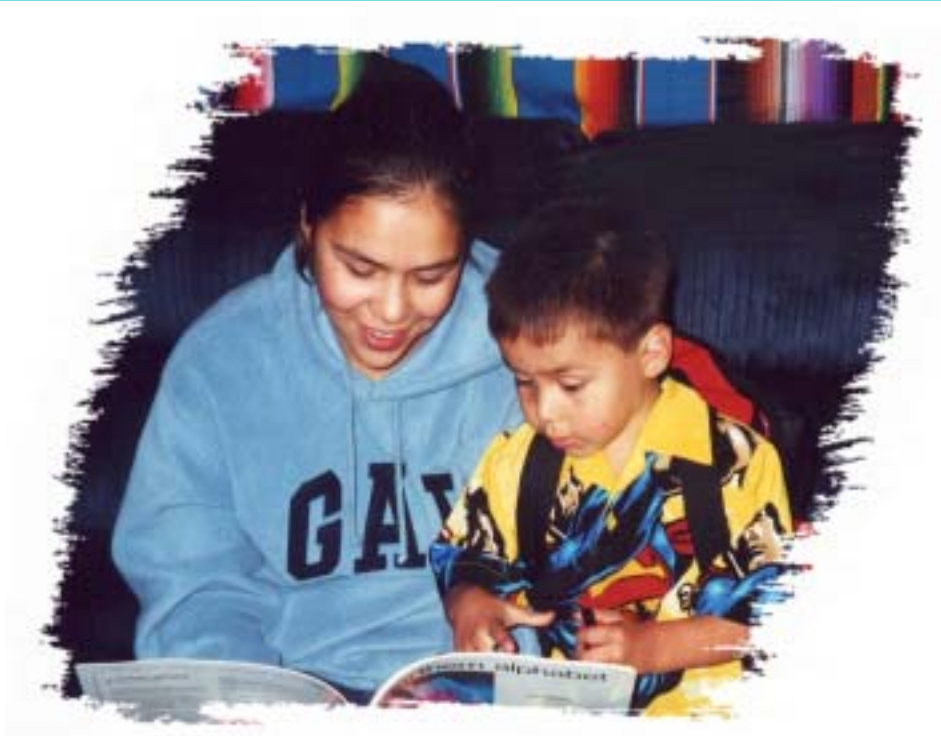


# On the Right Track

## Building Community Capacity for Family Literacy



## Evaluation of Family Literacy Programming in the NWT

Funded through the GNWT Early Childhood  
Development Framework for Action 2001-2004



NWT Literacy Council



## On the Right Track





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# On the Right Track



## Introduction

### Early Childhood Development Framework for Action

In May 2001, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) published its strategy to address the needs of young children in the NWT. The strategy, called *Framework for Action: Early Childhood Development*, had four parts:

- ❖ Health and Wellness Awareness and Risk Prevention
- ❖ Parenting and Family Support
- ❖ Child Development—Care and Learning
- ❖ Community Supports and Capacity Building



### The Goals of the Action Plan

The accompanying action plan described how the Departments of Education, Culture and Employment, and Health and Social Services would address these needs. The plan had four goals<sup>1</sup>:

- ❖ To enhance and sustain core services available to children 0-6 and their families in the Northwest Territories
- ❖ To encourage, support and facilitate child and family development at the community level
- ❖ To form and strengthen linkages between early childhood programs and projects so children and families can access integrated, comprehensive services and programs
- ❖ To encourage children and families to develop a strong sense of self, based on language, culture and heritage.

### The Outcomes of the Action Plan

Overall expected outcomes for the action plan included<sup>2</sup>:

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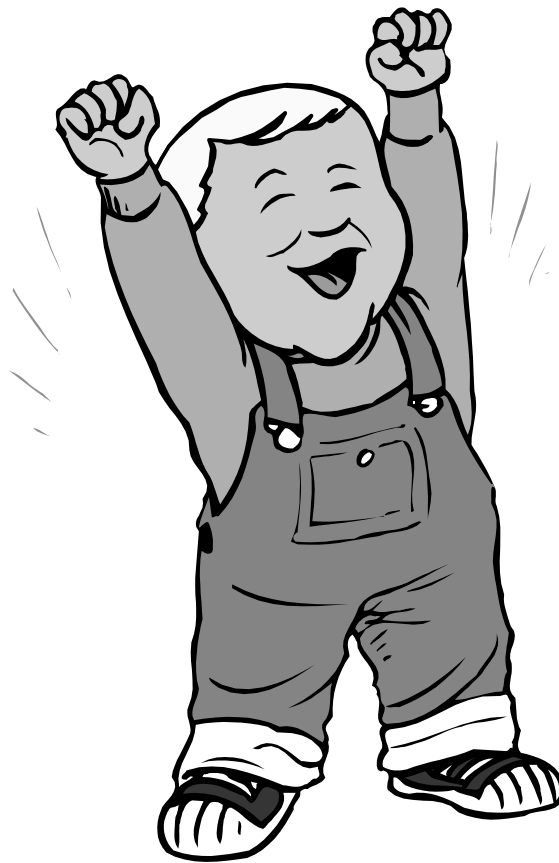
<sup>1</sup> From Hume & Associates, *Final Evaluation Report: Northwest Territories Early Childhood Action Plan, July 2001 to March 2004*.





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- ❖ Children and families in the Northwest Territories are healthier
- ❖ Children are more ready for school when they enter school
- ❖ Parents have the skills to support children's learning and development
- ❖ Families receive services through a community-based integrated service system
- ❖ Communities work with parents, families and elders to create healthy communities that make early childhood development a priority.



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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.





## The Role of the NWT Literacy Council in Family Literacy Programming

### Who is the NWT Literacy Council?

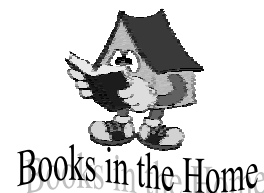
The NWT Literacy Council is a territorial-wide not-for-profit organization. Its mandate is to promote and support literacy development in all NWT official languages, and at all stages of a person's life. It does this through:

- ❖ Research
- ❖ Training
- ❖ Resource development
- ❖ Information sharing
- ❖ Public awareness activities

The NWT Literacy Council works with a variety of individuals, groups and organizations, at both the community and the territorial levels. One of its key roles is to work with people in communities to help their community to develop the capacity to plan and deliver literacy programming.

