

# *Live & Learn*

Winter 2007

The Newsletter of the PEI Literacy Alliance

January 27 declared Family Literacy Day!



From left to right: Shauna Sullivan Curley, Deputy Minister of Education, Catherine O'Bryan, PEI Literacy Alliance, Premier Pat Binns and Elmer MacFadyen, Minister of Community and Cultural Affairs

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## *Live & Learn*

The Newsletter of the PEI Literacy Alliance

*Live & Learn* is published by the PEI Literacy Alliance.

Edited and designed by Catherine O'Bryan and Norman Finlayson.

### **We would like to hear from you if you have:**

- learners' stories
- creative writing by learners
- articles or news about teaching adults
- upcoming events
- new resources for adult education

Please send your material to:

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by funding from the  
PGI Golf Tournament for Literacy.*

## **Message from the Chair**



It is hard to believe that we have “sprung ahead” already and we are ready to say good-bye to winter for another year.

Spring is traditionally a time of revitalization and renewal. Revisiting New Year’s resolutions that may have fallen by the wayside and adding some “oomph” to our routines.

The Alliance has caught spring fever as well. It has been a busy winter and among the highlights were Family Literacy Day, the Health & Literacy Summit, and another round of bursary applications. Planning is underway for the annual PGI golf tournament and the summer tutoring program. On the political front, we continue to support development of the provincial Literacy and Learning Strategy and maintain pressure on the federal government to fully restore literacy funding.

The Alliance is looking forward to what the future may bring for literacy groups. In the present political landscape, it is not enough to “wait and see” what will happen. We are holding a special planning day to map out our financial future, re-examine our goals, and investigate new ways to continue to support literacy issues for all residents of the province.

As spring approaches, we encourage all members to rekindle your passion for literacy and renew your commitment to move literacy forward in our communities.

*Angela Larter*

## Welcome Jinny

We'd like to welcome Jinny Greaves, our new staff member at the PEI Literacy Alliance. Her main role will be to research new funding opportunities for the Alliance.

Jinny has volunteered and worked in the non-profit sector for the last five years, beginning shortly after she received her undergraduate degree in business administration from UPEI. Some of her previous work includes coordinating projects and public events with the PEI Environment Network, Women's Network PEI, Council of Canadians, and the Cooper Institute.



Her current goals in life are to become fluently bilingual in French and English and to finish building her and her partner's log home in Mayfield. They have already felled and peeled all the logs they need, have the foundation built, and the beginnings of walls. Jinny's hope is that their log home will be powered fully with renewable energies such as wood, solar, and wind.

Jinny has many interests and hobbies. She enjoys playing guitar, painting, and making pottery. She also likes to play squash, go camping and hiking, and walk her dog Susie.

Jinny believes in the work of the Alliance and is thrilled to be a part of our team.

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### **Focused on Practice: A Framework for Adult Literacy Research in Canada**

Jenny Horsman & Helen Woodrow, Editors

This book outlines adult literacy programs and practices in every province and territory of Canada. It talks about what people have learned from doing research in their classrooms and how it has influenced their teaching. One chapter is a bibliography of writings on the topic of research in practice.

Karen Chandler's article is reprinted here on page 4. The article "Puzzling over RiP" by Ian Carr also has an Island connection.

The Literacy Alliance has a number of copies of this resource to give away. If you would like a copy contact [peila@eastlink.ca](mailto:peila@eastlink.ca) and we will mail it to you.



**Literacy Snapshot  
Prince Edward Island  
June, 2006 - Karen Chandler**

Prince Edward Island is the smallest province in Canada with a total population of approximately 138,000. According to the 2003 IALSS, 43% of adult Islanders are at Level 1 and 2. Of that number, 14,000 are at Level 1. According to Statistics Canada, there are 36,000 out of school youth and adults under 55 who do not have Grade 12.

For those who wish to improve their skills or obtain a Grade 12 certificate, Literacy/Adult Basic Education Programs are offered province wide through Holland College and community learning centres. Programs include literacy, high school credits leading to The PEI High School Graduation Certificate for Mature Students, and GED Preparation. The program is funded by the province and the Canada/PEI Labour Market Development Agreement and there is no charge to learners who attend the program. Participants must be at least 18 years of age and out of the public school system for one year. The challenge faced in this program is one of attracting low level literacy learners. We know they are “out there” but having them self-identify is a major issue.

The practitioners who facilitate these programs are hired by Holland College and require a PEI Teacher’s Licence as well as experience or formal training in adult education. They are hired on short term contracts and receive health and retirement benefits. The instructors in this setting have generally been part of the system for several years and are comfortable with that arrangement. Their issues are not so much around the terms of their employment as they are around the methods and supports

needed to help those with low literacy skills to move forward.

