Preface

This best practices inventory is part of a larger project, the Revelstoke Adult Literacy Outreach Project which was generously funded by Human Resources and Social Development Canada. The primary purpose of the project was to promote lifelong learning, and to enhance adult learners’ essential, literacy and computer skills through the facilitation of learner-centered literacy events and workshops. In addition to creating literacy workshops and events, it was my goal to create and share information regarding best practices for undertaking literacy outreach, and methods and curriculum that would be of use to practitioners. As such the Revelstoke Adult Literacy Outreach Project involved four distinct phases:

1. Research of other literacy projects, interviews with literacy practitioners and the subsequent creation of an inventory of best practice for literacy outreach.

2. Creating partnerships with local community service providers and their cliental to determine the cliental’s literacy needs and to discuss potential workshops and learning events.

3. The creation of and/or use of ready-made learning materials for the learning events and workshops.

4. Production and distribution of materials, curriculum and final report with an evaluation of the project and resources.

The Revelstoke Adult Literacy Outreach Project would like to acknowledge all the individuals and organizations for their help in creating the Best Practices Inventory:

Human Resources and Social Development Canada for providing the funding for this project.

Okanagan College for providing space and support for the project. A special thanks to program administrators Janet Lemieux and Wendy Stock for their administration, advice and guidance.

The Okanagan Regional Literacy Coordinator, Leslie Kiehlbauch, for all her helpful feedback.

My thanks to the many practitioners took part in conversations about best practices for literacy outreach.

Melissa Creelman & Paula Harper of Geri’s Place in Sparwood, BC for kindly hosting me when I visited their wonderful literacy project. Thanks to Lisa Talavia-Spencer for arranging my visit.

Jennifer Cliff-Marks in Nakusp for introducing me to the inspiring Women of Wonder group and for sharing her advice and wisdom.

Alice Weber for her proofreading and editing skills.
Looking at Literacy

Because I am fairly new to the field of literacy, I felt it would be prudent to begin the project by conducting research into best practices in the field of literacy, particularly in the areas of adult, workplace, family, and community literacy. In doing this inventory, I wanted to ask two questions: what do other practitioners have to say about best practices for literacy and what are the specific best practices for facilitating outreach in literacy programs.

What I discovered is that, while outreach is undeniably a fundamental part of literacy programs, outreach is discussed as part of the whole, not as a separate entity. Through interviews with practitioners and visits to two community literacy projects, my research is a small attempt to tease out and ask the question: what would best practices for literacy outreach look like? My objective is to use my research to create an inventory of best practices to assist me and any others who are planning and implementing outreach projects. The inventory is not meant to be exhaustive, rather a means to encourage further reflection and research. My research comes from readings on workplace, family, adult, aboriginal and community literacy. I also conducted interviews with fifteen literacy practitioners, and talked with literacy practitioners about literacy projects and programs in Nakusp, Sparwood, Houston and Salmon Arm, BC. (See Appendix A for details about the community literacy projects that I researched and see Appendix B for sample interview questions.)

As I began researching other literacy outreach projects, I was inspired by Lucy Alderson and Diana Twiss’ work in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. Alderson and Twiss are instructors as the Women’s Information Safe Haven (WISH) Drop-In Centre Society, a non-profit organization that works with female survival sex workers. They have created two very useful works *Dream Soup and Life Stew* and *Literacy for Women on the Streets* which discuss the challenges and rewards of creating literacy materials and programming for vulnerable learners. With regards to creating literacy materials for the women coming to WISH, Alderson and Twiss noted that they “found that literacy programming needed a re-definition if learning was to be appropriate and accessible to women who are fighting a daily struggle of survival. When we started the WISH Learning Centre, we could not find any learning materials that were directly applicable.” (Alderson, *Dream Soup*, 3) Like Alderson and Twiss, I often come across the stereotype that marginalized people are not ready to learn and that “learning can only take place within a literacy specific context”. (Alderson, 17 Soup, p.20). What inspired me about Alderson and Twiss’ work, as well as the work of the many literacy practitioners that I spoke to, is that while engaging marginalized learners can be difficult, it most definitely can be and should be done. When creating activities for the Revelstoke Adult Literacy Outreach Project, it was my hope that to design what Alderson and Twiss term “in-the door activities” or what others might call “serial episodes of learning”. These are safe, but interesting activities that enable participants to develop new literacy skills that can later be expanded upon. (Alderson, *Dream Soup* 25) As the coordinator and instructor of this project, it was my goal to work with local service providers and their clients to design and develop short workshops and fun learning events ¹ that would integrate the literacy, numeracy and essential skills.

