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AUTHOR Purton, Debbie
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ABSTRACT

This document presents and discusses the 12 family literacy standards for family literacy programs in Saskatchewan, Canada, that were developed during a 2-year process by Saskatchewan's Family Literacy Best Practices committee. The document is: (1) an educational tool to develop greater understanding of effective literacy practices; (2) a program evaluation tool; and (3) an aid for family literacy program and project development. The introductory section defines family literacy as encompassing the many ways and everyday situations in which adults engage in and use literacy and language and the emergent literacy of children. Ten examples of family literacy practices outside school settings are listed. The benefits of family literacy are explained along with the philosophy guiding family literacy work. The remainder of the document is a questionnaire containing between 5 and 21 questions on each of 12 family literacy standards pertaining to the following aspects of family literacy programs/projects: (1) effective communication; (2) philosophy; (3) participant and community involvement; (4) content; (5) access; (6) recruiting and supporting participants; (7) staffing; (8) working with volunteers; (9) family support services; (10) assessment; (11) administration; and (12) funding. An alphabetical listing of standards and list of Best Practices Committee members are appended. (MN)

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Family Literacy Standards

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Saskatchewan Literacy Network
206 - 220 - 3rd Ave South
Saskatoon SK S7K 1M1
Tel: 306-653-7368 Fax: 306-653-1704
www.nald.ca/sklitnet.htm

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I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to Best Practices Committee members who contributed their time, energy and expertise to establishing this best practice foundation for family literacy work in Saskatchewan. Your involvement in this developmental and participatory process ensures that the standards have been developed by the field and for the field.

Committee members include:

- Hilary Craig,
- Evelyn Gaudet,
- Donna Heselwood ,
- Pat Hoffman,
- Bebe Ivanochko,
- Norma Klassen,
- Lynne Mourot, and
- Ruth Vandekamp.

I would also like to extend our thanks to the many family literacy programs and practitioners that have been involved in reviewing the standards during various stages of development. Your support and thoughtful feedback have served to guide our efforts in a way that truly reflects family literacy programs, practices and realities within the province.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement that the Best Practices committee has received from Saskatchewan Literacy Network Board and Staff on this initiative. A special thanks is extended to Kim Blevins, Communications Coordinator and Bonnie Vangool, Executive Assistant for their contributions in layout, desktop publishing, printing and distribution of this document.

Debbie Purton, Project Chair
Literacy Specialist
Saskatchewan Literacy Network

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Background Information

What are family literacy standards?

The Family Literacy Best Practices committee has spent approximately two years developing and refining twelve family literacy standards. Each standard is followed by specific questions that are intended to guide practitioners and program developers. These standards and questions are not expected to provide all the answers. What we want them to do is to raise some important issues for those who are developing, implementing and evaluating family literacy programs in a variety of situations and communities.

Family literacy programs vary considerably. We suggest that you select those features that are appropriate and realistic for your program. You will also note that some standards may be more appropriate for a program facilitator, while other standards may be more relevant to program administrators.

Why are family literacy standards important?

Although family literacy work can and will be done differently according to the varying needs of participant groups and communities, it is important that our efforts are undertaken with the highest possible quality in mind. These standards help us determine that quality and aim for it in our programming.

Family literacy standards are important because:

- more and more Saskatchewan organizations are offering family literacy programming;
- these organizations are using a variety of models and approaches;
- we have received requests for guidelines from organizations that are developing family literacy proposals, and
- funders need information about "best practices" so they can make informed decisions when they allocate funds.

How should standards be used?

We intend the standards to be used:

- as an "educational tool" to develop a greater understanding of effective literacy practices,
- as a "program evaluation tool" or as a reference document. We hope that these standards will help you to identify the strengths of your approaches and to look at areas which need improvement or further development, and
- as an aid for family literacy program and project development.

How were the standards developed?

The family literacy standards have been developed by a working committee of the Saskatchewan Literacy Network. The committee members are family literacy practitioners, program managers and policy makers. (For a complete list of committee members, see Appendix B.)

