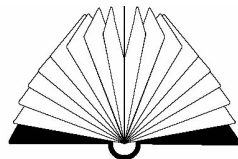


# Seniors' Literacy in the NWT



Prepared for  
NWT Literacy Council



**N.W.T. LITERACY COUNCIL**

Prepared by  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## ***RESEARCH PURPOSE AND APPROACH***

This research is intended to:

- better understand the literacy needs and preferences of NWT seniors; and
- make recommendations for better and more relevant literacy supports and services for NWT seniors.

The research involved consultations with 75 informants primarily in Inuvik, Yellowknife, Fort Simpson, Fort Resolution, and Wekweti. Community case studies were prepared for Inuvik and Fort Resolution

## ***NWT SENIOR LITERACY NEEDS***

Literacy is viewed as understanding, using and sharing information, communicating, and connecting. It is staying current in a world where information and technology are rapidly changing. *“Literacy is about more than reading and writing. It is about being able to function in our world: to understand, imagine and create.”* (Yellowknife literacy provider) The NWT Seniors Society believes that culture and language are at the centre of what literacy means in the NWT *“literacy has to respect seniors’ needs and culture.”*

## **A Literacy Profile of the NWT Senior Population**

The NWT has a rapidly growing NWT seniors population with low literacy. Limited school education and declining Aboriginal language use are two significant factors that increase the risk of NWT seniors being unable to function independently in activities of daily living in their home, community and work.<sup>1</sup>

Without support NWT seniors with low literacy may be at risk of:

- abuse and financial ‘scams’ from family members and caregivers.

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<sup>1</sup> Over one third of the NWT seniors who continue to work

- isolation and the emotional pain of being unable to connect in a meaningful way with others in the community, and to share their experiences, stories, and language.
- missing out on income and social security benefits.
- living unhealthy lifestyles.

Aboriginal seniors living in a complex world of multiple literacies may be at higher risk of suffering the consequences of low literacy.

Based on current methods of assessing English literacy rates, more than half of the seniors population is considered illiterate. In the next decade, the seniors population will multiply 1.5 times. Rapidly changing information and communication technologies will challenge even educated seniors. Aboriginal seniors are not expressing their literacy of the people and the land with the same frequency as they did in the past. To maintain the health of Aboriginal cultures, Aboriginal literacy will be needed.

### **Seniors' Preferences for Literacy Supports**

NWT seniors are interested in supports for their literacy needs. Despite the range of efforts to maintain seniors' enrolment, literacy is a 'hard sell' to seniors. To overcome challenges to engaging seniors in literacy activities, seniors identify the following preferences.

NWT seniors are more likely to be engaged in a literacy learning activity if:

- they participate in developing the activity and it is designed for them.
- they are in familiar and accessible locations with transportation provided.
- they have reminders, word of mouth/personal invitations and audio/visual information about the activity.
- learning activities are community-based, culturally relevant, fun, provide snacks, and bring seniors together.
- learning activities offer less structured approaches, (e.g. short-duration workshops, longer-term small group learning, and classroom sessions designed for seniors).
- familiar and trusted workers are involved and use a non-threatening (teaching) style.

- learning activities for seniors offer individualized instruction, a mix of activities and the potential for an adjusted activity pace.
- literacy activities use lots of visual and oral presentations methods.
- arrangements are made for presentations on topics of interest to seniors and include facilitated group discussions. (e.g. health and wellness; income security benefits)

## **Literacy Supports for Seniors in the NWT**

NWT seniors have options for supporting their literacy needs through informal and formal support networks in families and familiar community groups.

Community groups provide literacy outreach and drop-in helping services, interpretation in official languages, workshops adapted to the literacy needs of primarily senior clients, and community-based literacy learning activities in English and Aboriginal languages. Literacy supports are seldom a 'stand-alone' activity/project. Literacy is increasingly being integrated with health, political, cultural and recreational activities available to seniors.

Since 2001, GNWT Education Culture and Employment has expended \$223,730 from the NWT Literacy Strategy for 22 seniors literacy projects in 14 NWT communities. Project activities were primarily designed to stimulate learning. In a few cases projects involved collecting materials (e.g. NWT Seniors Society handbook) and providing outreach services/office to respond to seniors literacy needs. Classes, tutorials, learning groups, gatherings/Christmas feasts, sewing circles, cooking classes, home visits and outreach are common approaches to attracting some seniors needing literacy supports. NWT Literacy Council helps communities respond to the literacy needs of seniors. The Council delivers training, networking, advocacy and research.

Projects were usually integrated with other programs and services offered by a sponsor or delivery agency (e.g. community learning centers, literacy committees, Aurora College and/or Aboriginal language committees). Insecure year-to-year funding, limited project funding, low priority for seniors literacy, and lack of literacy provider capacity are obstacles to effective delivery of literacy supports for NWT seniors.

More could be done by communities to address the literacy needs of seniors. Some challenges faced by communities in responding to seniors' literacy needs includes:

- limited understanding of the social and economic benefits of a literate, independent and dignified senior population.
- limited priority given to planning to meet the needs of the growing seniors population with English reading, writing and communication skills and the declining Aboriginal literacy skills.
- communities with limited capacity to deal with senior literacy issues.
- community leaders and others who do not understand what literacy means or have a strong vision for meeting seniors literacy needs.

## ***RECOMMENDATIONS***

It is recommended that:

### Policy

The NWT Literacy Council develops and advocates for the use of best practices and guidelines to respond to the literacy needs of NWT seniors.

### Literacy Defined

The goal of seniors literacy activities be to provide supports to enable seniors to improve and maintain their literacy skills for independent living and dignity in the home, work and community environments. The definition of literacy is well understood by and guides seniors, senior serving organizations and literacy providers.

*“an individual’s ability to listen speak, read, write, view, represent, compute and solve problems in one or more of the NWT official languages at levels of proficiency necessary to function in the family, in the community and on the job.”*  
(ECE. 2001. NWT Literacy Strategy)

## Organization

The organization of seniors literacy supports at all levels be strengthened through improved interagency relationships among governments, literacy providers, communities and families.

The co-ordination of literacy supports be strengthened by encouraging:

- seniors to take a more active role in raising the profile and priority of literacy and advocating for a continuum of literacy supports in their communities; and
- community-based senior-serving organizations and literacy providers to build stronger relationships, integrate programs and services, and increase networking opportunities to effectively support seniors.

## Access to Seniors Literacy Supports

Literacy supports be promoted and awareness of literacy activities raised among seniors.

Literacy providers engage seniors in needs assessment as a first step in raising the awareness of the continuum of literacy supports potentially needed to meet senior literacy needs.

Literacy providers be supported and receive training to enable understanding and flexibility of techniques for contacting, recruiting, and meeting senior literacy needs.

## Seniors Literacy Programs and Supports

Seniors have access to a continuum of literacy supports with culturally relevant activities that enable seniors to function independently in their homes, communities and at work.

Senior literacy activities be made available in a familiar and welcoming environment for seniors.

Seniors literacy supports be designed based on individual assessment of needs involving the provider, senior and family.

### Literacy Providers and Personnel

Literacy providers have more access to human and financial resources to implement senior literacy activities including more volunteers and senior literacy helpers.

Literacy providers and sponsors of seniors literacy activities have more access to senior specific training and professional development opportunities.

### Funding

Sufficient long term funding be available to help NWT communities build capacity to develop and sustain literacy supports attractive to seniors.

A more comprehensive and complementary public policy for funding literacy supports be developed and implemented that does not distinguish between Aboriginal and English language literacy.

# **SENIORS LITERACY IN THE NWT**

Spring 2004

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NWT Literacy Council

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 The Need to Examine Literacy Supports for Seniors in the NWT

This research paper provides a snapshot of seniors needs and preferences. It presents the views of literacy providers, seniors, and senior-serving organizations in selected NWT communities. The specific objectives of the research were to:

- better understand the literacy needs and preferences of NWT seniors; and
- make recommendations for better and more relevant literacy supports and services for NWT seniors.

The NWT Literacy Council is dedicated to supporting the development of literacy in all official languages of the NWT. The Council believes that *“everyone has a right to literacy. It believes that literacy is something that involves everyone - individuals, families, communities, business, labour and governments. Literacy is the foundation of lifelong learning and of active participation in the social, economic and political life of our communities, our territory and our country”*.

The NWT Literacy Council sponsored the research. The Council recognizes that NWT seniors, like other Canadian seniors, may have significantly lower literacy skills than other segments of the adult population and they may have difficulties accessing literacy supports. The study is intended to stimulate discussions with seniors, senior serving organizations and literacy providers regarding approaches to meet seniors literacy needs in NWT communities. Lutra Associates Ltd. of Yellowknife conducted the research on behalf of the NWT Literacy Council.

The literacy needs of seniors have long been a focus of the NWT Seniors Society. In 1990, an NWT Seniors delegate attended the Learning –That’s Life Conference, a national conference on literacy and older Canadians sponsored by “One Voice”.<sup>1</sup> The conference recommended seniors taking the lead advocacy role on seniors literacy issues.

### 1.2 Research Methodology and Approach

The seniors literacy research project was managed by the Executive Director of

the NWT Literacy Council. The NWT Seniors Society agreed that the NWT Literacy Council should take the lead role in guiding and monitoring the research. The Executive Director of the NWT Literacy Council provided input on the research scope, approach and research instruments.

The terms of reference for the Seniors Literacy research project set out the scope and approach:

- provide a ‘snapshot’<sup>2</sup> (or) of literacy needs and preferences among NWT senior residents, 55 or more years of age.
- examine potential barriers to seniors’ participation in literacy activities.
- examine approaches or practices that support seniors’ participation in literacy activities.
- rely on qualitative research methods.
- consider literacy in all of the NWT’s official languages.

In this research, Lutra:

- received a research license from the Aurora Research Institute.
- reviewed relevant literature in other Canadian jurisdictions;
- reviewed relevant current statistical information on seniors from the NWT Bureau of Statistics; project file information from Literacy Programs and Support for Seniors (Education, Culture and Employment); and preliminary research instruments prepared by ECE and Bureau of Statistics staff;
- collaborated with the NWT Literacy Council to develop a research contact list of seniors, senior serving organizations and literacy providers in the NWT; and
- developed three interview guides to focus discussions with seniors, senior serving organizations, and literacy providers in the NWT (Appendix A). The NWT Literacy Council approved interview guides prior to use. The NWT Literacy Council also provided a letter of introduction to the research. The letter was provided to groups contacted over the course of the research.

Over the course of the research, telephone interviews, focus groups and face-to-face interviews were conducted with 75 informants primarily in Inuvik,

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<sup>1</sup> “One Voice” no longer exists.

<sup>2</sup> picture at the time of the research

Yellowknife, Fort Simpson, Fort Resolution, and Wekweti. These communities were selected due to their experience with and extent of seniors literacy activities. A complete list of agencies and individuals interviewed is attached in Appendix C. Several other groups and individuals were made aware of the research. For example, the research was described at the Family Literacy Day luncheon to approximately 30 Inuvik seniors and an opportunity was provided to discuss literacy support opportunities in Inuvik.

Community case studies were prepared for Inuvik and Fort Resolution. (Appendix B). These two communities were selected as they provide good examples of seniors literacy activities and experiences.

In many NWT Aboriginal communities, NWT seniors may be referred to as elders. This term carries a variety of meanings. For simplicity, the term senior rather than elder has been used in this research.

### **1.3 Literacy Among Seniors**

*"A person is functionally literate who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of his/her group and community and also for enabling him/her to continue to use reading, writing and calculation for his/her own and the community's development"* (UNESCO, 1962). The 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), reports that 80% of Canadian seniors (ages 65 and older) have low literacy.<sup>3</sup> IALS also found that most of these seniors felt they had no problems coping with day-to-day functions. The extent to which seniors with low literacy were frustrated while coping with daily living functions was not reported in IALS. It is important to note that the NWT was not included in the 1994 IALS, but will be included in the most recent IALS data to be released in 2005.

Literacy is also defined as a social practice requiring understanding of groups and institutions that socialize people into different literacy practices.<sup>4</sup> It is also defined as a right of citizens.

*"All Nunavummiut have the right to participate fully and be included in their community. Literacy is much more than reading and writing, it also means being*

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<sup>3</sup>Level I and level II combined

*connected to your language and culture. Literacy involves everyone and is fundamental to the development of health and well-being. Literacy is fostering and nurturing understanding, knowledge and wisdom.”* (Nunavut Literacy Council)

Research into literacy among seniors over the past decade has found that seniors with low literacy levels are more likely to:

- Rely on others to pay bills/write cheques and run a high risk of being victimized.
- Have low income, be poor and unemployed or on income support (e.g. 64% of people earning less than \$10,000 a year have very low literacy skills)
- Have poor health (e.g. seniors who cannot read labels on food products are less able to make healthy choices).
- Run the risk of serious health complications through the overuse or unsuitable mixing of medicines.
- Be in a workplace accident than more literate co-workers.