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¹ When talking to potential participants and when advertising an event, I deliberately shied away from using the term “literacy”. It has been my experience that people are more likely to take part in an event or workshop or project if the focus in learning and what skills they will gain rather than on literacy which implies a skills deficit.
What Are Best Practices?
The excellent guide, *Best Practices in Action: Tools for Community-Based Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programs*, defines best practice as “practices that support our philosophy of adult education—practices that we know are effective. Collectively, they are an ideal or a goal to work towards.” (Perry, 13-14) It is critical that the principles of adult education should inform the best practices we create. As Joan Perry points out, “[a]dult education’s history, theories, and learning principles have helped to inform literacy’s choices.” (22) In *Good Practice in Use: Guidelines for Good Practice in Workplace Education*, author Mary Belfiore identifies five key principles of adult learning essential to best practice. They include:

- valuing the life experience and knowledge of adult learners
- involving participants as decision makers and ensuring active participation in the program design
- recognizing and accommodating different learning styles
- developing and using materials that are relevant, practical and appropriate for adults, the organization and the culture
- recognizing that people have personal responsibilities and time commitments

(Belfiore, 6-7)
Indeed, in my interviews with literacy practitioners, all practitioners identified these adult learning principles as key to their best practice.

Many of the works reviewed for this inventory note that best practices should not be considered to be a “one size fits all” model, rather they are dynamic and must be “reviewed, reflected and refined” in order to adequately address local and organizational literacy needs. (Perry, 3) The NWT Literacy Council’s *Best Practices in Action Tools for Community-Based Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programs* counsels readers to use best practices to:

- Be an ideal or a goal to work towards.
- Be a framework for effective practice.
- Be a guide for program planning and development.
- Be a guide to inform and improve practice.
- Encourage reflection on critical issues by those developing, implementing and evaluating adult literacy and basic education programs.
- Transform practice.
- Be a tool to promote programs to stakeholders and other community members.

(NWT Literacy Council, 15)

Further Comments About Best Practices
The best practices and the comments in this paper are likely not new to literacy practitioners. Those working in the field put these statements into practice each day as they work with learners in a variety of programs and projects. For me, what my research has clarified is how the best practices are more than academic speculation; those that have been identified through research are truly embodied by the work of literacy practitioners. In terms of discussing what best practices for outreach might look like, I can make the following observations:

- All of the practitioners interviewed noted the importance of basing program around the learners’ physical, emotional, and personal needs and "going to where the learners are"
- Networking, sharing resources and partnerships were identified as key
• Being innovative and solution-oriented were identified as a means of creating solid partnerships, meeting learners’ needs and overcoming barriers faced by learners
• Removing the stigma of low literacy was seen as an important way to engage learners

To undertake a larger project of creating specific best practices for literacy outreach is beyond the scope of this project. However, it is my hope that the observations offered here will inspire others to continue discussing how we as practitioners conduct outreach.

Creating the Inventory
I must confess that I struggled with the best way to create a best practice inventory. Some of the questions I wrestled with were: should I incorporate practitioners’ statements or keep them separate from those I gleaned through readings, how do I best organize best practice statements to make sense to the reader, in the instance of workplace literacy best practice, how much to include that may be specific to workplace literacy and not as relevant to the larger picture of best practice for outreach literacy.

In the end, I decided to keep the two different resources separate to allow the reader to compare and contrast my findings. What appears below is a compendium of my readings of best practices in workplace literacy, aboriginal literacy, family, adult and community literacy. Any comments I may have about a best practice are written beside it.

