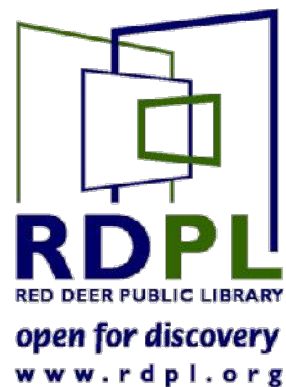


**CLA Conference
June 2006**

**Presented by
Celia Jaipaul
Program Coordinator
Family Literacy
Red Deer Public Library**



Red Deer Public Library

Family Literacy

Introduction (brochure available)

I have been the Program Coordinator for 6 years, and work part-time with the help of an assistant who also works in other departments of the library. I'd like to start with the question: How does our literacy program differ from other programs at Red Deer Public Library (RDPL). The answer relates to the essence of our vision, mission and mandate, which is to ensure community access to the universe of information, experience and ideas, and to provide library service to every person in Red Deer. Red Deer Family Literacy provides services to families who might be at risk of low literacy. Some of our programs target low income families, single parent homes, teen parents, Immigrant and Aboriginal families, and homes where parents themselves struggle with literacy. Our programs are intended to provide early intervention to break the cycle of low literacy, to build on strengths, and to provide information and support.

One of our keynote speakers said it very well on Wednesday night, that a library is the perfect place for the information revolution to be democratized. Our goal is therefore to ensure families can read and understand information, regardless of their economic situation. All of our programs, described later, are free.

Background

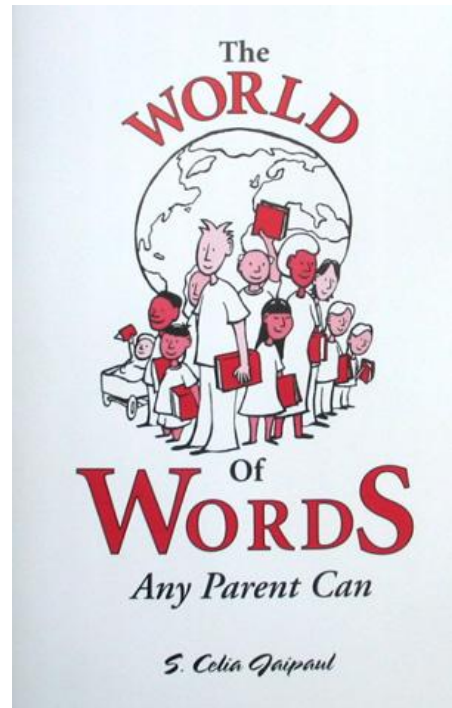
Red Deer Family Literacy came into existence in late 1997. Although it was not a part of library services at its inception, RDPL was instrumental in its birth, development and progress. Staff members at RDPL were the first to recognize the crucial need to assist disadvantaged groups in the development and enhancement of their literacy skills and those of their children. These staff members took the initiative to develop a needs assessment plan, to hire a contractor to do a feasibility study and make recommendations for programs and services. Sources for funding were sought and the first few years of the program were funded by the provincial Child and Family Services' Early Intervention Program. After provincial changes in 2001, that Department discontinued funding with the rationale that these particular services did not fall within its mandate. Transitional funding was received from the Red Deer & District Community Foundation to allow RDPL time to incorporate the program in future budgets. In January 2004, when RDPL assumed responsibility for its funding, Family Literacy officially became a part of RDPL services.

Current Programs

World of Words (WOW)

WOW is a program consisting of stories, rhymes, crafts and other literacy activities for children in kindergarten, their parents or caregivers, and younger siblings. Three schools participate in this program. In school #1, one kindergarten class and a Bright Beginnings class are involved (the Bright Beginnings is similar to a head start class). In the second and third schools, there are one and two kindergarten classes respectively. A paid Facilitator (in our case, a retired school Teacher), goes into the school and delivers the program during the last half hour of the class. There are over 100 children registered in total.

A unique feature of this program is that parents are invited to actively participate, and to include other young children/siblings in their care. Through this they can acquire or strengthen their own skills by modeling the Facilitator.



