



# The Centre for Family Literacy Centre Page

## ALBERTA PRAIRIE C.O.W. PROGRAM PUT TO PASTURE

### Our Vision:

*A healthy,  
literate society  
where all  
are able to  
contribute and  
succeed.*

**T**he Alberta Prairie C.O.W. Bus program will make its last visits this June. Travelling the length and breadth of the province for the past 13 ½ years, the C.O.W. Bus has promoted family literacy and provided parents and their preschool children with the opportunity to explore fun activities that support early language and literacy development.

The program worked in partnership with community organizations and a visit from the C.O.W. bus helped those organizations build awareness of their own programs. Each visit also included the presentation, to the community, of a Legacy Library of 50 quality children's books.



Our C.O.W. staff have many fond memories. As one staff member commented, "travelling to Hutterite Colonies and Aboriginal/First Nation communities was a highlight for me. I felt as if I learned more from them, than they ever learned from me!" Another staff member mentioned the challenges of driving the bus "over very windy or hilly roads like Highway 40 to Grande Cache in the winter, or the ice road north of Fort McMurray to Fort Chipewyan." For

most of our staff, making an impact in each community was the most important part of the

*Continued on page 2*

## SUPPORTING MARGINALIZED WOMEN

“ Me no write! Me no read! Me no go to school. Me have no money for child care. Here is my chance... ”

was the cry of one of the women attending the Women's Literacy class at the Rahma Mosque.

The class is made up of immigrant mothers desperate to break the cycle of isolation and dependency, who are inhibited by their inability to read and write. Despite the obstacles, these women have an impressive thirst for knowledge and a determination to change their futures.

Their journey started when three women approached the Centre for information on our Volunteer Tutor Program. They revealed that many women in their community would benefit from the program but could not access it due to either distance or a lack of child care. They asked the management of Rahma Mosque for permission to use the mosque as a venue for a group literacy class. Thus began the Women's Literacy class.

Despite their common religion, the women have diverse backgrounds, needs, and abilities. They come from different countries (India, Syria, Morocco and Somalia), range in

*Continued on page 2*

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## ALBERTA PRAIRIE C.O.W.

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job. "There was one librarian who was so inspired by all the ideas and activities that she started a 'remember the C.O.W. Bus' club for families."



Since announcing that this is the final year of the program, we have heard from many of our partners as they shared what the program has done for their community. One response summed it up best, "programs found participants, libraries found patrons, and people found support and services that they had no idea existed in their own neighbourhoods."



The feedback from parents over the years reinforced for us the importance of supporting them as their child's first teachers. "I didn't realize how important those simple activities are in my child's development," or "I'm doing that already, and had no idea the impact I was having on my child's literacy skills." It was so neat to see the "light bulbs" go on.

It has been a great run and we are sad to see it end. We are exploring ways to continue to meet the program's objectives of building awareness of family literacy, and supporting organizations working with families across Alberta. We want to acknowledge and thank Alberta Advanced Education for their support of the Alberta Prairie C.O.W. program.

## SUPPORTING MARGINALIZED WOMEN

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age from 20 to 50 plus, and their literacy levels vary from nonexistent to high school completion in their first language. What they do have in common is unemployment and isolation, but also an unequivocal desire to understand, write, read and speak English, find a job, and help their children with schoolwork.

Given their growing numbers and varying skill levels, it was decided there would be two separate classes so they could receive the individualized attention they need. The classes are facilitated by six dedicated volunteer tutors (two of whom are Muslim). After only 10 weeks, the women have improved their literacy and communication skills, gained confidence in themselves, and have developed a sense of community as they encourage and support each other's efforts.

The tutors strive to create a non-threatening, flexible learning space. When asked to share her story of her arrival in Canada, one woman who had a lot to share stopped herself and said, "Sorry, I talk too much, maybe because I am by myself the whole day and don't talk to anyone."

The Women's Literacy class provides these women with the opportunity to break the cycle of unemployment and isolation.

