

Literacy Matters

Fall 2022 Newsletter



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Empowering Northern Youth

Jeremy Mousseau and Kristie Leach are learning about systemic challenges facing some northern youth, while also celebrating the rewarding successes of Empowering Northern Youth (ENY) program participants.

“Going into our third cohort this fall, I am a lot less naïve about what barriers youth are facing,” says Jeremy, who coordinates the ENY program along with Kristie.

“We didn’t imagine that we would not be able to connect our participants with supports to find solutions to their housing, childcare and transportation issues” adds Kristie, noting that the gap in youth supports helps explain why a program such as ENY is needed.

While it is frustrating that referrals to various agencies are not the silver bullet that Kristie and Jeremy had hoped they would be, they find their jobs with the ENY program rewarding and satisfying.

“We have seen so much success, not just in terms of long-term employment, but also in the growth and development of participants,” says Kristie. That growth and development depends to some extent on the relationships that Jeremy and Kristie build with participants and encourage among each group of youth.

“Kristie and Jeremy are such really great people. They were such great instructors,” says Lauren Rabesca. “I really enjoyed meeting them... It was such a great course. I’m glad I took it. I’m glad I met these people. I am just so grateful to have friends who actually do care and support you. That’s what I have now.”

The ENY program ran two cohorts in Yellowknife beginning in March and April of 2022, with a third and final cohort scheduled this fall. So far, each cohort has started with seven participants.

Jeremy and Kristie prepared and facilitated four weeks of pre-employment programming that covered such topics as communication skills, conflict resolution, goal setting, resumé writing, and interview skills. They used the NWT Literacy Council’s Career-Life Work Series as a resource (<https://www.nwtliteracy.ca/resources/youth-and-adult-literacy#35>).



Participants can become certified or recertified in First Aid and CPR, the Workers Safety and Compensation Commission's young workers programs and Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS). ENY also supports participants to get or replace important documents, for example, driver's licences, health and Treaty Status cards and criminal record checks.

During this time, Kristie and Jeremy learned more about the unique skills and interests of each participant, which helped them to recruit employers that would be a good match for the program. Jeremy and Kristie worked hard to personalize the pairings among participants and employers for a two-week work placement.

Ruwayda Mohamed signed up for the program to get a job. "I had been out of a job for two to three months and having trouble finding a job again. I was doing housekeeping and wanted something different."

An important feature of ENY is the variety of physical, artistic, on-the-land, and other activities that are tailored to the interests and experiences of the participants.

These activities helped participants with job skills and to practice communication and collaboration within the group, all while creating opportunities for participants to develop resilience, trust, adaptability, and self-confidence in new situations.

"We deliberately set up the activities so that they are learning a new skill and there is something in the activity that meets their interests," says Kristie.

"I really loved the activities and skills I learned," says Ruwayda. "Archery was one of my favourites. I liked all the activities. Some were difficult, like northern games was very tricky. I discovered that I liked art, for example the fish painting."

Canada

"I was into it to learn some skills and that's what I got," says Lauren "I was actually surprised that we were going to go to fish camp. It was really nice to be doing something within my culture."

"I learned not to be afraid to ask questions. I learned that it's not a bad thing to ask questions, rather than sit there and not know what you're doing."

Lauren's work placement at a busy dental clinic led to a job as a receptionist at the same business. "I told Kristie that I get bored really quickly and I tend to move on once I'm bored. This is actually something that I feel that I can do for a really long time. The people are great. It's like I have a new family now. I want to stick out this job for as long as I can and see where it leads."

While not all participants have found ongoing employment, there are other ways for people to achieve their personal goals. Kristie says increased confidence is one of the benefits of the program. Participants are more confident, they will try and stick with something, are more extraverted, and can communicate better with each other, the program leaders and employers. Participants are more punctual. She notes that she is also more confident about the ongoing benefits of the program.

The program allows people to find out what they don't like as well as what they do like. One participant found that their work placement "was not for me in my life right now." However, for Shania Desjarlais, it did lead to a job that she says she wouldn't have had the confidence to apply for before taking the ENY program. "To be honest I kind of thought I wouldn't fit the criteria with my experience...I would have doubted myself."

Jeremy and Kristie follow up with each participant three months after they leave the program, with informal contacts in between.



They are grateful to the employers who offer work placements, as well as the Elders, artists, and traditional knowledge holders who lead the hands-on activities.

The NWT Literacy Council's sister organizations in the Yukon and Nunavut are running similar programs for unemployed and underemployed youth, all of them funded in part by the Government of Canada's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy.