Red Deer Firefighters' Children's Charities Reading Pals Summer Program (brochure available)

This is a one on one tutoring program designed to assist Elementary school students who need additional support in reading, writing and comprehension. The program helps students maintain skills learnt during the year and also gives them a booster for the upcoming school year. There are usually 100-120 students registered, with some on a waiting list. It is offered during July and August, for seven weeks. Packages which include program information, teacher referrals, and parent consent forms are taken to participating schools in late May/early June. A Teacher referral as well as a signed Parental Consent form must be received before the student can be scheduled. Students are paired with a "pal" and receive assistance from a Tutor to accommodate their identified needs. When registering, parents are asked to indicate their first, second and third choices for day and time. Each student is then scheduled into a one-hour time slot once each week based on this choice. Here are some other highlights of the program:

- A Coordinator is hired in May to contact and send out information to schools, schedule students, plan the program, seek sponsors for prizes, and research resources. The overall process is very extensive. Two tutors are hired to assist the Coordinator with tutoring, planning lessons, preparing weekly newsletters, and evaluations.
- Throughout the program, students work on reading, writing, and comprehension, and activities such as crossword puzzles, games, and recipes, which will help

strengthen their skills. Students earn points based on time spent on specific activities, as well as reading independently or with family members at home. These points can be redeemed at any time for prizes.

- Weekly newsletters are sent home with students to advise parents on activities for the next week, how they can help at home, and short, literacy tips. To ensure parents have seen the newsletter, the child earns points for bringing back the newsletter with a parent's signature.
- Two Family Nights are held so students and parents can interact and participate in fun, literacy activities. There is usually a guest speaker or special event for each night.
- There is daily as well as weekly evaluation of each student to document strategies and resources used, and progress of the individual.
- The Coordinator writes a Final Report which evaluates results in the context of goals and outcomes, and provides recommendations for the next year.



Kids Club (sample flyer available)

We are in the sixth year of a partnership with the Parkland Mall Shopping Centre in offering this program. The Kids Club is a pre-school storytime. Parents and Caregivers

bring their pre-school children from 9:45 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. and participate in stories, rhymes, songs, coloring and crafts aimed at the development and enhancement of early literacy skills. When the program first started, attendance averaged 25-30 parents and children in total, and we thought this was good attendance. Now the attendance could be 50-100 in total, even in the middle of winter when we experience really cold Alberta weather. The Kids Club is held one Thursday morning each month, except during July, August, and December. The Mall provides free refreshments which include coffee, juice, assorted pretzels and lemonade. Free space is designated in front of a fireplace where children sit on a large carpet and listen to the storyteller, who is most often a volunteer.



Prior registration is not required but a sign-in sheet is passed out so that we can have an indication of numbers of parents and children, whether they have attended before, and how they found out about the program. Quite often there are draws for book prizes, library t-shirts (some very over-sized!), book bags and mugs. In January this year, Red Deer Honda gave Family Literacy a \$100.00 donation to buy book prizes for Family Literacy Day. We purchased enough books to give out several prizes for four months. Families really enjoy receiving the free food, and the free gifts – even the oversized t-shirts.

Books for Babies/Families: PCLS-HVDP ***(Parent-Child Literacy Strategy-Home Visitation Demonstration Project)***

In April 2002 Family Literacy, in partnership with Healthy Families (now a part of Red Deer Family Services), entered a three year pilot project which allows both agencies to be more effective in delivering services for families. This project was sponsored by the Provincial Department of Education, and another benefit of the partnership is the ongoing referral to existing community-based literacy programs outside the home.

Healthy Families is an early intervention initiative designed to support families in providing a nurturing, stimulating and safe environment for their children from birth to age five through regular home visits made by Home Visitors. Families are referred into the Home Visiting program through their local Health Unit and their participation is voluntary. Since Healthy Families had already established a successful home-visitation program and a client-base in the region, it seemed a natural partnership for introducing literacy in the homes of families with these needs.

Therefore, the intent of the pilot was to serve the literacy needs of families via existing Healthy Families Home Visitors so that more families in need of literacy service, and who are otherwise difficult to reach, will receive literacy programming and referral to other family literacy and community-based literacy programs. In addition to their regular home visiting “duties,” Home Visitors would introduce a literacy component to their visit. During each literacy visit, activities presented to the family might include reading, storytelling, games, rhymes or songs.

