

Literacy more than just books

RYAN LUX
Staff Reporter

Just because most people in Fort St. John can read and write, it doesn't mean they possess literacy skills, said Erin Evans of the North Peace Literacy Alliance.

Literacy means more than the ability to read. To be fully literate an individual must be able to understand and employ printed information in daily activities.

"It means the ability to critically analyze and interpret information, and know what to do with it," said Evans.

A national study on literacy in 2006 revealed that 40 per cent of the city's residents do not have the literacy to fully function in a modern economy. That's five per cent higher than the provincial average and may not fully represent the community's literacy gaps.

Studies suggest that there is a link between literacy rates and community health,

crime, education attainment, civic engagement and unemployment.

Fort St. John residents in particular fair poorly when judged by these indicators, said Evans.

People in the Peace Region live, on average, three years less than other British Columbians – 78 years as opposed to the provincial expectancy of 80. There are higher rates of chronic disease and cancer among people living in the Fort St. John area.

Violent crime rates are double the provincial average in this city and the level of educational attainment is far lower than the provincial rate.

More than 25 per cent of people living in Fort St. John do not have a high school diploma, compared to 19 per cent province wide. In terms of civic engagement, only 48.8 per cent of eligible voters cast votes compared to 59.1 per cent nation wide.

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Erin Evans, community coordinator at the North Peace Literacy Alliance is trying to improve Fort St. John's literacy through awareness and programming.

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Mayor Bruce Lantz presented Erin Evans of the North Peace Literacy Alliance with a proclamation that January in Fort St. John would be Literacy Awareness Month.

Local kids love to read

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This year's theme is rock 'n' roll. Kids will use stickers to fill out rock tickets as they read more, making for a fun keepsake after the program ends.

Peltier, along with fellow university students Jessica Lum and Ryan Bolton, has been hard at work designing rock-themed posters, displays and activities to make the program unique and exciting for kids.

"What we really try to do at the library and the summer reading club is to make reading fun," she said, "so that's why we have the activities. We always match read-

ing books with fun activities."

She added that kids never seem to need much inspiration to read, as there are so many books out there they already like.

"The Harry Potter craze really kicked kids off and got them into reading. Since then there's been kind of a resurgence of interesting book series for kids. We always have kids coming in here saying 'Oh I've already read these books, I've read Harry Potter and Twilight, what can I read now?' There's all sorts of material out there and stuff for anyone - books about sports, animals, nonfiction, everything."

The program rewards everyone

who joins, but there are also prizes for specific accomplishments, such as biggest readers. Kids keep reading logs to track their reading and it doesn't matter whether they're reading independently, with a parent, or having a parent read to them.

"We encourage kids to read as much as possible, always with the idea that any reading is great," said Peltier.

Registration opens on June 30 at 10 a.m. at the Fort St. John Public Library. For more information on the "Reading Rocks" Summer Reading Club, email fsj.src@gmail.com or call 250-785-3731.

Northern Lights College works with Province to improve literacy

DAVID BELL
Staff Writer

The Province has partnered with 64 community literacy programs to help adults read and write at higher levels.

"Literate people create strong communities and strong communities build a strong province," said Moira Stilwell, Minister for Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, in a statement Wednesday.

"The thousands of people helped through this year's programs alone will have the skills they need to be better workers, and better citizens."

Provincial funding through the Community Adult Literacy Program (CALP) of \$2.4 million has been com-

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mitted this year to support the programs, delivered through community groups and post secondary institutions.

A Northern Lights College representative said the program is needed in Fort St. John.

"Literacy is a very big problem in northern communities," said Junko Leclair, a recruiter at the Fort St. John campus of the college.

"Many local people have left school early to join the workforce, build a family, or for other reasons, which contributes to lower literacy levels. As one of the service providers, one very strong message I always want to convey to people is that there is no shame in having low literacy, and it is never too late to start."

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Literacy not just about reading

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At Northern Lights College, the program is called Career and College Preparation, a part of the Adult Basic Education program.

"Our program is targeted towards students whose academic levels are somewhere between Grade 9 to 12 level, and for Grade 9 and 10 levels we offer the basic math and English courses in tutorial style. This program has been around for a long time, and we are only one of many service providers in Fort St. John," Leclair

explained.

CALP programs around the province get up to \$40,000 each to give instruction and help to adult learners in areas from literacy to high school completion. Most offer one-on-one tutoring by volunteers and in small classes. Other tools are used to improve outcomes for adults, First Nations students, younger and low income adults.

Leclair said literacy covers a wide range of areas.

"Having a confidence in literacy not only contributes positively to their job opportunities,

it also contributes greatly to their own quality of life. When I say literacy, I include reading, writing, numeracy, computer literacy, and general life skills. Funding literacy programs is great and anyone who is aware of their lack of confidence in literacy should seek help."

About 7,000 adults are expected to take part in programs around the province this year.

For more information contact Northern Lights College at 250-782-5251 or by visiting www.nlc.bc.ca/campuses.fortstjohn.profile.php.