-week program geared towards parents on Ontario Works. The program's goal is to help the parents get their children ready for school. Other partners in this project include the Kitchener Early Years Centre which provides space and childcare during the sessions.

For more information about these programs, contact Lorri Sauve at [sauvelm@sympatico.ca](mailto:sauvelm@sympatico.ca) or Anne Ramsay at Project READ at [anne@projectread.ca](mailto:anne@projectread.ca).

## Sharbot Lake and Kingston Literacy

### SHARBOT LAKE

Northern Connections Adult Learning program has been very busy in the past few months developing relationships and seeking funding to help move family literacy partnerships forward.

One of their proposed ideas is to work with Share the Stories, the Early Literacy Specialist, the Early Years Centre and a local Medical Centre to put a story corner in the medical centre manned by volunteers part-time.

They have also received funding from Industry Canada's Eastern Ontario Development Fund for a needs determination study focusing on "what parents of school-age children want/need as helps to support their children's literacy and school issues". To do this, they will be partnering with the Early Years Centre, local schools, parent associations and other literacy providers. A youth intern will be hired who will create questionnaires and surveys, host workshops, facilitate focus groups and network within the community. A strategic plan will also be developed.

Thanks to the work that this busy literacy program and its partners have already accomplished, mothers in the community are starting to advocate on their own behalf and have started a support group for local single mothers with several literacy learners taking a lead role. For more information about any of these initiatives, contact Joyce Bigelow at [literacy@frontenac.net](mailto:literacy@frontenac.net).

### KINGSTON LITERACY

Yet another partnership is led by Kingston Literacy which hires people in rural areas like Sharbot Lake to deliver RAPP packs and bookmaking courses during regularly-scheduled playgroup time. The local Early Years Centre provides childcare, space and participants. For more information about how this partnership works, contact Susan Leslie at [ccc@frontenac.net](mailto:ccc@frontenac.net).



RAPP stands for "Reading and Parents Program". It was developed by Kingston Literacy in 1990, when the first RAPP packs were assembled. Each pack contains a book suitable for a child between two-and-half and five years old. The pack also contains: tips for parents on how to use the pack; a craft idea and materials; a selection of poetry; and activity sheets. Everything in the pack relates to the theme of the story.

Throughout the 1990's, Kingston Literacy gradually developed more RAPP material, adding to their RAPP titles each year. To share this resource with others, in 2000 Kingston Literacy published a series of four photocopiable books containing all the materials needed to assemble thirty-eight RAPP packs. Individual programs supply the corresponding children's books and materials to make the craft. The *RAPP Spring and Fall Collection* and the *RAPP Winter and Summer Collection* are based on children's books with seasonal themes. The *RAPP Classics Collection* includes such classics as *Three Little Pigs* and *Franklin in the Dark*, and the *RAPP Holidays Collection* includes books with holiday themes.

You can order these materials from their website at [www.kingstonliteracy.com](http://www.kingstonliteracy.com). Click on the "FOR SALE" link at the left side of the page to see all of the resources they have available.

## St. Thomas—Elgin

The YWCA literacy program is partnering with the St. Thomas Health Unit to deliver a version of *Lullabies to Literacy* for hard-to-serve isolated parents involved with the Health Unit's Parent Resource Workers. This new program seems to have been an instant success with the YWCA providing some staff time and the Health Unit providing additional staff time and snacks.

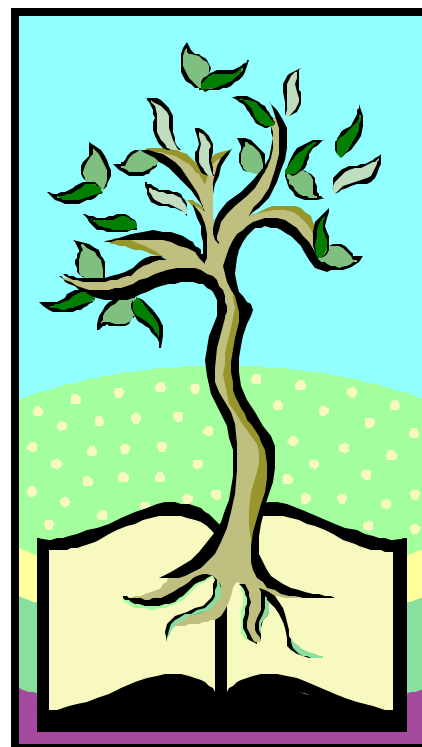
The program began with ten families and 13 children, with two other families dropping in occasionally. The families have enjoyed the time out, have formed new friendships and have seen the value of social interaction for their children. The program has focused on self-esteem, talking and listening, sounds, choosing books and songs and rhymes. Guest presenters have included the Early Years Literacy Specialist, a local musician and the Children's Librarian. For more information, contact Shelley Olivier at 519-631-9800 or by e-mail at [literacy.ywcastthomaselgin@on.aibn.com](mailto:literacy.ywcastthomaselgin@on.aibn.com).