Literature Review of Best Practices

Learner Participation
• Participation is voluntary. Mary Ellen Belfiore writes that “forcing people to participate usually results in resistance so learning becomes another obstacle in the day rather than an opportunity.” (Belfiore, 12). She makes the important point that participation is more than just taking part in a program, it includes participation in the visioning/planning and assessment process (including the initial needs assessment). (11)

• Assure confidentiality. While this standard practice in literacy programs, the issue of confidentiality often comes up in workplace literacy programs where the “balance between record keeping, reporting and confidentiality is sometimes contentious.”(Belfiore, 12) Furthermore, as Belfiore notes, in workplace literacy programs, employers often want to know how an employee is progressing. She counsels that “[w]ork done during an educational program remains confidential unless participants decide to it public in any way they choose.” (12)

• Respect learners’ needs, interests and goals.
• Respect and incorporate the diverse culture of learners and build on learners’ strengths.
• Involve learners in decision-making, program/event design and evaluation.
• Create First Nations/indigenous specific best literacy practices.
• Celebrate and emphasize the joy(s) of learning.
Curriculum/program materials/teaching strategies

- Design and/or use materials that are based on and relevant to learners’ lives.
- Recognize learners’ prior learning, life experience and skills.
- Use a wide variety of relevant, appropriate, culturally sensitive materials with relevant examples, graphics, scenarios and language.
- Use appropriate literacy and numeracy instructional design principles – clear language, font type and size, white space, and so on.
- Encourage a spirit of collaboration in learning settings.
- Cultivate and nurture the development of self-directedness in learners
- Promote life long learning and facilitate access to other learning opportunities. “A Survey of Best Practices in Adult Literacy” by the Literacy Campaign for Monterey County points out that “[e]ducation does not stop once a student leaves the classroom”. (Literacy Campaign for Monterey County, 1)
- Promote and raise awareness of the transferability of literacy skills. As practitioners well know, literacy skills are not skills learned and used in isolation to other skills.
- Enable learners to practice their skills in context and on tasks that are meaningful to their lives.
- Be sensitive to individual differences and the “personal reality” of the learners
- Incorporate the use of multimedia and technology into learning
- Help establish an intergeneration cycle of literacy learning
- Document, recognize and celebrate learner achievements
- Provide a learning environment that encourages learning
- Be sensitive to the different ways that individuals use language, gestures and the written word.
- Incorporate Aboriginal identities, cultures, knowledge and values
- Use a variety of flexible, learner-centered assessment
- Provide learners with opportunities to evaluate and revise curriculum and materials
Program/Project Planning

- Conduct regular planning sessions and set goals and objectives consistent with your program philosophy.
- Secure a long-term commitment from administration to provide for program planning and development based on exploring community needs.
- Include learner input in all stages of planning process.
- Clearly define the underlying goals of your program/outreach, etc to help to determine how it is approached.
- Reach out to the community to attract potential learners and to build support for your program
- Build in a cultural perspective that allows Aboriginal learners to develop their literacy skills in relation to their traditional, cultural values
- Encourage the participation of learners, their families and volunteers in “as many different aspect of the program as possible” (Family Literacy)

Funding

- Provide adequate, long-term, secure funding for institution, workplace and community based programs with money available for expansion.
- Establish partnerships to provide funding and support to offer essential literacy services

Staffing

- Use paid well-trained professional staff who have the ability to multi-task
- Provide staff with funding and opportunities for professional development

Volunteer Support and Training

- Provide volunteers with program orientation
- Ensure that volunteers have a clear understanding of program mission/philosophy
- Provide volunteers with quality tutor training
- Provide in service training events
- Support tutors through ongoing monitoring of progress
- Recognize and celebrate tutors through recognition events
**Assessment and Evaluation**

- Monitor learner progress on an ongoing basis through a variety of participatory assessment procedures.
- Base evaluations on progress towards goals established by partners, learners, and the program itself.
- Use ongoing evaluations to assess how well the program is meeting its goals and objectives and use that information to direct future planning.
- Learner assessment should be based on the individual’s learning objectives and should be designed with learner participation.

**Creating Partnerships/Community Involvement and Linkages**

- Recognize the importance of collaboration.
- Build equitable partnerships that share resources and responsibilities.
- Literacy and workplace educators should work as partners in learning to facilitate cooperative decision making among partners and learners as well as provide relevant opportunities and materials for learning.
- Collaborate with your local First Nations community.
- Respond to the needs of your community and establish and maintain links to referral sources, community organization, educational programs and organizations.
- Regularly review relationships with the community and its organizations.

