



ANNUAL REPORT
1999 – 2000

LITERACY BC MISSION

We promote literacy, support adult learners, develop partnerships and aim to present a united voice on literacy issues.

We strive for an environment in B.C. where adults who want to learn can access programs that respond to learners' needs and provide services based on good practice.

Literacy BC will build and support a diverse membership in order to strengthen and increase regional and local literacy efforts in the province.

Literacy BC will work to make sure it has the resources to do the job.



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Message From The President

Annual reports are almost always glowing records of achievement and noble statements of high ambition. In this case, our pride and optimism need to be muted.

There certainly were great achievements in 1999-2000, and we would be unfair to dismiss them lightly.

I was personally pleased to see the literacy movement divide itself more clearly into sub-fields. Workforce Literacy has had its own niche for some years and is now “desperately seeking convergence” of the many forces and players who can improve the literacy opportunities for so many people in our diverse workplaces.

Family Literacy has been gaining momentum in the last two or three years, and seems on the verge of getting the widespread public support it so richly deserves. I look forward to even greater support for this sub-field in the years ahead as more of us come to appreciate the central role that parents and other caregivers can have in children's learning and well being. There is still a great deal to be done.

Surely the active and sustained involvement of learners in literacy-related research has been a singularly important development. Indeed, our organization has been a ground breaker in engaging learners as active participants rather than passive recipients in important literacy research.

The sustained and assertive participation of Literacy BC in our national organization, The Movement for Canadian Literacy, reveals no indication of a slowdown. As a result, Canadians elsewhere in our country, not only British Columbians, are beneficiaries of our work.

Our recent agreement to carry on the Bursary Award Program of the Pacific Association for Continuing Education (PACE) stands to benefit a great number of potential literacy learners – and other learners whose barriers to learning success include limited financial resources.

Like all our staff, my Board colleagues and I are well aware of the reality that excellent literacy programs of many kinds are having real success in communities throughout the province. We hope that we have been consistently supportive to all programs wherever they are based.

It is not easy to find words to express our gratitude to our growing list of corporate and individual donors and sponsors. Many of our financial backers have been with us for years, and their loyalty to the cause of adult learners is truly remarkable. Each year, more

individuals and corporations back up their words and interests in literacy matters with cold, hard cash and services – without which our effectiveness would be sharply reduced. Sincerely, thanks to all of you. We are very proud to be able to identify you individually elsewhere in this report.

Our governments, both federal and provincial, have continued to support our work, despite the expanding list of demands on the public purse from all directions. The National Literacy Secretariat has been helpful in both financial and operational ways, while the BC Minister of Advanced Education, Training, and Technology and his staff have been solid in their support for our work. We are optimistic that the Minister will see the way clear to increasing grants for community-based as well as institution-centred literacy programs after an extended period of ‘status quo’ annual funding.

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Our staff have, as in every other year, been unsung pillars of the cause we share. My Board colleagues and I frequently notice how well they perform their duties with seeming great cheer despite shortages of resources, but we do not do so publicly enough or frequently enough. To all of you, our sincere thanks.

Yes, the past year has been a good one. All of us – donors, sponsors, learners, staff, program managers, practitioners, volunteers, and others who have helped learners in more subtle ways – have good reason to be proud.

I would be less than candid, however, if I did not convey some frustration with the slow pace at which we – at community, provincial, and national levels – are coming to grips with the importance of literacy and basic skills learning for such a high percentage of our population. All of us must do more, I believe, to ensure that the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged Canadians does not grow larger than it already is. Indeed, we need to rebalance the use of our public resources to close that gap.

That is why my Board colleagues and I are so hopeful that the province-wide consultation on literacy issues and concerns, taking place in Autumn 2000, will be a candid and productive exercise. We will see, I believe, how much British Columbians really care about some of their less advantaged neighbours and friends, and what we as a society are prepared to do to reduce the incidence of low literacy in our province.

I have come to the end of my term as President of this unique organization. I hope you will allow me a few lines to express my thanks to everyone associated with Literacy BC, but particularly to our Executive Director, Linda Mitchell, who serves as a model of vision, incredibly hard work, and commitment. Equally, I thank my Board colleagues who have made my role so interesting and enjoyable.

I look forward to a challenging but improving future for Literacy BC - an organization that has given me, as well as literacy learners, so much. I hope to be more than just a spectator in the immediate future.