*Lullabies to Literacy* was developed by the Macaulay Centre in Toronto, and you can find out more about it by visiting [www.macaulaycentre.org/familit\\_train.html](http://www.macaulaycentre.org/familit_train.html).

## Resources

Be sure to check with AlphaPlus Centre and the National Adult Literacy Database, but to start you off, here are some recommended resources:

- ⇒ **Family Literacy Connections: A Guide to Family Literacy Partnerships.** Peel-Halton-Dufferin Adult Learning Network. Call 1-905-812-3533 for more information.
- ⇒ *The Power of Partnerships.* **Literacy.ca.** Movement for Canadian Literacy. Fall 2004. Available online at [www.literacy.ca/public/litca/fall04/1.htm#inside](http://www.literacy.ca/public/litca/fall04/1.htm#inside).
- ⇒ Alhadeff, Mary Anne, *A Partnership Prenuptial Contract in Best Practices in Journalism.* Available online at [www.bpitv.org/resources/index.cfm?resourcesdoc=partnership\\_prenuptial](http://www.bpitv.org/resources/index.cfm?resourcesdoc=partnership_prenuptial).
- ⇒ Skage, Sharon. **Building Strong and Effective Community Partnerships: A Manual for Family Literacy Workers.** The Family Literacy Action Group of Alberta. Available online at [www.nald.ca/clr/partner/cover.htm](http://www.nald.ca/clr/partner/cover.htm).



## Centre for Family Literacy, Edmonton, Alberta

Now we're going to take a brief journey outside of Ontario to visit the Centre for Family Literacy located in Edmonton, Alberta. This organization offers many innovative and exciting programs – you can find out about them by visiting their website at [www.familit.ca](http://www.familit.ca). Thanks to Maureen Sanders from the Centre for providing us with the following information about ongoing partnerships.

*By Maureen Sanders*

All programs offered by The Centre For Family Literacy (CFL) are firmly rooted in community. We run both a wide range and a large number of programs in Edmonton every year and also provide services provincially, including training. Local programs include:

- ⇒ Books for Babies
- ⇒ Books Offer Our Kids Success
- ⇒ Help Your Child to Read and Write
- ⇒ Learning Together
- ⇒ Lending Boxes
- ⇒ Literacy Classroom on Wheels (the COW bus)
- ⇒ Rhymes that Bind
- ⇒ Storysacks



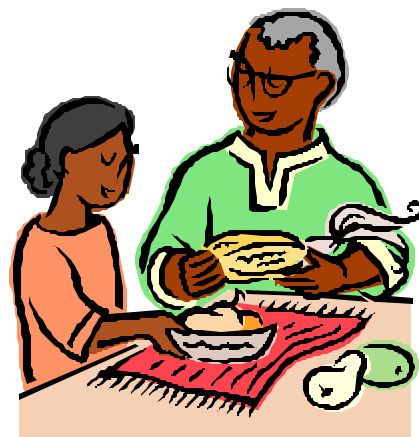
Family literacy programs are offered at a broad range of locations across the community - health clinics, schools, libraries, community centers, etc. Such site-based offerings allow participants to access programs without overwhelming transportation difficulties. Transportation is an important factor, particularly in the cold weather when parents may have to bundle up several children to come to a program site. Under those circumstances when transportation is provided, the service is much appreciated. About 30% of participants noted that transportation was a concern for them.

Family literacy programs are offered at the request of community agencies. In 2003, 81 partner agencies collaborated in offering programs. In addition, over 41 agencies were involved through the Community Outreach Information Sessions and Inter-provincial Training efforts provided by the Centre.