**Access**

- Programs/projects/events are held in easily accessible, familiar, and welcoming locations.
- Program/events should be free.
- Program/event times should be flexible.
- Program/event sites should ensure privacy and comfort.
- Programs/projects/events should take into consideration barriers to participation such as childcare, transportation, etc.
- Provide information and referrals to other community support agencies and programs.

**Promotion & Awareness**

- Target specific groups.
Promotional materials and activities should “clearly communicate the program’s assumptions, approaches to adult education, achievable goals and benefits for participants”. (Belfiore, 11)

Initiate community awareness programs that will attract potential learners and volunteers and build support for literacy issues and programs

Practitioner Best Practice Statements for Performing Outreach in Literacy Programs

My thanks to the many practitioners who took part in conversations about best practices for literacy outreach. Below is a summary of the many comments, ideas, and suggestions for best practice that came up in our conversations. See Appendix B for a sample of interview questions I used.

Working with Learners

Go to where the learners are. Don’t wait for them to come to you.

Creating a safe space for learners is essential. They need a positive environment and a way to measure their progress.

Provide financial support for learners to attend programs, upgrading and events.

Establish strong relationships with the learners by understanding their needs.

Find creative ways to reduce barriers for learners and listen to their needs.

Be open, flexible, empathetic and non-judgmental – many learners are marginalized.

Always point out learner’s progress and credit them for the work they are doing.

Recognize that skills and learning are transferable.

Normalize and remove the stigma of having low literacy skills.

Keep the emphasis of assessment on the quality of the learner’s experience and not on the ticking off skill attainment.

Program Development and Organization

Share. Share. Share. Don’t reinvent the wheel. Talk with other practitioners to find out what sorts of programs/projects they are working on. Find out what works and what doesn’t.

Be clear on who you want to serve and how you will develop your services.

Be innovative.

Reflect on your programs and practice.
Programs have to be stable and receive regular programming year after year. This makes programs sustainable. Furthermore, we know that it sometimes takes years before someone may access a program. Therefore, we need to have programs funded year after year.

Show an interest in other agencies and practitioners’ programs. Invite them to your events and programs.

Always use a friendly, accessible space to conduct programs.

Present information about to both those at the administrative level and the on-the-ground workers.

When developing materials, take into consideration of a wide array of factors: the dynamics within the group, their experience and knowledge, their interest, and the context.

Hire employees who have a personal stake in literacy, people who understand the people and the issues.

Creating Partnerships

Partnerships, partnerships, partnerships. Partnerships enable you to contact more people and do more in your community.

Always keep your eyes open and your ears to the ground for programs and services that you can partner with.

Create strong partnerships with the people who work with your client group: counselors, service agencies, etc.
Works Cited for Best Practice Inventory


Quality Literacy Programs Best Practices.  ABEA Executive, June 23, 1988


NWT Literacy Council, Aurora College and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment.  Best Practices in Action: Tools for Community-Based Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programs.  2004


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Appendix A
A Sampling of Community-Based Literacy Projects and Programs

As part of the Revelstoke Adult Literacy Outreach Project, I began researching and talking to coordinators and instructors involved in community literacy outreach projects around BC. Although there are many worthwhile and interesting literacy programs out there, I limited my research to four different communities: Houston, Nakusp, Sparwood and Salmon Arm.

The research was far from a chore; as a program coordinator and instructor, I am often so focused on the day-to-day tasks that I don't take the time to learn about other projects and programs. I was truly inspired by the innovation and dedication of the communities and the practitioners who shared their thoughts and projects with me.

Salmon Arm, BC
Explore Reading and Writing Skills – Okanagan College
The partnership was developed to plan and deliver an on-site program for employees at a forestry products workplace. Okanagan College’s Adult Academic and Career Preparation Department offered a 4-hour per week course, Exploring Reading and Writing Skills course (ERWS), off-campus. This course provides basic computer training and literacy instruction. As well, the instructor and tutor coordinator for Okanagan College’s Volunteer Literacy Program offered to move a total of four of their office hours per week to the worksite for the duration of the project. Unfortunately, the on-site program was suspended after six weeks due to a combination of factors, which included poor location (the instructor had to lug books, computers, etc across a parking lot, railway tracks and work-yard, up a long flight of stairs for each session twice a week and the workers also indicated that they felt there was not enough privacy in the space), a lack of adequate equipment and furnishings, and a downturn in the industry which resulted in employee layoffs. The instructor also found it difficult to work around the workers’ changing shifts. For example, if learners switched shifts, it was difficult to anticipate when they may be able to come to class. This meant that the instructor sometimes had to be there double the normal session time. Only two learners attended regularly during the six-week period.