Before the GNWT's *Early Childhood Development Action Plan* in 2001, the Literacy Council had been promoting the importance of family literacy for several years, because it believed that family literacy helped improve both adults' and children's literacy skills. With financial support from the National Literacy Secretariat, the NWT Literacy Council worked with communities to build capacity around literacy. It developed training for community people who were interested in planning and delivering family literacy programs. In addition, it created a number of northern resources and supported family literacy programs. These included:

- ❖ *Books in the Home*, a family reading program
- ❖ *1-2-3 Rhyme with Me*, an oral language program
- ❖ *Families First*, a parenting program





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### Partners for Family Literacy

A key part of the GNWT plan for early childhood was to support young children's literacy development and learning. It emphasized the important role that parents play, as their children's first and most important teachers, in helping young children learn. It soon became clear that the work of the NWT Literacy Council and the literacy work planned through the Early Childhood Development initiative overlapped.

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment therefore partnered with the NWT Literacy Council through a contribution agreement. Over three years (2001-2004), the Literacy Council would:

- ❖ Develop and deliver regional family literacy training institutes to people from all communities
- ❖ Distribute funding and provide support to community family literacy projects
- ❖ Provide community outreach to family literacy providers
- ❖ Develop and support the distribution of Family Learning Kits (literacy backpacks).

Along with the continued support of the National Literacy Secretariat, this new source of funding provided a more solid funding base for family literacy programming in the NWT. In all, the GNWT provided approximately \$1million for family literacy over the three years. Most of this money was spent on training community people, funding the delivery of community projects and developing resources for communities.







## Family Literacy

### What is Family Literacy?

Family literacy is the way parents, children and other family members learn together at home and in their community. Family literacy programs involve everyone in the family. They help to increase both children's and adults' literacy levels through informal learning.

Examples of family literacy include:

- ❖ Baking together
- ❖ Sewing
- ❖ Talking together
- ❖ Traditional on-the-land activities
- ❖ Reading a story
- ❖ Telling a story
- ❖ Reading labels in the grocery store
- ❖ Singing songs or saying rhymes
- ❖ Talking about the family





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# Evaluation of Family Literacy Programming Funded through the Early Childhood Framework for Action

### Overall Evaluation

Each individual component of the Early Childhood Development Action Plan had an evaluation section. As well, early on in the implementation of the plan, the Departments of Education, Culture and Employment and Health and Social Services hired Sharon Hume & Associates from Victoria, B.C., to develop and conduct an overall evaluation of the project.

Hume & Associates built on the individual component evaluations by gathering and adding more in-depth information. They selected a number of communities that were involved in several components of the initiative, where they could interview people involved in the various projects. They developed interview protocols for individuals and groups involved in delivering programs, and for people who took part in the programs.

For the family literacy component, they interviewed people who participated in the family literacy training institutes, who ran family literacy programs in their communities, and/or who distributed family learning kits. They also interviewed people who attended community family literacy programs, and families who received backpacks. In addition, members of the evaluation team attended the evaluation meetings that the NWT Literacy Council held in Years 1 and 2.

### NWT Literacy Council Evaluation Activities

As part of its own ongoing monitoring and evaluation, the NWT Literacy Council:

- ❖ Had people at the family literacy training institutes provide written feedback each day, and then at the end of the training.



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- ❖ Asked people for information about their programs when they reported on their community family literacy projects.
- ❖ Asked parents and children for feedback on the family learning kits through evaluation forms that were included in the backpacks.
- ❖ Asked community coordinators for feedback on the distribution of family learning kits in their communities.
- ❖ Held overall evaluation meetings at the end of Years 1 and 2. This enabled people to provide feedback after they had an opportunity to run programs and to apply what they had learned in their training. The Literacy Council asked people how the training could be improved to better support them in delivering programs, how successful they thought their programs had been, and how the Literacy Council could better support them.



Towards the end of the Early Childhood Development initiative, the NWT Literacy Council wanted to try to measure the impact of its family literacy programming over the three years. It developed an overall evaluation approach:

- ❖ It interviewed people in several communities who had been involved in family literacy during these years. It asked how training, funding, resources and support had helped them to deliver programs. It also asked about changes they saw in literacy among families in their communities that might be related to their work.
- ❖ It sent out survey forms to Kindergarten teachers in every school in the NWT, since they are the people who are most likely to see changes in the school readiness of children. While it recognized the





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difficulty of trying to isolate different interventions, it asked teachers to comment on any changes they might have seen.

- ❖ It developed parent questionnaires for family literacy providers to administer.

### This Evaluation Report

This report combines information from all of the evaluation activities over the past three years. It looks individually at each literacy initiative that the NWT Literacy Council was involved in, namely:

1. Family Literacy Training Institutes
2. Community family literacy projects and outreach support for family literacy providers
3. The family learning kits

Although The Literacy Council isolated each initiative for the purposes of evaluation, clearly it is difficult to separate the impacts of the community family literacy projects and the family learning kits. For example, both helped increase parents' awareness of the importance of literacy. Thus there is some overlap in terms of outcomes.





## 1. Family Literacy Training

### Why Train People in Family Literacy?

The NWT Literacy Council believes that to support children's literacy development effectively, parents:

- ❖ Need to understand how important literacy and learning are for young children.
- ❖ Need to be aware of how important their own role is in terms of their children's literacy development.
- ❖ Need to have some practical ideas of things that they can do in their everyday lives to support learning.

The training is designed to help community people learn about literacy. At the end of the training, participants have the skills to plan and deliver family literacy programs in their communities. These programs help parents develop the knowledge and skills they need to support their children's learning.

### What are the Family Literacy Training Institutes?

In the *Early Childhood Development Action Plan*, the Family Literacy Training Institutes are called the Northern Parenting and Literacy Program. However, the Literacy Council refers to them as "training" or "training institutes", and so those are the names that will be used in this report.

The five-day training was designed to help communities develop their capacity to support literacy programming by providing training for local residents. During Years 1 and 2, the Literacy Council delivered the training on a regional basis. Community members who were interested in family literacy could apply to attend the training in their region. During Year 3, the training was territorial wide, and anyone from any community in the NWT could attend.