Research into literacy among seniors has also confronted myths about this issue. (Table 1)

**Table 1: Perceptions and Realities About Seniors**

Perceptions	Reality
Seniors are generally alone and lonely.	Most live with a partner.
Seniors are sick frail and dependent on others.	Most live independently.

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<sup>4</sup> Cairney, Tevor. *Developing Partnerships: The home, school and community interface*

## Seniors Literacy Final Report

<b>Perceptions</b>	<b>Reality</b>
Seniors are cognitively impaired.	Most don't suffer enough of a decline in intellectual abilities to affect daily activities.
Seniors are set in their ways.	Studies show that personality remains relatively consistent throughout the lifespan.
Seniors are depressed.	Health Canada reports lower rates of hospitalization among seniors for depression than among persons aged 45 and under.
Learning opportunities for seniors are not as important as learning opportunities for younger adults.	Learning for a career or employment is given greater importance and priority than other reasons for learning.

Source: Nova Scotia Senior Citizens' Secretariat. 2003. Enhancing the Basic Learning Skills of Older Nova Scotians

Seniors who improve their basic English reading and writing skills can enhance their health and well-being. Benefits may include:

- being able to live independently as long as possible;
- being able to handle one's personal finances and avoid 'scams';
- remaining healthy and fit;
- continuing to be socially involved and connected to one's community;
- participating in the labour market, and
- Coping with automation such as bank machines, telephone messaging services and computers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Nova Scotia Senior Citizens' Secretariat. 2003. Enhancing the Basic Learning Skills of Older Nova Scotians

## 2.0 NWT SENIOR LITERACY NEEDS

### 2.1 Characteristics of the NWT Senior Population

#### Population

In 2003, one in nine NWT residents was a senior, 55 years or older. (Table 2) By 2014, one in six NWT residents will be a senior if forecasted growth is achieved in the next decade. (Table 3)

**Table 2: NWT and Selected Community Elder Population Estimates, 2003**

Community	Total	<55	55+	Percentage
NWT	41,872	37,251	4,621	11%
Fort Resolution	548	455	93	17%
Fort Simpson	1,237	1,108	129	10%
Inuvik	3,435	3,065	370	11%
Yellowknife	18,673	17,108	1,565	8%

Source: Bureau of Statistics. Population Estimates. Community and Age. 2003

Compared to growth trends anticipated for the NWT, Yellowknife's seniors population is expected to grow at a much faster rate (92%) than in other communities. In Fort Resolution, the seniors population is expected to decline over the next decade. (Table 3)

The vast majority of seniors, especially those 65 years and over, live independently. More seniors in NWT over 65 live alone than adults 55 to 64. (NWT Health and Social Services, 2003). Housing Association personnel suggest that a small percentage of seniors live in seniors housing, nursing homes or long term care facilities. Many seniors not living independently, live with a younger family member such as a grandchild.

**Table 3: NWT Senior Population Projections, 2004, 2009, and 2014**

<b>Population Age 55+</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Percentage Change 2004 - 2014</b>
Northwest Territories	4,903	6,208	7,544	54%
Fort Resolution	95	95	90	-5%
Fort Simpson	136	170	190	40%
Inuvik	396	489	623	57%
Yellowknife	1,724	2,522	3,303	92%

Source: Bureau of Statistics. Population Projections. Community and Age. 2004-2014

### Education

The NWT seniors population has lower levels of school achievement than younger adults. In 2001, 66% of the seniors population age 60 years and over, had not graduated from high school and 55% had not completed grade 9. Lower levels of formal schooling are more apparent in smaller communities with proportionately larger Aboriginal senior populations. In smaller communities such as Fort Resolution, as many as 85% of seniors may not have achieved post secondary education. In Yellowknife, 58% of seniors have some level of post secondary schooling. (Table 4)

**Table 4: NWT Seniors' Highest Level of Education, 2001**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Pop. 60 &amp; Older</b>	<b>Less than grade 9</b>	<b>Less than high school graduation certificate</b>	<b>High School Graduation and Post Secondary</b>
Northwest Territories	2,385	1,315	260	810
Inuvik	165	80	15	60
Fort Simpson	85	55	10	20
Fort Resolution	65	45	10	10
Yellowknife	600	145	110	350

Source: Statistics Canada. 2001 Census. Population 60 & Older by Highest Level of Schooling. Age Group and Gender

When today's seniors were children and youth, church run residential schools were the main, if not the only source of formal schooling. Many seniors attended these mission schools. Seniors in small communities generally achieved up to grade 5 education while in the larger centers they may have achieved some or completed secondary schooling. Despite lower levels of formal schooling some literacy providers suggest that basic English reading and writing skills are less of



an issue for seniors today than in the past. Many seniors have learned to read and write English on their own or through help from co-workers or family members. In the research communities, many seniors are described as having adequate literacy skills to get by, read street signs, write names, pass a drivers examination, do their own banking, and use debit cards. Still some seniors do experience difficulties as a result of poor literacy. The Fort Resolution literacy needs assessment found that among senior participants 29% needed basic reading, writing and math and 22% needed help with banking.

### Language

Today, NWT elders live in a complex world of multiple literacies. In the past, Aboriginal elders mainly communicated orally through stories and visually interpreting signs from the environment. Some learned Aboriginal language syllabics from the missionaries. When Aboriginal people encountered the residential school system, English immersion was the practice to the exclusion of Aboriginal languages. The residential school system created a mismatch between the home and school, and diminished the value of Aboriginal literacy in favour of English literacy.

In 1999, one in two NWT seniors (52.2%) 60 years and older, could speak an Aboriginal language compared to one in five (20%) of the population 15 years to 60 years of age.<sup>6</sup> English is the dominant language used today in the workplace, home and community. Within this environment, it can no longer be assumed that the oral tradition of storytelling and environmental interpretation will be passed from elders to younger generations.

Today there is a generation of Aboriginal elders and adults who are passively bilingual (e.g. fluent in English and understand but don't speak their mother tongue). Increasing use of English has eroded Aboriginal language use in the home, at work, and in the community. Of those seniors who are fluent in their Aboriginal language, almost 10% of these speakers do not speak their language in the home.<sup>7</sup>

English language use also affects other seniors whose mother tongue is not English. For example, NWT and Yellowknife Seniors societies serve a large

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<sup>6</sup> NWT Bureau of Statistics. 1999. NWT Labour Force Survey

<sup>7</sup> NWT Bureau of Statistics. 1999. Persons Who Can Speak an Aboriginal Language by Age and Community Type

immigrant population. These individuals moved to Yellowknife over the past 20 years from countries around the world and many do not have English language literacy. Inadequate English literacy skills have posed difficulties functioning in the community and at work.

Seniors Work and Income

Many seniors are still active in the labour force and are staying in the labour force after 60 years of age.<sup>8</sup> Employment and unemployment rates and cost of living may be reasons for continuing to work. Still only 34% of seniors (60 years and over) participate in the labour force compared to 76% of the working age (15-64 years) population. If seniors are not in the labour force, they may be participating in older worker programs, advising councils and community programs and/or engaged in traditional knowledge work for environmental agencies or industry. Seniors are often resource persons for First Nation sponsored language and culture programs such as in day care, schools and summer camps and story collection. Some seniors are caregivers for young children.

Once out of the labour market seniors are unlikely to want to return to wage employment. Almost 88% of seniors 60 years and over that were not working, did not want to work. Federal and territorial governments are co-operating in programs to extend older workers' labour market participation. This is evidenced in training and employer subsidies that can be arranged between Aurora College and employers.

**Table 5: NWT Labour Force Activity by Selected Characteristics, 2002**

	Pop. 15 & over	Labour Force	Employed	Unemployed	Participation Rate	Unemployment Rate	Employment Rate
NWT 2002	30,459	23,212	21,052	2,160	76.2	9.3	69.1
60 Years & over	2,590	888	758	130	34.3	14.6	29.3
NWT 1999	29,506	23,090	19,920	3,170	78.3	13.7	67.5
60 years & over	2,439	765	674	91	31.4	11.9	27.6

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics, 1999 and 2002 Labour Force Survey

The average income of NWT seniors 65 years and older is \$22,134. Younger

<sup>8</sup> NWT Bureau of Statistics. Fall 2002 and Winter 1999. Labour Force Activity by Selected Characteristics. NWT

seniors age 55 to 64 years have similar if not higher average income than other NWT wage earners. Lower income can be expected among seniors 65 years and older. Almost 68% of seniors 65 years and older can expect annual income of \$19,999 or less.

**Table 6: Total Income by Age for the NWT Population 15 or more Years of Age, 2001**

	All Ages	%	55-64 Years	%	65 years & older	%
Total Population	29,945	100	2,155	100	1,570	100
\$0 - \$9,999	5,925	20	475	22	80	5
\$10,000 - \$19,999	4,200	14	330	15	985	63
\$20,000 - \$39,999	5,800	19	400	19	330	21
\$40,000 - \$59,999	4,575	15	350	16	95	6
\$60,000 and over	5,265	18	415	19	75	5
Average Income	\$35,012		\$39,382		\$22,134	

Source: NWT Bureau of Statistics

## 2.2 The Demand for NWT Seniors Literacy Supports

### Literacy Defined

The definition of literacy by seniors, literacy providers and senior serving organizations varies widely.

The NWT Literacy Council and Education, Culture and Communication have adopted similar definitions of literacy.

*“how people understand and use information. It is how they read, write, and use*

*numbers and communication technology (computers, phones, fax, email, internet). People communicate and use information with every group of people they meet: at work, at home, and in their community.”* (NWT Literacy Council. 2000. Making a Case for Literacy)

*“the ability to read, write, calculate, speak and understand and communicate in other forms of language according to need. It is a continuum of these skills necessary for everyday life in the home, at work, in education and in the community.”* (NWT Literacy Council. 2002. Multiple Literacies)

*“an individual’s ability to listen speak, read, write, view, represent, compute and solve problems in one or more of the NWT official languages at levels of proficiency necessary to function in the family, in the community and on the job.”* (ECE. 2001. NWT Literacy Strategy)

Culture and language are at the centre of the NWT Seniors’ Society’s definition of literacy.

*“literacy has to respect seniors needs and culture. The definition should not place reading, writing and arithmetic ahead of the oral traditions of Aboriginal elders. In the NWT, it must recognize languages other than English.”* (NWT Seniors’ Society)

Persons participating in this research from various NWT communities define literacy in several ways.

*“Literacy is how elders pass their time. It is getting together for a meaningful and satisfying discussion where information is shared. Sharing stories about traditional ways on the land is very much a part of literacy.”* (Inuvik elder)

*“staying current”, “understanding and using information”, “reading, writing, and using numbers”,* (Caribou Outreach Learning Centre)

*“Literacy is the way you think. Elders have a holistic view of their environment. They see the land as a warehouse and sustaining.”* (Fort Resolution Environmental Working Group)

*“Literacy is part of the life cycle. It is the way we live, the way we learn. It embodies growth and development in everyday life.”* (Inuvik elder)

*Literacy is commonly understood as learning to read and write. This is not what*

*the elders in the community want. They want to connect and interact with other members of the community to maintain their literacy skills and share their stories. The connection has to be two way (i.e. need and share information). Literacy may be a good tool for connecting youth and elders.” (Stanley Isaiah Focus Group)*

*Fluency in English (reading and writing), French, Dogrib, North and South Slavey was necessary to communicate in the different environments (e.g. hunting and trapping subsistence, with the Grey Nuns at the Fort Simpson convent schools, reading the signs in the environment). The oral tradition of story telling was as much a part of literacy as fluency in another language.  
(Fort Simpson elder)*

*“A means of communicating and a way to help you understand what is going on. To use the language and to understand from a Dene perspective.” (Fort Simpson elder)*

*“Literacy is about more than reading and writing. It is about being able to function in our world: to understand, imagine and create.” (Yellowknife literacy provider)*

Understanding, using and sharing information, communicating, and connecting are common elements in the various definitions of literacy. Still, the word ‘literacy’ is not easily translated or understood in Aboriginal languages. It is a difficult concept for some elders to articulate. They may perceive literacy simply as the English reading, writing and arithmetic skills learned in school. Seniors with this understanding may be shy about their literacy skills and resist discussing literacy and accessing literacy support.

#### Literacy Needs of NWT Seniors

Seniors literacy needs and preferences are documented from discussions with seniors, senior-serving organizations, and literacy providers. Each has somewhat differing perspectives on the issues that shape literacy needs among seniors.

A significant proportion of the NWT’s seniors population could benefit from literacy supports in activities of daily living in the home, at work, and in the

community. This need is common to the seniors population in Canada. Low literacy and the subsequent need for supports are most pronounced in smaller primarily Aboriginal communities, where 85% or more of seniors may be functioning with low literacy skills. The release of the IALS survey in 2004 will provide a measure of literacy for the NWT that is consistent with other Canadian jurisdictions.<sup>9</sup> This measure will more accurately reflect seniors literacy levels.