*"We often forget how vulnerable a person is who struggles with literacy."*

— a tutor

## LOIS HOLE MEMORIAL LITERACY AWARDS

Prior to presenting the annual Lois Hole Memorial Literacy Awards in January, Jim Hole read an excerpt from a speech his mother gave in 2003 to the Alberta Society of Youth for Democratic Values International Convention. Although the speech was given almost 14 years ago, it still holds true today.

Dr. Hole encouraged youth at the convention to strengthen their commitment to democratic values. She went on to describe what she felt were the most important values, beginning with literacy.

*"Only a society of well-read individuals with keen critical thinking skills can maintain democracy. Citizens of a democracy should read voraciously," she stated, "they should question authority... and always be willing to think."*

Democracy flourishes when citizens have the knowledge and skills to participate in the process. For many Canadians with low literacy levels, their ability to understand social policy processes, and participate in the democratic process, is seriously curtailed.

Reflecting on Dr. Hole's words, one is struck by the impact that improving literacy levels has for individuals and for society. Literacy is at the root of so many social issues, including

poverty, unemployment, and health. Literacy is also a means of empowering individuals to take control of their lives and to become participating members of society.

Dr. Hole was passionate about literacy and education. She was a tireless advocate and believed strongly that *"families play a key role in developing and nurturing literacy through every stage of life."* The Centre is honoured that her family allows us to present our annual literacy awards in her name.

**THIS YEAR'S AWARD RECIPIENTS** exemplify Dr. Hole's commitment and devotion to literacy. **Shawn Griffiths**, winner of the Adult Learner Award, is a role model of an adult life learner who has worked extremely hard to achieve his goals. **Karen Tubb** champions family literacy programs at the Sundre Library and is a deserving recipient of the Community Leadership Award. A mother of three young children, **Callie Perry** is the epitome of perseverance and dedication to her children's learning. Lois Hole would be very proud of this year's award recipients.

To read more about each award winner, go to our website at [www.famlit.ca](http://www.famlit.ca)



## IMPORTANT DATES

*National Volunteer Week*

**April 23 - 29**

*Annual General Meeting*

**5:00 - 6:00 pm  
Tuesday, May 23**

*An Evening of Wine and Words*

**Thursday, May 25**

*Links fore Literacy Golf Tournament*

**Wednesday, August 16**

Visit our website for more information.



Online donations to the Centre can be made through [CanadaHelps.org](http://CanadaHelps.org)



The Centre for Family Literacy gratefully acknowledges the ongoing support of the following:



# LINKS FORE LITERACY CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT



The 6th annual Links fore Literacy Golf Tournament takes to the fairways this August. Join our sponsors and community supporters in a fun Texas Scramble format that allows you to use string and mulligans to improve your team score. Your team might be lucky enough to win the famous “green jackets”.

Funds raised benefit the Edmonton Literacy C.O.W. Bus, a program that visits 10 underserved communities in Edmonton on a weekly basis. Parents borrow books for free and participate with their children in literacy activities that support early learning and language development.

**Date:** Wednesday, August 16

**Time:** Registration and lunch – 12:30 p.m.  
Golf – shotgun start – 1:30 p.m.  
Banquet – 5:30 p.m.

**Place:** The Links at Spruce Grove  
Spruce Grove, Alberta

**To register:** Go to our website at [www.famlit.ca](http://www.famlit.ca) A portion of your registration fee is tax deductible.

## YES, I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

Your support will help us make a difference in the lives of Alberta families! Together we can make Alberta a healthy, literate society where all are able to contribute and succeed.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Mr. Mrs. Ms. Miss Dr.

First Name

Last Name

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E-mail Address

Home Phone

Work Phone

Fax Number

Address

City

Province

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Enclosed is my gift of:

\$25  \$50  \$100  Other \$

Payment option:

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Credit card #

Expiry date

Cardholder name

Cardholder Signature

For recognition purposes:

I wish my name to appear as follows:

I wish this gift to remain anonymous

Charitable registration number 869472720 RR0001

## 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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