If you are interested or know someone who might want to take part in ENY, contact jeremy@nwtliteracy.ca or call 867-873-9262.

Coming back together as a team

Over the last few years NWTLC has experienced a lot of changes, on top of adjusting to the pandemic. We have grown from a staff team of five people to 12 and we are still growing. All of the new staff are running many new projects, and expanding our reach as well as the ways that we connect with learners. We have purchased an office building, and have staff working at the Intercultural Centre, working remotely, and running programs out of different spaces.

With all of these changes, plus the safety measures in place due to the pandemic, our team was feeling very separate. We used to have potluck lunches and afternoon brainstorming sessions in the sun at our picnic table. There was always someone around when you needed a laugh or to commiserate about the never-ending frustrations when formatting a resource! NWTLC's team is truly collaborative, and we were all missing each other.

Thanks to funding from the GNWT's NGO Stabilization Fund, we were able to spend time over the 2021-2022 fiscal year reconnecting with each other. One aspect of our reconnection was to share hobbies we love, or special skills we have, through staff-led team building sessions. Each staff member could choose a month to facilitate a session for the rest of the team. While some sessions had to be cancelled due to COVID-19 changes, the rest were great and we look forward to continuing this.

On a rainy September day, we all headed out on the land for some cranberry picking. This was perfectly timed as we were back to working from home and it gave everyone a break from technology. It also gave us an opportunity to share our gratitude for living and working in Chief Drygeese Territory. In October we had a virtual cupcake party to celebrate the hard work of a departing colleague, and also to spend some



time together, catching up and enjoying each others' company as much as possible in the online format.

We were excited to be together in person for our November session where we stained and painted wooden ornaments. December brought us pasta making, which was quite an adventure. We all discovered how much work it takes to make fresh pasta. It took a lot of team work to get things mixed and pressed.

Thanks to Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning for hosting their annual Liwe Camp in March. We were grateful for a day of learning and connection. Pulling nets, watching and listening to Elders, and being on the land was a great way to come together as a team. At the end of March, we had a workshop with the Northern Mosaic Network. Before the COVID-19 shutdown in 2020, we had identified a need and interest for the staff to learn more about Gender and Sexuality Diversity, as well as steps to take in allyship. This was another day full of unlearning and learning.

Through this monthly project, we learned how needed these sessions are, and how coming together has helped our work. We have continued our team building work into spring 2022 with a trip to Vancouver to attend Decoda Literacy Solution's conference. In addition to attending the conference together, we had a paint night at an art studio and made a whole team of beautiful bees. We look forward to cooking Fillipino spring rolls, bowling, knitting, and cross-country skiing -- sessions that couldn't be fit into last year.

As we continue to grow and adapt, we can't wait to see what skills and ideas new team members share with us through a staff-led team building session!

Make the difference - The Canada Learning Bond

In March 2019 we received funding from Employment and Social Development Canada to increase the awareness and take-up of the Canada Learning Bond. The Canada Learning Bond can provide up to \$2,000 towards a child's post-secondary education. A child can only receive this funding if an adult opens a Registered Education Saving Plan (RESP) for the child.

This project aimed to have regional trainings across the NWT to provide education around the Canada Learning Bond and teach participants how to help sign up families in their home communities.

We also planned to do Canada Learning Bond information events, where NWTLC staff and trained community members would come together to hold an information session and help families sign up.

This project was originally scheduled to end in March 2021, but the funding has been extended for 24 months due to delays caused by COVID-19. The majority of training and take-up events over the past 26 months had to be cancelled or postponed. We hope to be able to pick up this work again and start travel in the Fall 2022. Our first events will be trainings for the Sahtu and Tlicho regions. We will also be visiting 23 communities across the NWT to do information events! Make sure to watch for us. We hope to see you in person soon.

If you're interested in learning more about the Canada Learning Bond program, or interested in attending a Canada Learning Bond training session, you can reach out to program coordinator, Charlotte Upton, at charlotte@nwtliteracy.ca.

The world sews Boomerang Bags, and so do we

Making Boomerang Bags is a new project in the Community Connections program. The Boomerang Bag movement started in Australia to help reduce consumption of plastic shopping bags and to repurpose fabric. The Boomerang Bag initiative has spread to 1100 countries worldwide. Now it is also in the NWT.

