

Report to Community

Lobstick Literacy & Learning Society

Community Conversation – April 13, 2016

Lobstick Literacy & Learning Society (LLLS) is a non-profit organization governed by a volunteer board, made up of a group of dedicated individuals, who contribute their time, energy and ideas to ensure that all community members will have lifelong access to literacy and learning opportunities that enhance their quality of life. LLLS strives to provide a variety of courses and workshops each year that meet the needs and interests identified by the community. The society receives the majority of its funding from the Community Adult Learning Program, Advanced Education. Advanced Education has a vision to enhance the quality of life in Alberta communities by increasing the ability of adults to engage in learning. To realize this, the following outcomes were identified to provide our direction as a Community Adult Learning Program.

1. *Enhanced access and participation of adults in learning*
2. *Increased literacy and essential foundation skills of adults*
3. *Strengthened pathways and successful transitions for adult learners*
4. *Increased capacity and alignment of community learning providers with public post-secondary institutions.*

What we Hoped to Learn

Our objective was to gather programming ideas, which will help meet these outcomes. We hoped for information that will help us increase program participation and compliment what other agencies and community groups are already doing in our service area. The information and ideas gathered will influence Lobstick LLS future programs and services. In order to get this information, we scheduled two separate sessions, where we planned to ask the following questions:

1. What do you see as the key learning or education needs in the next 3 years, for yourself and/or your community?
2. How do you, or others you know, like to learn?
3. What makes it difficult for adult learners to access learning programs in our community?
4. How do you contribute or how could you contribute to adult learning in our community?
5. What are some local and provincial trends that could affect learning needs?
6. What is the best way to let you, or others know about learning opportunities?

Partners and Participants

The two community dialogues were made possible with funding from Alberta Advanced Education and support from the Community Learning Network (CLN). The CLN, Norquest College; the Evansburg Public Library; the Evansburg and District Health Centre; and LLLS volunteer board members were all key players in the planning and delivery of the sessions.

Participants at the dialogues included 43 people from the high school, three libraries, health centre, parent groups, Yellowhead County Council, Yellowhead County Family and Community Support Services, Parkland County Council, Chamber of Commerce members and numerous community organizational members. Also attending were instructors and former LLLS learners. Geographically, representation was low from the west end. Our service area extends from Entwistle on the east to Peers and Niton Junction on the west.

Event Format

As participants arrived, they were welcomed and then invited to take the “Gallery Walk”. The Gallery Walk, involved a series of four questions posted on charts around the room. Participants wrote their ideas on sticky notes and posted them on the charts. After the meal, and presentations from the Community Learning Network, NorQuest College, and the Lobstick Literacy & Learning Society, Kim Ghostkeeper with Alberta Culture, facilitated group discussion to address more questions and to discover what else people had to share, once they were warmed up! A survey asking for feedback concerning how people like to hear about learning opportunities was provided for participants to fill out. Each event was concluded with a prize draw and a thank you from the board chair and the coordinator.

Information Shared

From the discussions, the Gallery Walk and survey, we received the following feedback.

Key Learning and Educational Needs in Next Three Years

1. Employment
 - ✚ Aptitude testing
 - ✚ Reinventing oneself
 - ✚ Retraining
 - ✚ How to search for new job opportunities
 - ✚ Resume writing (with a competitive edge)
 - ✚ How to deal with stress during unemployment

2. Technology
 - ✚ Basic computer skills for beginners
 - ✚ Internet skills
 - ✚ iPad and SmartPhone skills
 - ✚ Podcast Basics
 - ✚ How to apply computer skills to home, work, community
 - ✚ Sessions which teach new ways to use programs (i.e. Microsoft Excel)

3. Communication
 - ✚ Basic literacy
 - ✚ English as an additional language
 - ✚ Writing skills
 - ✚ Public speaking and presenting (salesmanship skills)
 - ✚ Understanding new Canadians, diversity

4. Finances
 - ✚ Planning, budgeting, management
 - ✚ Interest and investing
 - ✚ Income tax

5. Health & Community Wellness
 - ✚ Parenting workshops
 - ✚ Social skills
 - ✚ Social opportunities
 - ✚ Fitness & Nutrition
 - ✚ Healthy lifestyles
 - ✚ Volunteer Board development

How We Prefer to Learn

1. One on one tutoring and mentoring
2. Visual and hands on practice
3. Group discussion
4. Online with group discussion
5. 'Quick learning' (assess; then focus in on a learner's need and design curriculum around it).

