

Volunteer Edmonton

Linking literacy to communities

Special to the Examiner

In Canada, 42 per cent of adults do not have the minimum literacy skills required to cope with everyday life and work.

Frontier College, one of Canada's oldest literacy organizations, is hoping to change that. The college has played a fundamental role in helping to improve people's literacy skills.

Miranda Jimmy, regional co-ordinator for Alberta, explains that the college began training university students as literacy teachers to tutor workers in logging and mining camps shortly after the turn of the century.

STILL PRESENT

Today, the need is still present.

"A lot of people think that the need to improve literacy isn't relevant anymore. Everyone has access to education, and there are people who don't believe it's an issue," says Jimmy.

Without basic literacy skills, simple everyday tasks like reading a bus schedule, applying for a job or opening a bank account would be impossible.

As a national non-profit group, Frontier College currently operates in six

communities in Alberta.

While some literacy organizations have a specific focus on early literacy or ESL, Jimmy says Frontier College's focus is on meeting the needs not being met in the community.

"We don't want to duplicate the services already provided by other great organizations. We want to fill gaps."

In 2007, the college launched a pilot project that offered a day camp designed to introduce literacy outside of a school setting to children.

This past summer, the project was introduced to four different communities in Alberta at no cost.

"We provided the kids with free books to take home. Almost 97 per cent of them reported that it was the first book they ever owned," Jimmy notes.

In conjunction with the camps, the college offered workshops to help educate parents about how they can continue to support and encourage literacy in the home.

In Edmonton, Frontier College provides two ongoing programs in partnership with Edmonton Public Library – a reading circle and homework club – where volunteers work one-on-one with students to help strengthen reading and writing skills.

Edmonton Public Library provides the space and helps advertise the programs throughout the branches in the city.

"We believe learning can take place anywhere.

It doesn't have to be in a classroom," Jimmy emphasizes.

"Our philosophy is based on student-centred learning. We talk directly with our students and ask them what it is

they want to learn. We try to meet those goals through our programs."

The programs rely solely on volunteer contributions. Without enough tutors, the waiting list for students hoping to improve their literacy skills continues to grow longer.

ONE HOUR A WEEK

"A love of reading and a commitment of at least one hour a week is all that's needed to volunteer," she says.

To learn more about literacy and how you to help, visit www.frontiercollege.ca, call 780-487-4787 or e-mail edmonton@frontiercollege.ca.

For more information or suggestions for story ideas, please contact Evelyn Pham, communications co-ordinator at epham@volunteeredmonton.com, call 780-732-6655 or check out the website at www.volunteeredmonton.com.



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– Miranda Jimmy

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