

Literacy Matters

Fall 2019

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Community program meets community needs

The Dechıta Nàowo employment skills training program offers opportunities, optimism and confidence to its participants.

The Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN) Dechıta Nàowo Program targets members who need to upgrade their skills to get work or further their education. It trains program participants in different jobs, such as construction, heavy equipment, office skills, and environmental monitoring. It provides employability skills needed in any workplace, helps participants understand what employers expect,

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President's Message: Bev Garven

Welcome to our newsletter!



The NWT Literacy Council is honoured to be celebrating our 30th Anniversary in 2020, which is just around the corner. Much has changed in the Northwest Territories in the past 30 years and in how we view literacy. The Council continues to grow and adapt to meet the needs of the people and communities in the NWT.

Our Board of Directors made some membership changes during our in-person board meeting, Annual General Meeting, and Strategic Planning session in October. These are leaner times financially. To allow us to continue to meet once a year in person, we have made our board a little leaner.

We will maintain regional representation, but we will no longer consider a regional position vacant if the member is serving on our executive. Board members will now be regional representatives as well as possibly being elected to an executive position such as President or Treasurer. The change gives us flexibility to have as few as six members. We have eight members now.

We will share our strategic plan soon.

It will be our road map to follow for the next four years. You will see, as you read this newsletter, that we have new and exciting programs happening at the Council. Now more than ever, we need to plan ahead and keep to a path that allows us to adapt, while staying true to our mission and vision.

Our 30th Anniversary will be our theme for our activities in 2020. We anticipate moving forward as a strong, vibrant organization serving the NWT in 2020 and beyond.

Mark your calendar

National Family Literacy Day

January 27

Write for us!

We are always looking for contributions to our weekly blog and email newsletter, *Literacy This Week*, as well as to *Literacy Matters*.

We offer a small honorarium for blogs.

If you are interested, contact

nwtliteracy@nwtliteracy.ca.



Bison Bus

summer travels

The Bison Bus has hit the road! This summer the Bison Bus was officially open for business and travelling around the territory.

We travelled to Behchokò for a quick stopover with DeBeers for their Books in Homes project, before making the trip to Kakisa, where we met with the Kát'odeeche and Fort Providence Aboriginal Head Start programs, their families and elders. We shared a feast cooked over a fire, took part in a scavenger hunt, made rockets and bubble blowers, and enjoyed the books and games aboard the Bison Bus.

We travelled to Fort Resolution and Hay River in July and then to Fort Smith and Enterprise in August. We involved families in several activities on and off the bus. We made rockets and giant bubble wands, set up our literacy fishing pond, played outdoor games and activities

like our giant blocks and bean bag toss and did puzzles, games and crafts on the bus. We also gave away lots of books to children, parents and caregivers.

Other highlights this summer were our Bison Bus launch event and visiting summer camps, family programs and events in Yellowknife.

It was a great summer on the road. Thank you to all the communities who invited us to visit and everyone who came out to our events. Keep an eye on us next year to see who we'll visit next!



We celebrated Indigenous languages during **NWT Literacy Week**

During NWT Literacy Week we celebrated the United Nations International Year of Indigenous Languages. We asked people to take part in daily Indigenous language social media challenges and we debuted our videos promoting early childhood language learning. We held events in Yellowknife and funded communities to host their own events throughout the week.

Communities around the territory celebrated NWT Literacy Week in lots of different and creative ways. Here are some events in keeping with our International Year of Indigenous Languages theme.

- The Dene Nation invited people to their office to share their language research and share conversations in various Dene languages.
- The Goyatikò Language Centre in Dettah hosted an Introduction to Wiłłideh Games event.
- Chief Julius School in Fort McPherson brought students and elders together to discuss their language. They talked about their hopes for their language in the future, how they can better learn the language, how teachers can help and how they can plan and build a relationship together.
- Deh Gáh Got'ie First Nation Aboriginal Head Start in Fort Providence hosted a moccasin-making workshop. The staff, parents, elders and children used the workshop to speak in Dene Zhatié.
- Deninue Kue First Nation in Fort Resolution hosted a community Chipewyan BINGO event.
- Joseph Burr Tyrrell Elementary School in Fort Smith had a brown bag picnic lunch where community Indigenous languages were practiced and celebrated.
- The Hay River Literacy Society hosted a pyjama story time for young children and families.
- Aurora College in Kát'odeeche hosted an Elders' tea and board game afternoon.
- The Children First Society in Inuvik had a cooking event. Children learned to cook moose burgers by reading and following a recipe. They used simple math to measure ingredients.