Factors Which Impede Attendance of Programs

1. Long distances within service area
2. Location of course or workshop
3. Lack of transportation
4. Lack of childcare
5. Extremely busy schedules
6. Lack of awareness about learning opportunities
7. Lack of confidence and low self esteem
8. Embarrassment over low skill level
9. Fear of technology

Ways to Contribute to Adult Learning

1. Volunteer to drive learners to courses
2. Network, spread the word about courses and workshops – create awareness
3. Host sessions at the museum and libraries
4. Develop more partnerships
5. Provide childcare
6. Teach, facilitate, tutor, mentor
7. Free computer lessons at library
8. Children's programs at libraries
9. Attend programs

Trends Which Will Affect Learning Needs

1. Weak economy, leading to career changes
2. Workplace training
3. Concerns over healthcare system – individuals need to take responsibility for own lifestyle and learn how.
4. Shrinking social skills due to overuse of electronic communication (as opposed to face to face or verbal).

Best Mode for Promoting Learning Opportunities

(in order of popularity)

1. Course Booklet mailed out
2. Email
3. FaceBook
4. Website

Factors Which Help to Make Learning Positive

1. The learning meets a need.
2. The learning improves one or more aspect of life.
3. The learning helps to overcome the fear of failure.
4. The learning provides a sense of accomplishment and pride.

5. The learner will be able to apply the new skill(s).
6. The learner is able to 'self teach' and has learned how to research.
7. The learning provider maintains a welcoming and social atmosphere.
8. The learning provider hires knowledgeable, skilled and positive instructors.

Emerging Themes

We discovered, as an organization, that many things suggested are currently being offered. One-on-one tutoring and mentorship in the areas of basic computers, basic literacy and English as an additional language are huge and we are already doing and promoting these extensively. It is also vital, because of lack of time, emphasis be placed totally on what is relevant to the learner. Participants felt it is not necessary to relearn old skills.

Secondary skills resulting from a course, workshop or one-on-one session are very important. The secondary skills participants discussed repeatedly were social skills. They stated that learning has to be a comfortable and a fun experience, for learners to return and to give positive word of mouth promotion. Learners enjoy discussion and interaction with the instructors and other learners. There was concern, that as a society, our social skills are shrinking due to an overuse of electronic communication devices. Therefore, participants agreed, that on-line courses need to be complimented by discussion, preferably face to face.

Partnerships are very important in course development, planning and delivery.

We learned that our weak economy will undoubtedly lead to people wanting and needing to reinvent and retrain themselves.

There are great concerns over our healthcare system and people will need to take greater responsibility for their own health and lifestyles.

There is renewed interest in board development opportunities.

It was also reinforced that there are factors (barriers) that prevent people from attending learning opportunities.

Next Steps

We shall continue to offer one-on-one tutoring and mentoring in basic computer skills, basic literacy and English as an additional language. Learners will be assessed and provided with an appropriate curriculum.

We will continue to compile and mail a course guide out twice per year, but will try to add a one page newsletter in March. We will notify people on Face Book about upcoming courses and refer them to the LLLS website.

We will continue to provide assistance with resumes, job search, public speaking, interview skills and information for further learning.

We will proceed with addressing community health and wellness, as a community capacity building opportunity. Further research on specific courses and workshops, that will address the local needs, is necessary.

We will find new ways to bring financial literacy training to community members.

We continue to work on making all programming accessible by offering courses and one –on-one tutoring in more than one community at a variety of times and bringing programs to groups or organizations where childcare is already available.

We will offer board development workshops.