The work of the committee started in October 1998. At that time the committee agreed upon what needed to be done. Committee members researched family literacy programs and practices found to be successful elsewhere. The committee then shared the information and combined it with the experience and expertise of the group, to compile the twelve standards.

The draft standards were shared with a small group of family literacy programs and funders with varying levels of experience in the field to obtain initial feedback and input on the draft document. Following a series of revisions, a second draft was distributed more broadly to family literacy practitioners for further feedback. Recommendations from the field formed the basis of the final revisions to the document.

The Saskatchewan Literacy Network and the Best Practices Committee wish to extend our gratitude to the many individuals who took the time to critically review and reflect upon draft copies of the standards. Your feedback served to enhance the document and ensure that the standards are reflective of the families that you work with and the communities that you serve.

Introduction

What is family literacy?

Definitions of family literacy vary considerably. Family literacy is about encouraging parents to read with their children and to do follow-up activities with them. But family literacy is also about a great deal more. It includes a wide range of activities that occur within the daily lives of families.

Family literacy encompasses the many ways and situations in which adults engage in and use literacy and language within everyday situations. Family literacy also encompasses emergent literacy of children. Emergent literacy refers to the many ways and the many situations in which children learn to read, and to understand and use language and print. For example, children learn many skills and acquire a lot of information at home and on the playground. They are learning about writing when they scribble. They are learning about mathematics when they play board games. And, most important, they learn to love and value reading and writing when they see that adults close to them enjoy reading and making time for it.

Every family – even those in which adults do not use print often – have literacy practices that they use in order to survive. Here are a few examples:

- A mom walking upstairs with a child, counting each step as they climb.
- A small business owner teaching his son to use accounting software.
- A Moshôm/Kohkom telling stories to his or her grandchildren.
- An older brother pointing out street signs to a younger sibling.
- A son translating for parents who don't speak English.
- A father teaching his child to use a recipe book.
- A neighbour helping a new mother by singing lullabies to the baby.
- An aunt helping her niece and nephew with their homework.
- A granddaughter helping her grandfather to do research on the Internet.
- A babysitter discussing a television show with the kids she babysits.

In each of these examples we see family members involved in everyday activities that are directly related to the improvement of reading, writing, math and language skills.

What are the benefits of family literacy?

Family literacy increases access to information. It allows families to participate fully in many different areas within daily home, work and community life.

For example, family literacy enables family members to:

- Read instructions for giving medicine so that the well-being of family members is ensured.
- Read grocery labels, interpret information and compare prices so that effective food and budget choices can be made.
- Read notices and forms from school with understanding and be able to respond so children are supported in their school learning.
- Participate in group sessions with comfort.

Every time you read a story, play a game or do a puzzle with a child, you are teaching valuable skills. You are also learning about how your child learns. At the same time, your child is receiving the valuable message that he is capable of learning and solving problems.

Research has shown that what happens in the first few years of a child's life has a critical effect on how that child's life unfolds.[1] It will be more difficult to provide later the skills and attitudes that the child did not acquire in the early years. A child with plenty of positive experiences with loving caregivers is much more likely to have a successful, happy and healthy life than a child who hasn't received the same quality of care.

Family literacy gives caregivers and young children a framework in which they learn together while developing and nurturing positive relationships. These activities, and the skills, knowledge and personal relationships that result from them, lay the critical groundwork for success in school and personal coping skills.

During a keynote address at the "Family Literacy: Key to a Healthy Future" Provincial Conference and Western Symposium held in Saskatoon in June 1998, Dr. Fraser Mustard emphasized the fact that a family's wealth or poverty is not the only factor that determines whether or not children are at risk. "This means that in every socioeconomic class, a portion of the population is affected because they have not had sufficient stimulation. In our society, because of its size, there are actually more children in the middle class in difficulty than in the poverty group."[2] Dr. Mustard concluded that we need to have universal programs available for all families.

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[1] Dr. Fraser Mustard, *"The Effect of Economic Change on Society's Children and Human Development"* Keynote Address, Family Literacy: Key to a Healthy Future Provincial Conference and Western Symposium, June 4 – 6, 1998, Saskatoon, SK.