NWTLC purchased sewing machines and supplies with a Waste Reduction and Recycling Initiative grant from the GNWT. A call was put out to the Yellowknife quilters' guild for unwanted fabric, and fabric donations keep coming in. It is beautiful material to work with. We use everything, including two-inch strips for bag handles, and small scraps for hair scrunchies. The mismatched fabrics add fun and interest to the bags.



Starting in March 2022, a few women from around the world came together to sew. The program grew slowly and equipment was moved to a bigger space in April which allowed more women to attend the program.

On sewing days, the room is humming with sewing machines and chatter. Conversations cover a range of topics: how to book swimming lessons, where to buy things in town, program plans, classes that are offered, and sharing life stories.

Women are encouraged to practice their conversational English. English sewing terms are posted around the room to help people learn new English words. Each new participant is encouraged to read the simple instructions and illustrations when they start.

It was a surprise to learn how differently cultures sew. In Vietnam, you make a paper pattern, trace it with chalk and cut out fabric with scissors. In many countries, pins aren't used to hold fabric together. You hold the pieces in place and sew. My mother is with me in spirit every day, as I demonstrate how to centre, place and pin a pocket onto the body of the bag before sewing.

The sewing room is very collaborative. When there is a question on the next step in sewing a bag, a more experienced person steps in to instruct. Practicing English is an important goal, but demonstrating a skill doesn't necessarily need words. The steps to sew a bag have been reviewed and revised by the group numerous times, when a sewer realizes a more professional



way to complete the project or a more efficient way to cut the fabric. Pockets are cut in numbers, then silk screen printed in a batch to make the most of the stencil and avoid wasting ink.

It is a delight to see how much pride the women take in the bags they have made. Each bag is a work of art. A few women have taken on the role of quality control and ripped out stitches when they aren't happy with how a bag was made.

We are grateful to Thuy Ha at the store Thanh Dat for her sewing skills and her ability to teach. She has generously shared her time and supplies, and loaned a serger machine to the project. The serged bags look more professionally made. Everyone has been so excited to learn to sew. They would like to learn to make clothes next.

The program has evolved and it will likely continue as an open space to be creative and make things. Many of the women have brought in crafts to show the group, or shared photos of what they have made. Future plans



involve crochet, cross stitch, beading and plastic clay sculpture. I can't wait to see where these artistic ladies go with this sharing of talents. It is a conversation circle turned into an international sewing circle, evolving into a maker space.

Cultural exchange on the Land

People from different parts of the globe who now call Yellowknife “home” gathered at the Bushkids site on a Sunday morning for a Cultural Sharing and Exchange workshop. The morning was the first of four half-day sessions that welcomed folks who, recently and not-so-recently, arrived to Canada and the community of Yellowknife from other countries. The activity was offered as a hybrid between an information session and a community connections program. The space provided a rich opportunity for cross-cultural exchange and connection as we shared worldviews, stories, and food on the Land.

The workshop was hosted by Beb(a)ski – For the Land consulting and services, a collaboration between Chloe Dragon Smith and Robert Grandjambe, who took time out of their busy spring trapping season to visit us from their off-grid home in Wood Buffalo National Park. The name of their company comes from each of their ancestral backgrounds: beba meaning “for” in Dënesųłné yatié (Chipewyan Dene language) and aski meaning “Land” in nêhiyawêwin (Woodland Cree language). Part of Beb(a)ski’s mission is to provide spaces for teaching and sharing Indigenous knowledge on the Land, and opportunities for engaging in Ethical Space – living and learning in harmony with the Land while co-creating space that both welcomes and respects the coexistence of differing worldviews (e.g., Indigenous and Euro-Western).

We began our time together rooted in this philosophy of Ethical Space. While standing in a circle, we fed the fire and learned about welcoming, introducing ourselves to, and acknowledging our gratitude for, the Land that we live and play on every day.

Chief Drygeese territory is home of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and, more recently, the North Slave Métis Alliance. Then we introduced ourselves to one another, a diverse group from all walks of life coming together to share our similarities and differences with stories, customs, and food.

As the morning went on, we were invited to learn about different animals of the NWT with a hands-on fur kit resource designed by Beb(a)ski. The fur kit made its debut during these workshops and was a real hit with everyone! It is a free NWTLC resource. It comes complete with fact sheets for the 16 furs included in the kit, most of which were harvested by Chloe and Robert. The fact sheets are available for download online and the full kit, complete with furs, is available to sign out free of charge through the NWTLC.