Paul Gallagher
President

Highlights Of 1999 - 2000

The Year 2000 marks the 10th anniversary of Literacy BC. Looking back, our decade of efforts and accomplishments represent a legacy both to measure our future progress against, and a foundation upon which to build new initiatives.

In the past year, several of our initiatives took advantage of new technologies that were not available to us when Literacy BC was created in 1990. While these new tools allowed us to better reach out to the literacy community, they also remind us that we have only just begun our work to promote literacy and lifelong learning in B.C.

Supporting Learners

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Supporting adult learners lies at the core of Literacy BC. One way we remain sensitive to the needs adult learners needs at an internal policy level is to maintain at least four learners on the Board of Directors. In addition, the Learners Caucus Committee provides a member to serve on the B.C. cost-shared projects External Review

Committee, the Learner Advisory Network of the Movement for Canadian Literacy, and on the Learners Talking to Learners provincial advisory committee.

The toll-free **Help Line** continues to provide a barrier-free opportunity for over 600 adults annually to locate literacy programs in their community. In the fall of 1999, *It Guided Me Back to Learning: A Longitudinal Research Study on Calls to the Literacy BC Help Line* was published. It was a fitting way to mark the tenth anniversary of the first provincial toll-free literacy help line in Canada. The study brought to light many of the factors that affect the participation of adults with low literacy skills in B.C. The findings are making a significant contribution to our practice in the areas of information, referral, public awareness, and our efforts to influence public policy.

Providing Information, Consultation, And Referral Services

This past year, Literacy BC handled over 6,500 inquiries via email and telephone from educators, literacy practitioners, volunteer tutors, libraries, government, community agencies, employment centres, employers, unions, and the general public. It is interesting to note that more than 25 percent of these calls were from parents related to their children's learning needs.

As the clearinghouse for literacy information in the province, Literacy BC takes a leading role by maintaining one of the largest literacy resource lending libraries in the country. Last year, we added significantly to our specialized collection of over 1600 catalogued materials for researchers, policy makers, learners and the general public.

Imprints, the Literacy BC bi-monthly newsletter for over 500 of our members, continues to be a leading voice and visible record of the literacy movement in BC and Canada. As always, the content reflected the remarkable diversity of groups, interests, and perspectives that are touched by (and participate in) literacy. In 1999, this was augmented by *The Gift of Literacy*, a four-page newsletter that was launched to provide friends and supporters with an overview of the work of Literacy BC.

Building Community Partnerships And Networks

Over the past 10 years, Literacy has been developing and supporting a regional network of literacy practitioners and programs. Between September 1999 and July 2000, more than 140 calls regarding regional literacy coordination were logged. From these calls and other forms of collaboration with regional literacy coordinators, there continued to be a need to advocate (at the college, school district and ministerial levels) on behalf of regional literacy coordination. There is a continued and ever-growing interest to maintain a strong provincial network, access to training and professional development, and ways to share information and expertise among practitioners.

In this regard, *Electronic Conferencing* is an increasingly significant way for the literacy field to share information and resources, undertake group or committee work at a distance, and participate in new forums for discussion and professional development. For several years,

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Literacy BC has been a leading player in shaping both the form and use of this new technology in the province and northwestern region of Canada. Last year was no exception.

In 1999-2000, the B.C. literacy electronic network and conferencing service expanded and improved its services to the field. Also in 1999-2000, a unique collaboration among the four western provinces, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut received funding from the

National Literacy Secretariat to build a regional literacy electronic network and conferencing service. *e-northwest* is being managed by Literacy BC in partnership with the Alberta Association of Adult Literacy and is:

- Creating access for the literacy fields in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Nunavut and the NWT to the benefits of electronic conferencing
- Creating efficiencies of cost, time and human resources by sharing and distributing existing information and expertise, as well as access to technical requirements
- Opening up new opportunities for the exchange of information and ideas that contribute to the practice of literacy within the region
- Developing long-range strategic planning to respond to the expressed desire for a national electronic conferencing infrastructure that will link the Canadian literacy field in a new and innovative way.