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The training focused on providing information on literacy, family literacy and emergent literacy (that is, literacy for young children). It provided resources on family literacy and helped people develop skills to deliver programs, such as:

- ❖ *Books in the Home*
- ❖ *1-2-3 Rhyme with Me*
- ❖ *Families First*

### Who were the Participants?

Ideally, family literacy programs do not stand alone, but build on programs that already exist in the community, such as pre-school, school, library or adult basic education programs. Consequently, the Literacy Council encouraged people who were already working with programs to attend the training, although it was open to other community members as well. People who participated included:

- ❖ Early childhood providers/ Aboriginal Head Start workers
- ❖ Teachers
- ❖ Adult educators
- ❖ Librarians
- ❖ Family resource centre workers
- ❖ Nutrition program workers
- ❖ Community health representatives

### Outputs, Outcomes and Indicators

#### *Training sessions and participants*

From 2001 to 2004, 189 people took part in 7 regional training institutes: the number of people from each community varied. In addition, the community literacy coordinator from the Literacy Council conducted further training in Lutselk'e and Fort Smith for *Families First*, and in Tsiigehtchic for *Families First*, *Books in the Home*, and *1-2-3 Rhyme with Me*. The community training sessions had 18 participants.



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## Training Sessions and Participants, 2001-2004

Region	Location of Training	Communities Represented	# of People
South Slave	Hay River	Hay River, Hay River Reserve, Fort Smith, Fort Providence, Kakisa, Fort Resolution, Lutselk'e	37
Deh Cho	Fort Simpson	Fort Simpson, Fort Liard, Jean Marie River, Nahanni Butte, Fort Providence	14
Yellowknife	Yellowknife	Yellowknife, Wrigley, Wha Ti, Dettah, Gameti	22
Beaufort-Delta	Inuvik	Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Holman, Inuvik, Paulatuk, Sachs Harbour, Tsiigehtchic, Tuktoyaktuk	33
Sahtu	Norman Wells	Colville Lake, Deline, Fort Good Hope, Norman Wells, Tulita	20
Dogrib	Yellowknife	Gameti, Deline, Rae-Edzo, Trout Lake, Wekweti, Wha Ti, Yellowknife, Dettah	26
NWT	Yellowknife	Aklavik, Deline, Fort Good Hope, Fort Liard, Fort Providence, Fort Resolution, Fort Simpson, Fort Smith, Hay River, Hay River Reserve, Inuvik, Gameti, Rae-Edzo, Tuktoyaktuk, Tulita, Wha Ti, Wrigley, Yellowknife	37
Community	Fort Smith	Fort Smith	10
Community	Lutselk'e	Lutselk'e	5
Community	Tsiigehtchic	Tsiigehtchic	3
<b>Total</b>			<b>207</b>





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### People from Each Community Trained in Family Literacy, 2001 - 2004

Community	# of FL Providers Trained Each Year			Total
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	
Fort Smith	6	-	11	17
Hay River	14	-	1	15
Hay River Reserve	3	-	1	4
Fort Resolution	6	-	3	9
Kakisa Lake	2	-	-	2
Fort McPherson	1	3	-	4
Lutselk'e	2	-	5	7
Fort Providence	10	-	1	11
Fort Simpson	5	-	1	6
Fort Liard	1	-	1	2
Jean Marie River	1	-	-	1
Nahanni Butte	1	-	-	1
Wrigley	2	-	2	4
Yellowknife	15	5	6	26
Wha Ti	2	1	1	4
Dettah/ N'dilo	1	2	4	7
Gameti	1	2	1	4
Aklavik	-	5	1	6
Colville Lake	-	2	-	2
Deline	-	7	1	8
Fort Good Hope	-	4	1	5
Holman	-	5	-	5
Inuvik	-	9	1	10
Norman Wells	-	4	-	4
Paulatuk	-	3	-	3
Rae Edzo	-	9	5	14
Sachs Harbour	-	4	-	4
Trout Lake	-	2	-	2
Tsiigehtchic	-	3	3	6
Tuktoyaktuk	-	2	2	4
Tulita	-	4	2	6
Wekweti	-	3	-	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>207</b>





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## *Feedback*

Overwhelmingly, people who participated in the training appreciated the opportunity to take part and agreed that it was excellent:

- ❖ They thought that the facilitators were excellent and well-organized.
- ❖ They saw the training as a complete package; people could leave the training and begin to implement what they had learned right away.
- ❖ They liked the content and thought it was relevant to them.
- ❖ They liked the fact that they got lots of ideas that they could use in their community.
- ❖ They thought the training was participatory and fun; they especially liked the hands-on activities.
- ❖ They appreciated the way the day was broken up with energizers.
- ❖ They enjoyed the variety of activities in the day.
- ❖ They liked all the resources that they received.
- ❖ They liked meeting other people from their region and sharing ideas with them.



Several participants reported that the training helped improve their self-esteem and gave them more confidence. Others, who worked with those participants, agreed. One respondent noted that the people from her community who had taken the training talked about the training “all the time.” Another participant reported that the training helped her find her “path in life.” Her training and subsequent involvement in running a pre-school reading circle made her realize that she wanted to work with children. As a result, she applied to, and has been accepted into, the NWT Teacher Education Program next year.

One adult educator commented that she encouraged people to attend the first training session and then asked to have additional people included in the territorial-wide training. She thought this was an excellent way to







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maintain vitality around family literacy, because the person who attended the later training session came back energized, and re-energized the others.

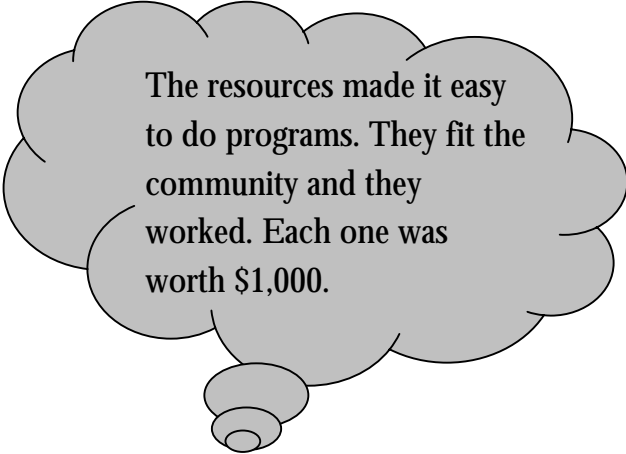
Many participants commented on how important it was for them to meet other people who were working in family literacy, and on the networks that they were able to establish through the face-to-face training. At one of the evaluation meetings, people expressed a need to find a way to share information. The Literacy Council responded by developing a newsletter, *Family Literacy Times*

People really appreciated the resources that the NWT Literacy Council provided, both during and after the training. They described them as “great”, “user-friendly”, and “useable.” They also like the *How to Kits* that the Council sends out twice a year. The new *Books in the Home* kits are also “great”, because they take some of the work out of planning for family literacy programs. Family literacy providers reported that the new materials give them fresh ideas on a regular basis, and this helps keep up the momentum.

The materials were distributed beyond the participants in the program. One family literacy provider, for example, shared them with participants in a Teacher Education Access program.