In the final analysis, the AACP Chairperson felt that the instructor’s time was needed on campus as there were more students prepared to register in the on-campus program than at the worksite.

Explore Reading and Writing Skills Course - Okanagan College
This course was offered by the Adult Academic and Career Preparation (AACP) Instructor Fundamentals instructor. During one semester in 2006/2007, learners were enrolled in an ABE college course, Exploring Reading and Writing Skills (ERWS). Sessions were offered twice a week. Eleven individuals referred by the Centre met individually with the college instructor at the Salmon Arm Family Resource Centre to work on their personal literacy goals with the instructor. However, most of the learners attended only a few sessions. The main difficulties encountered were the lack of adequate space and an inability to link up with the specific group of potential learners initially targeted for the program by the host agency.
Houston, BC
Although it may be small in size, this northern interior town is host to a number of dynamic literacy projects of which it can truly be proud. The town is home to the Houston Link to Learning, a community literacy organization "committed to working in partnership with individuals, families and communities to promote literacy" which holds as its goals “to promote awareness and understanding of the value of literacy for individuals, families and communities, to take a leadership role to develop and maintain partnerships with individuals, families and community organizations, to offer literacy opportunities for learning." ([http://www.learnhouston.ca/about.htm](http://www.learnhouston.ca/about.htm)) Below are just of a few of the community literacy services and programs provided through partnerships between the Houston Link to Learning and local services and organizations.

**Stepping Out Coffee Break/News Discussion**
This group of about ten to twenty people (sometimes even thirty) meets once a week at a local restaurant to discuss local issues and concerns. Community Literacy Practitioner Belinda Lacombe first started meeting with the group over four years ago. She noticed that the restaurant was a popular hangout and began meeting with the folks who frequented the restaurant. She began to recruit additional participants by placing posters up that advertised the event as a literacy program. This event would not be possible without the support of the restaurant’s owner, who, in addition to providing a comfortable space, donates the first five coffees to participants. The local newspaper, Houston Today, also donates copies of the paper for participants to read at the café.

During the weekly meetings, the group develops a monthly newsletter around local issues and stories of interest to the group. Lacombe describes Stepping Out as a safe place for people who may not normally have a voice to formulate and discuss their opinions. For example, in creating the newsletters, the participants not only have a chance to develop a host of skills such as computer, writing and organizational skills, but also to discuss and develop their own perspective on issues and events.

**A Learner’s License Group**
This program is for folks who may have failed their driver’s learner test and feel that they may not pass it a second time. Learners are self-referred or by ICBC. The program assists learners by either matching them with a tutor or enabling learner to take part in a study group. In the study group, learners will go through the manual and discuss the material. The program takes place at different places such as the local college and/or public places like the A&W.

**Learner-Led Workshops**
As the title suggests, these are workshops in which the learner is the “expert” who shares his or her skills or knowledge with the rest of the group. If learner has a skill, coordinator asks if s/he would like to share the skill in a workshop. The learner then develops lesson plan and budget. Learner led workshops provide an excellent opportunity to develop not only the traditional literacy skills of reading, writing and numeracy, but also problem solving, organization, and public speaking skills. The learner-led workshops are also a great way for learners to boost their self-esteem and confidence.

**Community Kitchen Committee**
This program is run by committee of ten to fifteen adult learners which builds the program capacity through the development of resources, shopping lists, budgets and upcoming projects. The committee meets every second week and the participants involved in the kitchen meet on alternate weeks. Learners take part in a wide variety of learning projects from completing Food Studies 12 to learning about food security and how
to do for oneself and the community. Learners with children can access childcare is provided by a qualified Early Childhood Educator. While parents are learning in the Community Kitchen, the children take part in activities geared towards school readiness.