[2] Ibid.

Background Philosophy

What philosophy guides family literacy work?

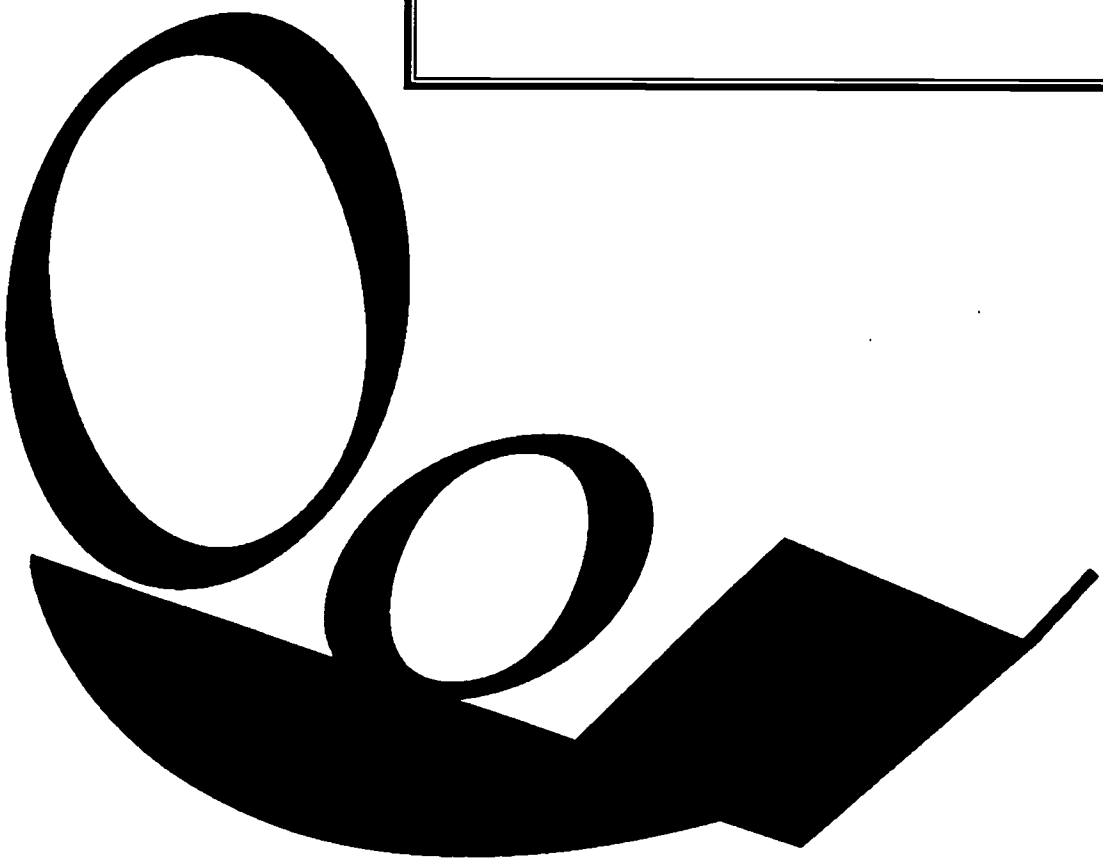
Quality family literacy programs are designed from a strengths-based philosophy of learning. They begin with the belief that all participants enter the program with a unique set of knowledge, skills and experience. They also believe that everyone has areas in which they could benefit from further knowledge, skills and experience. Quality family literacy programs build on the skills that participants bring to programs, moving from what participants already know to what they want and need to learn.

Strengths-based family literacy programs assume that participants can, with support, participate effectively in deciding content, direction and format so that programs are useful and meaningful to them. They also assume that people learn best when they start with topics that they consider most important. Quality family literacy programs recognize that they must respond to the goals of participants. They use materials specific to individual and group needs rather than using generic materials or pre-packaged programs. A skilled facilitator is essential to act as a guide and to take direction from the group.

