

Literacy Matters



FALL 2015



25 Years of Improving Literacy and Opportunities for Northerners

We're proud to mark our 25th anniversary as an organization this year.

In 1989, over 100 people from across the NWT (which then included Nunavut) gathered to discuss the literacy needs of their communities and the territory as a whole. The first interim board for the NWT Literacy Council was formed from this passionate group of northerners. They developed the first by-laws.

Soon after, a second gathering took place, creating our first board of directors. Former Nunavut Commissioner, Edna Elias, was elected the first president. We officially became the NWT Literacy Council in 1990, and have been growing ever since.

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President's Message: Jeri Miltenberger

Elections Are a Good Time to Discuss Literacy

Literacy is often seen as an issue only for individuals. In fact, it is essential for, and a recognized measure of, a healthy and prosperous society. There is a strong relationship between literacy and good health, economic productivity, and crime reduction.

Improving literacy makes our lives better, and our north stronger. Improving literacy, in our country and our territory, is a legacy we can give to future generations. To do this, we need to creatively engage community support for literacy and essential skills training, family literacy and community wellness.

It takes many minds and hands to achieve our literacy goals. We need to take a long term, broad approach. The NWT Literacy Council supports community-based literacy programs for all ages and for all types of literacy. We continue to work with our partners to improve opportunities for northerners.

The national, territorial and municipal elections this fall present an exciting opportunity to engage northerners and candidates in discussions about literacy. Please talk to candidates about the importance of literacy and the interconnection between literacy and reducing poverty, growing healthy communities and improving the economy.

In times of economic restraint or recession governments may cut support for things that might not see immediate results. Effective literacy efforts are often a long-term investment but they are the best way to advance our health, social wellbeing and economy. We often hear that the north's greatest resource is its people. As the northern economy continues to change in our global world, investing in people is the wisest decision. Literacy is an investment in northerners.

We want to hear your voice and your ideas about literacy in the



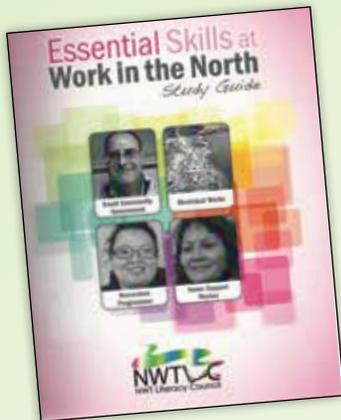
north. We all need to be part of the conversation to ensure the upcoming elections are a chance to talk, listen and learn. We ask you to send us questions for candidates by email, Twitter or Facebook. We will forward literacy-related questions to candidates and publish the responses on social media.

Literacy is one issue that impacts every other issue we must consider as we plot a course for the north.



The NWT Literacy Council received a Premier's Award for Collaboration in June. It acknowledged our contributions in committees and in providing feedback during consultations and on draft documents associated with the NWT Department of Education, Culture and Employment education renewal initiative. The staff and board members at the ceremony are pictured from left to right: Katie Randall, Suzanne Robinson, Kathryn Barry Paddock, Helen Balanoff, Pat Ilgok and Emily Thagaard.

Check Out Our Resources!



Essential Skills at Work in the North Study Guide Volume 3

Our first two Essential Skills at Work in the North guides were so popular that we created another one. This guide features more northern community jobs:

- Municipal Worker (Fort Providence)
- Municipal Worker (Whatì)
- Recreation Programmer
- Home Support Worker

25 More Recipes for Fun

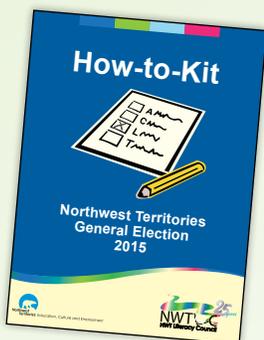
By popular demand, our fun-filled family literacy “cookbook” of recipes for playdough, goop, finger paint and more is back. We have 25 new awesome recipes for creativity.



Northwest Territories General Election 2015: How-to-Kit

The NWT election is November 23, 2015. This How-to-Kit helps adult learners understand the vocabulary associated with elections and the election process. It also has activities to help people prepare questions for candidates on some key issues, including literacy.