Workplace Education PEI, a partnership of business, labour and government ensures learning opportunities in the workplace/workforce. Programs are developed following organizational needs assessments and individual needs assessments. Funding for workplace education programs is always a challenge. We cobble together funding from various sources to cover the costs of programming. The other major challenge in workplace education is finding employers who are willing to offer employees the opportunity to improve their literacy skills in the workplace and in finding qualified instructors who are able to commit to the uncertainty and limited hours of employment.

The Volunteer Literacy Program provides one-on-one literacy tutoring to individuals who may not be ready to participate in the Literacy/ABE Program offered by Holland College. The challenge faced with this program is having enough trained volunteers to fill the needs as they arise. Ongoing training and providing support services for the tutors is a necessity. Project funding provides coordination and training support for tutors.

The combined efforts of the PEI Literacy Initiatives Secretariat and the PEI Literacy Alliance are making progress in moving the literacy agenda forward in this province and have created a sense of urgency to address literacy issues. In response, Premier Binns has committed his government to take the lead in working with communities and business partners to develop a provincial Literacy and Learning Strategy that will incorporate all life stages.

Earlier, in a presentation to the Rotary Club of Charlottetown, Premier Binns made the statement, “Government cannot solve the literacy problem alone but all Islanders working together can make a difference for our future and for the future of Island families”. In May of this year, he called together his senior bureaucrats, policy makers, communications officers and deputy ministers to hear the latest literacy survey results and the implications of these results for both children and adults in the province. As a follow-up, he directed those in

attendance to find ways of putting literacy front and centre in all dealings with the public and to report back on how it is being implemented in each department.

The move to transform PEI into a literate society must be grounded in solid evidence-based decision making. We have current international and national literacy research but there is also the need to create new knowledge in the form of PEI based literacy research. As a result of the data collected during interviews and focus groups for the project *Developing a National Framework for Research in Practice in Adult Literacy in Canada*, it was determined that in general, research activity over the past several years has been limited in this province.

PEI does not have a framework to encourage research activity and there is no support for Research in Practice. However, efforts are being made to change that situation. Just last year, the Literacy Research Network (LRN) was created as a joint initiative of the University of Prince Edward Island and the PEI Literacy Alliance. Its mandate is to promote, develop and disseminate literacy research in PEI while increasing the research capacity of community based organizations. LRN will take the lead through mentoring programs along with a series of workshops to help community leaders use research in their policy making and program delivery.

As in the other provinces, PEI has significant barriers to research in practice which are common across the country. According to Audrey Penner, Program Manager at the Institute of Adult and Community Education, *some of the barriers that may be limiting the research activity at the practitioner level in this organization include negativity around the term, a lack of confidence in being able to conduct research, lack of time and more importantly, lack of funding for long term projects.* The practitioners themselves questioned the value of existing research, their level of expertise and where they would find the time. According to Jessie Lees, a researcher for the LRN, *if the literacy effort in PEI is to reach its potential, it will be necessary to convey the everyday usefulness, comprehensibility, and interest in research.*

At the practitioner level, lack of time was cited more frequently than was the issue of funding. However, those interviewees who have experience in writing proposals expressed concern about the present funding criteria. Jessie Lees, also feels that there are many problems associated with proposal based funding. *We have good people wasting time writing proposals in competition with each other and the research has to fit the proposal, not the need.* She has learned that proposals should include funding that covers enough time for implementation, feedback and revision.

Ray Doiron, Co-Director of the Learning Research Network (LRN), echoes Jessie's sentiments and feels that too much research is driven by someone else's agenda. *People are not free to ask their own questions as they have to make the question fit the proposal. They often do not have the freedom, the flexibility or the resources to do it well.*

It was obvious from the conversations with practitioners that the possibility of engaging in research activity has not, in most cases been brought to their attention. As a result of the sessions, I feel that practitioners may look more critically at existing research and perhaps through time may show more interest in research that directly impacts their practice. The concept of a mentorship program has been introduced by the LRN and in the introductory phase, two non-researchers participated in research projects. By continuing to offer this approach, the LRN may entice practitioners to become involved.

The recent findings of the IALLS and PISA as it relates to PEI raise many questions in the field or adult education. Why are the literacy rates in PEI so low? Why do those who need to improve their educational levels not come forward? What strategies will work best for those who do? How can we identify and better serve those with learning disabilities? How can we dispel the myths about those who are incarcerated?

The PEI Literacy Action Agenda calls for Literacy for All by the year 2020. It appears that the time is right for literacy research that is current and relevant to the needs of Islanders.

*Karen Chandler serves on the board of the PEI Literacy Alliance.*

## 2007 Health and Literacy Summit



Linda Shohet and Judy King, facilitators for our Summit

On March 1<sup>st</sup>, the PEI Literacy Alliance hosted a Health and Literacy Summit at the Delta Hotel. It was a day for community and government to learn about the links between literacy and health. It was also a chance for everyone to work together to determine the first steps that should be taken to increase health literacy on PEI. Health literacy is the ability to access and understand health information.