After the excitement of learning about the different animals of the NWT, we also learned about trapping, how to make a snare for a hare, and how to clean small game animals. Each session ended with sharing food from everyone who participated in the workshop. This was a great way to end the session: sharing food, stories, and smiles. For newcomers and “oldcomers” alike, this

was also an opportunity to counter colonial ways of thinking. The workshop helped to further develop an understanding of, and appreciation for, Indigenous systems and the rich stewardship of the Land by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of the Northwest Territories. Through these workshops we deepened intercultural relationships and fostered a safe environment for learning and exchanging ideas and knowledge in mutual respect and appreciation.

In the future, NWTLC hopes to expand this type of program with newcomers to Canada and the NWT: bridging culture and community together through knowledge exchange and sharing.

(This article was originally written for an April 2022 edition of our blog.)



Adding another shelf to Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

You may recall reading about Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (DPIL) in our Fall 2018 newsletter. The article outlines the parameters of this inspiring program that mails free books to children every month from birth until their fifth birthday. The article also sheds light on the important work of Troy Bellefontaine (of BeautyMark Salon) and Lynne Ternosky (of the Rotary E-Club of Canada One) to support this program in 11 communities. Ongoing efforts from BeautyMark Salon and the Rotary E-Club of Canada One now support the program in 16 communities, and the Deh Gah School in Fort Providence has adopted the program as well.

Since the publication of that article, the NWTLC has been working hard to fundraise and secure financial support to offer this program in the remaining 15 communities across the territory. We are thrilled to announce that, thanks to funding from the United Way NWT and the GNWT Healthy Choices Fund, the NWTLC can now offer this program in Colville Lake, Délne, Tulita, Fort Smith, Enterprise, Łutselk'e, Hay River, Kát'odeeche, Behchok, Gamètì, Wekweetì, Whatì, Ndilo, and Dettah. Yellowknives Dene First Nation members living in Yellowknife are also eligible to sign up. Since launching the program in June, the NWTLC has already seen significant uptake with 72 children enrolled in the first month!

With the growth of home libraries through this program, NWTLC recognized an opportunity to support family literacy beyond the pages of storybooks. Reading stories together can spark all kinds of conversations and activities among families.



The high quality, age-appropriate stories distributed through the DPIL program are no exception! In addition to overseeing the administration of DPIL, the Family and Community Literacy Coordinators of the NWTLC are creating activity kits that extend the stories through rhymes, crafts, games, and activities that families can do at home.

Our hope is that the activities in these kits will help to animate the stories, and inspire families to spend even more time talking, singing, playing, and learning together.

Each child enrolled in this program, who lives in a community overseen by the NWTLC, will receive a kit to accompany their welcome book, as well as a second kit later in the year inspired by a specific title from their collection.

This ambitious endeavour is made possible through the invaluable assistance of our summer students and dedicated Community Champions. NWTLC summer students helped to prepare and package materials to send out to all registered families, while Community Champions filled the important role as a liaison between the NWTLC and the individual communities. Not only do Community Champions receive and help distribute activity kits on behalf of the NWTLC, they are also advocates for the program in their own community and help families to sign up. We are looking forward to sharing these kits with families and to receiving feedback about this enhanced program feature.

If you are interested in learning more about how to sign up for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in your community, please contact our Family and Community Literacy Coordinator, Nicole, by email at nicole@nwtliteracy.ca.

Skill Builders for Youth



Our Skill Builders for Youth project has continued to yield great programs, led by dedicated and creative facilitators, in another year full of trials and tribulations resulting from COVID-19 cases and restrictions across the territory. A lot of credit should be given to facilitators who were always able to change course and run programming in new and innovative ways, stay patient throughout major delays and roadblocks, and continue offering youth programming in their communities.

Our Skill Builders for Youth program is all about re-engaging youth with learning and their community. We provide training and mentorship to develop community capacity, and then offer funding and ongoing support to help community members run youth literacy programs.

We were so excited to get to host our Skill Builders for Youth training in-person this past May. We had 15 participants attend from Ulukhaktok, Inuvik, Norman Wells, Deline, Wekweetì, Fort Simpson, Fort Liard, Ndilo



and Yellowknife. Our training helps prepare community facilitators to run youth programs using Skills for Success (formerly known as literacy and essential skills).

This year's training included several new training materials as well as a new format. As a part of the training, participants got to model what a Skill Builders for Youth program could look like through a mitten-making activity. With the help of Elder Sarah Cleary, participants each made their own pair of mittens while working on five of the Skills for Success which had been embedded into the activity. The embedded skills were communication, numeracy, creativity and innovation, digital, and writing. Additionally, we were very lucky to have Sue Folinsbee do a session on program evaluation. Participants learned about the importance of program

evaluation, and different activities and techniques that can be used to assess youth programs.