ABC Life Literacy prepared *A Guide to Voting: a Literacy Practitioner Workbook for Voting in the 2015 Federal Election*. It can be found on their website at abclifeliteracy.ca/sites/default/files/GuideToVoting-July16.pdf



These new resources are on our website. You can contact us to get hard copies.



Language Revitalization is About Creating Fluent Speakers

We organized a workshop this spring to give representatives of the NWT Aboriginal language communities a chance to connect and share information.

Workshop participants, who often create resources in their own language, had questions answered about copyright law by Vera Raschke, the librarian at the NWT Legislative Assembly in Yellowknife. Travis Mercredi, of Outland Sound, provided tips on audio and video recording.

We learned about the success and challenges of the master apprenticeship program operating in the Beaufort Delta, from Beverly Amos, of the Inuvialuit Cultural Resource Centre based in Inuvik. There are three learners, or apprentices, in each community who meet 50 hours a month with a fluent elder speaker. The program is based on one from British Columbia (www.fpcc.ca), developed from the work of linguist, Leanne Hinton.

A highlight of our two days together was our panel of young people who shared insights into their experiences of learning their indigenous language. The panelists were Jacey Firth-Hagen (Gwich'in), Itoah Scott-Enns (Tłı̨chǫ), both of Yellowknife; and Khelsilem (Dustin Rivers), of the Skwomesh Language Academy in British Columbia. Khelsilem participated in the panel via Skype.

Jacey condemned the school system for failing to produce any indigenous language speakers after 30 years of language instruction in the NWT. She suggested the NWT needs a combination of a social media campaign, such as the "Speak Sami to me" campaign in northern Europe, along with a master apprenticeship program and language immersion in schools. She noted that good work has been done in Hawaii and Greenland.

Itoah did not learn Tłıchǫ while growing up, but became inspired as a new mother to learn her language. She is also watching her sister, who is participating in a master apprenticeship program in the Dehcho region. Itoah is learning Tłıchǫ from her mother. She and her mother incorporate Tłıchǫ sessions into everyday activities, such as house cleaning, at least once a week.

Itoah says she lacks chances to speak her language. A wider support network is needed to create more space and time for learning.

Khelsilem says his involvement in a master apprenticeship program in 2010-11 saw his fluency “skyrocket”. He says dictionaries and other resources are great, but to him language revitalization should be about increasing fluency.

He said he is inspired by the success within the Mohawk Nation, which is creating a generation of young fluent speakers. He had three messages for the workshop participants:

1. Know that there are others out there working on language revitalization.
2. Know that it’s possible to create fluent speakers; it’s already being done.
3. We all have lots to share and try.

In response to questions and comments from the audience, Khelsilem suggested that young people not be expected to use their indigenous language until they are ready and know the language. This follows the pattern of young children learning to speak. It’s a mistake to make people speak before they are comfortable doing so, or to focus on correcting the pronunciation of learners. We don’t do that with children, he said.

Elders have patience and will give the time if they know you want to learn. It’s important to make mistakes. He said he saw a TED Talk with someone who tries to make 200 mistakes a day.

We now have a Facebook group, as recommended by the language group representatives. It’s called Resources for NWT Aboriginal Languages and is at www.facebook.com/groups/592262134238848.

How Children Learn Language

Marianne Bromley created a video based on her *How Children Learn Language* presentation at the May 2014 Aboriginal language workshop.

The video responds to requests from Aboriginal language community representatives. They wanted to pass on the following messages to people in their communities:

1. It’s never too early to talk to a baby.
2. It’s easiest to learn any language as a baby.
3. Babies learn language from the people who talk to them.
4. Face-to-face, in-person interaction is necessary for babies to learn language.
5. Every speaker can help by talking to babies in their language.
6. Children can learn more than one language at a time.
7. Learning more than one language does not confuse children or hurt their abilities in either language.

The *How Children Learn Language* video is on the NWT Literacy Council YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6pzlu5xpAA.



What's Happening in Family Literacy

Our annual Family Literacy Training Institute is September 14 – 18, 2015. This popular training is open to early childhood workers, librarians, teachers, and anyone else who works with families.

Come and learn how you can encourage families to learn and share together. Register and join us at Northern United Place in Yellowknife. We cover travel costs for participants.