CFL staff, prior to program initiation, visit all agencies. Such visits ensure that both the agency and CFL are aware of the responsibilities of each other with respect to program offerings and help identify how agency goals and those of CFL programs blend to assist families. Needless to say, such collaboration takes time and effort, not only at the initiation stage, but also to maintain that partnership over the course of program delivery. CFL staff are continually in touch with agency personnel to sustain these positive relationships. In fact, many agency reports indicated that the presence of the CFL program coordinator is one of the strengths of program delivery. Furthermore, when staff members from CFL are not the primary facilitators of a program, the support provided by the CFL program coordinator is particularly appreciated.

The number of agencies who reported that they would offer a program again is 96%. The number of agencies who rate a program as excellent or very good is 98%. In addition, the number of agencies who recognize the need for language/literacy programs is 90%. These high percentages have been maintained for years. In other words, CFL programs continue to meet the needs and expectations of the community.

The agencies that participate paint a broad picture of the community at large. Some agencies provide some funding and personnel as facilitators for a program. Other agencies such as Health Units provide space, access to potential participants, or release staff that have been trained to serve as facilitators. Agencies like schools provide appropriate space for program delivery. The Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta has involved students in program delivery as part of a course requirement. Because of the collaboration among agencies, much more can be accomplished than could be achieved by one agency alone.



The COW bus (Classroom on Wheels) that travels across several inner city neighbourhoods circulated more than 10,000 books to over 450 parents and 800 children. This program has more than tripled over the past year and its influence has been considerable. On the last day of June, a little girl ran up to the bus. She was very excited. She said, *"We're going to miss coming to the bus so mom got us library cards and signed us up for a reading program."*

Considerable integration takes place between preschool and public educational efforts. For example, libraries have had difficulty attracting less literate parents to make use of their services. The *Books for Babies* program incorporates a library component within its program, and works with library staff to encourage library use; the libraries, in turn, offer their facilities for part or all of the program and provide free library cards to participants. Results from this partnership have been very positive with 65% of participants indicating they use the library more frequently.

In the past year, CFL staff has liaised with over 1200 individuals through its Community Outreach Information Sessions. One of the major goals of CFL is to heighten the awareness across the community of the importance of oral language and literacy development from birth to adulthood. To this end, CFL works hard to network and to provide expertise to agencies and individuals across the community, the province and the nation in order to sensitize them to how they may:

- ⇒ Include language and literacy events within their current professional practices.
- ⇒ Have a greater understanding of the developmental nature of oral language and literacy development.



One outcome of this partnership work is that we are now seeing more and more non-literacy agencies adding "literacy specialists" to their staff. This is heartening in that agencies are obviously seeing the benefits of literacy work with families and are wanting to do more. However, it also brings its challenges in that the staff they hire often lack the background to do the work effectively, so this is where our training programs come into play. But that's another story!

**The Centre for Family Literacy is the creator of the "Foundational Training in Family Literacy" being offered online by Community Literacy of Ontario from January to June 2005. Speaking of which, CLO is proud to announce that our online training is full (to bursting!) and we look forward to our first class in January 2005.**

## All About Partnerships

After hearing about all of those innovative and inspirational partnerships, let's take a general look at partnerships. Establishing a partnership can be as informal and simple as agreeing to work together on one small part of a project or it can be a much more formal, organized arrangement including legal agreements that list specific areas of responsibility. A partnership can be defined as a relationship between two or more organizations working towards a common purpose where all parties benefit to some degree. Some people make the analogy that partnerships are like a marriage, and like marriages, no two arrangements are exactly the same.

Mary Anne Alhadeff, writing for "Best Practices in Journalism" (see [www.bpity.org/resources/index.cfm?resourcesdoc=partnership\\_prenuptial](http://www.bpity.org/resources/index.cfm?resourcesdoc=partnership_prenuptial)) explores this view of partnership as a marriage. Before entering into a partnership arrangement, she suggests some points to consider such as:

- ⇒ Are the partner organizations compatible?
- ⇒ Are their mission statements compatible?
- ⇒ How will you resolve conflicts?
- ⇒ Is this partnership ongoing or time-limited?
- ⇒ How many partners will there be?
- ⇒ What does each partner bring to the relationship?
- ⇒ What are the roles and responsibilities of each partner?
- ⇒ What is in it for each partner?
- ⇒ How will partners communicate (and how often?)
- ⇒ Will there be minor or junior partners?
- ⇒ What are the financial obligations of each partner?
- ⇒ How will you evaluate the results of the partnership?
- ⇒ What constitutes termination of the partnership?