Educational attainment represents the set of skills learned in school (e.g. fluency, reading, writing, understanding and using information in English) rather than the literacy skills learned from experiences outside the school system. Using educational attainment as a measure of literacy, low literacy to illiteracy is a dominant characteristic of a large portion of the NWT seniors population.<sup>10</sup> Two-thirds of seniors 60 years and older have not graduated from high school and more than half (55%) have not achieved grade 9. (Table 4) More than half of the NWT seniors population is considered illiterate.

The effect of low educational attainment and subsequent low literacy levels means that many NWT seniors are unable to function independently in activities of daily living. These seniors have difficulty reading, understanding, using and responding to written information they receive daily in their homes, at work and in the community.

The literacy needs of seniors are not likely to change in the coming decade. In 2003, seniors 55 years and older were 11% of the territorial population but will become 16% of the population by 2014. The NWT seniors population is expected to increase by 54% in the decade 2004 –2014.

The next generation of seniors will be more active and more independent than past generations of seniors.<sup>11</sup> Future seniors will be better educated than today's seniors. While future generations of seniors may have higher levels of formal

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<sup>9</sup>The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) defines "literacy" as a particular skill, namely the ability to understand and use printed information in day-to-day activities, at home, at work and in the community. IALS measures proficiency in processing the written information that people encounter every day to perform different tasks. Three literacy domains are examined: prose, document and quantitative.

<sup>10</sup> Educational attainment has been recognized as one indicator of literacy levels in the NWT. Illiteracy has been defined as less than grade 9 education. Persons with low literacy have less than secondary school education (grade 12). Persons with these education levels are considered to have some level of difficulty reading, writing, understanding and using information.

<sup>11</sup> GNWT. Education, Culture and Employment. 2003. NWT Seniors Program Review

education their literacy skills and ability to understand and use information will depend on their success staying current with rapidly changing information and communication technologies. The need for literacy supports for NWT seniors is likely to continue.

Aboriginal seniors are not expressing their literacy of the people and the land with the same frequency as they did in the past. The next generation will need to preserve and maintain Aboriginal literacy skills to keep their language, customs and oral traditions alive.

Seniors, senior serving organizations and literacy providers observe the consequences of low literacy for some seniors as:

- missing out on income and social security benefits.
- not understanding the importance of proper nutrition and exercise.
- living unhealthy lifestyles.
- misusing medicine and at risk of health complications.
- frustrated, impatient and unable to use technology.
- relying on family members for financial help and at risk of abuse and 'scams'.
- mismanaging their income.
- missing out on employment or mobility.
- at risk of being marginalized and not given opportunities to learn and participate.
- unable to connect in a meaningful way with others in the community to share their experiences and stories.
- unable to explain themselves to paid caregivers, getting frustrated and giving up.
- not understanding important decisions being made in and for their community.

*In Dene communities there is "too much of an English perspective in use and too little explanation". "Elders have little understanding of the order of political issues and how the region (Deh Cho) is where it is now."*<sup>12</sup> Occasionally when elders are asked to contribute to community or regional discussions, they speak off topic/on a tangent. They appear unaware of basic community issues and how they can contribute to resolving them. Residents of Fort Resolution, Fort

Simpson and Inuvik share these concerns.

NWT seniors need more than learning basic literacy skills in a classroom. They need help to overcome personal literacy difficulties and risks, support for Aboriginal literacy, and English as a second language (ESL) services. The highest priority for literacy activities among seniors in Fort Resolution are: reading and enjoying a 'good' book, upgrading literacy skills, and computer training. Of a lesser priority are learning very basic literacy skills, help with banking, and reading labels on food packaging or medicine containers. Approximately 40% of seniors expressed interest in learning and upgrading Aboriginal language reading and writing skills.<sup>13</sup>

*"NWT seniors need to connect or get together with friends for a stimulating discussion."* (Inuvik senior) The Inuvik Day Program found that seniors want to get out more and socialize with their friends.<sup>14</sup> An example of an activity that provides opportunities to socialize is the Yellowknife Seniors "coffee break" on Mondays and Thursdays which brings seniors together for group discussions. Ideas are generated and put into action. Other examples are in Inuvik at the Ingamo Hall Elders Lunch, in Yellowknife at Lunch with the Bunch, and in Fort Resolution at Our Great Elders Luncheon. These luncheons often involve guest speakers who share information with and engage seniors in discussion on topics important to them.

NWT seniors also need to tell their stories. In Fort Smith, Fort Simpson and Yellowknife, seniors combined storytelling with writing and video workshops. In Fort Resolution and Yellowknife seniors have produced illustrated booklets of their special stories.<sup>15</sup> These books have been distributed in the community and schools (i.e. 'Book of Christmas Memories', 'Whispers' and 'Echoes').

### **Seniors Preferences for Literacy Learning Supports**

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<sup>12</sup> Pers. Comm. Gerry Antoine

<sup>13</sup> Freda Cardinal. 2002. Elder Literacy Needs Assessment. Fort Resolution. NT

<sup>14</sup> McCarney. J. 2003. Adult Day Program Needs Assessment Report

<sup>15</sup> Book of Christmas Memories, Yellowknife Seniors Society and Whispers and Echoes, Fort Resolution Seniors Literacy Project



*“Many elders would like to improve their reading and writing skills and would not refuse opportunities for more education.”* (ICC Elders Council)

Literacy providers and senior serving organizations stress the importance of asking seniors how they think their literacy needs could be met. In responding to seniors literacy needs, literacy providers and senior serving organizations in the NWT describe conditions that diminish and enhance the impacts of seniors literacy activities. Some of these characteristics have been referred to as ‘myths’ and refuted in other research.<sup>16</sup>

- Seniors may be shy and don’t want to be labeled as a result of their low literacy skills.
- Seniors may have declining eyesight, loss of hearing, decreased mobility, and health conditions that impact on their ability to learn.
- Seniors may have addictions (gambling and alcohol) that need to be addressed to improve their ability to learn.
- Seniors appreciate personal visits to effectively receive information.
- Aboriginal elders may better understand information if it is interpreted in their first language.
- Seniors need support from their family and community in resolving difficulties arising from low literacy.
- Seniors not reacting well to pressure and stress may become withdrawn.
- *“The older you are the harder it is to learn”*. (Stanley Isaiah Seniors Complex focus group)
- *“Seniors are set in their ways”*. (Fort Resolution Seniors Literacy Needs Assessment)
- Seniors will participate in literacy activities (e.g. workshops) if they see literacy as a priority.
- Seniors have higher self esteem/feel better when they have the skills to take care of themselves
- Many seniors are self-taught. It is a real struggle for them to learn in other environments.
- Seniors have lost their motivation in an environment where daily needs are being provided for.

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16 Nova Scotia Senior Citizens’ Secretariat. 2003

- If a senior, literacy provider or senior serving organization believes that seniors are too old to learn, then the senior may be held to lower expectations.

NWT seniors' preferences for literacy supports are confirmed in research from other jurisdictions.<sup>17</sup>

### 1. Planning and Assessment

**NWT seniors are more likely to participate in a literacy learning activity if they are consulted and encouraged to contribute to the design of the activity.** Needs assessments conducted prior to the establishment of the Fort Resolution Elders Literacy Program and the Inuvik Adult Day Program were the first steps in creating interest in and ownership for these senior programs. Yellowknife and Fort Smith seniors have actively planned, created and attended their own literacy activities. The Yellowknife Senior's Society concedes, however, that its programs may not reach Yellowknife elders with lower literacy skills.

**Seniors are attracted to a literacy activity specifically designed for them.** Adult computer and literacy upgrading programs are publicly available in many NWT communities. Few older learners enroll in programs offered by Aurora College campuses and community learning centres. Lack of advertising to seniors and the labour market focus of ALBE upgrading programs may discourage access. This may explain the small number of seniors enrolled in ABE upgrading at Inuvik's Aurora Campus.

**Seniors needs are better served if a learner assessment is completed.** Literacy providers are aware of memory, audio, visual and physical disability and their effects on learning and literacy needs. Needs can more readily be met today than in the past due to greater awareness of disability and greater access to materials and technology for assisting learners with disability.

**Seniors will participate in workshops if the subject matter is a priority.** For example, the diabetes workshop co-ordinator in Inuvik has found this to be the case.

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<sup>17</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and the National Literacy Secretariat. 1997. Lifelong Learning in Action

## 2. Location and Transportation

### **Seniors prefer attending activities in easily accessible and familiar**

**locations.** Although elders are attending the Day Program in the new Inuvik hospital, they would prefer a more familiar and closer location such as the Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre. In the past, seniors lost interest in participating in Aboriginal language programming when it moved from Ingamo Hall to the Aurora College Campus. In Fort Simpson the literacy coordinator staged activities at different sites familiar to elders (e.g. Deh Cho Friendship Centre, Long Term Care, Stanley Isaiah). Literacy providers and seniors in that community agree that a seniors resource centre (to call their own) would be the best location for activities. They also suggest that a welcoming environment can be created through materials (e.g. pictures, books, teepee, fire pit, drying racks) of interest to seniors.

**Seniors prefer to have transportation provided to get to activities.** Senior serving organizations and literacy providers confirm the importance of budgeting seniors transportation as a program cost.

## 3. Promotion

### **Seniors prefer to be encouraged or reminded to attend a literacy activity.**

Fort Resolution computer classes were scheduled weekly, however literacy tutors personally reminded seniors in advance of each session. **Word of mouth and personal invitations** are the best ways to get seniors to attend activities.

**Seniors want to understand what a program is about before they make a commitment to it.** The Fort Simpson literacy project is using video to help seniors see what other seniors are doing. 'Oral tradition through video' is a new program approach being considered by the Canadian Diabetes Association (CDA).

## 4. Teaching and Learning Styles

**Seniors prefer a literacy activity that is fun, periodically brings peers together, involves games and the potential to win prizes.** The Fort Resolution Elders Literacy Project began with an elders gathering in the community hall. One-third of the seniors population 55 years and over attended the gathering. They enjoyed a hot meal, visiting, playing "lingo" (literacy bingo) and winning prizes.

**Seniors prefer a non-threatening approach to literacy activities.** Literacy providers and senior-serving organizations suggest that seniors are sensitive to being confronted and told what to do.

**Seniors are comfortable attending a literacy activity if they know and trust/respect the instructor or facilitator.** In Fort Resolution, tutors were well known to the seniors population. It helped that one of the tutors was a bilingual Chipewyan-English speaker and could switch between languages when explaining information to seniors. The Caribou Outreach Learning Centre's literacy coordinator plans to volunteer at the Adult Day Program to recruit participants for the seniors literacy program at the Centre in Inuvik.

**Senior learners need more support in their learning activities than other adult learners.**

Literacy providers say that seniors with low literacy skills may get frustrated with and have a larger *“learning curve for technology than other adult learners.”* They identified the need to *“check-in”* more often with senior learners *“to ask them how they are doing”*.

**Seniors prefer individualized instruction centred on their needs and experiences.** Literacy providers agree that building the instructional activity around a senior's own experiences is a good technique for engaging seniors. This approach requires educators to have good skills and awareness of seniors experiences.

**Visual and oral presentation facilitates learning for seniors with low literacy skills.** Literacy providers and senior serving-organizations list techniques that seniors prefer in literacy activities, workshops or classes. Visual props including overheads with minimal writing, 'hands-on' and interactive activities (talks and demonstration by community presenters), video presentations relevant and familiar to local seniors, and large print materials are some of the techniques used to engage seniors in literacy programs in the NWT communities.

**The small percentage of seniors who enroll and participate in classroom activities, prefer less structured approaches and small groups.** Outreach

and campus based literacy providers suggest that typically two to three seniors (10%) enroll in their Adult Literacy Basic Education classes. Literacy providers identify facilitated group discussion, workshops, small groups and one-on one tutorials as preferred approaches. A drop-in approach to literacy, where seniors can set their own schedule, and plan activities to meet their needs, is also desirable.

**Senior learners enjoy a mix of literacy activities.** Seniors prefer instruction combined with exercise, dance, song, craft (sewing), games, storytelling, snacking and luncheons.

**Seniors prefer culturally relevant activities.** Seniors, literacy providers and senior serving organizations agree that seniors are enthusiastic about sharing their stories. Senior stories are published in booklet, audio cassette and video format. Storytelling activities promote the intergenerational connection between seniors and youth that is so important to both generations.

#### 5. Content (Topics)

**Seniors prefer topics that are relevant to them.**

Meaningful discussion can occur when ideas are shared by a guest speaker and discussed by the audience. Topics of interest to seniors are: health and wellness, income security benefits, taxes, nutrition, financial management and budgeting, will writing and insurance, housing, banking, and medication.