**Community Garden**
The Community Garden is a learning project that is “guided by a committee of adult learners, community members, community organizations, and seniors. The committee meets bi-weekly to make plans and to divide tasks.” ([http://pvlcc.spaces.live.com/](http://pvlcc.spaces.live.com/)) Half of the garden is devoted to Community Kitchen and the Foodbank and the other half to participants. Learners help plan plots, help in the Community Kitchen and take part in workshops such as canning and harvesting. Participants can build upon existing computer skills and reflect on their learning experience by creating blogs about their learning and gardening experiences which are posted the Pleasant Valley Learning Communities Cooperative website. To view the blogs, visit: [http://pvlcc.spaces.live.com/](http://pvlcc.spaces.live.com/)

**Community Computer Literacy**
The project committee of the Houston Link to Learning noted that there was a need in their community for basic computer skills. As a result, three projects which focused on providing a fun, free and informal information about and access to computers. These projects were:

1. **Lunch Learning stations at the Northwood Saw Mill.** This project began in February 1996 as a response to workers' need to increase their computers skills to meet the increasing technological job demands. Rather than require workers attend formal courses to improve their skills, workers were invited to use three computers donated by the mill. The three computers were located in the lunchroom so that they would be easily accessible to the workers. Allowing the computer access may have seemed unrelated to the job at hand, but the project illustrated that enabling the workers to explore their personal interests such as learning to play games, access encyclopedias, or accessing the internet helped engage those who might otherwise be resistant to learning to use the computer. The buy-in for the employer was that the skills employee learned by using the computer were transferable to the job.

2. **The Link at the Library (Summer 1995)** helped to create public access to computers at the Houston Public Library.

3. **Beginning in the summer of 1995, computer camps were held to assist adults and children in learning basic computer skills.** Currently, Northwest Community College and the Houston Link to Learning hold computer classes for adults. Seniors can use the BBC’s Computer Tutor, an online program, to enhance their basic skills. The course is self-paced and seniors can come in free of charge to use the lab.

More information about these three projects is available in Dee McRae, Dave Manahan, and Jim Dewar’s *Community Computer Literacy: Lunchroom Learning, The Link at the Library and Computer Camps*.

**Pleasant Valley Learning Communities Cooperative (PVLCC) [www.pvlcc.ca](http://www.pvlcc.ca)**
The project is three year research project focused on the use of technology for creating opportunities for learning in the rural communities of Houston, Gransile, Tachet and Topley. One ways of the project assists
people is by providing one-to-one tutorials on everything from basic computer skills to learning to use online conferencing systems.

**Learning Circles:** PVLCC is planning a series of "learning circles". Learning circles are group lead and supported - learners guide each other. Examples of activities are: creative writing and drum making.

**Community Map and Research:** PVLCC hosted a series of conversations and interviews with the community member to create a community map. This map is now available online.

**Nakusp, BC**
Located about 100 km from Revelstoke, Nakusp is a small community of about 1,524 (Statistics Canada 2006 results). Nakusp is a part of the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL), a "charitable non-profit organization that supports strong community and lifelong learning. Throughout the Columbia Basin, CBAL educates the public about the importance and benefits of literacy by supporting local community actions based on the principle of expanding and improving literacy practices.” CBAL has a number of innovative community literacy programs throughout the Columbia Basin region (Revelstoke and Sparwood are included in this region. For more information about CBAL, visit [www.cbal.org](http://www.cbal.org) and thanks to the hospitality of Jennifer Cliff-Marks, CBAL’s Adult Literacy Coordinator in Nakusp, I was lucky enough to visit a number of this area’s adult literacy programs and services in the fall of 2007.

**Nakusp and Area CAP (Community Access Program)**
The Community Access Program offers free computer and internet access Mondays to Fridays from 12:00 to 8:00 pm. The site, which is housed in the School District No. 10 Board Office, has proven very popular, seeing an average of sixty users per day who come to use the twelve refurbished computers and receive one-to-one and/or small group computer literacy instruction. In addition to providing a means of accessing computers for those who might be not otherwise be able to do so, CAP also build capacity through its employment of three tutors and a partnership with the School District which allows a local high school student to receive mentorship and work experience while providing the site with IT support.

**Women’s Writing Group**
This is a weekly writing program for women uses journaling, creative writing and a book club discussion group to support and encourage those with low literacy skills improve their writing skills, explore literature and express themselves in a fun and safe environment. The program, which takes place at Selkirk College, is facilitated by a local writer who assists the women in developing their skills.