Other Yellowknife events

NWT Literacy Council staff spent a lunch hour outside of the Yellowknife Post Office giving away free books and Council neck warmers. We also handed out coffee and hot chocolate to warm everyone up on a cold fall day.

One of our favourite NWT Literacy Week traditions is hosting Lunch with a Bunch. Each week Yellowknife seniors have lunch at the Baker

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Centre. We catered and served lunch and held a raffle for northern books. It's always a treat for us to be invited back to get a chance to talk, laugh, and enjoy times with the seniors.

We hosted our annual Family Literacy Fun Night at the Fieldhouse in Yellowknife. This free event featured dinner, games, bouncy castles, books, arts and crafts and music. We had help from many of our Yellowknife family literacy partners. Thank you to the Literacy Outreach Centre, the Early Learning and Child Care students from Aurora College, Yellowknife Playgroup, Ecology North, Centre for Northern Families, Canadian Parents for French and Association Franco-Culturelle de Yellowknife.

We hope you had a great time celebrating NWT Literacy Week. Thank you to everyone who hosted events and promoted the use of Indigenous languages throughout the week.

Literacy award winners

We partnered with the Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment to host the NWT Ministerial Literacy Awards and Adult Learners' Luncheon. Students and instructors from Aurora College, Tree of Peace, Yellowknife Association for Community Living and Native Women's Association were invited to take part in the awards luncheon. This year's winner of the Council of the Federation Award was Liza Mandeville. Michelle LeMouel was the recipient of the Youth Learner Award and Shawna Coleman won the Professional Educator Award.



Photo: Education, Culture and Employment, GNWT



We nurture relationships among kids and with the land

The Community Connections program for newcomers focused on outdoor activities this summer. The NWT Literacy Council supported eight children of immigrants to attend Bushkids Summer Camp. There were many discoveries and investigations into the land and creatures around Yellowknife.

During the four-day camp in August, participants were delighted with the experiences and they learned new skills. Bushkids Summer Camp was run by Wendy Lahey and Chloe Dragon Smith at the Yellowknife Ski Club. They follow the principles of Forest and Nature School which have existed for thousands of years with Indigenous peoples in Canada and around the world. Simply put, Forest and Nature School is an educational model that involves significant time outdoors.

The participants made tools, art, forts and new friends. They built new relationships, learned about everyone's

cultures and how to say a few words in different languages.

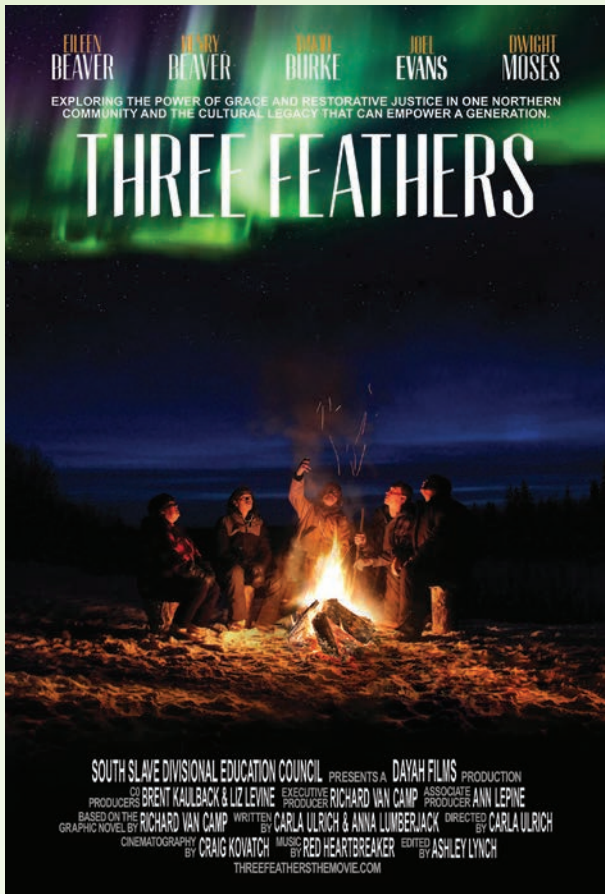
Each day the children became more comfortable in the bush environment. Every afternoon, the group (21 children aged 5–11 years, a youth volunteer, and 4 educators) went for a hike. In the beginning, the immigrant children were stumbling over rocks like newborn caribou calves. By the end of the week they ran and jumped as they hiked around the Ski Club.