### **2.3 Literacy Supports for Seniors in the NWT**

The majority of NWT seniors with low literacy skills may underestimate or shy away from addressing their literacy needs. The needs assessment experience in Fort Resolution suggests that over two-thirds of elders may not be interested in the kind of structured learning experience offered by a community learning center. In that community seniors said that it was too late to learn; they had no interest; or they were still employed. In these cases, seniors may be content to address their literacy needs through informal and formal senior support networks in families and familiar community organizations. In many cases family support may be provided by a grandchild who helps around the house and with reading and writing tasks. The NWT Seniors' Society, friendship centres and First Nation offices also respond to requests from seniors for assistance dealing with income

security benefits, various forms, or Aboriginal language needs.

NWT seniors are currently exposed to a range of supports as more NWT communities become aware of the benefits of a literate seniors population. Many communities are involved in successful literacy activities that respond to seniors needs. The case studies of Fort Resolution and Inuvik are good examples. (Appendix B)

Community organizations have to varying degrees recognized the literacy level of their clients and adjusted programs and services accordingly. For example, Aboriginal organizations, educators and community wellness providers have independently adjusted community governance and program service models to respond to the multiple literacy needs of the population. Frontline health and social service agencies and First Nation organizations also dedicate resources to helping seniors understand and use information. Common supports include:

- Aboriginal language interpretation of information provided by health practitioners or First Nations. (Aboriginal elders often understand information better if it is presented to them orally and in their Aboriginal language.)
- short duration workshops delivered with clear, simple and repeated oral messages and limited written materials.
- a helping hand or referral to community agencies to help fill out forms.
- presentations on topics of interest.

The NWT Literacy Council also helps communities respond to the literacy needs of NWT seniors. The Council's website ([www.nwt.literacy.ca](http://www.nwt.literacy.ca)) provides relevant resources including:

- A list of 1-3 day training sessions on important topics (e.g. community building, program planning, tutor training, and proposal writing).
- Best Practices in Action – a resource manual of literacy activities.
- Factors related to a successful Adult Education Program.
- The Community Development Model. (The NWT Literacy Council promotes a community development approach to literacy development for NWT communities. It helps to build capacity in communities by addressing issues and taking advantage of opportunities for training and change at the community level.)
- Northern Learning Network.

- Learner Profiles.

#### An Overview of NWT Literacy Strategy Projects Since 2001

The NWT Literacy Strategy (2001) of the GNWT allocates resources through the Literacy Programs and Support for Seniors Program. These programs recognize that seniors need opportunities to achieve a sufficient level of literacy for active, independent living. Funding is available to support projects such as peer tutoring, community learning groups, public awareness, literacy and health, and computer literacy, etc. In the past three years, 14 NWT communities have received NWT Literacy Strategy funding to address and support the literacy needs of seniors. Seniors participated in activities to overcome their literacy difficulties, for something to do and to learn new technology (computers) to research their family roots.

The objectives of the 22 literacy projects funded under the NWT Literacy Strategy ranged from:

- promoting literacy to seniors;
- assessing literacy needs of seniors;
- stimulating literary discussion;
- developing computer and digital camera skills;
- sparking interest in reading and writing;
- providing a comfortable environment for seniors to seek help with their literacy difficulties; and
- sharing and recording/publishing life stories and experiences.

Project activities were primarily designed to stimulate learning. In a few cases projects involved collecting materials (e.g. NWT Seniors Society handbook) and providing outreach services/office to respond to seniors literacy needs. Classes, tutorials, learning groups, gatherings/Christmas feasts, sewing circles, cooking classes, home visits, outreach were different approaches for attracting seniors. Independent living concepts pertaining to health and healthy lifestyles, basic nutrition, math for daily living, budgeting are examples of topics of interest for seniors.

Projects met with varying degrees of success. Literacy and computer classes offered at community learning centres attracted from zero to sixteen participants. Seniors health, weather, transportation and personal reminders were

determinants of attendance. Strengths and weaknesses of the projects are described as:

- A great opportunity to target literacy issues for seniors. It gave seniors a place to gather, socialize, engage in discussion and undertake an enjoyable activity (e.g. sewing).
- *"I found the stimulation involved reading the same book and following up with a thought-provoking discussion very rewarding."* (Norman Wells Senior)
- Getting the elders out of their homes to mix and mingle together in a learning environment helped open them up to all aspects of new things.
- The elder literacy program was a mixture of wonderful successes and disheartening failures.
- Participants enjoyed the course. They would like to continue with the program.
- Booklets were created with the stories that elders told.
- Elders lacked interest and commitment.
- Elders are set in their ways. They did not readily adopt the idea of literacy tutoring in their own homes.
- Elders really enjoyed the readings. They should continue even as a voluntary event once in a while.
- Senior patrons were quite excited, very grateful for and responded well to the quality time set up especially for them in the library.
- We discovered what works by trial and error.
- Seniors are still looking for an advocate for their concerns with public transportation, family support and elder abuse.

#### Organization, Priority and Focus

Literacy supports for seniors in the NWT are best described as in an early stage of development. In the three years since 2001 NWT Literacy Strategy was implemented, \$223,730 was spent from the Literacy Programs and Support for Seniors Fund on 22 seniors literacy projects. The funding provided important exposure for seniors literacy in 14 different NWT communities. Table 7 summarizes the range of projects funded.



Seniors Literacy Final Report

**Table 7: Summary of NWT Seniors Literacy Projects, 2001/02 – 2003/04**

Organization & Community	Project	2001/02 Actual	2002/03 Actual	2003/04 Budget
<b>Inuvik</b>				
Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre	Elders community service		\$10,689	\$10,000
Caribou Outreach Learning Centre Inuvik	Seniors literacy classes		\$13,378	\$10,000
Aklavik, Ehdiitat Gwich'in Council	Storytelling and reading		\$6,985	
Town of Norman Wells	Literacy promotion, book club, reading, computers		\$4,387	\$7,000
Tsiigehtchic Charter Community	Seniors literacy learning activities		\$11,000	
Holman Elders Committee	Drum dance & song; Inuinnaqtun reading & writing	\$16,525		
Gwich'in Social & Cultural Institute	Gwichin biography project	\$15,000		
<b>Deh Cho</b>				
NODA Literacy Society, Ft. Simpson	Elders' resource center			\$7,000
<b>South Slave</b>				
Deninue K'ue Community Learning Centre	Computer class, literacy tutorial, and storytelling		\$14,997	
Not allocated				(\$20,000)
<b>North Slave</b>				
Yellowknife Seniors Society	Computer classes			\$7,000
Dechi Laot'I First Nation, Wekweti	Seniors literacy learning activities		\$5,000	\$5,000
Rae, Dogrib Community Services Board	Elders conference			\$7,000
NWT Seniors Society	Workshop, handbook	\$30,297		
NWT Literacy Council	Plain language audit	\$1,625		
Wha Ti Elders Committee	Elders' literacy project	\$10,784		
Deh Gah Gotie First Nation Ft. Providence	Elders' literacy project	\$2,303		
Gameti Community Learning Centre	Storytelling, reading and writing		\$7,760	
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$76,534</b>	<b>\$74,196</b>	<b>\$73,000</b>

Source: Education Culture and Employment

Note: Actual expenditures are recorded for all 2002/03 projects with the exception of budget figures for Dechi Laot'I FN and Tsiigehtchic Charter Community projects.

Successive projects in Inuvik, Norman Wells and Wekweti have provided continuity of services for seniors in those communities. Projects are typically short duration lasting up to three months. They are usually staged during the mid-winter months.

Projects have been sponsored and delivered by agencies with an expertise in elders/seniors issues, education or community based programming. Projects are usually incremental or an add-on to other programs and services offered by sponsor or delivery agencies. For example, the Community Learning Centres in Inuvik, Gameti, Wekweti, and Fort Resolution offer a range of community-based adult education classes, tutorials and family literacy services. Sponsorship and partnerships between community learning centres, elders/seniors committees, community governments, friendship centres and education councils have increased the potential for community ownership or provided in-kind project administration and reporting.

Literacy providers encounter obstacles in the organization and sponsorship of literacy activities. These include:

- Aurora College's approach does not lend itself well to community-based programming appropriate for seniors. Specifically, at the ALBE level, the College and sponsors are focused on supplying an educated work force to meet labour market demand.
- Year-to-year funding provides an insecure environment for effectively building sustainable programming for adults and seniors.
- Limited project funding has diminished the priority of literacy supports for seniors. Community organizations may not fully appreciate the benefits of a literate seniors population. Some Aboriginal organizations put a high priority on literacy, dedicate resources to one aspect of literacy support (e.g. Aboriginal language literacy, storytelling, culture) but are under-resourced to respond to a full range of literacy needs. Other agencies (e.g. libraries, front line health and social service agencies, seniors organizations, friendship centers) integrate literacy into a mix of services.
- Potential sponsors and providers have not applied for literacy funding for seniors because the processes are too onerous for the small amount of money available.
- Literacy providers are not working together and there is plenty of overlap.
- Senior's literacy programs start and stop. They are fragmented and inconsistent.
- Community leaders and adults do not have a strong vision of what a community learning centre could be. They think of the community learning center as the ABE program.

- Literacy providers are stretched to full capacity. They may not have the time, resources and expertise to effectively deliver another activity.

The NWT Seniors Society recognizes it has an organizational role in seniors literacy supports, however decentralization and changing priorities have limited the Society's involvement in recent years.

The following are examples of recommendations from community-based literacy project reports.

- Transportation costs should be added to the program to assist seniors in attending school.
- New computers and more Internet hook-ups need to be purchased to effectively deliver Introduction to Computers and Internet. If we are going to introduce technology we should have up to date material.
- Ask elders (thorough needs assessment) what they want before designing and introducing a program.
- Fun literacy based social events (feasts and game nights) should be mixed into literacy tutorials and instructional activities.
- Raise awareness, increase support and improve coordination for seniors literacy in the community. Literacy supports need to be a priority to be attractive.
- Senior literacy training similar to family literacy training would be fantastic. Literacy providers could share their experiences and their knowledge.
- More celebration and documentation of success stories.
- Increase the number of programs that provide opportunities for seniors to network, have fun and enjoy good food while learning.
- Increase the number of seniors helping seniors.
- Community outreach/service should be more consistent in delivery, location and personnel.
- Offer literacy outreach learning activities in senior serving organizations (e.g long term care, friendship centers, seniors centers)
- Literacy providers should recognize that seniors have the same right to literacy learning as adult learners.

## **3.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **3.1 Conclusions**

In the next decade, the NWT seniors population will increase 1.5 times. The NWT also has a rapidly growing seniors population with low literacy. Literacy difficulties among seniors are expected to continue into the future with Aboriginal literacy declining and increasing information and communication technologies. These seniors have difficulties functioning independently in their home, community or work. Seniors today and in the future need help to overcome literacy difficulties encountered in the activities of daily living. Many NWT seniors use literacy supports if they are aware of and are attracted to them.

Many community groups are advocating for and providing services to seniors. Community groups provide literacy outreach and drop-in helping services; interpretation in official languages; workshops such as for diabetes adapted to the mainly senior clients, and literacy learning activities in English and Aboriginal languages. Literacy supports are seldom a 'stand-alone' activity. Literacy supports are becoming more integrated with health, culture, recreational and political services involving seniors. Seniors prefer literacy supports that are part of community life and services. Existing programs and services would be more effective if they involved literacy supports.

A small segment of the NWT seniors population needing literacy support turn to community learning centers, literacy committees, Aurora College and/or Aboriginal language councils. Classes, tutorials, learning groups, gatherings/Christmas feasts, sewing circles, cooking classes, home visits and outreach are common approaches ways to attract seniors to more formal activities.

To make seniors access to programs easier, literacy providers and senior-serving organizations offer transportation, a 'call-around' service, and a familiar location for the literacy activity. Aboriginal language literacy activities are sometimes on-the-land and bridge the gap between youth and seniors.

Seniors literacy is a 'hard sell'. Seniors may be shy or uncomfortable sharing their literacy difficulties. Some seniors have the attitude that they are too old to learn, and are satisfied to get help from someone in their family or a community

agency. NWT seniors may be reluctant to enroll in or they drop out of certain activities. It is an objective of many community groups to support the independence and participation of all citizens. Many community groups use needs assessment and word-of-mouth promotion to raise seniors awareness of and provide literacy supports.

NWT literacy providers offer short-duration workshops, longer-term small group learning, and classroom sessions designed for seniors. Seniors are often called upon to remind them about the activity. Learning activities are fun and mixed with games, socializing, prizes, recreation, craft, food and singing. Snacks and coffee are usually available. Literacy providers make arrangements for presentations on topics of interest to seniors and facilitated group discussions. They use an individualized approach and adjust the pace and support to the literacy needs of the senior. They also link learning to culture. It is challenging to maintain seniors engagement. Despite the range of efforts to maintain seniors enrolment, seniors still drop out. Community and family support for seniors learning may be reasons seniors don't enroll in or stay in literacy activities. Seniors may not be supported and independent enough or want to participated in literacy activities.

More could be done by communities to address the literacy needs of seniors. There is little priority to planning for meeting the growing seniors population and their need for English reading, writing and communication skills and to express Aboriginal literacy. Communities have limited capacity to deal with senior literacy needs.

