

# Regional libraries band together to improve services

TESSA HOLLOWAY  
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

The Northeast Library Federation was officially launched last week to help libraries work together with an annual grant of \$47,000 from the provincial government.

The new federation replaces the Peace River Library Association and will allow seven libraries to buy books in bulk, share materials more efficiently and upgrade their technology and catalogue systems. The federation, three years in the making, includes the libraries in Fort St. John, Taylor, Hudson's Hope, Chetwynd, Pouce Coupe, Tumbler Ridge and Fort Nelson. Dawson Creek was the only library in the region not to join.

Andy Ackerman, chair of the Fort St. John Library Board and member of the Northeast Library Federation board, said the move will help save libraries money.

"Libraries purchase a considerable amount of things every year – books,

computers, all that normal operating equipment. I think by working as a federation we can increase those efficiencies by joint purchases," he said, adding the federation plans to hire a staff person that will also take workload off of the library staff and coordinate between libraries.

Ackerman said they can also receive government funding as a library federation that they couldn't receive under the old association structure, allowing them to invest in new technology and services that were previously out of reach.

"We're looking at a whole new shared IT system for libraries...so that all libraries will have the same databases and all the same equipment and all that kind of stuff and

that all costs money," he said.

Library federations have already been established in four other regions in B.C.

Deb Thomas, president of the B.C. Library Association, helped found the Kootenay Library Federation. She said the program is an asset for small, rural libraries.

"When you're a very small library it's very hard to find enough dollars in a given year to warrant a large discount for a book dealer," she said. "We were able to negotiate a very good discount, one that was probably comparable to what the much bigger libraries were getting."

However, the library board at Dawson Creek didn't see any benefit in joining, according to Marilyn Belak, city council representative on

the library board.

"We were leading edge in B.C. with all the technology and all the things that this presents libraries with," she said, adding the decentralized nature of the program makes it too alike the Peace River Library Association that already existed,

"It's kind of rebuilding the wheel in every area rather than having a strong central area that would help us tie in everything together. I think that's evolving but there were a few leading libraries like us who said we're just going to wait for this program to evolve."

The province also announced \$23,000 in funding each for two English as a Second Language programs for recent immigrants last week. The programs, run by the Fort St. John Literacy Society and the Fort Nelson Community Literacy Society in partnership with Northern Lights College, will each provide one-on-one tutoring, group sessions and training to assist with common activities to 12 to 15 immigrants.

“**When you are a small library it's very hard to find enough dollars...**

– Deb Thomas

President, B.C. Library Association

# Literacy society receives funding

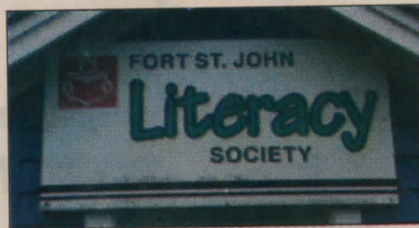
**TESSA HOLLOWAY**  
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

The Fort St. John Literacy Society received \$40,000 in funding from the provincial government Friday.

North Peace MLA Richard Neufeld announced a total of \$108,000 in funding for adult literacy programs in the region. Last year, the local literacy society was the only project to receive funding at \$28,240. This year, they were joined by the Fort Nelson Community Literacy Project, which received the other \$68,000.

The announcement is part of \$2.4 million in funding for adult literacy programs across the province, up from \$1.4 million last year.

Jean McFadden, coordinator for the Fort St. John Literacy Society, said the extra money will go towards covering operating costs to support expanded programs such as increased English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, a new immigrant program and the Words on Wheels bus.



**Fort St. John Literacy Society**

"Our programs have expanded and so it's just recognizing an expansion has taken place," she said.

But despite the expansion, most of their programs are still at capacity or have a waiting list, including 16 people in the ESL program.

"We're helping the new immigrants to Canada overcome their language barriers because they're coming skilled but they need the language," said McFadden.

She said these programs need to be expanded even more, especially given literacy skills and high school completion in the northeast lags the provincial average.

She said they're also partnering with other provincial initiatives including Literacy B.C. and Read Now B.C.