Keep doing them!



The resources made it easy to do programs. They fit the community and they worked. Each one was worth \$1,000.





## 2. Community Family Literacy Projects

### What are the Community Family Literacy Projects?

As part of the Early Childhood family literacy initiative, the NWT Literacy Council received funding to enable communities to run family literacy programs. The funding was designed to provide start-up money to people who had participated in the training, so that they could begin delivering programs as soon as possible after completing the training. It was limited to \$3,000 a year for each community, with larger communities, such as Yellowknife, Fort Smith, Hay River and Inuvik, receiving enough funding to run several projects. The Literacy Council encouraged community members and organizations to submit proposals jointly because of the limited funding.

The NWT Literacy Council developed criteria for the funding, as well as a simple application form. At the end of their project, those who had received funding had to submit a final report. Communities had the flexibility to design programs to fit the needs of the people in their community, so projects varied from community to community. Some communities organized one-time family literacy events; some delivered several short programs; some delivered one program that ran for several months. Some delivered a program in English, while others used Aboriginal languages.

### Outputs, Outcomes and Indicators

#### *Numbers of community family literacy projects, 2001 - 2004*

During 2001-2002, only 3 regional training sessions took place, so, since funding was available only after training, not all communities were eligible for funding. Between 2001 and 2004, however, every community in the NWT, except one, delivered family literacy programs or events. A number of communities delivered programs every year.





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### Community Family Literacy Projects, 2001 - 2004

Year	# of Communities	# of Programs/Events Run in Communities	Amount of Funding
2001-2002	14	34	\$44,000
2002-2003	25	37	\$96,000
2003-2004	28	49	\$114,000
<b>Total funding available to communities over 3 years</b>			<b>\$254,000</b>

#### *Types of programs and services offered*

Family literacy providers delivered a broad range of programs:

- ❖ Community family literacy evenings
- ❖ *1- 2-3 Rhyme with Me*, in English and Aboriginal languages
- ❖ Book-sharing sessions, such as *Books in the Home*
- ❖ Parenting programs, such as *Families First*
- ❖ Storytelling
- ❖ Reading circles
- ❖ Adult-children playtimes
- ❖ Crafts and games
- ❖ Making baby books
- ❖ Developing materials
- ❖ Research
- ❖ Aboriginal language and culture programs, such as recipe books, drum dancing and singing



People who ran programs usually offered services, such as child-care or transportation. Many also offered incentives, such as take-home books or



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prizes. Most included arts and crafts as part of the program, as well as nutritious snacks.

## *Integration into existing programs*

It is clear that family literacy providers integrated family literacy into existing programs, as the Literacy Council had originally envisioned. Programs that offered family literacy included:

- ❖ Pre-school programs
- ❖ Day care programs
- ❖ Aboriginal Head Start programs
- ❖ Pre-natal nutrition programs
- ❖ Schools
- ❖ Women's shelters
- ❖ Family resource centres
- ❖ Adult education programs
- ❖ Libraries
- ❖ Aboriginal language programs
- ❖ Dene Bands



## *Projects in general*

On the whole, family literacy providers were very pleased with their programs. Each year, more than 90% of those who ran programs said it was “worthwhile” to run them. More than 80% were either “Very satisfied” or “Satisfied” with their programs. Many were happy with the participation, and with the interest and enjoyment that parents obviously got from the programs. One

Attendance  
was great!





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community, for example, had over 200 people come out to a community family literacy evening. The few who were “Somewhat satisfied” or “A little dissatisfied” tended to feel frustrated because participation was not as good as they would have liked. Some found it difficult to reach “hard-to-reach” families. However, all those who ran programs said they would be prepared to run programs again. In Years 1 and 2 over 600 adults and 1000 children attended programs or events. (The figures for Year 3 are not yet available.) Family literacy providers reported that people enjoyed the fun activities, and were eager to participate.

A very positive experience!

Several respondents commented on the ability of the family literacy programs to bring together different people, both organizations and families, in the community around a common purpose. A number of family literacy providers commented on improved partnerships with other organizations in the community, such as pre-school, the school, or the community learning centre. One person described the family literacy programs as “a community bridging activity.”

It was fun to see other families enjoying themselves with different activities.

Overall, respondents reported that the community literacy projects raised individual and community awareness around literacy generally, and family literacy in particular.

### *Emerging patterns*

Several patterns seemed to emerge in family literacy programs around:

- ❖ People’s entry into family literacy programs
- ❖ The range of programs offered



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## ❖ The length of programs

The first pattern was around families' involvement in the programs. It was not unusual for people to become involved in family literacy by attending a one-time-only family literacy event. When they saw how much fun and how non-threatening it was, they then started coming to



programs. It seemed that once parents had attended one event or program, they then came to others. Also as people became comfortable with family literacy, they requested longer programs. Sometimes their children were factors in their attendance: because the children enjoyed the programs so much, they asked their parents to take them there. In fact one family literacy provider said, "Children *forced* the parents to take them." A number of parents said they wished such programs had been available when their older children were growing up.

The second pattern was around the nature of the programs. Several family literacy providers started with simpler or shorter programs, such as family literacy evenings, or *1-2-3 Rhyme with Me* that lasted four to eight weeks. As their skills developed and they became more experienced, they broadened the range of programs they offered. Very few people, for example, offered the



parenting program, *Families First*, as their first program. They recognized that it is more challenging to facilitate, and that they needed the experience







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of delivering other programs first. In one community, in response to the needs of her community, the family literacy coordinator started to do home visits as part of her program. She reported that the parents that she visits ask for activities that they can do with their children, and/or books. They also share with her activities that they have done during the previous week.

A third pattern seemed to emerge around the length of the programs: a number of people ran longer programs once they had more experience. During the second year, for example, a number of family literacy providers offered programs that lasted 12 weeks or more. In some communities, programs were so popular that people did not want them to end. In one community, at the request of program participants, the family literacy provider has decided to run one family literacy event a month during the summer.

### *Funding*

Family literacy providers identified that funding to run community projects was critical to their success. Most agreed that having funding available immediately after completing their training was an important incentive for them to start a project. People appreciated the simple application and reporting processes, and the support that the Literacy Council's community literacy coordinator gave them in filling out the forms. Many said that, without easy access to funding, they would definitely not be able to run programs in the future. One respondent noted that it was because funding was available to run programs that family literacy now has a higher profile in communities.