Seniors themselves may have a poor attitude about learning and be unaware of the variety of opportunities available to help them. Communities including seniors may not know the benefits of literacy. Seniors may view literacy as a deficit of reading, writing and number skills that should have been learned in school. Community leaders and other adults do not understand what literacy means or have a strong vision for meeting seniors literacy needs.

Although literacy and seniors committees exist in some NWT communities, there is inadequate organization around literacy supports. Literacy supports are fragmented and often inconsistently available. Low priority, limited resources, too few literacy providers and little sustained integration of effort are factors that effect seniors literacy supports in NWT communities.

### 3.2 Recommendations

To respond to the literacy needs and preferences of NWT seniors it is recommended that:

#### Policy

1. The NWT Literacy Council develops and advocates for the use of best practices to respond to the literacy needs of NWT seniors. Best practices should:
  - reflect the values of independence, dignity, participation, fairness and equity, and security as the cornerstones of senior supports.
  - encourage human service providers mandated to support seniors to integrate literacy in existing and new programs and services and give priority for, and profile to seniors learning opportunities.
  - direct communities and literacy providers to respect the right of seniors to literacy supports.

#### Definition

2. The goal of seniors literacy activities be to provide supports to enable seniors to improve and maintain their literacy skills for independent living and dignity in the home, work and community environments. The goal would be to:
  - respond both to the need of NWT seniors to be current, understand and use information in English and maintain the rich culture and languages of Aboriginal peoples; and
  - integrate literacy in existing and new programs and services and into literacy activities such as family literacy activities.
3. A simple, easily translated definition of seniors literacy that celebrates knowledge, experience, culture, social practice and language and lifelong learning be 'front and centre' in an aggressive awareness or social marketing campaign in the NWT.

#### Organization

4. The organization of seniors literacy supports at all levels be strengthened through interagency relationships among governments, literacy committees, seniors councils, community leadership, community volunteers, family members, service providers and senior-serving organizations that focus on seniors and their literacy needs.

5. Community-based senior-serving organizations and literacy providers strengthen the coordination of seniors literacy supports by:

- encouraging seniors to take a more active role in raising the profile and priority of literacy and advocating for a continuum of literacy supports in their communities.
- encouraging literacy providers of all types to build stronger relationships to effectively support seniors.
- increasing networking opportunities among literacy providers at all levels. (e.g. The NWT Literacy Council could create links and a page for elders literacy on its website ([www.nwt.literacy.ca](http://www.nwt.literacy.ca)) with publications, teaching materials, presentations and techniques, best practices and other resources.)

#### Access to Seniors Literacy Supports

6. Literacy supports be promoted and made more attractive to:

- target seniors.
- communicate benefits of a literate seniors population to families and communities.
- raise awareness of literacy activities among seniors.

7. Literacy providers engage seniors in literacy needs assessment as a first step for determining/understanding the continuum of literacy supports potentially needed to meet seniors literacy needs.

8. Literacy achievements of NWT seniors should be celebrated.

9. Literacy providers be supported and receive training to enable understanding and flexibility of techniques for contacting, recruiting, and meeting seniors literacy needs. Word-of-mouth (seniors talking to seniors), audio-visual presentations at seniors gatherings, and feasts with games and prizes are examples of techniques to use.

#### Seniors Literacy Programs and Supports

10. Seniors have access to a continuum of literacy supports that enables them to function independently and improve the quality of their lives in their homes, communities and at work. The continuum should include interpretation and advocacy where needed, and a variety of literacy learning opportunities.

11. Senior literacy activities be made available in a familiar and welcoming environment for seniors.
12. Seniors literacy programming and supports be designed to address the needs of seniors through:
  - undertaking individual assessments involving the provider, senior and family and recognizing individual literacy needs as well as any physical, cognitive/memory, audio or visual challenges the individual may face.
  - culturally relevant activities.

#### Literacy Providers and Personnel

13. Literacy providers have more access to human and financial resources to implement senior literacy activities including more volunteers and senior literacy helpers.
14. Literacy providers and sponsors of seniors literacy activities have more access to training and professional development opportunities. (For example, the NWT Literacy Council's current literacy training could be enhanced through the inclusion of a module specifically related to the learning needs and preferences of NWT seniors.)

#### Funding

15. Sufficient long term funding be available to help NWT communities build capacity to develop and sustain literacy supports attractive to seniors.
16. A more comprehensive and complementary public policy for funding literacy supports be developed and implemented that doesn't distinguish between Aboriginal and English language literacy.



## **APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDES**

## Interview Guide for Seniors

**Even though literacy is defined in several ways, definitions tend to be similar. For example, literacy is defined as:**

*“how people understand and use information. It is how they read, write, and use numbers and communication technology (computers, phones, fax, email, internet). People communicate and use information with every group of people they meet: at work, at home, and in their community.”* (NWT Literacy Council, 2000, Making a Case for Literacy)

*“the ability to read, write, calculate, speak and understand and communicate in other forms of language according to need. It is a continuum of these skills necessary for everyday life in the home, at work, in education and in the community.”* (NWT Literacy Council, 2002, Multiple Literacies)

*“an individual’s ability to listen speak, read, write, view, represent, compute and solve problems in one or more of the NWT official languages at levels of proficiency necessary to function in the family, in the community and on the job.”*(NWT Literacy Strategy)

### **Defining Literacy**

#### **1. What does literacy mean to you? How would you define literacy?**

Does your definition consider the skills needed to understand, communicate and participate in activities in the home, workplace and community?

#### **2. Would your definition of literacy be the same for all languages? Would you define Aboriginal language literacy in the same way that you would define English language literacy?**

### **Seniors’ Literacy Issues**

#### **3. What literacy difficulties do you or other seniors encounter in the home?**

For example, can you understand the labels on medical prescriptions, food products or cleaning products?

#### **4. What literacy difficulties do you or other seniors encounter at work or when earning a living? For example, can you calculate the cost of gasoline or deal with an error on your pension cheque?**

**5. What literacy difficulties do you or other seniors encounter in the community?** For example, can you understand the information discussed at council meetings? Can you read impact benefit or land claim agreements?

**6. Who helps and how do they help you to overcome literacy difficulties in the home? At work or while earning a living? In the community?**

**7. Are you satisfied with the help that you receive to overcome literacy difficulties? What would make you more satisfied?** Would you be more satisfied if you had more opportunities to develop your own literacy skills so you wouldn't need help from others?

#### **Participation in Literacy Activities**

**8. Please describe the literacy activities that you have participated in to help you overcome any literacy difficulties.** Have you ever participated in an ABE class or tutorial? A seniors' literacy project? Family literacy project? Oral history project? Aboriginal language project? Older worker project? Computer training project? **If you haven't participated in any literacy activities, why haven't you?**

**9. Thinking about the literacy activity (ies) you have participated in, what were the most attractive or helpful parts of the activity?** Was it the opportunity to learn new things? Socialize? Practice your culture? Learn to use computers? Was it the style of instruction?

**10. How did the literacy activity help you to deal with your literacy difficulties?** Did it help you to improve your reading and writing abilities? Did it give you confidence to ask questions and get information that you need?

#### **Strengthening Literacy Supports for Seniors**

**11. What is the best way to help you or other seniors overcome literacy difficulties encountered in daily living?** Is teaching language and communication skills to seniors the best way? Or is it better for seniors to have helpers to deal with literacy difficulties? Is it better to have seniors only activities, seniors and youth activities or activities that involve all age groups?

**12. If you were designing literacy activities for seniors, what would you recommend in order to encourage and maintain seniors' participation?**

Would weekly group discussions or workshops attract seniors or are one-to-one activities preferred? Would activities in the home be preferable to activities in a community facility? Would activities that use computers attract seniors?

**Information about You**

**13. How old are you?**

**14. Do you consider yourself to be a senior? Elder?**

**15. Where do you live?** (Prompts: Do you live in your own home? In a seniors home? A nursing home?)

**16. If you live in your own home, how many people live with you?**

**17. Do you have any hearing, memory, mobility, visual, or other mental or physical health conditions that affect your literacy? How do these conditions affect your literacy and learning?**

**18. Finally, is there anything that I have forgotten to ask you about literacy among seniors in the NWT?**

**Thank you!**

## Seniors Literacy Providers Interview Guide

**Even though literacy is defined in several ways, definitions tend to be similar. For example, literacy is defined as:**

*“how people understand and use information. It is how they read, write, and use numbers and communication technology (computers, phones, fax, email, internet). People communicate and use information with every group of people they meet: at work, at home, and in their community.”* (NWT Literacy Council, 2000, Making a Case for Literacy)

*“the ability to read, write, calculate, speak and understand and communicate in other forms of language according to need. It is a continuum of these skills necessary for everyday life in the home, at work, in education and in the community.”* (NWT Literacy Council, 2002, Multiple Literacies)

*“an individual’s ability to listen speak, read, write, view, represent, compute and solve problems in one or more of the NWT official languages at levels of proficiency necessary to function in the family, in the community and on the job.”* (NWT Literacy Strategy)

### **Defining Literacy**

#### **1. What does literacy mean to you? How would you define literacy?**

Does your definition consider the skills needed to fully understand, communicate and participate in activities in the home, workplace and community?

#### **2. Would your definition of literacy be the same for all languages? Would you define Aboriginal language literacy in the same way that you would define English language literacy?**

### **Seniors’ Literacy Issues**

**3. What literacy difficulties are you aware of and see seniors encountering in the home?** For example, can they understand the labels on medical prescriptions, food products or cleaning products?

**4. What literacy difficulties are you aware of and see seniors encountering at work or when earning a living?** For example, can they calculate the cost of gasoline or deal with an error on their pension cheque?

**5. What literacy difficulties are you aware of and see seniors encountering in the community?** For example, can they understand the information discussed at council meetings, or read and understand impact benefit or land claim agreements?

**Literacy Activities for Seniors**

**6. What are the objectives of your literacy activity/program?** Is the activity/program a community based or family literacy project, ABE program, College campus program, culture/language project) Is it dedicated to seniors?

**7. How many seniors can this literacy activity/program serve?** Seniors 55-64..... Seniors 65+ How many regularly attend? Seniors 55-64.....; Seniors 65+.... What have seniors told you are their reasons for attending the literacy activity? What would attract more seniors to your literacy activity/program?

**8. Please explain how you promote this literacy activity/program.** Are seniors aware that they are welcome to participate in your literacy activity/program? What, if any, role do family members have in encouraging seniors to participate in this literacy activity or other activities?

**9. Please describe your role in the delivery of seniors' literacy activities** (e.g. tutor; instructor, facilitator). How does your approach to and delivery of seniors literacy activities differ from literacy activities for other age groups?

**10. What aspects of the activity/program do seniors enjoy(ed) the most? Dislike?** Is it the schedule; pace of activity; outreach/taking the activity to seniors or helping seniors get to the activity; physical set-up; use assistive or adapted devices and supplies to help seniors cope with special mental, physical, cognitive conditions; content relevant to seniors; a senior friendly environment; use of senior peer tutors; use of Aboriginal language?

**11. Overall has the literacy activity helped senior participants deal with their literacy difficulties?** How do you know?

**Strengthening Literacy Supports for Seniors**

**12. What is the best way to help seniors overcome literacy difficulties encountered in daily living?** Is teaching language and communication skills to seniors the best way? Or is it better for seniors to have helpers to deal with

literacy difficulties? Is it better to have seniors only activities, seniors and youth activities or activities that involve all age groups?

**13. If you were designing literacy activities for seniors, what would you recommend in order to encourage and maintain seniors' participation?**

Would weekly group discussions or workshops attract seniors or are one-to-one activities preferred? Would activities in the home be preferable to activities in a community facility? Would activities that use computers attract seniors? Would activities involving innovative audio, visual, physical and memory strategies be preferable? Would more advertising and/or consultation be helpful? Would improved assessment, goal setting and evaluation help to improve the design?

**14. As a literacy practitioner/service provider, what would help you to strengthen literacy supports for seniors?** Are program standards needed? Is accreditation and recognition of seniors' literacy programs needed? Is practitioner training needed? Are more seniors literacy resources required?

**15. Finally, is there anything that I have forgotten to ask you about literacy among seniors in the NWT?**

**Thank you!**

## Senior-Serving Organization Interview Guide

**Even though literacy is defined in several ways, definitions tend to be similar. For example, literacy is defined as:**

*“how people understand and use information. It is how they read, write, and use numbers and communication technology (computers, phones, fax, email, internet). People communicate and use information with every group of people they meet: at work, at home, and in their community.”* (NWT Literacy Council, 2000, Making a Case for Literacy)

*“the ability to read, write, calculate, speak and understand and communicate in other forms of language according to need. It is a continuum of these skills necessary for everyday life in the home, at work, in education and in the community.”* (NWT Literacy Council, 2002, Multiple Literacies)

*“an individual’s ability to listen speak, read, write, view, represent, compute and solve problems in one or more of the NWT official languages at levels of proficiency necessary to function in the family, in the community and on the job.”*(NWT Literacy Strategy)

### **Defining Literacy**

#### **1. What does literacy mean to you? How would you define literacy?**

Does your definition consider the skills needed to understand, communicate and participate in activities in the home, workplace and community?