During each pilot year, Family Literacy provided “Books for Babies” book bags for home Visitors to give to every new family in the HVDP. The bags include books, handouts providing information on literacy- based activities, and access to a free library membership. These book bags are an excellent introductory tool to enhance early literacy in the home. For many families these bags may give them the first books in their home. The bags are also a positive way of bringing literacy – through reading, rhymes, songs, and talking with children – to the home, as well as linking the parent to other community literacy programs. These linkages assist in eliminating the barrier of isolation which many families face, especially in rural communities.

In addition to the bags, Family Literacy developed several resource boxes and kits for Home Visitors to use with families and children at different age categories, from babies to toddlers to pre-school. These boxes also contained basic materials including craft paper, crayons, glue, pencils and coloring sheets. Used books in good condition, received from donations, have been provided to Healthy Families to assist their families in building their own “collection.”

During the pilot, over 300 book bags were provided to Healthy Families. Since the completion of the pilot in March 2005, we have continued, and will continue to provide Books for Babies book bags, used books and other resources as part of this program, and the partnership we have consolidated. We continue to support the work of

Healthy Families by meeting regularly with the Program Coordinator to explore areas of need in literacy and how to fill these gaps. We continue to provide available information on appropriate training opportunities for Home Visitors.

Family Reading Fun (Book “The World of Words” available)

This program is offered in partnership with local agencies/organizations (our current partner is Infant Pre-school Wellness Program of Family Services) serving parents or families who also need help in improving their literacy skills. Quite often, the needs of these parents include an awareness:

- that reading at home with their child is crucial to their child’s development of literacy skills
- that their own level of literacy should not be a barrier – they are their child’s first teacher
- that the earlier the better for their child. Many parents do not know they can start from the moment they have their baby
- of the importance of going to the library: many are fearful and intimidated by the thought
- that reading itself is fun and that literacy takes many forms e.g. simple rhymes, singing, playing games
- of the absolute, crucial importance of the early parent-child bonding necessary for their child’s future schooling.

Either the Coordinator or a Facilitator from Family Literacy goes to the agency or organization and presents a literacy component during the agency’s regularly scheduled program. Activities include modeling reading to children, rhymes, information on appropriate books and craft extensions. This component could be presented during one or more sessions, depending on arrangements made with the agency. Sometimes Family Literacy will contribute toward the refreshments. Family Services, Central Alberta Pregnancy Care Centre, and Red Deer Family Day Homes have participated in this program.

Special projects

Each year we try to undertake a special project which generally includes the greater community. A few examples are:

- Starbucks Book Drive – for two consecutive years this project was undertaken in partnership with Family Literacy. The community was invited to drop off new or good used books at the local Starbucks which were then given to Family Literacy for use with families in need.

- Classroom on Wheels Bus (C.O.W. Bus) – this is a bus designed in a classroom/library style, equipped with books, crafts, puzzles, puppets and other literacy materials. This Bus, managed by the Centre for Family Literacy in Edmonton, travels across Alberta and makes presentations to schools, organizations and agencies. In partnership with Family Services and Red Deer College, we were able to sponsor the Bus and the two Facilitators who travel and do presentations. Over the course of three days, hundreds of preschool and school-age children had the opportunity to participate in planned activities on the Bus.
- “Share Your Story” – this project was done as a partnership between Healthy Families, Family Literacy and other departments of RDPL. Celebrities in the community were invited to “nominate” their favorite book from which they were given the chance to read during a special evening celebration. These books were then donated to the library.

Some Ongoing Partnerships/Corporate Sponsors

- Parkland Mall – since January 2001 has been our partner for the Kids Club. Also provides gift certificates each year for program supplies
- Red Deer Family Services – includes Healthy Families, Infant Pre-school Wellness, Moms and Tots.
- Red Deer Public School District
- Red Deer Catholic Regional School Division
- Red Deer Adult Literacy
- Red Deer College
- Red Deer Firefighters’ Children’s Charities
- Friends of Red Deer Public Library
- Delta Kappa Gamma
- Wee Sign
- Central Alberta Refugee Effort (CARE)
- Central Alberta Diversity Association (CADA)
- Central Alberta Pregnancy Care Centre
- McDonald’s, Pizza Hut, Boston Pizza, A&W, Red Deer Honda, Save-On-Foods
- Shaw Cable
- Red Deer Advocate, Red Deer Express, Red Deer Life (local newspapers)
- CHTV