The strengths-based model of family literacy combines needs assessments with asset mapping techniques. Needs assessment are helpful in determining what participants need to know, while asset mapping is a process for identifying the knowledge, skills and experiences that individuals, groups and communities already have. From this base of knowledge, quality family literacy programs are designed around participant needs, strengths and the skills they have to offer.

The Saskatchewan Literacy Network and the Best Practices committee believe that by working from a strengths-based approach, family literacy programs will meet the needs of participants and ensure success.

Standards



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Instructions

There are twelve family literacy standards listed in this document. The instructions for completing this questionnaire are:

- Read through each standard listed in boxes.
- Read through the questions listed after each standard.
- Complete the checklist by placing a checkmark (✓) in the column that best describes your program.

E.g.

❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ N/A

Effective Communication

Quality family literacy programs are sensitive to the different ways that individuals use language, gestures and the written word. They are aware that the following may influence a person's understanding:

- gender
- cultural background
- learning styles
- past experiences
- familiarity with print
- family background
- regional background
- disabilities
- school experiences
- education levels, etc.

Staff members in effective family literacy programs spend time and effort communicating accurately and sensitively. They realize that the process of receiving and giving information is often as important as the information itself.

Family literacy programs also use language in a respectful way - language that recognizes that people have a right to decide which words should describe them and the cultural background from which they come. Program participants are viewed and treated as people who have something to contribute.

Yes	No	N/A	
❑	❑	❑	Do staff members understand that different individuals have different ways of using language, gestures and print?
❑	❑	❑	Do staff members (both paid and volunteer) have training and/or experience in effective communication?
❑	❑	❑	Have staff been trained to be aware of and sensitive to issues in cross-cultural communication?
❑	❑	❑	Do staff members use and promote language that is acceptable to the people they work with? (e.g. people with disabilities vs. disabled people)
❑	❑	❑	Does the organization encourage staff to check with participants/advisory committee about whether written and verbal communications are worded in an acceptable way?

Philosophy

Quality family literacy programs are based on a strengths model. They value and build on the diverse literacy skills and practices which families and communities bring to programs. Each program has a vision statement which is communicated to participants and the community and which is reviewed regularly

Yes	No	N/A	
❑	❑	❑	Do you use strengths-based language in all aspects and stages of the program?
❑	❑	❑	Have you developed and recorded a vision specifically for your family literacy program?
❑	❑	❑	Did you get input for your vision from the participants, staff and advisory committee or board?
❑	❑	❑	Do you review your vision on an annual basis to ensure that it accurately reflects participant and community needs?
❑	❑	❑	Do you identify, acknowledge, value and build on the diverse literacy skills that participants bring to the program?
❑	❑	❑	Do you understand and respect the diversity of the families that your program serves?
❑	❑	❑	Do you encourage program participants to use/learn their family's first language (according to their comfort level)?
❑	❑	❑	Does each participant group develop its own definition of family literacy?

Participant and Community Involvement

Quality family literacy programs offer services that meet the needs of participants, families and the communities in which they take place. Participants are involved in all stages. They give input on program content and format and are included when programs are evaluated.

Yes	No	N/A	
❑	❑	❑	Do you ask participants what they want to learn and check regularly with them to ensure that the program is meeting their needs?
❑	❑	❑	Do you build on the existing strengths and skills of participants?
❑	❑	❑	Do you provide opportunities for participants to demonstrate their achievements to family and community members?
❑	❑	❑	Do you have ongoing contact with your local library, health district staff, community school coordinators, social service workers, etc.?
❑	❑	❑	Do you have an advisory board made up of community members?

Content

Quality family literacy programs are designed based on the literacy needs, interests and goals of the participants. Program materials are selected, developed or adapted to build on participants' strengths and meet identified literacy needs. Participants are actively involved in all stages of this process.