A number of people indicated that they would like to see the





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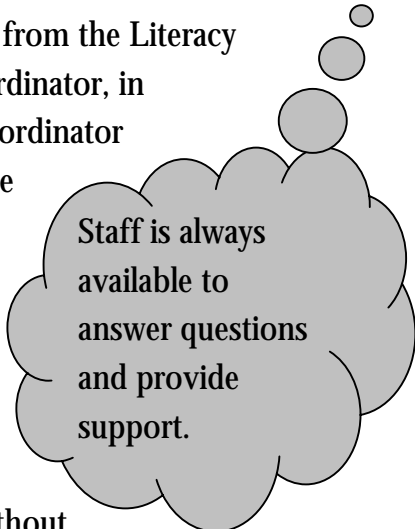


funding for family literacy projects increased: some felt that the limited funding restricted what they could do. One person said, “Funders have to realize that literacy is expensive.”

In Year 3, a number of programs received funding for Aboriginal Language Nests, which usually included elements of family literacy. As well, people reported that they were applying to other funding sources, such as the Community Literacy Projects funding or the Healthy Children Initiative through ECE, to ensure their programs had adequate funding, or to allow them to run more or longer programs.

## *Outreach and support*

Family literacy providers appreciated the assistance from the Literacy Council in general, and the community literacy coordinator, in particular, in the delivery of their programs. The coordinator worked with people to shape their programs. People felt comfortable calling her at any time to discuss their project, to share their successes or to problem-solve with her. People also agreed that the support of the Literacy Council staff was critical in terms of their success. One respondent noted, “I was never made to feel inadequate.” Another indicated that she would have given up without that support.



Staff is always available to answer questions and provide support.

## *The impact of programs on families*

Overwhelmingly, people were impressed by the increased numbers of books in NWT homes and communities, and the increased visibility of books. One respondent described it as a “dramatic” increase. Another respondent noted that during a girls’ club sleepover, almost every girl brought a book, something that she had never seen before.

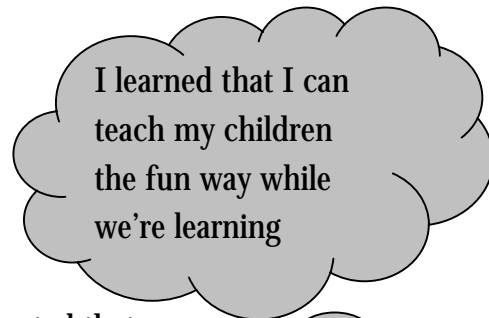




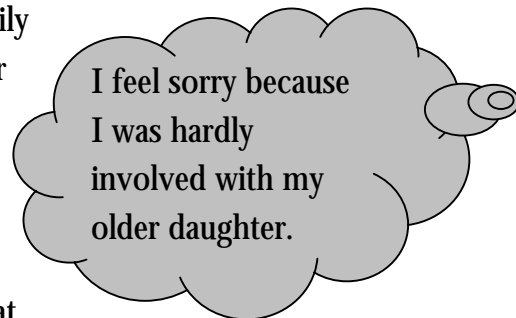
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The increased numbers of books came about, not just through programs like *Books in the Home*, but because families, on their own initiative, began to buy, or borrow, more books. Children are asking parents to buy literacy materials for them. In addition, parents are asking family literacy coordinators for more books. This has had some important spin-off effects. Stores in some communities began to bring in more books and other early childhood literacy materials. The bookstore in one community reported increased sales of children's books, and in at least one community with a library, families were borrowing more children's books. In one community, a family literacy provider reported that parents, who had never ordered books before, were ordering books through Scholastic book fairs.

Programs offered a place for parents to come together and discuss common issues. They provided opportunities for parents to share their experiences and problem solve together.



Both parents and family literacy providers reported that families read more together. They do other literacy activities as well, such as colouring, drawing, making books, storytelling, arts and crafts, and cutting out. Parents are able to list the literacy activities that they do now that they did not do before. One family literacy provider said that parents come to her office and show her activities that they do at home, and that they want to share with other parents. One parent, who already engaged in literacy activities with her child, commented that she usually read to her only at bedtime, but now she had set aside other parts of the day to do more literacy activities.



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Family literacy providers also reported increased and improved interaction between parents and children. One family reported that they now watched TV less, and did more things together as a family. Others, too, said that they spent more time as a family. Some family literacy providers thought that parents increasingly

recognized the importance of their own role in supporting their children's literacy development.

Children appeared to learn a number of positive things as a result of theirs and/or their parents' involvement in programs. Programs, such as *1- 2- 3*

*Rhyme with Me*, promoted the development of children's oral language skills, and an enjoyment of literacy. Programs that ran oral language programs in Aboriginal languages promoted the importance of language and culture as part of literacy development, and the use of Aboriginal languages among young children. Reading programs helped develop a respect for, and a love of, books, and knowledge of how to use them.

It was great, because lots of other parents were there.

Family literacy providers and parents alike commented on the desire of some parents to improve their own levels of literacy, usually because they wanted to be an example to their children. They wanted their children to stay in school and do well at school. They also wanted to be able to help their children learn, by helping them with homework, for example. Two adult education programs that ran family literacy programs reported that they had





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enrolled new learners as a result of family literacy initiatives. In addition, some family literacy providers reported that their own literacy levels had increased, that they were reading more themselves, as well as reading more to other family members, such as their own children or grandchildren. So family literacy training made a difference for the families of those who attended the training, as well as for other families in the community.

Respecting people's own forms of literacy and accepting their literacy skills were seen as important factors in parents' positive response to family literacy. Many families, for example, have an oral, rather than a written, tradition. One family literacy provider commented that it just did not occur to some families that children would enjoy having books, but after they realized, "they bought into the program big time!"



Finally, people noted the impact of family literacy in terms of employment opportunities. Three communities applied for, and received, funding from other funding sources for a part-time family literacy coordinator. In one of these communities, they combined funding to create a full-time school librarian/family literacy coordinator position. Several communities used some of their funding to pay the salary for a family literacy provider to run the programs. Although part-time, this was a new employment opportunity for these people. In response to the question "Have the training and resources helped you personally?" one family literacy provider responded, "It provided me with employment as the family literacy coordinator." In another community, the adult educator believed that employment was empowering and ensured that those who had received training were paid to run programs.



