

The Centre for Family Literacy is dedicated to helping Alberta grow and prosper.



# The Centre for Family Literacy Centre Page

November 2005

## Edmonton Literacy Classroom on Wheels (C.O.W.) Bus

“One cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of those first years for the course that a child will follow throughout his entire life.”

Erasmus (1466 –1536)



The Literacy C.O.W. Bus has been on the road since September 2000 and has delivered family literacy programs to over 5,000 children and adults within the City of Edmonton. Each year 10 low-income, high-density housing areas are selected for weekly visits from the C.O.W. Bus.

When the C.O.W. Bus arrives in their neighbourhood, it is an extremely exciting time for both parents and their children. One parent commented “My children’s lives have been really impacted by the C.O.W. Bus

coming to Sakaw ... they have learned to respect books, play with other children and share.”

The bus is a bookmobile that offers an opportunity for families with limited resources to borrow books for free. The program is run on the bus and is very informal. Parents and their children come to the bus together to borrow books and participate in stories, songs, puzzles and quiet activities. Our goal is to provide a safe and friendly place for families and this has been key to the success of the program.

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## Childcare Training

In 2003, Dr. Ruth Hayden, Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta and Maureen Sanders, Executive Director of the Centre for Family Literacy developed training in Oral Language and Literacy Development for child caregivers. This year, again with funding from Alberta Children’s Services, we are directly delivering these “First Steps” training workshops to day home and childcare workers across Alberta.

Because so many children spend significant time in care settings everyday, the impact of caregivers on children’s language development has become a focus of recent research. A Canadian study has shown that children benefit when their caregivers receive training in providing high quality language interactions. Results included that children whose

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## Edmonton Literacy Classroom on Wheels (C.O.W.) Bus *Continued from page 1*

There are two staff members who work on the bus and their focus is not only on loaning books but also on building relationships with parents and children. They provide support to parents to help them nurture their children's language and literacy development and link them with other programs at the Centre or in the community.

In addition to the book borrowing and literacy programs, there are weekly draws for gift books or grocery coupons to encourage families to return their books on a regular basis. Parents very much value this incentive. One parent stated "I'm so glad I won the draw today. I was wondering how I was going to buy milk." Another parent commented "My four year old son asks me to read the C.O.W. gift book every night."

Many of the parents who participate in the C.O.W. program develop life-long reading habits. Their new confidence as active participants in their children's literacy development fosters greater possibilities for the future academic success of their children.

The Literacy C.O.W. Bus was the initiative of the Success by 6<sup>®</sup> Council of Partners and since its inception the Centre for Family Literacy has been delivering the program on their behalf. The Success by 6<sup>®</sup> Council of Partners is now transitioning out of direct programming and the Centre is currently looking for funding to continue this very successful program in 2006.

*This program is currently funded by Success by 6<sup>®</sup>, Rotary Club of Edmonton, Edmonton Oilers Community Foundation, United Way of Alberta Capital Region.*



“Encouraging families to have fun reading sets a wonderful foundation for students beginning school. The Classroom on Wheels Bus in many cases is the first inspiration children get as far as literacy is concerned and a great inspiration it is!”

Shirley Gresik, Librarian  
Athlone Elementary School



*Staff from ABC Child Development Centre, Edmonton, discuss information from the First Steps resource manual.*

## Childcare Training *Continued from page 1*

caregivers received training "used more word combinations and spoke more often with their peers." (Girolametto and Greenberg, 2003)

The childcares and day homes that participate in First Steps training receive an assortment of quality children's books to support their work. "This has inspired me to do more with what I know and have learned" and "Most interesting class in years" are participant comments that reflect the value of the workshops to these frontline childcare workers, and all have been excited to receive the new books.

Caregivers who attend the training learn ways to further enhance the work they already do to support children's oral language and literacy development. The training is not about adding to their workload, but enriching the quality of their language and literacy interactions with children. Together we talk about the research that proves, and of course the daily evidence they see, that literacy begins at birth!

## Centre Forms Partnership with Research Firm

The Centre for Family Literacy is pleased to be working with Pivotal Research Inc. on a study of family literacy in the workplace.