**2. Would your definition of literacy be the same for all languages?** Would you define Aboriginal language literacy in the same way that you would define English language literacy?

### **Seniors’ Literacy Issues**

**3. What literacy difficulties are you aware of or see seniors encountering in the home?** For example, can they understand the labels on medical prescriptions, food products or cleaning products?

**4. What literacy difficulties are you aware of or see seniors encountering at work or when earning a living?** For example, can they calculate the cost of gasoline or deal with an error on their pension cheque?



**5. What literacy difficulties are you aware of or see seniors encountering in the community?** For example, can they understand the information discussed at council meetings? Can they read impact benefit or land claim agreements?

**6. How have you or your organization become aware of senior literacy needs?**

**7. Do you think that improving the literacy skills of seniors is an important issue?** Should it be?

**Literacy Activities for Seniors**

**8. Who usually helps seniors improve their literacy skills and overcome their literacy difficulties?** Is it a family member, a frontline worker (e.g. homecare, social or health worker, an adult educator), or a literacy service provider? Is there good collaboration between senior serving organizations and persons/groups who help seniors overcome literacy difficulties?

**9. How does your organization serve seniors?** Does it sponsor/administer activities, coordinate volunteers, or advocate on behalf of seniors? Please describe your role, if any, in the delivery of seniors' literacy activities. Does your organization partner with other organizations to increase the resources for seniors literacy activities?

**10. Does your organization involve seniors in the planning and delivery of literacy activities for seniors?**

**11. How do you gauge the effectiveness of your literacy program/activities?** What works and what doesn't work in meeting the literacy needs of seniors?

**12. Please explain how you promote the literacy activity/program to seniors.** Are seniors aware that they are welcome to participate in your literacy activity/program? **Why aren't more seniors attending?**

**13. Please describe how your organization is funded to provide senior literacy activities.** Do you partner with other community groups to sponsor programs that have a literacy activity for seniors?

**14. Are you aware of any gaps in literacy activities and programs for seniors?** What are they?

**Strengthening Literacy Supports for Seniors**

**15. What is the best way to overcome literacy difficulties encountered by seniors in daily living?** Is teaching language and communication skills to seniors the best way? Or is it better for seniors to have helpers to deal with literacy difficulties? Is it better to have seniors-only activities, seniors and youth activities or activities that involve all age groups?

**16. If you were designing literacy activities for seniors, what would you recommend in order to encourage and maintain seniors' participation?** Would weekly group discussions or workshops attract seniors or are one-to-one activities preferred? Would activities in the home be preferable to activities in a community facility? Would activities that use computers attract seniors? Would peer tutors, leaders or instructors be preferred?

**17. How could your organization do more to help seniors improve their literacy skills?**

**18. Finally, is there anything that I have forgotten to ask you about literacy among seniors in the NWT?**

**Thank you!**

## **APPENDIX B: COMMUNITY CASE STUDIES**

## Fort Resolution Seniors Literacy Case Study

### The Senior Population

Fort Resolution has a proportionately larger senior population than other NWT communities. In 2003, one in six of the community's population was 55 or more years of age, which for the purpose of this case study is a senior. By comparison, only one in nine of the NWT population was a senior. (Table 1)

**Table 1: NWT and Fort Resolution Senior Population Estimates, 2003**

Community	Total	<55	55+	Percentage
NWT	41,872	37,251	4,621	11%
Fort Resolution	548	455	93	17%

Source Bureau of Statistics, Population Estimates, Community and Age, 2003

In the next decade, Fort Resolution senior population (age 55+) is projected to decline by 5%, while the NWT senior population will increase by 54%. (Table 2) Fort Resolution will be one of a few NWT communities that are not expected to experience senior population growth.

**Table 2: NWT and Fort Resolution Senior Population Projections, 2004, 2009, 2014**

Community	2004	2009	2014
NWT, Age 55+	4,903	6,208	7,544
Fort Resolution, Age 55+	95	95	90

Source Bureau of Statistics, Population Projections, Community and Age, 2004 -2014

### Education and Selected Literacy Characteristics of Fort Resolution Seniors

Fort Resolution has had formal education programming since a church run mission school was established here circa 1890. Most seniors achieved grade five or six at the mission school. The mission school closed in 1956 when the federal government school was opened. Most seniors considered school to be a positive experience. Overall, secondary and post-secondary education has held less value for the current generation of seniors than the subsistence lifestyle. Compared to NWT seniors, Fort Resolution seniors have proportionately lower levels of educational attainment at secondary school levels. (Table 3)

**Table 3: Seniors Highest Level of Education, NWT and Inuvik, 2001**

	<b>Pop. 60 + Years</b>	<b>Less than grade 9</b>	<b>Less than high school graduation certificate</b>	<b>High School Graduation and Post Secondary</b>
NWT 60 + years	2,385	1,315	260	810
Fort Resolution 60+ years	65	45	10	10

Source Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, Population 60 & Older by Highest Level of Schooling, Age Group and Gender

Selected data from the Fort Resolution 2002 seniors literacy needs assessment<sup>1</sup> describe the literacy skills among seniors in the community. (Table 4)

**Table 4: Selected Literacy Characteristics of Fort Resolution Seniors**

<b>Literacy Characteristics</b>	<b>Percentage (n=19)</b>
Tell time by reading numbers on the clock	100%
Fluent in English and a second language	95%
Capable of writing their name	95%
Capable of reading medication bottles	89%
Received prior schooling (e.g. grades 4-12)	72%
Know the English alphabet	71%
Problems understanding everything read	39%
Know the Chipewyan alphabet	17%
Unable to read road signs	11%

Source: Freda Cardinal, 2002, Senior Literacy Needs Assessment, Fort Resolution, NT

Note: 18/n19 means 18 of 19 respondents replied.

Most seniors are fluent in English and one or two other languages notably Chipewyan and French. Even though seniors speak English, they don't always understand information in English. Chipewyan elders prefer to speak Chipewyan as they have better understanding in this language.

Most seniors have some English reading and writing skills, but a few lack sufficient literacy skills to read prescriptions, simple signs or fully understand information they receive. Very few are able to read and write in the Chipewyan language.

<sup>1</sup> Freda Cardinal. (2002) Elder Literacy Needs Assessment. Fort Resolution: NT

## Seniors' Work

Some seniors (55+ years) are employed. Those not employed or actively seeking work often find casual work or volunteer in the community. Seniors are commonly recruited as traditional knowledge specialists, language and cultural advisors, or mentors. Their knowledge provides a holistic context for many community programs.

The Deninu K'ue First Nation (DKFN) plays a lead role in engaging seniors in community programs and the political life of the community. Seniors are:

- recruited to advise the DKFN Negotiations Working Team in regional self-government negotiations.
- engaged in DKFN First Nation program delivery through the Elders Justice Program; pre-school/day care; Chipewyan Language Working Group; Fort Resolution Environment Working Committee; and Deninu Drug and Alcohol Program.

The DKFN is also considering the formation of an Elders Council to advise the Chief and Council.

Seniors involved in community programming may be reimbursed for the time they devote to telling and documenting their stories, contributing traditional knowledge (TK) to land use planning and environmental impact assessments and helping with Chipewyan language workshops or classes.<sup>2</sup>

Within the extended family setting, seniors are also regarded as primary family caregivers. Some may have child-minding duties.

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<sup>2</sup> Budget permitting, seniors expect an honorarium if they are called upon as resource persons. Honorarium rates are \$75 to \$125 per day and up to \$200 if they are asked to participate for a full day.

## Senior Literacy Needs and Preferences in Fort Resolution

### Defining Literacy In Fort Resolution

In Fort Resolution literacy is perceived in different ways.

It is:

*understanding information.*

*understanding both TK and science on matters relating to the land and environment.*

*being able to use the Internet to access information or write a letter.*

*communicating orally or dialoguing with and relating to each other.*

Literacy is seen as a way of thinking and among seniors it is having a holistic view of the environment and seeing the land as sustaining. “The land is the warehouse’. (Fort Resolution Environment Working Committee) Aboriginal language literacy is seen as reading and writing in Chipewyan.

Considering educational attainment as a literacy measure,<sup>3</sup> almost 85% of Fort Resolution seniors 60 years and older have literacy needs. Table 3 indicates that 55 of 65 Fort Resolution seniors have low literacy skills (70% have less than grade 9 and 15% have more than grade nine and less than grade 12) and may have difficulties functioning independently in the community. The 2002 literacy needs assessment provides a better understanding of the individual needs and preferences of Fort Resolution seniors. (Table 5) Senior participants agreed that they would like to be able to read a book and understand the material they are reading. Not being able to read or write has made it difficult for seniors to communicate with the public, find work or have a better job. Seniors also wanted to learn how to operate and use computers.

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<sup>3</sup> Educational attainment has been recognized as one indicator of literacy levels in the NWT. Illiteracy has been defined as less than grade 9 education. Persons with low literacy have less than secondary school education (grade 12). Persons with these education levels are considered to have some level of difficulty reading, writing, understanding and using information. The updated (2004) International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) report will change this reporting practice to coincide with other Canadian and international jurisdictions.

**Table 5: Literacy Needs and Learning Preferences of Fort Resolution Seniors, 2002**

<b>Literacy Needs</b>	<b>Percentage (n=19)</b>
Read and understand a good book	100%
Upgrade reading, writing, and arithmetic skills	73%
Learn how to use a computer	73%
Use a calculator	56%
Learn how to read and write in Chipewyan	39%
Basic reading, writing and math	29%
Help with banking	22%

Source: Freda Cardinal, 2002, Senior Literacy Needs Assessment, Fort Resolution, NT

The needs assessment indicates that some seniors see learning more as a way to satisfy their literacy needs. These seniors would be satisfied attending computer classes at the Learning Centre, learning basic literacy skills from a tutor in their own home, or learning from a familiar and bilingual tutor. One senior attending the computer classes liked working in a group of six that usually attended the classes. The classes were fun. The senior learners helped each other to learn mainly by asking questions.

It is important to note that 68% of seniors (40 of 59 seniors) contacted were not interested in participating in the literacy needs assessment and literacy learning activities. The reasons given were: “it was too late to learn, no interest, or employed”. These seniors may be confident in their literacy skills or coping with help from other family members or community agencies. The Fort Resolution Seniors Society believes that literacy is not a priority for community seniors.

The DKFN recognizes literacy as an important issue. It has an ‘open door’ policy, welcoming members to informally drop-in to its administration offices, programs and development corporations to seek and receive information and assistance. Health and social service workers (e.g. homecare coordinator, social worker, community health representative) and the Metis Association also help.

The DKFN and other Fort Resolution agencies see seniors having three needs.



1. *“Seniors need more help in understanding complex issues of the environment. The literacy challenge is to take the written word and present it in a holistic manner.”* (The Fort Resolution Environmental Working Committee)<sup>4</sup>
2. *“Seniors are losing their values. In the old days seniors would share in the discipline of kids, and celebrations would happen without drugs and alcohol. There was more respect and family togetherness.”* (Deninu Drug and Alcohol Program)
3. *“Seniors need information in Chipewyan to understand affairs in the community and home.”* (Fort Resolution Seniors Society)

### **Seniors Programs and Services**

Several community agencies use different techniques and strategies to respond to seniors needs. An inter-agency committee meets to coordinate and integrate human services in the community. Although membership is open, all community agencies do not participate. There is also a community literacy committee. Seniors do not participate on either committee.

#### Deninu K’ue Adult Learning Centre - Aurora College

The Fort Resolution District Education Authority and Deninu K’ue Adult Learning Centre operated the **Fort Resolution Elder’s Literacy Project** in 2003 with funding of \$15,000 from the NWT Literacy Strategy. The project objectives were to assess senior literacy needs, design and deliver a range of literacy activities, and publish booklets containing elders’ stories for use in northern literacy programs.

The Elder’s Literacy Project followed a community development model rather than the curriculum driven ABE approach<sup>5</sup>. The community development model provides opportunities for:

- empowering community adults to take control of their own literacy needs.
- making senior literacy learning fun and relevant to the Fort Resolution environment;

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<sup>4</sup> The Environmental Working Committee is looking at its communication strategy, how to improve delivery particularly to seniors and public understanding of the message.

<sup>5</sup> ABE Adult Basic Education is delivered by Aurora College. Upgrading courses follow a curriculum leading to GED exams and entry into post secondary education.

- instructional activities which focus on the learners' own experiences;
- hands-on activities with tutors available for guidance; and
- senior involvement in needs assessment and scheduling.