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## *Summary of Outputs & Outcomes (2001-2004)*

Outputs	Outcomes	How We Know
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 regional/NWT training sessions held</li> <li>• 3 community training sessions held</li> <li>• 2 evaluation/training meetings held</li> <li>• 207 FL providers trained</li> <li>• 1 or more FL providers in each NWT community</li> <li>• 120 FL programs/events run in NWT communities with ECD \$</li> <li>• \$255,000 spent on FL programs in NWT communities</li> <li>• Each community in the NWT, except 1, has run 1 or more FL programs</li> <li>• Over 600 adults &amp; 1000 children participated in programs during Years 1 &amp; 2 (Year 3 figures not yet available)</li> <li>• More books in NWT homes</li> <li>• A network of NWT FL providers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved skills among some FL providers, including literacy levels</li> <li>• Increased awareness of importance of literacy</li> <li>• Increased awareness of importance of parents' role in children's literacy development</li> <li>• Increased awareness of importance of culture &amp; language in literacy development</li> <li>• Parents recognize value of literacy</li> <li>• Increased interaction among parents</li> <li>• Increased interactions among community organizations, such as school and adult education; Band and school</li> <li>• Increased opportunities for employment in some communities</li> <li>• Literacy generally &amp; family literacy, in particular, have a higher profile in NWT communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some FL providers report improved self-esteem/confidence/ literacy levels</li> <li>• Children ask parents to take them to programs/events</li> <li>• Parents who never ordered books before order books from Scholastic Book Fairs</li> <li>• Community stores are stocking more books/early childhood materials because families are asking for them</li> <li>• Increased borrowing of books by families reported from 1 library; increased sales of children's books</li> <li>• New learners reported in 2 adult education programs as a result of family literacy</li> <li>• Parents report increased parent-child interactions</li> <li>• Parents report they do more literacy activities with their children, such as reading, counting, colouring, drawing, crafts, bookmaking</li> <li>• Parents can tell how they have changed their literacy practices</li> <li>• 3 communities applied for funding for FL coordinators; other communities have hired part-time FL providers</li> <li>• Several communities have literacy committees</li> </ul>





# On the Right Track

## 3. Family Learning Kits

### What are Family Learning Kits?

At the beginning of the project, the NWT Literacy Council was asked to develop a literacy learning kit for families with children aged from 0 to 6 years old. It soon became clear, however, that the kits would not be well targeted. For example, it might mean that a family with a baby would receive only one baby book, along with other books that might not be immediately useful. Or, it might mean that a family with a five year old would receive many books that would be too young for the child. Together, the members of the working group reworked the idea of the learning kits. They decided that the Healthy Family Kits (a separate project) would consist of three kits: birth; six months to one year; one year to two years. Each would include some books. The family learning kits would focus on pre-school, or 4 year old, children.



Family learning kits are backpacks filled with a variety of literacy materials. Specifically, they include:

- ❖ *Franklin Goes to School* (book and audiotape)
- ❖ *Red Parka Mary*
- ❖ *A Northern Alphabet*
- ❖ *A Winter Walk with Haley*
- ❖ *The Strangest Sight I have Ever Seen*
- ❖ *Mother Raven Nursery Rhymes*
- ❖ *Literacy Activity Cards* (activities for parents and children)
- ❖ *On the Right Track* (information for parents)
- ❖ Magnetic letters
- ❖ A writing pad
- ❖ A pencil bag, with pencil, ruler, pencil sharpener and eraser





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- ❖ Scissors
- ❖ Crayons

In addition, a book in the child's appropriate Aboriginal language is included. French backpacks were distributed in Yellowknife, Hay River and Fort Simpson.

## Distribution of the Family Learning Kits

The kits were to be distributed over three years to all families with children born in 1997, 1998 and 1999. Because the Literacy Council did not receive funding until later in 2001, it did not have time to acquire all the materials and assemble the backpacks for distribution in Year 1. Instead, during Year 2, it distributed backpacks to two sets of children: 4 and 5 year olds—those born in 1997 and 1998.

In larger centres such as Yellowknife, Hay River, Rae-Edzo and Inuvik, backpacks for all three years were distributed



through a continuous process, partly because of the numbers of children involved, and partly because of the difficulties of identifying eligible children in these communities.

As far as possible, the Literacy Council tried to ensure that the distribution of the kits was linked to other family literacy initiatives and that it included an educational component for parents. This involved training the people who attended the family literacy training institutes. During Year 1, some Kindergarten teachers and school librarians were also asked to help out with the distribution to families with 5 year olds.





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Community coordinators developed their own plans to distribute the backpacks. Some held workshops for parents only. Others held family workshops. A few chose to visit homes and show parents how they could use the materials with their children. As with other family literacy programs,

I enjoyed handing out the kits. Seeing the joy on some of the kids' faces was unbelievable.

community coordinators received funding to distribute the backpacks.

In all, approximately \$65,000 went to communities for backpack distribution. The money was used

for salaries, where necessary, and supplies

for workshops. If any funding remained, it was

used to buy more literacy materials for the community.

Most coordinators reported that distribution went very smoothly, although in a few communities, some coordinators were disappointed with turn-out at workshops. In several communities, backpacks were distributed on special days, such as Treaty Day or International Children's Day.

In one community, in an emergency housing project, the family literacy provider gave the backpacks to mothers and their children, and went through the materials. This approach prompted parents to ask questions about supporting literacy, and was seen as non-threatening and supportive by the family.<sup>3</sup> The family literacy provider also saw it as a positive way to engage with families.

One of the greatest difficulties that coordinators had was responding to families who wanted backpacks for children who were not eligible for them.

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<sup>3</sup> From Hume & Associates, *Final Evaluation Report: Northwest Territories Early Childhood Action Plan, July 2001 to March 2004*.





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## *Challenges with the family learning kits*

There were two major challenges with the project. Assembling and packing the backpacks for community distribution was a very labour-intensive and time-consuming task. Two summer students were hired by Education, Culture and Employment to do this. Since the same students returned the second year, the task was slightly easier in Year 2 because they had developed an effective process during their first summer.

In addition, the difficulties of identifying eligible children varied from community to community. In the smaller communities, it was relatively easy, but in the larger communities it was much more difficult. Information from childcare or pre-school programs, and from Health Centres was the primary means to identify children. Word of mouth was also an important way of letting people know about the project. In Yellowknife and Hay River, public advertising was used to try to identify children who might be otherwise missed. And in several communities, information was put out on “the green screen” or local TV station.

## Outputs, Outcomes and Indicators

### *Numbers of family learning kits distributed, 2001-2004*

During the three years, over 2000 backpacks were distributed to families throughout the NWT.

Year	# of Backpacks Distributed
2002-2003	1,700
2003-2004	450
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,150</b>





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### *The impact of the family learning kits*

Each year, parents returned about 10% of the evaluation forms that the Literacy Council included in backpacks. In some smaller communities, where family literacy providers helped parents with evaluations, there was 100% return. Families who returned the evaluations received another free book for their children.