Like marriage, there are different types of partnerships. **Family Literacy Connections: A Guide to Family Literacy Partnerships** (Peel-Halton-Dufferin Adult Learning Network) describes the following types of partnerships that currently exist within family literacy programs:

- ⇒ Donation: a one-time contribution (financial or otherwise).
- ⇒ Sponsorship: ongoing financial support.
- ⇒ Cooperation: two or more agencies share information and may work together informally.
- ⇒ Coordination: multi-disciplinary sharing of knowledge, decision-making and coordination of service delivery in the best interests of the participants. Coordination is more formalized than cooperation.
- ⇒ Collaboration: two or more agencies with common goals work together to plan, carry out and evaluate. Collaboration can include joint risk-taking and the sharing of authority and benefits for all partners.



## What Makes a Partnership Successful?

Source: *Family Literacy Connections: A Guide to Family Literacy Partnerships (Peel-Halton-Dufferin Adult Learning Network)*

Successful partnerships don't just happen. Like any good thing, they take work. *"Family Literacy Connections"* suggests the following elements of successful partnerships:



- ⇒ One organization maintains the lead.
- ⇒ There are partnership guidelines that state clear goals.
- ⇒ A variety of partners are involved. Involving more partners may mean that you can provide better services. The partners should have similar philosophies.
- ⇒ Sustainable funding is in place.
- ⇒ There is an advisory committee with representatives from all partners. This isn't a committee for the sake of having a committee!
- ⇒ The advisory committee can ensure that the vision is adhered to, and that there is discussion and agreement about any changes. The committee also has an important role to play in strategic planning and evaluation. This point isn't as important if there are only two partners!
- ⇒ Strategic planning is done annually.
- ⇒ There are paid, skilled staff for the partnership initiative. This doesn't mean that volunteers are not important, but at least one paid staff person can handle the day-to-day operations of running a family literacy program. Without that staff person, this responsibility falls to the partners.
- ⇒ There are good lines of communication.
- ⇒ Partners must have a vested interest in the project.

Inevitably, there will be times of conflict and disagreement in any partnership. Keeping the lines of communication open and making sure that the advisory committee meets regularly and fully discusses issues can help minimize conflict. Here are some other ideas for problem solving in partnerships:

- ⇒ Be flexible and willing to adapt to change.
- ⇒ Don't take things personally.
- ⇒ Be diplomatic in how you present a problem.
- ⇒ Be prepared to learn from your mistakes and to admit them to your partners.
- ⇒ Don't sit on a problem. Take care of it right away.
- ⇒ Keep goals and priorities clear and use them to make decisions.
- ⇒ Keep everyone informed of any changes.
- ⇒ Hold people to what they said they were going to do (including yourself).

## The Organization for Literacy in Lambton

By Miriam Watson

The Organization for Literacy in Lambton is fortunate to have many community partnerships. Some of our partners offer financial support, some offer administrative support while other partnerships are of a collaborative nature. This article will focus on just a few of our many partnerships.

Do you have a partnership you would like to share? If you do, please contact CLO!

- ⇒ The Sarnia and District Volunteer Services Organization screens high school volunteers through interviews, reference checks and police background checks. They keep a database of high school students looking for volunteer opportunities and try to match them up with charitable organizations looking for volunteers. They are an excellent resource for us.
- ⇒ The Boys and Girls Club of Sarnia offer us a room at low cost to run our *Partners In Reading and Learning* (PIRL) and *Together In Math Essentials* (TIME) programs three evenings a week.
- ⇒ Various organizations and church groups around Lambton County also offer low cost or cost-free space for programming.
- ⇒ Lambton County Libraries help collect new books for our *Give-A-Book* initiative, which aims to give a new book to every child in Lambton County whose family receives a food basket at Christmas.
- ⇒ Salvation Army, Christmas Is For Everyone, Operation Christmas Tree and Aamjiwnaang First Nations all partner with us to deliver a new book to every child whose family will be receiving a food basket from the food bank at Christmas.
- ⇒ The Book Keeper Bookstore helps collect books for our *Give-A-Book* initiative and supports many fund-raising initiatives, including a *Toonies for Literacy* can at their store, *Showcase Literacy* and discounts on purchases for our organization.
- ⇒ Ontario Early Years partners with us for *Family Literacy Day* events and *Dr. Seuss's Birthday Celebration*.
- ⇒ Sarnia Lambton Training Board partners with us for the *Need To Read* festival.



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