**Women of Wonder (WOW) Group**
WOW is a program for women in New Denver which combines face-to-face meetings with an on-line chat and support group. The program, which was developed by Cliff-Marks and the women’s support group counselor in New Denver, was originally designed to enable participants to learn to how to use technology to research health issues. Each of the eleven participants received a refurbished computer with internet connection. In developing the program, the facilitators found that many of women had very low computer skills and low literacy skills. Accordingly, most of activity was initially concentrated on learning to use the computer and the group members came to see the computer as tool to virtually connect with one another. A tutor was hired to teach a computer course and provide assistance.
Geri’s Place Family Resource Centre

Thanks to the hospitality of Lisa Talavia-Spencer, Melissa Creelman, and Paula Harper, I had the pleasure of visiting Geri’s Place in May 2008. This centre, which is located in the heart of the community, trailer 8 of the Spardell Trailer Park, is sponsored by the Columbia Basin Family Resource Society, Fernie Women’s Resource Center, Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Many of the residents of the trailer park are low income families who may not always have access to reliable transportation, computers or even phones. The centre is open four days a week to both members of the trailer park and the Sparwood community.

Melissa has been a key figure at Geri’s Place since its conception. In her work as a youth outreach worker, she became aware of the need for programming that would serve the needs of both adults and children. She began by going door to door chatting with the trailer park residents. The trailer court owner then donated the trailer that houses Geri’s Place and programming began. For such a small space, Geri’s Place manages to house an awful lot. There’s a computer room with desktop computers and a printer; a dining area that houses a community kitchen of sorts where group meals are prepared and table where participants can work on lessons or crafts; and a living room for meetings, watching videos or working on projects. Lastly, there is a backroom that serves a quiet place for meetings or working on homework or as a get-away for mums and their young children to play with toys or read.

Geri’s Place is an excellent example of a literacy programming which upholds the philosophy that literacy should be “built in, rather than bolted on”. By locating itself where the learners are, Geri’s Place provides residents and community members with access to services and literacy programming in an accessible, welcoming and familiar environment. As the learners explain, it is “a comfortable safe place to come and learn...We always have fun at Geri's Place.” From September to May, the centre offers a variety of programming for both adults and children such as:

*The Adult Literacy Program* - Adult students work with Paula Harper, the College of the Rockies ABE instructor, three mornings a week to learn basic literacy skills in reading, writing and math as well as work on computers. A noon meal is shared as part of the life skills component of the program.

*Cooking 123* - This is a program where youth and young mothers can come and learn to cook simple meals.

*Arts and Crafts* - simple and easy crafts that anyone can do

*Creative Community* - participants learn to build flower gardens and simple landscaping skills.

*Homework Club* - an after school program for kids

*Ladies Tea Time* - A weekly group meeting where women get together to make a lunch. While cutting and chopping they discuss what’s going on in their lives and work with a Stopping the Violence program counselor.
Appendix B

Best Practices Questionnaire

Hello,
I am compiling an inventory of best practices for as part of the Revelstoke Adult Literacy Outreach Project, a project generously funded by Human Resource and Development Canada via the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills program. Briefly, the goal of the project is twofold:

1) to increase the numbers of adults who may not normally participate in literacy programs or events (For example, workshops such as Foodbank clients taking part in a budgeting workshop, short courses with focus on improving literacy skills, etc)

2) to create and share information regarding best practices, methods and curriculum that would be of use to practitioners conducting similar outreach projects.

I am looking for practitioners, volunteer tutors, or anyone involved in the field of literacy to contribute what they feel constitutes best practices in the outreach. Your contributions can take the form of best practice statements, stories of what worked and what didn't, comments and suggestions. I would love to hear from other folks working in the field of literacy! Thanks for taking the time to fill out the short questionnaire below.

Name:_________________________ Date:_________________________

1. What kinds of literacy programs/projects have you been involved in?

2. What types of outreach projects/program/activities did you do as part of your program(s)?

3. What strategies did you find helpful in:
   a) establishing partnerships
   b) recruiting and retaining learners
   c) developing materials and resources
4. What kinds of barriers or difficulties did you encounter in your program/project(s)?

Comments on what supports/materials, etc that might have helped you overcome these barriers:

5. If someone asked you for advice on creating an outreach project and/or materials or curriculum for this project, what would be your top three suggestions/best practices/pieces of advice for this person?

Other comments:

Thank you very much for your time. Your contribution is much appreciated.