

LIFELONG



LEARNING

In its broadest sense, literacy means learning. Literacy is the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential (OECD/Stats Canada, IALS 1995). When community groups and individuals came together to develop a *Community Literacy Plan for Chilliwack* (September, 2006), they decided to adopt a community development framework with the following guiding principle: To promote lifelong learning and social inclusion through which environmentally sustainable community economic development is achieved. This special series will take a closer look at how our community is responding to the challenge.

never too early

Reading with your baby is a special bond that does so much good

By Aidan Chafe
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For parents curious about when the right time is to start reading to their kids, staff at the Chilliwack Public Library say it's never too early because it's always beneficial for a child's mental and social development.

Jennifer Douglas and Natalie Fouquette, librarians at the library, host Babytime story times, a program that introduces mothers with techniques to enhance early childhood reading skills.

The program, which includes listening to nursery rhymes, poetry, songs and repetitive stories, helps babies' minds rapidly develop essential language connections. Every time a baby is held and read to, basic literary skills like turning the pages and scanning text left to right get reinforced.

"You're making it interactive, you're not just holding the book and reading it to the child," Douglas explained. "You're encouraging physical interaction with sound, touch and movement that works on developing the child's skills. There's so much going on in the baby's development right now, that all of those different parts of the child's abilities are being represented."

Research confirms that reading to infants not only benefits speech and language development but



Aidan Chafe/TIMES

Jennifer Douglas, a librarian at the Chilliwack Library, reads to mothers and babies during a recent Babytime story time session. Babytime story times is a program aimed at informing/teaching parents about the benefits of reading to infants.

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it also contributes to their overall intelligence, adds Fouquette. Recent discoveries in neuroscience have led to a clearer understanding as to the vital role reading aloud plays in the development of a baby's brain.

"There's research out there, and we've read a lot of it, that affirms what we teach at these sessions," she said.

Another important element of reading to children, at any age, is the bond that's formed between mother and child. Babies, for instance, who are read to learn

to associate books with warmth, comfort and security. The bonding that takes place plays a vital role in the success of a child's future relationships during adolescence, then adulthood. Fouquette says it's important for mothers to share that information with the father, aunts, uncles and grandparents—individuals that are going to play a major role in the child's life.

"Developing that bonding experience is a big part of it," explains Fouquette. "It's so essential for their intellectual and social development."

Since it started several years ago, the program has received overwhelming response as sessions typically fill-up within weeks of registration. Douglas says an advantage of large group settings is that mothers are

given the opportunity to connect with each other afterward, sharing stories about their own motherhood experiences.

"I think that's an important part about story time, what happens afterwards," she said. "All the babies get to play together and the moms get to talk. Everyone shares in a social time at the end."

► Babytime story times, aimed at infants from birth to one years old, will run again in May and November, 2009 at Chilliwack and Yarrow Libraries. During the four-week, half-hour sessions parents can learn how to share rhyme, song and stories with babes

in arms. For more information on how to register contact either Chilliwack, 604-792-1941, or Yarrow Library, 604-823-4686.

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Jennifer Douglas

Volunteers, community service agencies and the business community are working along with the Chilliwack Learning Community Society to implement the following five strategies to promote lifelong learning:



1 Reach out to adults in need of help from others. Give them support, services and programs that bring back the desire to learn.

2 Reach out to parents and caregivers of young children. Give them skills, tools and support to develop a love of learning and school-readiness in their child.

3 Work alongside the existing system of family development programs to increase pre-literacy supports and program sustainability.

4 Work alongside community agencies to encourage and develop learning opportunities for youth to progress beyond their current capabilities.

5 Work with local businesses to create or improve literacy and employability skills training in the workplace.