Funded by the National Literacy Secretariat of Human Resources Development Canada, Literacy BC's *Workforce Literacy Initiative* works in consultation with an advisory council representing business, labour, educators, and government. In 1999, the Initiative continued to implement projects designed to:

- Develop strong and active partnerships to upgrade the literacy skills of BC's workforce
- Help employers, unions, and educators to recognize their direct stake in and responsibility around workforce literacy
- Increase the demand for, and the usefulness of, the workforce literacy information and consultation services that are available to employers, unions, and educators

Last year's projects included: a public awareness campaign;

- a series of business breakfasts, called *Workforce Skills – The Business Imperative*;
- the production of an information kit for the affiliates of the BC Federation of Labour;
- professional development activity for workforce literacy practitioners;
- support for new workforce literacy programs;

- a partnership with Simon Fraser University to explore the feasibility of developing university-accredited training for workforce literacy practitioners; and
- research with Dr. Kathryn Barker into the “real life” application of prior learning and assessment principles.

In addition, *Learning Curves*, the bulletin of the BC Workforce Literacy Initiative was launched in the fall of 1999. The twice-yearly publication provides a forum for the efforts of partners across the province as they address workforce literacy – and seeks to extend the issue to the widest possible audience.

Two 2000 - 2001 workforce literacy initiatives are now well underway. The first, in partnership with the Industry Training and Apprenticeship Commission (ITAC) and other key partners is a province-wide consultation on literacy and workforce skills issues – including a 300 person “decision-makers” telephone survey and meetings and forums in 33 communities throughout BC. It is a first-of-its kind benchmarking process to capture the attitudes, activities, and recommendations around literacy and workforce skills issues among business, labour, education, community development agencies and the media. In the process, Literacy BC is collecting and updating its profiles of workforce literacy programs and practitioners in BC – to be housed on the newly developed Workforce Literacy Initiative web site. The second project that is underway is called *Desperately Seeking Convergence* – a series of activities designed to find the common “policies and practices” ground among business, labour, and educator groups as it relates to workforce skills.

Last year, Literacy BC’s three-prong approach to building the capacity for **family literacy** in our province included *program support*, *professional development*, and *partnership building*. We also provided leadership and consultation at the inter-provincial and territorial level in terms of beginning the process of developing a “national” vision and strategy for family literacy in Canada.

We successfully raised awareness of the issues, as well as provided support and information to schools, community organizations, government, business, libraries, family resource programs, social service agencies, health boards, and the family literacy community.

In short, the opportunities for **partnership building** have been extraordinary.

The cross fertilization of ideas, knowledge and experience among the myriad of stakeholder groups is beginning to collectively shape how we think about families and learning. Private sector partners including Honda Canada, the Grizzlies Foundation, Chapters, The Vancouver Sun, Starbucks Coffee Company, and West Coast Energy continued to partner with Literacy BC at community-based activities

such as the annual *Word on the Street*, *Spinoza the Bear Program*, *Raise a Reader Day*, and the *Family Literacy Day/Week Campaign*.

Through electronic conferencing, we were able to build family literacy links with practitioners across in Canada and internationally.

Partnerships with natural allies and within provincial initiatives – even where the issues being addressed may not be explicitly literacy-related – provide Literacy BC with tremendous opportunities to raise awareness about literacy issues. Last year’s participation on the *First Call*, *Spotlight on Children, Youth and Families Campaign* Advisory Committee positioned Literacy BC build a capacity for family literacy among the 50 or more provincial member organizations. It also ensured that the term “family literacy” was communicated in all coalition publications and position papers. In addition, it provided spin-off projects such as our work with the B.C. Association for Family Resource Programs to identify literacy as a key area for future development by that organization. In another *First Call*-derived project, Literacy BC was able to develop stronger ties with elementary schools and the Ministry of Education by helping to coordinate services and mutual strategies to advance family literacy. Our role also included consultation, support and information to the Ministry’s on its *Family Literacy Project Teacher’s Guide* (as part of their ‘*Champions Stay in School*’ program). In addition, Literacy BC was invited to support and consult with the Ministry of Education’s on its first literacy contest, called *BC Kids Write From the Heart*.

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While one of Literacy BC's aims is to extend its message beyond "the converted" to those who may not be aware of the impact of literacy issues on their particular areas of influence, we also take pride in projects with literacy partners in BC and across Canada. This past year, we have continued our long-standing relationship with ABC CANADA as consultants on their new LEARN Campaign advertising program (which promotes our Helpline to learners through yellow page ads). Furthermore, we began work with ABC CANADA on exciting national research about why learners come to literacy programs. As has been the case for a decade, we had another successful *Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf Tournament*.

