

► People

Literacy builds stronger families

LIFELONG



LEARNING

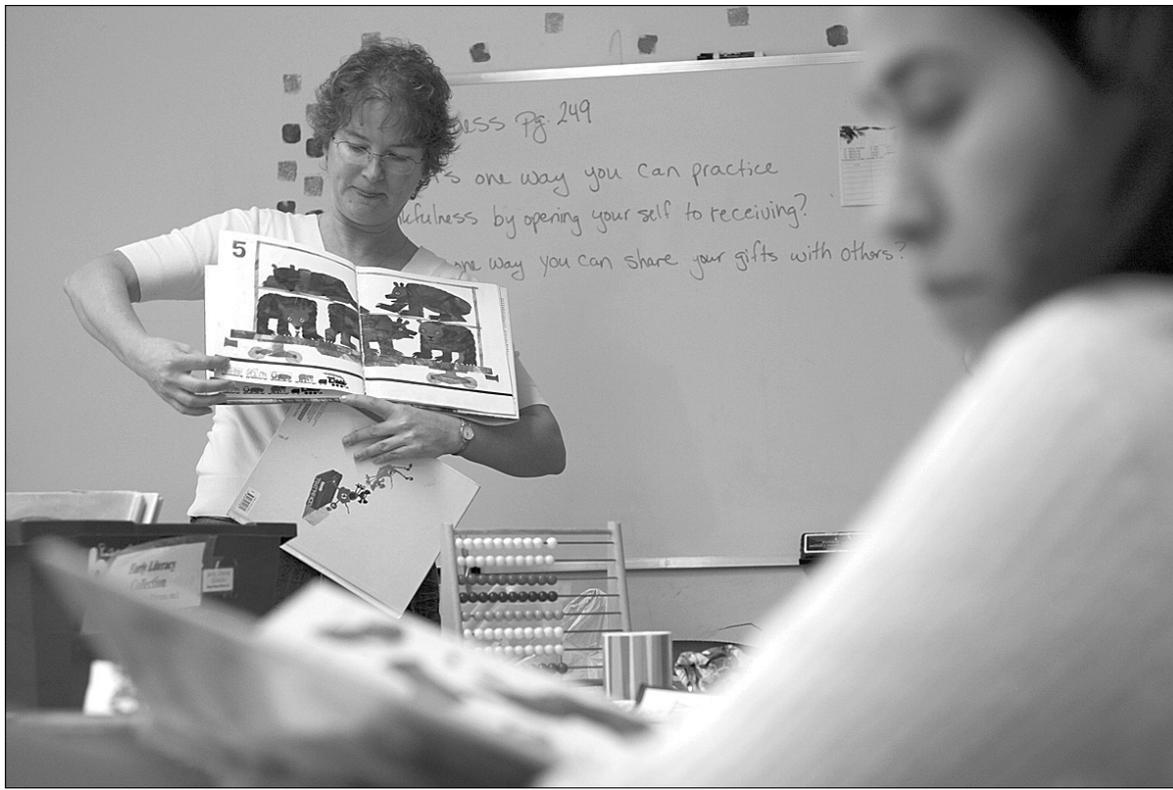
By Aidan Chafe
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When it comes to literacy, often the first thing that pops into our minds is reading and writing. But in fact literacy can incorporate a variety of other learning skills says Jackie Ayer, Family Literacy coordinator for Chilliwack Community Services (CCS).

For the past 16 years, Chilliwack parents and children have been taught a unique and successful approach to literacy through Families in Motion and Central Gateway for Families Family Literacy Program. These programs, the most comprehensive family programs offered by CCS, revolve around the idea that literacy, as a learning unit, can build on the families' strengths and connections within the context of culture and community in which they live.

"Increasing one's educational level and literacy level has throwbacks to the home where it can benefit the whole family," explained Ayer.

The literacy programs work around a four component model. The model is comprised of adult



Aidan Chafe/TIMES

Pamela Auffray, a family literacy facilitator for 16 years, instructs mothers like Cris Bill (foreground) on how to read and communicate to their children at Chilliwack Family Place on Friday during a family literacy session.

education, parent education, parent and child together time (PACT), and child care.

UFV instructor Vicki Grieves meets with adult participants twice a week at McCammon and Central Community elementary schools to upgrade their academic skills in areas such as math, English and computer literacy.

Participants work on completing their General Education Development (GED), with the goal to prepare for university enrolment.

"It's great to see all the elementary kids running around to their classes and then you have a mom pushing her stroller down the hall,

and she's going to class too," Ayer explained. "It's such a cool thing for the kids to see."

The third session of the week, which takes place at Chilliwack Family Place on Wellington Avenue, highlights parent education. Participants learn new parenting skills, while addressing day-to-day challenges and concerns.

Ayer says moms often have a tough time discerning between family goals and personal goals, because, as a parent, they naturally appear intertwined.

"We encourage them by saying, 'That's great! Now you as a woman, what is it that you want to do for you, and how can we get

you there?," said Ayer.

Family Virtues also gets introduced and developed over the course of seven months.

Family Virtues is a teaching philosophy adopted from psychotherapist Linda Kavelin Popov, and explained in her book *The Family Virtues Guide*, which lists 52 virtues that can reinforce positive communication between parent and child. Participants read the guide aloud, to gain confidence in their reading, and follow it up with group discussions about that particular virtue and how it can be applied, and finally they write in their journals to reinforce the lesson.

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ABCDEFG

"So they've done reading, they've done some reflective writing, and on top of that they have learned something they can bring home with them to help their parenting," Ayer said. "We've accomplished all of these things just by focusing on a virtue."

To round up the session parents and children get together for PACT, and engage in play-based, one-on-one time. The goal of PACT is to recognize parents as primary influences and teachers in their child's life.

Every participant also receives free child care which focuses on the child's physical well-being, speech, creativity and social skills.

► Families in Motion and Central Gateway for Families Family Literacy Program are offered by Chilliwack Community Services in partnership with School District No. 33, Literacy BC, Skwah Band, Fraser Health Authority and University of the Fraser Valley. They are offered three mornings a week from September to April, with registration available for those wanting to join in January. To register, or for more information, contact Jackie Ayer at CCS, 604-792-1631 ext. 230.

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