Qualified and committed community tutors<sup>6</sup> were recruited to plan and deliver literacy activities. In-house and external tutor training were provided.<sup>7</sup>

The Elder's Literacy Project successfully engaged 40% of Fort Resolution's seniors. Participants represented a cross section of the senior's population. For example:

- 25 seniors attended a Christmas party/feast where they learned how to play "lingo" a word bingo designed by the tutor.
- 12-13 enrolled in computer training. An average of six participated in the two hour classes during the 8-12 week delivery period;
- Seven seniors told stories and others participated in basic reading, writing and numeracy tutorial sessions in their own homes.

The range of activities and their presentation were strengths of the Elder's Literacy Project. Examples of these activities are:

- basic literacy tutorial sessions in senior's homes or through field trips.
- senior gatherings/feasts, games (e.g. lingo/literacy bingo) and prizes (e.g. books).
- evening computer classes at the Deninu K'ue Adult Learning Centre each week.
- Chipewyan language usage to enhance understanding of literacy activity.
- visual aids (e.g. Alpha-deck sets) for games geared to learning the alphabet. (Seniors were given their own calculators to help them with basic addition and subtraction skills.)
- incentives offered for some literacy activities (e.g. free food, prizes, and honorariums for stories published).

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<sup>6</sup> Two local tutors, recruited from adult students enrolled at the Deninu K'ue Adult Learning Centre, were responsible for planning and delivering the needs assessment survey, literacy activities, and senior story production. The Community Adult Educator required tutors to have grade 12 and be a team player.

<sup>7</sup> A computer-based tutor-training course training (STAPLE); computer publisher/graphic design and power point training (Microsoft); and proposal writing, lesson and program planning training were available.

The Elder's Literacy Project published two booklets, *Echoes* and *Whispers*, containing seven illustrated stories. The booklets were first distributed to the writers, then to the public through the local store. A more recent printing has made the booklets available to the school.

After a good start, project personnel were challenged in meeting program goals and the project finished ahead of schedule. In the latter stages of the project, computer-training classes were not well attended and tutorial sessions were cancelled. One of the qualified literacy tutors moved away from the community. As a result, Fort Resolution now has limited capacity to deliver another seniors literacy project. The remaining qualified community tutors are busy with adult learners attending the Community Learning Centre. Qualifications and commitment are obstacles to recruiting additional tutors.

The Elder's Literacy project is a good example of the Fort Resolution Community Literacy Program now in its third year of operations. The pillars of the Program are:

- literacy awareness and support – (e.g. information session at bingos; book prizes, community booklet production; developed literacy posters; sponsorship of special community events.
- family literacy.
- adult literacy tutoring.
- development of local tutors and literacy workers.

### Fort Resolution Health and Social Services

**Our Great Elders' Facility** is a level one independent living facility. It offers meal, personal care and medicine dispensing supports to seniors who are referred by a physician. Staff support seniors 24 hours per day and seven days per week. Staff also delivers homecare services, foot care and palliative care primarily to community seniors. Currently one resident is living in the four-unit facility. Six seniors live independently in satellite housing adjacent to Our Great Elders' Facility.

Front line staff are in regular contact with the Fort Resolution seniors population. Seniors are encouraged to drop-in to Our Great Elders' facility for:

- coffee and to visit.

- a nutritious, healthy seniors luncheon and occasional entertainment on Wednesdays 12 noon to 1 pm.
- games and card nights on weekends.

The Community Health Representative (CHR) delivers health promotion; does weekly home visits; and delivers medications primarily to seniors. To improve dialogue with seniors the CHR interprets in Chipewyan for the nurse and other health and wellness community providers. Health fairs, information sessions and participation in interagency meetings are the main techniques planned for improving health promotion awareness in the community.

### Deninu K'ue First Nation Programs

The **Lou Menez Chipewyan Language Resource Centre** offers a series of workshops and produces teaching materials (genealogies and legends) for Chipewyan language development in the community. Seniors are recruited as resource persons for delivery of terminology and standardization workshops. Participation in workshops offers an unique opportunity for seniors to build Chipewyan language literacy skills including alphabet reading and writing. Terminology and standardization workshops are designed to be fun for participants and use games and word replacement exercises.

The **Elders' Justice Program** delivers workshops targeting youth and elders. Workshops are designed to be fun and use role-plays and other interactive ways to engage participants.

The **Deninu Drug and Alcohol Program** counsels and initiates holistic healing for families experiencing addictions. Culture based healing camps are the main tool for helping to deal with addictions. In this regard seniors act as resource people telling their own sobriety stories to help others maintain sobriety and deal with their addictions. The Deninu Drug and Alcohol program plans to send clients and seniors to the summer gathering at Fort Reliance to work on spiritual and religious healing.

The **DKFN Chief** is responsive to the needs of seniors in a personal, hands-on way.

### Fort Resolution Seniors Society

The Fort Resolution Seniors Society owns a building that is used by seniors to drop-in, play cards, visit and buy a snack. The building and its snack bar are part of fund raising undertaken by the Seniors Society. Funds raised are used for transporting seniors to the Lac Ste Anne spiritual gathering and for funeral expenses. The Fort Resolution Seniors Society has representation on the board of directors of the NWT Seniors Society.

### **Community Recommendations for Strengthening Literacy Supports**

Seniors and senior-serving agencies in the community were forthcoming with suggestions for strengthening literacy supports for seniors in Fort Resolution.

√A project would benefit from networking with other senior literacy programs across the north.

√To improve the performance of future seniors literacy projects it is necessary to:

- understand and deal with resistance to change (Many seniors are set in their ways and felt they were too old to learn.);
- design ways to meet seniors needs as no models/best practices are available to fall back on – trial and error approach;
- have family and community support and value for seniors and their needs<sup>8</sup>.
- enable personal contact with seniors and personal invitations to community activities. The best way to communicate with seniors is by word-of-mouth.

√There should be a liaison person to help seniors with their literacy difficulties.

√More public meetings with interpreters would help seniors to better understand and participate in community affairs.

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<sup>8</sup> Deninu K'u Adult Learning Centre. 2003. Fort Resolution Community Literacy Program, Final Report.

## Appendix B: Fort Resolution Case Study

- √ Conduct a thorough needs assessment before introducing a senior literacy program.
- √ Learning activities should be fun, involve social events and games. Occasional feasts or games nights help to sustain interest in programs.
- √ Network with other community organizations to build support for seniors literacy programs.
- √ Work to improve community discussion about ways to support seniors and address their needs.

## Inuvik Seniors Literacy Case Study

### Seniors in Inuvik

In 2003, the proportion of seniors, age 55 and over, in the Inuvik population was comparable to other communities in the NWT. (Table 1)

**Table 1: NWT and Inuvik Senior Population Estimates, 2003**

Community	Total	<55	55+	Percentage 55+
NWT	41,872	37,251	4,621	11%
Inuvik	3,435	3,065	370	11%

Source Bureau of Statistics, Population Estimates, Community and Age, 2003

In 2003, one in nine of the Inuvik population was a senior (age 55 years and over). In the next decade, the Inuvik senior population (age 55+) is projected to increase by 57%. (Table 2) Inuvik is one of the many NWT communities that will see its senior population grow.

**Table 2: NWT and Inuvik Senior Population Projections, 2004, 2009, 2014**

Community	2004	2009	2014
NWT, Age 55+	4,903	6,208	7,544
Inuvik, Age 55+	396	489	623

Source Bureau of Statistics, Population Projections, Community and Age, 2004 -2014

Senior-serving agencies estimate that 60% of Inuvik seniors live independently on their own. The Inuvik Housing Authority has 45-50 senior tenants in its independent housing units. Other seniors live with family, in Long Term Care or live in their own homes.

### Education and Selected Literacy Characteristics of Inuvik Seniors

Decades ago mission schools were the only source of formal education. Some seniors attended these schools and generally achieved up to grade 5. Compared to NWT seniors, Inuvik seniors have proportionately higher educational attainment at secondary education levels. (Table 3) A small number of seniors, 55 years and older, have returned to Aurora College for upgrading to extend and enhance their employment opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Aurora Campus Learning Centre personnel indicate that ABE classes are a mix of older learners 55 years and older. Approximately 10% of the classes are older learners.

**Table 3: Seniors Highest Level of Education, NWT and Inuvik, 2001**

	<b>Pop. 60 &amp; Older</b>	<b>Less than grade 9</b>	<b>Less than high school graduation certificate</b>	<b>High School Graduation and Post Secondary</b>
NWT 60 & Older	2,385	1,315	260	810
Inuvik 60 & Older	165	80	15	60

Source Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, Population 60 & Older by Highest Level of Schooling, Age Group and Gender

Senior-serving agencies describe Inuvik seniors as having fluency in English. Literacy providers say that basic literacy (basic English reading and writing) is less of an issue today than it was in the past. Many seniors have learned to read and write English on their own. They have adequate literacy skills to read street signs, names, drive, do their own banking, and use debit cards. If they don't read or write well, these difficulties may not be known and the senior him/herself may be too embarrassed to seek help.

**Senior's Work**

Seniors, age 55 and over, are choosing to remain in the labour force until they retire. Retirement for some may come later as government is encouraging seniors to retrain and extend their employment. GNWT and HRDC funded Older Worker Programs operated in Inuvik in 2002/03 and 2003/04. They gave seniors an opportunity to work in schools helping teachers reinforce language skills in the classroom; mentor at risk/problem youth; and learn computer skills. The Program was expanded providing senior employment and training opportunities in Aboriginal and non-government organizations, and the tourism industry in 2003/04. For example, the Inuvik Community Corporation recruited an older worker as a resource person to co-ordinate and network with other community programs.

Seniors are supported in the schools to teach traditional skills (e.g. building sleds drums and snowshoes, and beading) and lead on-the-land activities.<sup>10</sup> They are important resources for Aboriginal language development in school and pre school programs. Seniors are also hired to provide traditional knowledge to oil and gas exploration companies, or participate with aboriginal organizations as advisors.

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<sup>10</sup> These activities are supported by Aboriginal Language funding through the District Education Authority (DEA)



## Defining Literacy In Inuvik

Literacy means different things to different agencies and residents of Inuvik.

- To working seniors and senior students literacy tends to be viewed as the ability to read, write, understand, communicate and think in English. Literacy may also be viewed as staying current, understanding and using information to function effectively in everyday living.
- For others *“literacy is how seniors pass their time. A good visit is leisure and quality time with a friend or group of friends. It is getting together for a meaningful and satisfying discussion where information is shared. Sharing stories about traditional ways on the land is very much part of a meaningful discussion.”* (Inuvik senior)
- *“Literacy is part of the life cycle. It is the way we live, the way we learn. It embodies growth and development in everyday life.”* (Inuvik educator)
- *“Literacy for Aboriginal seniors could be the preservation of their Aboriginal language and culture. An expression in the oral tradition of storytelling, songs, dance like the Arctic Village caribou dance to bring the caribou in a time of need, and drumming.” “Literacy is being able to read the land, the weather like the sundogs and the moon”* (Inuvik educator)

## Senior Literacy Needs and Preferences in Inuvik

Using educational attainment as a literacy measure<sup>11</sup>, almost 58% of Inuvik seniors 60 years and older have literacy needs. 95 of 165 Inuvik seniors have low literacy skills (49% have less than grade nine and 9% have more than grade nine and less than grade 12) and may have difficulties functioning independently in the community. (Table 3)

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<sup>11</sup> Educational attainment is one indicator of literacy levels in the NWT. Using this measure illiteracy is defined as having less than grade 9 education. Persons with low literacy have less than secondary school education (grade 12). Persons with these education levels are considered to have some level of difficulty reading, writing, understanding and using information. The updated (2004) International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) report will change this reporting practice to coincide with other Canadian and international jurisdictions.

Senior literacy needs and preferences are also described by agencies and seniors participating in the case study. The Inuvik Community Corporation Elders Committee believes that *“many seniors would like to improve their reading and writing skills and would not refuse opportunities for more education.”* At the Family Literacy Day seniors luncheon in 2004, the Caribou Outreach Learning Centre manager and NWT Seniors Literacy researcher engaged Ingamo Hall luncheon guests in a seniors literacy discussion. Of the 30 seniors, fourteen (47%) were interested in upgrading their basic reading, writing and computer literacy skills.

At the Ingamo Hall luncheon, seniors spoke openly about literacy difficulties. They described the challenges they had in staying current, understanding and using information in a second language (e.g. not in their mother tongue). These seniors said they would be comfortable attending classes at the Caribou Outreach Learning Centre. They noted that some seniors are shy about divulging low literacy and may be intimidated by a literacy program.

Inuvik frontline agencies (e.g. Aurora Campus, the Diabetes Program, the Day Program, Ingamo Hall, ICC, GTC, and housing) are aware of the literacy needs of local seniors. As evidence they point to the lack of books, newspapers and magazines evident in senior’s homes. Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre hears seniors concerns about not being:

- aware of programs and services they may be eligible for; and
- able to apply for benefits and / or services due to cumbersome application processes.