One day our adventure took us to the shores of Great Slave Lake. There was a steep hill to climb down,

and everyone patiently followed the safe route down. The children tried out the fishing rods that they made. Even though no one caught a fish, it was very special to be by the water, and the hike gave us beautiful views of Yellowknife.

It was impressive how well the children took care of each other, themselves and the land. The children showed kindness and curiosity towards each other and the world around them. They were open to trying new things, they helped each other and they challenged themselves. Sharing circles emphasized how all of our ancestors lived close to the land somewhere, and everything we rely on in our lives today (food, clothing, materials) all come from the land somewhere, even if it is often far away.

These special activities were possible thanks to the following grants: GNWT Healthy Choices, United Way NWT's Community Investment Fund, and the City of Yellowknife, Community Services. The grants supplement the Community Connections program funding from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.



Three Feathers

film features four languages

A new feature film, *Three Feathers*, was filmed in four languages, Cree, Dënesųhíne, Dene Zhatié and English. The film is based on a story by Richard Van Camp and was produced by the South Slave Divisional Education Council who gathered several other sponsors. *Three Feathers* was filmed in and around Fort Smith and directed by Carla Ulrich. It played this fall at the Yellowknife International Film Festival.

Our community partners build youth skills



The NWT Literacy Council hosted its biggest ever Skill Builders for Youth Training in May. We had 17 participants from 13 communities. The training is for anyone who works with youth in the NWT. It brings together people from different backgrounds including recreation, adult education, youth programming, community government, and teaching. People who attend a Skill Builders for Youth training event are eligible for our Skill Builders for Youth funding for their community youth programs.

The Department of Education, Culture, and Employment funds the Skill Builders for Youth program, which is targeted at youth, 16-29 years old, who are out of school, unemployed, underemployed, or at-risk. This is the second year of our three-year contribution agreement.

The goal of the Skill Builders for Youth program is to provide informal learning experiences for youth that build literacy and essential skills while offering a path back into learning. People who facilitate Skill Builders for Youth community programs have told us that they appreciate having access to funding like this that is flexible enough to meet community needs.

This year's training participants were very engaged, and we all learned a lot from each other. We talked about different definitions of literacy. We kept coming

back to the idea that literacy is intersectional. In other words, what it means to be literate depends on who you are, where you are, and how you want to live your life. This led many participants to see the value of integrating literacy and essential skills into on-the-land-programming.

Eight communities have been approved for funding so far this year to run a Skill Builders for Youth program. We look forward to visiting some of these programs this winter. You can find the application forms for Skill Builders for Youth funding on our website here: www.nwtliteracy.ca/funding. To learn more or to apply for Skill Builders for Youth funding, call the NWT Literacy Council office at 1-866-599-6758 or email nwtliteracy@nwtliteracy.ca.



Photo: North Creative



Photo: North Creative

We have new staff members

Welcome to Coleen Canney, our new Youth and Community Literacy Coordinator. Coleen is a member of the Tłtshet's'èhk'edéłi First Nation, a water protector, and an LGBTQ+ activist. She was a founding board member for the Rainbow Coalition of Yellowknife, and contributed to Denendeh Against DAPL (Dakota Access Pipeline). In her spare time she loves to read, sing, play ukulele, attend movie club, and do various live performances. We look forward to having Coleen work with communities on our Skill Builders for Youth project.