It and other fund raising activities showed the importance of partnerships with corporate sponsors, members, donations, and other fund raising events. In fact, the 1999 budget shows that our gross and net fund raising revenues increased by over 16%, while related spending decreased by a similar percentage.

Providing Professional Development For Literacy Practitioners

Literacy BC's role is, at core, about facilitating the building of capacity for responsive, capable, community-based delivery of literacy services. This includes assisting in the development of a trained, informed, and connected community of literacy practitioners. Literacy BC is helping to do this in the following concrete ways:

- A one week Family Literacy Summer Institute attended by nearly 100 practitioners from across B.C. and Western Canada
- Semi-annual Regional Coordinators meetings
- Regional seminars and workshops around practitioner training
- The provision of professional development opportunities on the B.C. electronic network and conferencing service
- Development of the B.C. Framework of Statements and Standards of Best Practices in Family Literacy

Literacy BC has continued its involvement and support for the Youth Options BC *Youth Community Action Program*. The program provides youth with opportunities to gain valuable volunteer work experience related to their field of study and it earns them a tuition credit for post-secondary study in B.C. This past year, six program-sponsored students received training and work experience with Literacy BC.

Research Initiatives

In 1999-2000 Literacy BC led or partnered in several important research initiatives. One of these, called *Action Research: Learning How to Build a Provincial Literacy Network* was initiated by learners on the Literacy BC board who wanted to investigate ways learners in the province could build and maintain connections with each other. This unique and innovative project was managed by Literacy BC and funded by the B.C. literacy cost-shared program. Six adult learners, a Literacy BC project coordinator, and a research friend from the University of British Columbia conducted an intensive year-long investigation into how to build a learner network and into the collaborative process of working together as a research team. The project also included an extensive training component to build the skills and confidence needed to undertake this demanding project.

Literacy Research Circle

Literacy BC partnered with Simon Fraser University in an exciting new research initiative to establish and develop a practitioner-based literacy research circle in B.C. This project is funded under the Valuing Literacy in Canada grant program of the National Literacy Secretariat and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The project will develop the research capacity of literacy practitioners, encourage and assist cooperation between university researchers and practitioners, improve the dissemination and application of research results, stimulate research in key areas of inquiry, encourage the

training of practitioner researchers, and stimulate collaboration among researchers from different disciplines.

National Follow-Up Study on Patterns of Participation

Literacy BC partnered with ABC CANADA in a national follow-up study that looked at patterns of participation in Canadian literacy and upgrading programs. This national study built on previous research by Literacy BC in the provincial longitudinal study. A parallel finding in both studies was that program-related reasons were the main factor deterring

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enrolment for the largest percentage of callers. These findings challenge us to examine our practice.

Literacy BC also participated in another national study by ABC CANADA on the reasons why adults do not participate in literacy programs.

Raising Public Awareness

There are several ways in which Literacy BC was able to focus attention on the literacy issues. Among these, are the following:

- Media-sponsored symposiums and workshops for business, labour, government, and educator representatives
- Distribution of thousands of posters and information packages
- Events such as the annual *Take 5 and READ* campaign for International Literacy Day, and high profile *PGI Golf Tournament for Literacy*, *Family Literacy Day/Week Campaign* and *Word on the Street*.

Influencing Public Policy

By monitoring and consulting with governments, Literacy BC is able to keep literacy on the radar screen of public policy initiatives and enactments. Some of these activities include the following:

- Meetings with government representatives from education, social services, health, criminal justice and human resource development
- Providing policy consultation to the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training and Technology (MAETT).
- Regular dissemination of information kits and releases to key decision makers including MLAs and MPs
- Participating in national policy consultations.

Our members, funders and donors have made our work possible. Thank you for helping to create and build a strong network as we foster the notion and the practice of lifelong learning in B.C.

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MANY THANKS FROM LITERACY BC

Literacy BC relies on the generous support of many organizations, groups and individuals who contribute their time, energy and money to further the cause of literacy. We would like to say a special thank you to the following who made generous contributions to Literacy BC during the April 1999 – March 2000 period.

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