Stakeholders and seniors responding in the Day Program needs assessment characterized problems affecting Inuvik seniors as isolation, loneliness and addictions.<sup>12</sup> The Assessment described seniors’ needs and preferences that may be applied to literacy program activities:

- Seniors want to get out more, and want to socialize with their friends.
- They favour a day program that does not duplicate services already offered. They need event coordination, a seniors’ voice and accessible health information.
- The majority preferred a casual style of day program. Seniors do not want a highly structured program where they are told what to do.

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<sup>12</sup> McCarney, J., 2003, Adult Day Program Needs Assessment Report

- Seniors prefer culturally relevant activities.

Inuvik seniors and senior-serving organizations are concerned that poor reading skills combined with memory loss may limit some senior's understanding of prescriptions/labels leading to their improper use. Seniors diagnosed with chronic disease (e.g. diabetes) may be assisted by family helpers or Community Health Representatives (CHR). Still some seniors may be at risk of serious medical complication because they do not understand the need to monitor their blood sugars and eat a proper diet. The regional Diabetes Program has the main responsibility for providing information on diabetes to seniors.

Seniors and agencies that serve them prefer literacy supports as having:

- a comfortable setting in a seniors center rather than a classroom setting, a building they could call their own. Ingamo Hall is a familiar and preferred location for seniors programming.
- someone known and trusted that seniors feel comfortable going to for help with forms, information or advice.
- workshops because they are a successful approach for engaging seniors.

### **Seniors Programs in Inuvik**

Several literacy providers and senior-serving organizations seek to address the literacy needs of seniors. Seniors programs are:

- Aurora Campus and Caribou Outreach Learning Centres (Seniors Literacy/Learning Supports);
- Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre (Seniors Lunch and Literacy Supports);
- Inuvik Regional Health and Social Services Authority (Day Program, Diabetes Program, homemaking services, home care nursing, meals on wheels, geriatric visits, senior's fitness);
- Inuvik Community Corporation (ICC) and Gwich'in Tribal Council (GCC) Elder's Councils; and
- Inuvik Centennial Library.

To enhance literacy activities for seniors Inuvik agencies are becoming organized and networking. The elders councils (GTC and ICC), non-profit Inuvik literacy committee, Aboriginal organization regional literacy committee and the Regional

Training Partnership also offer potential to increase awareness and supports for addressing the literacy needs among Inuvik seniors.

The above agencies receive funding to provide supports for seniors, but serving seniors is or may not be a main priority of any one group. For example, in 2003/2004, \$24,000 allocated from the NWT Literacy Strategy to address literacy needs of Inuvik seniors helped Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre and Aurora College sponsor a seniors literacy/learning project and an outreach community service project. These supports became extensions of other services available from these agencies.

#### Aurora Campus, Aurora College

The **Aurora Campus Learning Centre** offers curriculum-based upgrading (ABE) courses in a classroom setting for adult learners in Inuvik. Typically older learners (55 years and older) are in the labour force. Their skill/upgrading goals are to get a job or a job promotion. They are motivated to attend classes to improve their quality of life or to better connect with the younger generation. Their goals may include a high school diploma/or equivalent and subsequent enrolment in post-secondary and/or Aboriginal language programs. They intend to stay in work force for an extended period of time.

The **Caribou Outreach Learning Centre** is community-based and located off campus in a familiar Inuvik building (e.g. Native Womens/NWT Training Centre). The Caribou Outreach offers ESL (primarily to Arabic speakers), correspondence tutoring, family literacy (geared to pre-schoolers and parents), academic upgrading and computer classes. Programs offer flexible scheduling; are client centred; and geared to the skill needs of the learner.

The Caribou Outreach Learning Centre employs one instructor/ manager who is facilitator, tutor, instructor and transporter. Seniors literacy classes were scheduled four evenings per week from September 2003 to March 2004. The goals of the seniors literacy classes were:

- to increase literacy levels in English and math using ABE curriculum at the 110 and 120 levels;
- to increase awareness in the technology field;
- to increase learner's self-esteem and readiness for further upgrading; and
- to increase health awareness, and promote healthy lifestyles and independent living (e.g. medications, and yearly check-ups/exercise programs).

Key elements of the Caribou Outreach Learning Centre literacy presentation to seniors included:

- individualized learner centered and open classroom approaches for reading, writing, numeracy and computer literacy instruction (e.g. to allow seniors to work at their own pace).
- instruction with topics of interest to seniors, invited speakers and opportunities to draw on life experiences.
- small group facilitated instruction.
- invitation to family members and friends to join in.

The Caribou Outreach is considering the use of “story sacks”, a story time on the radio contest, and word or picture bingo to enhance and promote literacy instruction to seniors.

#### Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre

The Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre sponsored literacy programs for seniors in 2002/03 and 2003/04. In 2003/04, NWT Literacy Strategy funding of \$12,760 was budgeted for the **Elders Literacy Project**. The project was designed to encourage seniors to develop personal skills for independent living and managing their own affairs. It assisted seniors to gain a better understanding of legal requirements, government regulations, and medical terminology. The project blended with the Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre’s storefront services to seniors to help with letter writing, completing forms and applications, or gain referrals to agencies. A senior liaison worker was hired for service delivery. The worker connected with Inuvik frontline services to establish working relationships and access accurate information (e.g. to help with renewal of extended health care renewals, Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement).

The Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre began bi-weekly **elders luncheon** three years ago. Lunches are free and the country food menu is an attraction for up to 40 seniors at any given time. Seniors from the Day Program are transported to the luncheon from the hospital at no cost. (see Elders Day Program below) Luncheons may be sponsored (e.g. a local MLA or oil exploration company) or have a theme. From time-to-time guest speakers are invited to present on topics of interest to seniors. Seniors enjoy gathering at Ingamo Hall because it is close to where most seniors live. These luncheons also provide opportunities for seniors to give feedback on community issues.

Inuvik Centennial Library

The Library's programming is geared more to youth and children than adults. The Library has a small collection of low literacy and large print books available to the public. The Library has free public access to seven computers and the Internet. An eighth computer provides access to an online library collection catalogue and Microsoft Photoshop. Computer time is booked in advance allowing ½ hour sessions for youth and one hour sessions for adults. Youth usually book in the evenings. Services and programs are advertised but nothing is specifically targeted at seniors. Currently a small number of seniors visit the library mainly to read newspapers or magazines. The librarian is a member of the non-profit Inuvik Literacy Committee but is not connected to other senior-serving agencies in the community.

Inuvik Regional Health and Social Services Authority

Two programs operated by the Inuvik Regional Health and Social Services Authority are sensitive to the literacy needs of Inuvik seniors. Activity and presentation models used by these programs offer good opportunities for attracting and sustaining participation by seniors.

The **Diabetes Education Program** is a series of nine workshops delivered each year and targeting regional residents diagnosed with diabetes (estimated at 1% of seniors 60 years and older). The workshops have a capacity for 15, and are 1 1/2 days long. Funding for workshops covers participant travel and accommodation expenses. The workshops are facilitated and the model enables learning within a group setting.

Since the program began over four years ago, facilitators have become aware of illiteracy and low literacy needs of their client group. The workshops are client centred and adapted to meet the literacy needs of the participants. Workshop materials are prepared at the grade three level and lower. Workshop presentations appeal to the senses. Visuals (e.g. pictures and displays) are used in workshop demonstrations to present messages without the written word. Information delivery is paced in 20 minutes blocks, followed by a physical activity such as jigging, dancing or stretching.

Workshop participants are invited at least once each year to review information. Follow-up improves content recall and processing functions. Messages are consistently reinforced by other health practitioners dealing with participants in

the community. The workshops also encourage seniors to speak out and tell their own stories.

Community members have asked the Diabetes Program for video taped and translated copies of diabetes workshops. This approach is consistent with the 'oral tradition/working through video approach' adopted by the Canadian Diabetes Association (CDA).

The **Elders Day Program** is new. The program was setup in 2004 to address seniors' health problems (e.g. depression, poor nutrition) associated with loneliness and poor lifestyle choices. In the early stages, the program attracted 10 seniors per day from long term care, and 10 seniors per day from the rest of the community.

The Day Program is fully integrated with some community activities for seniors (e.g. Ingamo Hall elders luncheon, and seniors fitness) and may expand and include seniors literacy activities offered by Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre and the Caribou Outreach Learning Centre.

Improving senior literacy skills, and youth-senior connections are viewed as Day Program priorities. Participants are encouraged by co-ordinators to tell stories about the old days. A question is asked during exercise sessions to stimulate participant story telling. In 2004, it is anticipated that a Beaver International volunteer will lead a session introducing video techniques to youth for filming seniors stories.

Seniors are involved in planning the monthly Day Program calendar. They chose activities such as traditional crafts and sewing circle, armchair yoga, senior exercise and fitness, bowling, Karaoke, old time square dance, lunch at Ingamo Hall, card and board games, guest speakers, baking, sing-along, spinning wool, and drum dancing. Senior volunteers will be recruited in the future to lead cooking classes and other activities. A newsletter is prepared in plain language. Day program promotional materials list the following services: hot meal daily; recreation programs; exercise programs; health and wellness information, education seminars, referrals to nurses, doctors and specialists, individualized care plan, whirlpool bathing, and foot care.

The Day Program is located at the Inuvik Hospital east end of Inuvik. The majority of seniors participating in the 2003 needs assessment preferred a

location in the west end, closer to where most seniors live. Planners/co-ordinators acknowledge that the success of the Program will depend on a transportation system that moves seniors to different activities. They also recognize that the Program must remain culturally relevant to sustain the participation of most seniors. The program co-ordinator would like to attract more seniors.

### **Community Recommendations for Strengthening Literacy Supports for Seniors**

Inuvik seniors, seniors serving organizations and literacy providers provide a checklist of needs and preferences for strengthening literacy supports for seniors.

- √ Literacy must be a priority for seniors. Seniors have to want to take control over their own health and well-being. Seniors must want to listen to information and learn about it. *“People feel better when they have the skills to take care of themselves.”* (Frontline worker, Inuvik)
- √ Seniors should be offered the choice of improving their Aboriginal or English language literacy skills. Seniors should not be pushed/forced into programs or told what to do. The first step is a needs assessment undertaken by familiar local people (e.g. Teaching and Learning Centre staff, Adult Educators, Elders Council). Seniors should be involved in ongoing literacy planning and evaluation of activities.
- √ Approaches to seniors learning that focus on their knowledge and build on their strengths, should be pursued.
- √ Senior workshops and small group learning sessions are good forums for seniors to share and understand information.
- √ Outreach/community service programming which provides one stop and storefront information and help for seniors, should be a priority. There should be a place in town where seniors can go to get information, and someone who can explain it in plain language
- √ More networking and partnerships between senior serving organizations are needed to overcome limited funding for seniors literacy activities.



√ More could be done to promote the NWT Literacy Strategy to seniors/seniors groups. Prior to this research, the ICC Elders Council was unaware of the NWT Literacy Strategy. Community service announcements can be placed on television (“the rolling channel”), on CBC radio in English and Aboriginal languages, and on posters at the Post Office. However, word-of-mouth is a proven technique for informing seniors.

√ Regional Aboriginal organizations should be more aware of seniors issues (literacy). They should play a larger role in sponsoring senior literacy activities and partnering with literacy providers.

√ On-the-land programs and activities (e.g. plant identification, traditional medicine use, harvesting and butchering caribou meat, storytelling, and sewing) offer good opportunities for seniors and youth to share and learn from each other. Seniors pass on their traditional skills while youth exchange their English and technology skills.

√ Aboriginal seniors see preserving and revitalizing their language as a priority literacy issue. *“Imagine waking up one day to hear a seagull singing a robin’s song.”* Seniors may avoid speaking their own language. It was taken away from them by the residential school system. (Inuvik elder)

√ Seniors are very interested in collecting stories and passing on their own “personal journey” to grandchildren and future generations. They may be interested in having their stories printed or recorded.

√ “Adopt an elder.” Youth may be encouraged to mentor/help seniors with their reading and writing skills. A language nest model where youth and seniors read to each other in English and an Aboriginal language may be an effective approach.

√ Storytelling is an excellent tool for improving communication between youth and seniors.

- √ There is a need to support Aboriginal language reading and writing skills. Seniors must be willing to be part of the solution for Aboriginal language recovery.
  
- √ Ingamo Hall Friendship Centre and the Day Program at the hospital offer good opportunities for organized seniors gatherings. Gatherings could be organized with guest speakers to present interesting information and stimulate meaningful discussion. It is hoped that the hospital day program can work to give seniors a place to go.
  
- √ Senior volunteers/role models should be recruited to help with service and program promotion to other seniors.
  
- √ In a learning activity, seniors may be uncomfortable asking questions. Literacy providers/instructors should “check in with seniors daily/frequently.”
  
- √ More seniors in teaching positions would attract more seniors. There are quite a few seniors with good speaking skills, who could be facilitators for seniors literacy.
  
- √ Transportation to seniors literacy activities will improve attendance.



## **APPENDIX C: BIBLIOGRAPHY AND LIST OF CONTACTS**

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