Like the training and the community literacy projects, the response to the program was extremely positive. Most parents were delighted with the backpacks. The Acting President of one early childhood programs wrote: “The children were very excited to receive them [the backpacks] and have spent many hours exploring and enjoying

the materials in the backpack.” Another letter of appreciation read: “Parents tell me that their children really like having their own books and a place to keep them. With no library and no preschool it is difficult for parents to find reading material for their youngsters.”



Parents reported that the most useful part of the family learning kits were the books. A number commented on how nice it was to receive so many northern books, with content that was relevant to their children. Some expressed surprise at the numbers of books that seemed to have northern-relevant content. Many recognized that the materials would benefit a number of family members. Several parents reported that “everything” in the backpack was useful.

Attractive, fun  
presentation of  
materials!

He has a younger sister  
who will benefit from  
this as well.



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One of the most popular items among parents

was the set of literacy activity cards.

Many parents indicated they would

do at least one activity from the

cards everyday. This gave parents

new ways of interacting with their

children around literacy. When asked

why they liked the cards, they said that they were user-

friendly, creative and fun, and that the “great ideas” encouraged them to

teach their children in positive and fun ways. When asked if they would

have used them if they had been in a book format, many parents answered

“probably not.”

Using chocolate pudding  
in a bag to practice the  
alphabet is fantastic,  
creative and CRAZY!

Children valued the backpacks highly. They

reported to parents that the backpacks “made

them feel special.”<sup>4</sup> The backpacks also

promoted a positive view of literacy and

school. One family literacy provider said it

sends the message: Backpacks are FUN!

School is FUN! One child said in his

evaluation, “I can’t wait to go to school!”



Parents reported that because coordinators

treated the occasion as special and fun, this

excitement was passed onto their children. One kindergarten teacher, for

example, held “Backpack Day” once a week. Children were expected to

bring their backpacks to school on that day, and the class would use

materials from the backpack. In a pre-school program, children were

encouraged to bring their backpacks as library bags: they took a book from

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<sup>4</sup> From Hume & Associates, *Final Evaluation Report: Northwest Territories Early Childhood Action Plan, July 2001 to March 2004.*





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the school library, put it in their backpack and returned with it in their backpack the following week.

Overwhelmingly, the favourite item among children was the Franklin book, with its audio-tape. A number of parents reported that the tape was so popular that they were going to record some of their children's other books on tape too. In terms of other literacy materials, the scissors (which were for either hand) and magnetic letters were the most popular.

I like the scissors because I cut better now and can use either hand.

Several parents and family literacy providers claimed that children liked the backpack and its contents because they were their very own—not their sister's, or their brother's, but theirs.

Not surprisingly, some of the outcomes are similar to those from the community family literacy projects. The kits provided more books in NWT homes. They also provided families with the resources to engage in reading and other fun literacy activities.

The project led to an increase in the amount of time that parents spent reading with their children. One parent said, "I didn't know my children would be so interested in books and reading."<sup>5</sup> Parents reported making up rhymes, storytelling, making their own books, making their own family albums as new activities they did with their children.

I never thought of making our own books. It's a great idea.

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<sup>5</sup> From Hume & Associates, *Final Evaluation Report: Northwest Territories Early Childhood Action Plan, July 2001 to March 2004*.



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Receiving the family learning kit seemed to open the door to some parents to go to family literacy programs. The kits were seen as a gift, not as a program, or someone telling parents what they should be doing.<sup>6</sup> Parents were introduced to family literacy and the community's family literacy provider in a non-threatening way. This encouraged some parents to take the step of going to a family literacy event or program. A number of family literacy providers commented on this pattern.

Family literacy providers and parents indicated that families appeared to be using the backpacks and their contents. In some communities, the children in the Kindergarten class “always” wore their backpacks to school. In one community, the family literacy provider put two backpacks on the shelves in her office, low enough for children to reach them.



Children would come into her office, take the backpacks down and use them. The children obviously recognized the materials: they knew the titles of the books and could “read” some of the stories. Another family literacy provider suggested that the families were using all the parts, although the backpacks and their contents were not necessarily kept together any more.

One parent, although supportive, questioned the cost of universal distribution of such a resource, arguing that some families could easily afford these materials, and already engaged in literacy activities with their children. However, others, who might have been excluded if distribution had not been universal, commented on how nice it was that their children were included, adding that it made their children part of the community, and that for them it reinforced the importance of literacy. One family literacy

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.





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provider reported that the provision of literacy materials like this for pre-schoolers created a level playing field for all children going to school. All the children in the community had the things they needed for school, plus they knew some of the things to expect when they first went to school.

One parent and one family literacy provider summed up the project: “A great project. Let’s do more.” A Kindergarten teacher suggested that this was one of the most meaningful projects that the Department of Education, Culture and Employment had ever been involved in.



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## *Summary of Outputs, Outcomes and Indicators (2001-2004)*

Outputs	Outcomes	How We Know
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2,100 family learning kits distributed</li> <li>• Most families in the NWT with children born in 1997, 1998, 1999 received a backpack</li> <li>• More books and other literacy materials in NWT homes and communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More level playing field between those who have materials for school &amp; those who did not in the past</li> <li>• An expanded understanding of what literacy is</li> <li>• Increased literacy activities between parents and children</li> <li>• Increased enjoyment of reading &amp; literacy for both parents &amp; children</li> <li>• Increased awareness of the importance of literacy</li> <li>• Increased awareness of the importance of parents in children's literacy development</li> <li>• Increased awareness &amp; reading of northern books</li> <li>• Increased # of parents participating in literacy programs</li> <li>• Increased knowledge &amp; skills relating to parenting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children in communities are wearing their backpacks</li> <li>• FL providers &amp; parents report that children are using materials from their backpacks</li> <li>• Children enjoy receiving their backpacks &amp; are very excited about them</li> <li>• Parents &amp; FL providers report that children like having their own books</li> <li>• Children recognize the books in a different setting, such as Daycare</li> <li>• 1 community reported more books in the Daycare Centre</li> <li>• Parents &amp; FL providers report that family members, including older siblings, are doing more literacy activities</li> <li>• Parents can give example of literacy activities they do &amp; how they have changed their practices</li> <li>• Parents reported that backpacks resulted in increased community awareness of literacy</li> <li>• FL providers reported that children who did not receive backpacks asked for them</li> </ul>





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### Conclusion and Recommendations

Overwhelmingly, everyone involved in the three projects—family literacy providers, parents, other community members and children themselves—report that they were extremely successful, and that each project has had positive outcomes.