Please check our website or contact Patricia at pat@nwtliteracy.ca, 873-9262 or toll free 1-866-599-6758 for more information and for a registration package.

Family Literacy Training includes:

- **Introduction to Family Literacy**
We will explore the meaning of family literacy: how everyday activities such as cooking, making crafts and spending time together are literacy experiences for children.
- **1-2-3 Rhyme with Me**
A fun, interactive rhyming and singing program for young children and their parents. You will learn about baby brain development and oral language development.

- **Choosing Books**

We will explore different types of books and why we love them!

Learn about appropriate books for different ages and stages.

- **Family Literacy Nights**

These are a great way to get started in family literacy in your community. We will have time for everyone to plan programming for their community.

Every Tuesday night in the summer in Yellowknife you could find our summer student, Emily Thagaard, at the Yellowknife Farmers Market. She organized lots of family literacy activities, and crafts for families to enjoy together. Another hit was our new bookmobile. It's always full of free books to give away.



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Staff Changes at the Literacy Council



Amanda

Welcome to our new Youth Services Coordinator, Amanda Grobbecker. Amanda began working with us in late June. Her main responsibility is coordinating our community-based youth literacy work. Amanda is also taking on some of our skill development project in partnership with the Yukon Literacy Coalition and Ilitaqiniq (Nunavut Literacy Council).

Since moving to Yellowknife three years ago with her husband, Amanda has delivered active fitness programs in 25 NWT communities. She received an innovation award from the NWT Recreation and Parks Association for her work. Amanda brings a Master's degree in Higher Education Leadership to her new role with the Council. She hails from Stratford, Ontario.



Charlotte

Emily Thagaard is our summer student this year. Emily delivers family literacy activities at the Yellowknife Farmers Market each week and works on other projects. She returns to her classics studies at the University of Alberta this fall.

We're looking forward to working with our new Family Literacy Trainee, who joined us in the late summer. Charlotte Upton is a recent sociology graduate from Trent University in Ontario. She was born in Yellowknife and lived here until age 13, when she moved to Ottawa. Charlotte was drawn back to Yellowknife because it has always felt like home.

The Council bid farewell this spring to our former executive director, Helen Balanoff, who had stayed on staff for the past year as project manager, mainly working on short courses with Aurora College. We had a big send-off marking her many years of education and literacy work in the NWT. Thanks to all her current and former colleagues who came out to honour Helen.

Our Family and Community Literacy Coordinator, Kathryn Barry Paddock, is our new Executive Director. Past Executive Director, Michael Corbett, left the Council in May. We also said goodbye to Literacy Coordinator, Marianne Bromley. Marianne is returning to private consulting work, particularly related to early childhood brain development.

Youth and Adult Services Coordinator Katie Randall went on maternity leave in early July and is now the proud mother of a baby girl, Sidney Vera Ann.



What We Learned About Young Adult Learners

During the past four years we've explored ways to embed literacy and essential skills learning into programs that interest youth. Youth, ages 15-30, have unique reasons for wanting to learn, as well as unique struggles in learning.

We learned early on that programs that work for children or for older adults would not work for this age group. Our two youth projects were an opportunity to explore a whole new area and we learned a lot in the process.

Our first youth literacy project was a partnership with the Yukon Literacy Coalition, Iliitaqsiq (Nunavut Literacy Council) and Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador. The Government of Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills funded the project.

We had 12 pilot projects in 10 communities across the four jurisdictions. Each pilot project was run by a community-based organization with local facilitators trained by the literacy organizations.

Some facilitators had previous experience with literacy and essential skills, while others did not. They all found unique ways to embed literacy and essential skills

into the programs, no matter the subject matter. Projects included filmmaking, on-the-land skills, cooking, mitten making, picnic table building and hockey.

Some of the lessons learned through this project were:

- Community-based organizations are crucial partners when offering local programs.
- Facilitators need a strong connection with youth, and the ability to accurately assess the needs of youth in the community.
- Elders in each program were able to fill their traditional role as instructor. The projects helped strengthen relationships between youth and elders.
- Embedding literacy and essential skills worked best in new projects. It was difficult to add on to an existing program.



- Youth participants need to be recognized for their commitment and work. Projects that incorporated ongoing recognition had better retention rates and more youth involvement.