Coleen takes over from Emily Smith, who is now the Program Coordinator with Northern Youth, an organization that promotes youth leadership through on-the-land experiences.

We're also pleased to welcome our new Community Oral Health Literacy Coordinator, Stephanie van Pelt. Before moving to Yellowknife last year,

Stephanie lived and worked in Southeast Asia and across the Americas in the field of conflict resolution and peace building. She has also worked in experiential education programming in Central and South America and enjoys work that builds community, relationship, and understanding among people with diverse perspectives.

In her spare time, Stephanie enjoys being outdoors, playing volleyball, music, and quiet time reading a book. She also loves combining digital media and storytelling for social change. The arts-based Community Oral Health Project will operate across the NWT.

This fall we said goodbye to our dynamic summer students, Catriona Profit and Jeremy Mousseau who are back pursuing post-secondary studies. We are grateful for their contributions!

We encourage people to apply for the

Canada Learning Bond



This spring the NWT Literacy Council received funding from the Government of Canada to increase awareness and take-up of the Canada Learning Bond (CLB). The Canada Learning Bond aims to help parents of lower-income families save for their children's post-secondary education. Children must have been born in 2004 or later to be eligible for this federal program.

Our program aims to improve the take-up of the CLB program in the NWT, where 4,400 eligible children are not receiving this money for their further education.

We will host four regional events to train and encourage local community champions to help people in their communities to apply for the CLB. Yellowknife's event

is November 21 and 22. Similar events will take place during 2020 in Norman Wells, Inuvik, and Hay River.

Once people apply, and if they are eligible for the CLB, the federal government will put \$500 into a child's Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP). Anyone can set up an RESP for a child. Eligible children receive \$100

a year dependent on the family income up to a potential total of \$2,000.

The learning bond is retroactive. That means if your child is five years old when you apply for the learning bond, and your income qualified each year since they were born, your child's RESP will get the money they qualified for since birth.

Apply for the Canada Learning Bond

To apply for the Canada Learning Bond, first set up an RESP. You can go to your bank or other financial business that offers RESPs.

You don't need to put your own money into the RESP. You can ask for a plan that does not have fees and does not need money from you.

You can apply in person at a bank or start your application online through www.startmyresp.ca/NWT

Some financial institutions will help you open an RESP over the phone.

To open an RESP you need: The child's Social Insurance Number and the parent's photo identification and Social Insurance Number.

RESP money can be used for university, college, trade school, apprenticeships, and CEGEPS.

Students don't have to use their RESP right after high school. The account can stay open for 35 years from the date it was opened.

To learn more or for help, contact Christine at the NWT Literacy Council.

Our new oral health project

The NWT Literacy Council is starting a new project to help improve the oral health of NWT children and youth. NWT residents have more problems with their teeth than most Canadians. To help improve the situation we're gearing up for community gatherings for children and their families in 20 communities across the territory to provide oral health information and activities.

This project will run from this winter until the spring of 2021. The Council is developing two resources for this project. An oral health-themed story book for children will be written by author Richard Van Camp and illustrated by Neiva Mateus. An animated video for older children will also cover oral health themes. The book and video will make their debut during the oral health gatherings, with each family receiving a copy of the story book.

At the community events there will be oral health-themed games and activities for children, the chance for families to ask questions of a trained community member about oral health issues, as well as a fluoride varnish (for those interested) where possible. The community gatherings for oral health will also feature a puppet show performed by local youth and the Council's Oral Health Literacy Coordinator. We'll also give out dental care supplies to everyone who comes to a gathering.

The Literacy Council is brainstorming to decide what to call these gatherings. Be on the lookout for an oral health gathering in a community near you in 2020! This project is funded by the Department of Health and Social Services.

What's happening in Family Literacy

We were happy to partner with DeBeers again this year for their Books in Homes program. The Books in Homes program visits schools around the territory and hosts a free “travelling bookfair” for students. We visited several communities to promote literacy and reading while helping with the event. We helped students pick out books and hosted literacy-based activities.