While one of the stated outcomes was increased literacy levels, it is unrealistic to expect such changes after only three years: the development of literacy requires a long-term commitment. However the positive outcomes at this point make us optimistic for the future. A number of people commented that the emphasis on literacy by groups such as the NWT Literacy Council, schools and private companies was really beginning to change people's attitudes towards literacy. One person referred to it as "the marketing of literacy." Another person went so far as to claim that it was possible to identify the time when these organizations began emphasizing literacy. She and other people in the community observed that the literacy skills of children following the introduction of literacy interventions is "noticeably higher" than before. Only time will tell what the long-term effects are.

What is clear is that the work of the last three years has increased the capacity of communities to design and deliver their own literacy programs, and that this, in turn, has created a momentum around family literacy. Today, many families, organizations and communities are mobilized around family literacy, even to the point of advocating to their MLAs for funding for family literacy to continue. The idea has engaged people who might otherwise have been reluctant to get involved in literacy. And the bottom line is that both parents and children appear to be benefiting from this movement.

As a result of its findings, the NWT Literacy Council wishes to recommend to the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. . .





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1. . . . that the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) demonstrates its ongoing commitment to families and their young children in the NWT by developing a long-term comprehensive approach to early childhood development that includes family literacy.

The Early Childhood Development Framework for Action was a three-year initiative. However, many of the projects funded through it, such as family literacy, Aboriginal language nests, or the family visitor program require long-term commitment. GNWT funding has been restored for Aboriginal language nests for an indefinite period of time. Government of Canada funding for early childhood is available for two more years (2004-2006). Of that, \$251,000 has been allocated to family literacy for 2004-2005, with no commitment to family literacy beyond that. In the short-term, the same level of funding needs to be committed for 2005-2006 to support family literacy.

Early childhood development is important. It has been shown to be a cost effective way of providing programs and services, rather than having to provide remediation services later. Further, the GNWT has committed in its 10-year strategic plan to provide programs that promote positive parenting skills and child development. A long-term commitment of five to ten years, a more comprehensive approach, and improved integration among the various aspects of the program are needed if early childhood programming is to be effective. A piecemeal approach will not achieve the intended results.

2. . . . that funding to support community family literacy projects needs not only to continue, but to increase, and a different process used for distribution..

\$3000 has been available over the past three years to each NWT community to deliver family literacy programs, with Yellowknife, Hay River, Fort Smith





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and Inuvik receiving additional funding to support several programs. This funding had the desired intent of motivating people to return to their community after training and start delivering a family literacy program. However, this report shows that funding was integral to the success of programs and needs to continue. Furthermore, as literacy providers gain experience they want to offer more extensive programming, but can do that only with increased funding.

The NWT Literacy Council agreed to distribute funding to communities as a way of supporting the implementation of family literacy programs at the start of the project. However, the Literacy Council is not a funding agency, and does not wish to assume that role. Processes to distribute funding already exist in the Department of ECE. For example, funding for family literacy projects could be used to enhance the Healthy Children Initiative funding, specifically for literacy initiatives. Literacy providers appreciated the process that the NWT Literacy Council used because of its simplicity. The Council would be willing to work with the Department, for example on an advisory committee, to design an effective process to distribute the funding.

3. . . . that stable, secure funding needs to be available to provide ongoing development of family literacy programming as well as ongoing training and outreach support to family literacy providers

Family literacy is an emerging field of literacy that has been shown to be effective in improving the literacy skills of both children and adults. As this report shows, considerable momentum has developed as a result of the NWT Literacy Council's work. However, further support for family literacy is needed through ongoing development of programming; ongoing training for family literacy providers; and the ability to provide outreach services to family literacy providers.

The NWT Literacy Council has introduced several models of family literacy, such as the family learning kits, all of them beneficial in different ways to



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those who participate in them. However, there are many different models, all with enormous potential. An example of a model that has been extremely successful in other parts of Canada is the 4-component model. This consists of an adult education component, a child development component, a parenting component and a parent and child together component. Adaptations of this model are now being introduced on the Hay River Reserve. Various models need to be explored, pilot-tested and implemented as appropriate.

In addition, training needs to be ongoing: new people need to be trained to replace those who are no longer involved; and people who continue to be involved need to have opportunities to upgrade their skills. Since the training focuses on multiple literacies, it promotes literacy in all languages, providing support to other programs such as Aboriginal Head Start and Aboriginal language nests. Training, however, is not the only support literacy providers need. Following training, many need outreach support, through telephone, e-mail or on-site training. In addition, they need resource materials to assist them in the delivery of their programs.

At this point, federal funding will provide limited support to family literacy for one more year. Yet family literacy is an integral part of the NWT Literacy Strategy, which continues to 2005-2006. The current funding gap needs to be addressed, and an ongoing commitment made to this important aspect of literacy programming.

4. . . . that family literacy programming is extended beyond families with children from 0 to 6 years old to include families with school-aged children.

Since family literacy was part of the Early Childhood Development Framework for Action, the funding guidelines restricted enrolment in programs to families with children from 0 – 6 years. In reality, many families with children in that age range also have older children that participated.





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Family literacy programs benefit all families in the community. Ideally, such programs would be run by a community partnership, such as a community literacy committee, that would ensure a range of programs is available to meet the literacy needs of all families in the community.

5. . . . that the GNWT continue to take a community-development approach to family literacy.

According to the final evaluation report of the Early Childhood Development Framework for Action, the most successful activities under the Action Plan were those that involved a community-development approach. The experiences of the NWT Literacy Council would support that finding. Family literacy programming has been so successful because it took a community-development approach. The Council built on the existing strengths of the community. It assisted people to develop the skills to assess their community's literacy needs and gave them some tools to respond to these. Communities then had the flexibility to make their own decisions around family literacy to effect positive changes. This approach is integral to the success of family literacy initiatives.





## Appendix

Information for this report was obtained from a variety of sources, including:

- ❖ The daily evaluations from the Family Literacy Training Institutes
- ❖ The overall evaluations of the Family Literacy Training Institutes
- ❖ The evaluation meeting in May 2002
- ❖ The evaluation meeting in April 2004
- ❖ The parent and children evaluations included in the family learning kits
- ❖ The evaluations from the community coordinators for the family learning kits
- ❖ The evaluation reports from Sharon Hume and Associates, 2001-2004
- ❖ The NWT Literacy Council evaluation questionnaires in April 2004:
  - For family literacy providers on family literacy training, projects and support
  - For family literacy providers on family learning kits
  - For parents
  - For Kindergarten teachers