Our second youth project was a two-year pilot project funded by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. It was aimed at young parents who were out of school and unemployed.

The goal of the Skill Builders for Young Parents project was to provide young mothers and fathers with concrete skills they could use to support their families. In year one, mothers in four communities participated in a Literacy, Cooking and Nutrition program. They improved their cooking skills, while learning about nutrition, budgeting, working together and using digital skills to find recipes online.

Also during year one we asked young fathers what kind of programming they would like. In our four focus groups there was no consensus, but it was clear that a community-based approach was needed.

In year two, facilitators chose to do either the cooking program or a program for young fathers, depending on the interest in their community. Programs included floor hockey, mitten making, drum making and on-the-land activities.

We learned through this project that:

- Facilitators need support with planning how they are going to embed literacy and essential skills into the program.
- Programs need the time and space to add extra learning activities.
- Project ideas and support need to come from the community.
- The support of community leaders helps projects succeed.
- Facilitators need to be able to communicate among themselves and share ideas.

The evaluation reports for these two youth projects are on our website, along with an annotated literature review. They can be found at [www.nwtliteracy.ca/NWT Literacy Council Research](http://www.nwtliteracy.ca/NWT_Literacy_Council_Research).

Changes to Our Board of Directors

We have a new board president. Jeri Miltenberger, of Fort Smith, took over the role this spring at our annual general meeting.

Jeri replaced Cate Sills, who did not seek re-election to the board at the end of her term. Cate was also a former executive director of the Literacy Council. We wish Cate all the best and thank her for her



Ken

contributions over many years as both a staff and board member.

We have a new board member to replace Cate. Welcome to Ken Latour, a long-time northern adult educator. He takes on the role of treasurer.

“It’s a chance to assist where I can,” says Ken. “Through the years I’ve participated in Literacy Council training and worked in partnerships with it through Aurora College. So I’ve seen firsthand the benefits of the work the Council does.”

Born in Tuktoyaktuk and raised in Hay River, Ken is currently a regional program head for Aurora College in Hay River. He taught there as well as in Fort Resolution.

Finally, congratulations to Mary Ann Vital, our board member, representing the Sahtu region. Mary Ann was recently named the indigenous language coordinator in the Sahtu. Mary Ann also coordinates the Délı̄ne preschool program.

Mark Your Calendar Now!

International Literacy Day

September 8

Family Literacy Training Institute

September 14-18

NWT Literacy Week

September 20-26

International Plain Language Day

October 13

Family Literacy Day

January 27, 2016

Aboriginal Languages Month

March 2016

Save Money and Paper!

We are committed to the wise use of our money and our natural resources, including paper.

Please send an email to nwtliteracy@nwtliteracy.ca if you would like to receive *Literacy Matters* by email instead of a paper copy.

Felt Stories

Felt stories are great for children who show little interest in books. Felt play provides hands-on learning, and children can use their wild imaginations. Children enjoy the stories because they can try new roles.

Felt stories:

- Provide visuals for spatial perception and colour recognition.
- Involve the senses – textures, sounds, colours, and shapes.
- Help develop fine motor skills for eye-hand coordination.
- Use listening and hearing skills, and allow children to make funny sounds for the stories.

The NWT Literacy Council made six felt stories that we use in our family literacy training:

- B-I-N-G-O
- Five Green and Speckled Frogs
- Five Little Ducks
- Five Little Owls
- Five Little Monkeys
- Old MacDonald Visited the North



We Want a Quality Early Childhood Program



The Fort Providence Aboriginal Head Start instructors guide happy children as they paint and weigh rocks, plant seeds, make airplanes, collect insects and paint pictures at its end-of-the-year picnic in June.

There are only smiles as children, parents and instructors later walk to the Lady Evelyn waterfalls, play in the campground play area near Kakisa and actively demonstrate the early childhood philosophy that children learn through play.

The NWT Literacy Council is proud to have mentored the program instructors for the past two years. We're also producing a 'best practices' video for NWT early childhood programs in conjunction with the program.

The Fort Providence Aboriginal Head Start program began in the

community's old fire hall in 1977. Its enrolment fluctuates to a maximum of 16 children: all of the community's three- and four-year-olds are enrolled. The younger children attend two afternoons a week and the four-year-olds are in the program all day. The program is free and encourages parental involvement.