"Literacy is the key to strong communities and a strong economy," said Richard Neufeld, who made the funding announcement.

"This investment will bring new opportunities to residents throughout our region and help us meet our goal of making British Columbia one of the most literate jurisdictions in North America."

The Fort Nelson Community Literacy Society received \$68,310 split among three new programs they're offering. The Prophet River Family Drop-in program and Family Drop-in program receive \$24,420 and \$23,980 respectively to help both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young parents become involved with their children's education, while the Sikanni Adult Learning program received \$19,910 to help young workers in the burgeoning oil and gas industry attain literacy skills needed for work.

# Literacy benefits form provincial funding

FORT ST. JOHN - The province is investing over \$108,000 in projects to improve adult literacy skills in Peace River North.

"Literacy is the key to strong communities and a strong economy," said Peace River North MLA Richard Neufeld.

Four literacy programs in the region will share \$108,310 to

deliver adult literacy programs ranging from family tutoring to literacy education for young oil and gas workers.

*Fort St. John Family Literacy and Outreach Centre* - \$40,000 - Matches 50 adults with 20 volunteer tutors, offers two 12-week family literacy sessions a year, holds at least two new tutor training workshops a year and provides monthly seminars for experienced tutors.

*Prophet River Family Drop-in Program* - \$24,420 - This program helps aboriginal parents become partners in their children's education. They will take part in crafts and other play-time activities, learn safe and healthy food preparation, network with other aboriginal families, and have access to literacy material and help from tutors.

*Sikanni Adult Learning Program* - \$19,910 - This new program will help meet the literacy needs resulting from the oil and gas industry boom in the Fort Nelson region, which often attracts young men from other areas who are not prepared for starting work. One-on-one tutoring will be provided, and help connecting with other community resources.

*Family Drop-in Program* - \$23,980 - This program will address needs of young families in Fort Nelson. The program includes parents learning to interact with their children through crafts and play, and becoming partners in their children's education. The parents will also learn about safe and healthy food preparation and nutrition.

# REGION

## Adult literacy targeted in F.S.J.

**HARDY FRIEDRICH**  
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

This is not only the first week of school for children in the city, but it's also the start of another campaign by the Fort St. John Literacy Society to raise literacy and high school graduation rates among adults.

Nearly one-quarter of adults aged 20-34 living in northeast B.C. have less than a high school education, compared to a provincial average of 14.6 per cent, according to a 2001 Statistics Canada study.

But while some parents may be able to get by, the effects are often felt by children who aren't read to often enough. And with the third-highest birth rate in the province, not every local student is prepared for the first day of school.

"It impacts family literacy," said Jean McFadden, coordinator for the Fort St. John Literacy Society. "The importance of parents reading to their kids at home is that it gives them a head start when they start school."

The society has been working on improving the statistics, partly through the Choose Success family literacy program. Sign-up for interested adults

is taking place at the One Stop Registration at the Kids Arena on Sept. 8, also International Literacy Day.

For Fort St. John resident Jody Van Koughnett, the program helped her achieve a Grade 12 diploma and set a precedent for her 10-year-old son and five-year-old daughter.

She dropped out of high school in Grade 8, which wasn't a tough decision at the time considering both of her parents had done the same.

"I have children now and I want them to stay in school. It was important to me to finish so I had the diploma to back me up," she said. "For my son, he's seen me do schoolwork his whole life now, so it's kind of a natural part of life to him."

Free child care and tutorial support at the local literacy society eased some of the pressures of finishing a high school education.

"It's a good program – they do a lot

to help out," the 28-year-old mother said.

The Words on Wheels bus and Understanding the Early Years are other local programs aimed at improving literacy among local children.

The literacy society also expects to be busy with English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. The program is building on a successful 2006 pilot project that experienced a higher-than-expected enrollment.

"We've had a lot of new immigrants into the community because the economy is so strong," McFadden said.

Over the past year, 38 resident ESL learners took part in one-on-one adult tutoring. The new sessions begin in October.

The Choose Success family literacy program begins this month.

The society also offers a Community Adult Literacy Program for those wishing to improve their work skills or pursue other learning goals.

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— Jody Van Koughnett