This summer we continued to have our summer students help families do an activity, game, or craft at the Yellowknife Farmers Market. Many families also visited our Book Mobile every week to check out our selection of free books. On Canada Day, our summer students, Catriona Profit and Jeremy Mousseau, hosted a scavenger hunt and made homemade ice cream with children and families. Our Book Mobile also was at Yellowknife's Ramble and Ride this summer with books for community members of all ages.

We went to other community events throughout the summer. Charlotte Upton and Catriona attended Ecology North's Rivers to Oceans Day and did an activity on buoyancy and volume with tin foil boats. We visited the Centre for Northern Families throughout the summer and fall doing various crafts and activities. Playgroup invited us to do a StoryWalk® during one of their sessions at the Fieldhouse. We did presentations about reading to your baby at the Yellowknife Public Health and at Moms, Boobs and Babies post-natal group.

We celebrated the Book Cellar's 40th Anniversary in August. We took the opportunity to thank Judith Drinnan and The Book Cellar for all the support they have given us over the years, as well as for having such a broad variety of northern books. We took the Bison Bus with lots of games, crafts, and activities for families to do both on and off the bus. Judith donated the proceeds of the anniversary barbeque to our Bison Bus. Thank you, Judith.

In August, both Katie Johnson and Charlotte presented at Education, Culture and Employment's Early Childhood Symposium. Katie talked about emergent literacy. Charlotte hosted a session on Make and Takes, where participants had the chance to make iSpy bags, story discs, story dice and felt stories. This was a great chance for us to catch up with familiar faces and meet people new to the field of family literacy and early childhood education.

NWT Literacy Council staff members also participated in professional development opportunities. Katie attended the NWT Recreation and Parks Association annual conference in October. Our summer student Jeremy attended High-Five training. Charlotte attended the 2019 National Centre for Families Learning Conference, learning more about language acquisition, STEM for early childhood, and the role of fathers in family literacy.

We have two upcoming Family Literacy Institute Training events. One will take place in Yellowknife, November 25-28. The second training will be a Beaufort-Delta regional session in Inuvik, February 18-20. Go to our website for more information on these training sessions.

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Bowl-A-Thon raises \$8,000 for Bison Bus



Our Bowl-A-Thon for Literacy saw 20 teams of 4-6 fun-loving people bowl to raise over \$8,000 for the Literacy Council's Bison Bus. Each team raised at least \$100.

We held our Peter Gzowski Invitational (PGI) Bowl-A-Thon for Literacy in April. Award-winning Canadian broadcaster and journalist, Peter Gzowski, started PGI events for literacy in 1986 when he hosted a golf tournament for friends to raise money for literacy programs.

This expanded into the Peter Gzowski Invitational, a series of golf tournaments across the country featuring music, media, and literacy celebrities. Today the provinces and territories still hold PGI events, ranging from gala dinners to Pickle Ball tournaments.

Local entertainer Terry Brookes did magic tricks and made balloon hats, animals, and more at our bowl-a-thon. Local businesses donated money to be lane sponsors, and prizes for our Strike Zone lane. Jacey Firth Hagen was our Gzowski Award winner. Jacey is a Gwich'in language activist, student, and creator of the Speak Gwich'in To Me social media campaign.

Thank you to our prize sponsors:

- Arbonne
- Barren Ground Coffee
- Cabin Radio
- City of Yellowknife
- Creative Basics
- Glen's Your Independent Grocer
- Gourmet Cup
- PGI Canada
- Signed
- Yellowknife Book Cellar

Thank you to our lane sponsors:

- Global Storm
- Kavanaugh Waste Removal Services
- Kopykat
- Nunasi Financial Services
- Top of the World Travel



Photo: YKDFN Dechita Nàowo

...continued from page 1

and helps to improve communication and other transferable skills. Program participants are also exposed to various careers.

Participants can improve their literacy and essential skills in the Dechita Nàowo programs as well as through a partnership with the Aurora College Community Learning Centre in Ndilo.

“We started the program because we saw young men with nothing to do during parts of the year”, says the Dechita Nàowo Program Manager, Margaret Erasmus.

“Our staff have developed and they run our program. We’re in the community so we can find out what it is people want”, says Margaret. “We also look at the labour market needs.” A big part of the program’s success is building relationships with employers and industry. “People are aware of us now after four years and they let us know what they need.”

