

Foundational Learning – Aboriginal Literacy Initiatives

Jurisdiction: Alberta

Contact: Barbara Leung

Level: Post-Secondary

Theme: Community-Based Practices

Description of Practice:

Alberta Advanced Education and Technology is committed to initiatives aimed at improving foundational learning in the province. Foundational learning refers to the learning opportunities and supports required to attain and maintain the foundation skills or competencies that enable individuals to participate socially, pursue further learning, and have satisfying employment. Literacy skills are a critical in providing a foundation for further learning.

Background:

Alberta has a strong history of supporting community-based learning. In the early 1970's the Government of Alberta established Further Education Councils, which were renamed Community Adult Learning Councils in 1994. Today, learners in over 80 communities are supported through the Community Adult Learning Program. The Community Adult Learning Program provides opportunities in local communities for adults, including Aboriginal, immigrant, and other underrepresented groups, to return to learning to meet their personal learning or employment goals. Individuals and communities benefit from the efforts of Community Adult Learning Councils, volunteer tutor adult literacy programs and family literacy programs, as capacity is strengthened through individual learning, organizational development and community collaboration. These community-based organizations are supported with significant volunteer and local support. The goals of the Community Adult Learning Program are:

- To improve the accessibility of learning opportunities in Alberta's communities, especially for those individuals with special needs or barriers to learning.
- To provide opportunities for Albertans to acquire important foundational skills such as literacy and English as a Second Language.
- To address education, training and learning gaps in Alberta's communities.
- To mobilize community volunteers and other resources in support of learning.
- To contribute to solving individual and community problems through learning initiatives, in coordination and cooperation with related organizations.

Advanced Education and Technology provides annual ongoing grants to Community Adult Learning Councils. Through the Parent-Child Literacy Strategy, nonprofit organizations can apply for a maximum of \$40,000 a year. Grants are provided for one to three year periods.

Aboriginal Family Literacy

The Parent-Child Literacy Strategy is an intergenerational program that focuses on parents and other adult caregivers and their preschool children. The strategy recognizes that parents are the first teachers, and aims to boost their confidence and skills in engaging their young children in early learning and emergent literacy activities. In 2004, an Aboriginal-specific component was developed which included supports for the re-establishment of First languages. Since 2004, nine family literacy projects have been established with Aboriginal organizations and communities and up to three additional projects are expected to be delivered in 2006/2007. Assisted by an Aboriginal Advisory

Committee, the department is currently supporting the following eight family literacy programs:

- Ben Calf Robe Society
- Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement
- Lac La Biche Regional Awasisak & Family Development Circle Association
- Red Road Healing Society
- Edson Friendship Centre
- Kikino Métis Settlement
- Rocky Native Friendship Centre
- Lloydminster Métis Housing Group Inc.

Development:

While Alberta has one of the best learning systems in the world, certain populations including Aboriginal people, Albertans residing in northern and remote communities, individuals whose parents have low income and/or lower levels of educational attainment, persons with disabilities and new immigrants remain underrepresented in their ability to participate and benefit from formal and informal learning.

The Ministry is committed to improving Aboriginal community-based access to foundational learning opportunities. The Ministry is currently reviewing recommendations made in the A Learning Alberta: Final Report of the Steering Committee.

Evidence:

During the 2005/2006 year, 245 parents and 321 children participated in the Aboriginal component of the Parent-Child Literacy Strategy.

Adaptability:

All activities described could be adapted for use in other jurisdictions.

Further information:

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