Using the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey research conducted by Statistics Canada as a foundation, the research will measure family literacy in two ways. First, the importance of literacy in a range of occupations will be determined. Second, case studies for a sample of occupations will measure family literacy expectations of the respondents when they were growing up, what education, training and professional development they have achieved and how family literacy values are communicated to their children.

The case study approach will assist in understanding how family literacy in Alberta has evolved over generations and will add to the knowledge generated from other research. We look forward to releasing the results of this study in January 2006.

## A Commitment to Literacy Will Benefit Alberta's Economy

A commitment to literacy is crucial to Alberta's future prosperity and competitiveness was the key message for Edmonton business leaders at a recent breakfast held at the Centre for Family Literacy.

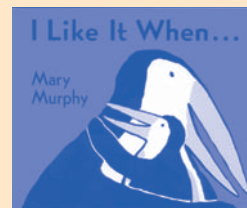
Sustained and sustainable prosperity requires building the skills of Alberta workers and literacy is the foundation upon which these skills are built. The breakfast meeting was an opportunity for the Centre to bring our message that literacy develops in families first. The meeting also included a roundtable discussion on how we could work together to impact literacy in our community.

This was a great opportunity to forge new relationships with the business community and we were encouraged to hold more of these events in an effort to build awareness of the literacy challenges facing Albertans.

## Selected Books

Here are some of the wonderful children's books we are distributing to day homes and childcare centres across Alberta to help support and inspire literacy development.

**Board books** for our youngest "readers" ages 0 - 3 and feature few words per page:



***I Like it When ...*** – Mary Murphy. Bright, bold colours for young eyes and warm feelings about the joys of holding hands, tickling, reading together...

***Let's Play*** – Leo Lionni.

Asks "What shall we do today?" and then goes through possible activities such as swimming and picking flowers. Good ideas that children could add to as a model for discussing options with them, especially for when they're bored!

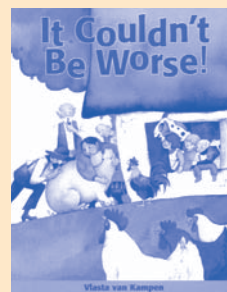


**Information book**  
for ages 4 - 8:

***Dinosaur 123 ABC!*** – Illustrated by Jan Lewis. Scholastic book, no author. Colourful drawings of dinosaurs with good word play as well as practice with the alphabet and with counting. Great for little boys who love dinosaurs! The dictionary section at back provides scientific names of dinosaurs. Can use different sections for younger and older children.



**Storybook** for ages 3 - 5



***It Couldn't Be Worse!*** – Vlasta van Kampen. Beautifully illustrated, fairy tale type of story about a rural family uses rich vocabulary and the predictable refrain "It couldn't be worse."

## Centre Receives Canada Post Literacy Award

The Canada Post Literacy Awards have been presented for the past 13 years and recognize the efforts of learners, educators, volunteers, and business leaders who have made a significant contribution to improving reading and writing skills in communities across the country. The four categories of awards are Individual Achievement, Educator, Community Leadership, and Business Leadership.

The Centre for Family Literacy was selected out of 223 nominations and won in the category of Community Leadership.

“This organization was the first centre to focus on the development of literacy in the context of the family.”

Maureen Sanders, Executive Director  
Centre for Family Literacy

“Our innovative programs, training and research help Alberta families achieve what they imagine – improved education, jobs and health. That’s been our greatest reward. But to receive national recognition for the impact



our work has in the community — that’s icing on the cake”, Maureen continued.

The Centre was selected for the award based on its outstanding track record of success. In 2004 alone, 6,700 participants benefited from the many programs offered by the Centre, such as one-on-one tutoring for adults and the innovative Classroom-on-Wheels (C.O.W.), a literacy bus painted to resemble a cow that makes weekly trips to distribute literacy materials and

programs to families with limited resources.

The award was presented in a ceremony held in Lethbridge, Alberta on September 12th.

## Centre launches Electronic Newsletter

If you prefer to receive this CentrePage newsletter via email rather than by mail, please advise us by emailing [cfla@eLit.ca](mailto:cfla@eLit.ca). The electronic version will be available in 2006. Please reference Centre Page in your request.

## Literacy Develops in Families First

The Centre for Family literacy is dedicated to helping Alberta grow and prosper. Our innovative programs, training and research help Alberta families achieve what they imagine - improved education, jobs and health.

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