The Literacy Council helps the Fort Providence Aboriginal Head Start staff learn new activities, such as how to make books, make puppets, and generally enhance literacy learning. Over the years, the Literacy Council paid for each of the four staff

members to attend a national family literacy conference and most of them have participated in the Council's Family Literacy Training Institute.

"They show us what to do and we adapt that," says the program's director, Joyce McLeod. "Last year we learned new activities from the Council's *Science Fun* book. We scaffold these activities with the ones we already do to build on what the children know.

"The Literacy Council staff is friendly and lots of fun and there is a really relaxed feeling as we get to know each other. They give us more ideas for activities. The mentoring

builds on our skills and builds our confidence,” says Joyce.

Aboriginal Head Start programs in the NWT receive training and coaching through the national program. “That helps to make us strong too. There are eight Head Start sites in the NWT and we communicate with each other, especially through monthly teleconferences.

“We’re always improving our program. We want to have quality early childhood education here. The Literacy Council helps us do that. We have content through Aboriginal Head Start, but we can build on that. We get instructions and resources from the Literacy Council. We are working on building on the Slavey language part of our program.” The program receives Aboriginal language nest funding from the Dehcho First Nations.

“It’s like a jump start for the kids. They learn all the basics and it’s hands on,” says parent Jolene Lacorne. “They do way more than I could do because I have a full-time job. The kids learn from one another too. Mine was potty trained at Head Start and she talks better.” Jolene is proud her daughter now knows more of the Slavey language than she does.

Knowing more about early childhood research changed the program’s focus so it now has activity centres and works with large and small groups of children. “We are more actively playing now, rather than the children sitting at a table and engaged in teacher-directed activities. There’s also a new emphasis on nutrition, obesity and injury prevention. The teaching of the Slavey language and culture activities is very important to the Aboriginal Head Start program component,” notes Joyce.

Michelle Landry has her fifth child in the program. “They learn a lot. It’s especially good when they take the kids on the land. We can’t always do that if parents don’t have a boat or whatever.” Michelle says Head Start also helps reduce childcare costs.

A big advantage for the Fort Providence program is staff continuity, which has built up a sense of responsibility, achievement and consistency. Joyce began at the centre when it opened. “We would like to build on this community program, in terms of ongoing employee training and support.”

The biggest payback for Joyce is seeing the young people in the community and knowing they all graduated from the Head Start program. Last year she says there were challenges with Junior Kindergarten duplicating what Head Start was already doing in the community.

It’s also a challenge sometimes to get the community to understand that “we’re not a day care, we’re a preschool program. There’s a big difference.” Other challenges include getting more parents to read to their children in their homes and the decreasing use of the Slavey language in community homes. “It’s diminishing and there is a strong need to revitalize the language in the program.”

“We help parents know what their kids are capable of,” says language nest instructor Martha Gargan. “There’s so many things that we can teach kids through fun. People can talk and read to babies in their tummy. That was new to me when I first started early childhood development training.

“Every year we learn new things from the kids. Every child is different.”



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We thank everyone who worked hard to get our organization started, and who continued to support us during the last 25 years.

We have gone from having one part-time executive director to a staff of up to 10 full-time employees, covering literacy needs and activities from birth to elders. Our board of directors represents all regions of the NWT. We have strong partnerships in NWT communities, with our neighbours in the other northern territories and with literacy coalitions across Canada. We are now one of the most prominent literacy organizations in the country.

We have received a number of awards for our work, including the Department of Education, Culture and Employment's Ministerial Literacy Award, the Premier's Award for Collaboration, the National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) Award for Leadership in Technology and the Canada Post Community Leadership Award.

The theme for NWT Literacy Week in September is *Celebrating 25 Years of Literacy*. Please join us to celebrate this milestone by acknowledging the literacy-related accomplishments of people in your community.

Hold a special Family Literacy Night with stories from the past 25 years. Invite elders to talk about the literacy programs that have taken place in your community over the years. Celebrate in your own way!

We'll share special memories of the NWT Literacy Council's history during Literacy Week on our Facebook page and on Twitter. Please join the conversation and share your stories.



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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 wellbeing, 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.

Your support is important to us.

Join the Literacy Council and strengthen the voice of our network of literacy workers and supporters across the NWT.

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.



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