In the 2021-2022 fiscal year nine Skill Builders for Youth projects were successfully completed in nine different communities:

- Fort McPherson
- Fort Resolution
- Hay River
- Kátł'odeeche
- Łutselk'e
- Paulatuk
- Tsiigehtchic
- Yellowknives Dene First Nation (Dettah)
- Yellowknife (North Slave Correctional Centre- Youth Unit)



They hosted Learning in the Kitchen, Youth Literacy Night and Telling our Stories (digital literacy) programs. This is a decrease from our usual number of programs due to the pandemic. We are on track to increase these numbers this year, and fund new communities and projects with the addition of newly trained facilitators.

GNWT Education, Culture and Employment funds the Skill Builders for Youth program. The program continues to receive overwhelmingly positive feedback from youth and facilitators after seven years in existence.

If you work with youth and would like to learn more about the Skill Builders for Youth program, you can reach out to program coordinator, Charlotte Upton, at charlotte@nwtliteracy.ca.



Three for Change

In the spring, NWTLC joined the Yukon Literacy Coalition and Ilitagsiniq-Nunavut Literacy Council on a project called Three for Change. The goal of the project is to develop social enterprises and skills that will support people to find success in business development.

Three for Change is a four-year project funded by Employment and Social Development Canada. It is focused on developing and delivering training modules on targeted Skills for Success, and developing local social enterprises that use a northern approach for service delivery.

Over the life of the project, the three territories will undertake the development of a social enterprise (SE) that addresses a need of the vast region of northern Canada.

Part of establishing an enterprise includes the development of material, and the delivery of training on skills required for it to be successful. These include problem solving, communication and innovation. While the NWT will collaborate with the other two territories, it will also develop local social enterprises that serve identified needs within the territory.

The phrase “social enterprise” refers to a business which is directly involved in the development and/or selling of goods or services that both generate income and achieve or contribute to a social and/or environmental goal. Many social enterprises can be found within non-profit organizations and align their purpose with the mission statement and work of the organization. Over the summer, NWTLC will connect with stakeholders to identify gaps, and generate SE ideas that respond to local needs and interests.

This is an exciting project that will build on existing resources, training and knowledge the NWTLC has developed over many years. It’s a great opportunity to work collaboratively with community groups to develop social enterprises that provide employment opportunities, increase knowledge, and offer a service or product to the community that isn’t currently being met.



HIPPY- Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters

This HIPPY Year we doubled our number of participants, from four children last year to eight this year. Seven of these children were able to complete the entire 30-week curriculum. This means that parents of these youngsters also completed the 30 Home Visits through the HIPPY Year. The virtual delivery of the program made it possible despite the stricter COVID restrictions during the winter.

Mothers, who are major participants in this program, were able to build their confidence by being able to implement the lessons week by week according to the HIPPY curriculum standard. Their English communication skills have also improved significantly. Relationships among mothers, fathers, and children were strengthened even more. Families have come out from their isolation and have participated more in the activities in their communities.

Graduation day was the major highlight of this year’s HIPPY program. Seven children graduated and one participated. Two families have completed the Age 5 curriculum which is the last year of the program. Families who are in Yellowknife all attended the celebration. Other relatives also came to celebrate this joyous day with the graduates.

The HIPPY program is set to expand even more by the fall. Three families are in the recruitment process and will bring the total number of families to eight, which is our maximum number of participants. As this progression unfolds, we expect more families to join and mothers to become Home Visitors themselves in the next few years.



Upcoming Events and Dates

- Plain Language Day**
October 13
- Sahtu Canada Learning Bond Training**
November 15, Norman Wells
- Family Literacy Training Institute**
December 5-8, Yellowknife

New resources

- Fur kit**
The NWT fur kit resource, designed in collaboration with Beb(a)ski – for the Land consulting and services, contains furs from 16 different animals native to the NWT. Every fur has a corresponding resource card that has interesting facts about each animal, as well as questions to ask an Elder. This resource can be signed out from the NWT Literacy Council office at 5016 47 Street.
- Little Chefs**
This Family Literacy resource has been updated to include numeracy activities and discussion prompts in each unit. We have also replaced books which were out-of-print.

Learning in the Kitchen
This Skill Builders for Youth Resource has been updated and reprinted.

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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**.

www.nwtliteracy.ca

