

Moving Forward: A National Summit on Libraries and Literacy

Summary from Tables: Morning Sessions

Wednesday, June 14, 2006

Table: Connecting libraries and basic skill agencies

Time: 10:30 – 11:30, 19 participants

Time: 11:30 to 12:30, 15 participants

Participants' experience with theme area:

Variety of participants from literacy agencies and libraries across the country (municipal, provincial and federal levels) as well as learners.

Opportunities:

General

- LBS (Literacy & Basic Skills) provides guidelines for literacy programs in Ontario; this can be improved and expanded
- Some programs are constrained (government regulations) as to age group they serve, BUT they can suggest younger learners visit their local libraries, etc.
- providing physical space for literacy programs *within* libraries
- remove barriers; identify what keeps people out of libraries and fix it!
- promote libraries *within* literacy programs (integral part of program)
- sharing resources, knowledge, expertise between all agencies/libraries
- integrate literacy to health, justice, etc.
- more opportunities to share (conferences like this one!) are essential!
- Promote positive aspects of literacy (NOT negative ones)
- Matching needs of learners with the right programs/services and practitioners
- Establish long-term goals/purpose to avoid re-inventing the wheel, embarking on un-necessary projects

Collection development

- AlphaPlus: are in a position to help libraries, etc. (ie: asses their resources/collection developmental tool) but *should they go in to libraries to assess collections?*
- Literacy agencies and libraries should consult each other, in order to improve services and materials provided
- In order to avoid un-necessary spending, different agencies/libraries should concentrate on specific collection development (ie: learner vs. practitioner resources)

Access

- Libraries and literacy agencies have good collections, but need to provide better access
- Literacy collections are ideally placed near newspapers/magazines to avoid making learners feel excluded, arrange materials in logical progression to encourage learners to continue improving their literacy levels
- Remember materials should not and cannot be all print-based

Community

- Partnership potential is huge, both with libraries and literacy agencies and with public/private sector
- involve corporations, encourage them to promote importance of literacy within their organizations – make it important to them!
- Promote activities to bring literacy learners into libraries,
- Promote community awareness of services and collections available in libraries AND literacy agencies
- Outreach librarians to promote community development: not just going out INTO the community, but working WITH the community
- Role of government agencies (ie: Library & Archives Canada), version of TD Summer Reading program for adults

Challenges:

- good existing literacy organizations, but not enough connections to library services and collections
- literacy needs to be linked to reading for pleasure, not *just* for employment purposes
- how to identify and justify what is being missed by literacy programs (ie: reading purely for pleasure)
- especially in Quebec, there is a need to be a better connection between literacy agencies and libraries, particularly as learners quickly exhaust the resources available in literacy centres
- particularly in Quebec, literacy has not been regarded as a very important issue, some programs exist but fairly disconnected (same situation in English and French)
- how to make literacy a mainstream, integrated part of library programming, not just project-based, short-term programmes
- avoiding duplication between agencies
- make all Canadians aware of literacy challenges, help those facing such challenges to self-identify and realise need/importance for improving literacy (especially in rural areas)
- *always* present friendly staff at circulation desks, sensitize staff to importance of making *all* patrons feel welcome in the library
- making libraries (print-based materials) relevant and appealing to Millennials

- dispel the myth that “only people who read go to libraries”
- specific rural issues (distance, access to limited materials, etc)
- figuring out **who** to talk to (right gov't agency for the right question)
- limited budgets, resource, staff, etc. causes strain on what can be provided properly
- accessibility; various types of abilities (visual impairments, etc.), transportation, babysitting issues (single parents)