The Ministers of Health and Education opened the Summit, followed by research presentations on the links between health and literacy, and facilitated group sessions for participants to discuss 'creating a health-literate community.'

Seventy people attended. Participants ranged from childcare professionals to those working with seniors.

According to Linda Shohet, summit facilitator and executive director of the Centre for Literacy in Quebec, 46% of Islanders have low literacy, and for the last four decades low literacy rates on PEI have not improved. Difficulty in reading or understanding can lead to dangerous results in medical treatment.

Judy King, from the University of Ottawa, explained that health care professionals often overestimate a patient's level of reading comprehension and may blame failure to follow instructions on poor motivation.

Health professionals need to use common words not medical jargon. They need to take their time - they will save time in the long run. They need to give clients enough details so that they can integrate the information into their lives; they need to use the 'teach back' or 'show me' teaching method.

Participants had over 50 suggestions for a five-year plan for PEI to increase health-literacy. Two highlights were:

- goals stated by the government to reduce low literacy rates in PEI with strategies funded and supported to meet these goals
- a formalized program for literacy training for healthcare providers.

Nishka Smith, summit evaluator, stated that an environmental scan is needed. Linda Shohet agreed saying this is a necessary first step and went on to say that research that is specific to PEI will help us understand the needs of Islanders.

*The Health & Literacy Summit was part of a two-year project funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada.*



## Research Conversation

On December 11 the Literacy Research Network (LRN) held a “lunch and learn” meeting. About twenty researchers and community members heard presentations from Angela Larter and Jessie B. Lees on their current research findings.

Angela’s study titled “Putting a Price Tag on Learning” explored the financial and social costs of going back to school to adult learners in PEI.

Jessie did a scan of all literacy research done in PEI since 1990. Her report titled Literacy Research in PEI: A Reflection examines where we have been, what we have learned and what are the research gaps.

Both projects were supported by the Literacy Research Network which aims to add to the collection of made-in-PEI literacy research.

Call the PEI Literacy Alliance at 902-368-3620 for your free copies of their studies or e-mail [peila@eastlink.ca](mailto:peila@eastlink.ca).

We plan to hold the next research conversation on March 29th.

## Adult learners are people just like you

They have hopes and dreams for themselves and their children but less opportunity to realize them because of their difficulty reading and writing.

Learners talk of poverty, family obligations, abuse, learning disabilities, and not getting the help they needed at school as some of the many reasons they missed out on their education as children.

The learners we spoke to want the opportunity to take control of and responsibility for their education now as adults.

*“If you can’t read you have to be fully engaged and aware all the time! People with literacy problems have had to find other ways to cope everyday; it’s a type of genius.”*

### Learners want better literacy skills:

- to use at home: read to their children or help with homework; read labels; safely give or take medicine; read recipes; understand warranties; follow instructions and read manuals to perform other household tasks.
- to use in the community: read bus or train schedules; talk comfortably with doctors; shop economically; do banking without help; attend local events and use the library effectively.
- to use as involved citizens: read the newspaper; decide how to vote; take part on boards and committees; speak out on matters affecting their children and themselves; understand legal information and their rights as parents, tenants and citizens.

*Source: What Adult Literacy Learners Would Like YOU to Know brochure*

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## **Congratulations**

Shauna Sullivan Curley, Deputy Minister of Education, is the winner of the 2007 Lieutenant Governor's Award for Excellence in Public Administration. The award was presented by the Honourable Barbara A. Hagerman, Lieutenant Governor, and Keith Hillier, Regional Chair of the Institute of Public Administration at a ceremony at Government House.



The award recognizes outstanding contributions to the public sector by employees who exhibit high standards of excellence, dedication and accomplishment, and whose exceptional achievements have shown distinctive leadership in public administration in Prince Edward Island.

## **2007 Summer Tutoring Program**

For the past several years the PEI Literacy Alliance has sponsored this program. We want to create a list of eligible tutors for 2007 if funding is secured.

You may apply if you:

- were registered as a full-time student in 2006-07
- intend to return to school on a full-time basis in the next academic year
- are a student in a secondary, post-secondary, vocational or technical program
- are between 15 and 30 years of age at the time of your interview
- are a Canadian citizen, permanent resident or a person on whom refugee protection has been conferred under the Immigration and refugee Protection Act
- are legally entitled to work according to provincial legislation and regulations
- are not working 30 hours or more per week at another job

For more information call 902-368-3620 or e-mail [peila@eastlink.ca](mailto:peila@eastlink.ca).



**Support our PGI Golf Tournament for Literacy**

We are looking for sponsors, golfers and donations. Call Norm or Catherine at 368-3620.

Thursday, June 14 at Andersons Creek