That’s one reason construction skills have figured prominently. Another reason to keep labour market needs in mind is “that people get discouraged if they take training and there’s nowhere for them to go to work”, she says.

Dechita Nàowo participants started by doing renovations, then building sheds, and have since built a greenhouse and training centre in Dettah and a cookhouse and smokehouse at the YKDFN Wìlìdeh cultural camp. The program has offered three levels of construction basics and helps participants get certificates as much as possible, in such things as electrical and plumbing basics.

Heavy equipment operator and environmental monitoring training are also in demand. Although it serves more men than women, women have participated in the environmental monitoring courses, and traditional female job training such as administrative assistant and early childhood courses. Dechita Nàowo stopped providing early childhood courses once Aurora College began offering this in Yellowknife.

“We try not to compete with other programs, but rather fill in gaps and complement what is available elsewhere”,

Margaret notes. “We work hard to ensure people experience variety in our program and we keep things interesting for them.” The program can also help prepare YKDFN members for college courses or supplement them. For example, Dechįta Nàowo trained people to work with community elders and cook traditional foods, as add-ons to the regular course work for Personal Support Worker students.

Dechįta Nàowo focuses on personal development and traditional language and cultural skills. “People are getting great lifeskills”, notes Margaret.

As one participant, Zachary Sangris, said in a thank you to staff, “I’m not that shy young adult I was a year ago.”

Margaret says the staff works to make their program “barrier free”. The staff members act as mentors and coaches. “We really work with people to help them get past whatever hurdles they’re experiencing.” The Dechįta Nàowo program has 10 employees, most of them YKDFN members. Community elders advise and guide the program.

“We work with people who need jobs, or who have been relying on seasonal employment and want more stable work and higher rates of pay. People may take training with us in one field and end up working in another area”, notes Margaret. “So much of what we do is transferable personal growth. We consider it a success if a person finishes a program. That’s a success for some people. Or, it might be finding their first full-time job.”

“It’s the program participants’ doing when they succeed”, says Margaret, “but we can take credit for providing training in an environment that they want to train in.”

Dechįta Nàowo now also helps high school students graduate with the qualifications they need for further education or training. It offers after-school tutoring and works with the Ndilo and Yellowknife schools to get students the credits they need. This past summer it developed and piloted a post-secondary school preparation curriculum. It also takes students on an annual tour to post-secondary institutions in southern Canada.

Integrating language and culture is an important part of the program, as well as providing opportunities for youth and adults to spend time on the land.

“There is tons of cultural stuff. I’ve learned a lot about survival on the land”, says Stanley Mackenzie, a 20-year-old who has taken many courses with Dechįta Nàowo since he left high school more than two years ago.

“I would have probably been trying to find a job but no one would have hired me without experience, or math, or computer skills. Instead, I’ve learned the skills to inspire me to want to build my own house. I’ve been here so long now, I feel it’s my family.”

Margaret can see how the program changes participants. “Once you are proud of who you are and you know the land and its history, once a person’s identity and confidence is built up, you can see the difference”, she says.



Photo: YKDFN Dechįta Nàowo

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Become a Literacy Council member

Literacy and essential skills touch all aspects of our lives.

Literacy and essential skills impact our social and economic well-being, our health, our families and our communities.

The NWT Literacy Council is committed to ensuring that all NWT residents have access to the literacy supports they need to:

- get jobs
- continue their education
- take care of their families
- participate fully in their communities

The NWT Literacy Council is a strong non-government literacy voice and service provider.

Why become a member of the NWT Literacy Council?

A strong network is key to creating solutions that address the complex issues of literacy and essential skills.

Join the Literacy Council and strengthen the voice of our network of literacy workers and supporters across the NWT. Your support is important to us.

Literacy is everyone's business!

Yearly dues

- Individual, \$10.00
- Family, \$20.00
- Organization, \$25.00

Membership dues can be waived on request, if necessary.

Donate online

Donations are essential for the NWT Literacy Council's work.

You can donate online at www.nwtliteracy.ca or directly through Canada Helps.



It's easy and it's fast!



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