Yes	No	N/A	
❑	❑	❑	Do you present information in a variety of ways to take into account different ways of learning?
❑	❑	❑	Do you emphasize that the people who raise a child are the child's first teachers?
❑	❑	❑	Do you provide activities that help participants to understand how their roles change as their children grow and develop?
❑	❑	❑	Do you offer activities that encourage participants and children to interact?
❑	❑	❑	Do you give participants an opportunity to improve their communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)?
❑	❑	❑	Do you provide materials and suggestions for fun literacy activities that involve speaking, using numbers and reading?
❑	❑	❑	Do you point out the wealth of ways and the number of daily activities that can be used for literacy development for adults? For children?
❑	❑	❑	Do you provide activities and opportunities for participants to meet each other and to develop support networks?
❑	❑	❑	Do you use literacy as the vehicle for learning about and discussing issues identified by participants?

Do you provide information (according to need and expressed interest) on topics such as:

❑	❑	❑	how children develop physically, mentally and socially?
❑	❑	❑	how to select toys and books which are appropriate for children at specific ages?
❑	❑	❑	parenting?
❑	❑	❑	special services for teen parents?
❑	❑	❑	nutrition?
❑	❑	❑	FAS/FAE?
❑	❑	❑	discipline?
❑	❑	❑	traveling with your children?
❑	❑	❑	use of technology?
❑	❑	❑	health and wellness topics?
❑	❑	❑	Public Legal Education booklets?
❑	❑	❑	support groups (e.g. AA, AlAnon, Sexual Abuse support groups)?

Access

Quality family literacy programs are accessible to participants. Programs operate in locations that are easy to access, safe, welcoming and comfortable. Programs are conducted in such a way that all participants can hear, see and understand information. Program supports such as childcare, refreshments and transportation are provided.

Yes	No	N/A	
			Location
❑	❑	❑	Is transportation available for participants?
❑	❑	❑	Is the program location in an area that is safe?
❑	❑	❑	Is parking available?
			Building
❑	❑	❑	Are all services in the building accessible to people with physical disabilities?
❑	❑	❑	Are signs on the washroom doors easily understood?
❑	❑	❑	Is there a place where parents can change and nurse babies?
❑	❑	❑	Is the building smoke-free or is there a designated smoking area?
			Meeting Area
❑	❑	❑	Is there enough comfortable seating for adult participants?
❑	❑	❑	Is there a safe, well-equipped place where children can play?
❑	❑	❑	Is your facility decorated and furnished in such a way as to make it welcoming to children?
❑	❑	❑	Have you made sure that everyone can be seen and heard?

❑ ❑ ❑ Are all printed materials written in plain language with large, clear type and plenty of white space?

Childcare

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you provide free childcare?

❑ ❑ ❑ Are childcare workers familiar with the goals of your family literacy program?

❑ ❑ ❑ Are childcare workers trained?

❑ ❑ ❑ Do childcare workers facilitate family literacy experiences?

Other

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you provide nutritious snacks?

❑ ❑ ❑ Are participants involved in deciding what snacks are provided?

Recruiting and Supporting Participants

Quality family literacy programs place a high priority on personal contact as this is an important and effective way of recruiting participants. A process is in place to provide program information to the community. Program information reflects an awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of families.

Yes	No	N/A	
❑	❑	❑	Do you personally contact participants to encourage attendance?
❑	❑	❑	Do you remind participants about the sessions a day or two before they happen?
❑	❑	❑	Do you promote your program in a variety of ways? (i.e. personal contact, newsletters, flyers, brochures, word of mouth, elders, teachers, community announcements, churches, health/social service workers, etc.)
❑	❑	❑	Do your recruitment practices reflect an awareness of families' needs? (i.e. schedules, emotional needs, feelings of isolation, etc.)?
❑	❑	❑	Do you contact participants if they do not attend?

Staffing

Quality family literacy programs have an adequate number of qualified staff to meet the needs of the community. Training of program staff is given a high priority within the organization.

Yes	No	N/A	
			Recruitment and Staff Planning
❑	❑	❑	Do you recruit and train community members, including former program participants?
❑	❑	❑	Are job descriptions available for all program staff (including volunteers, paid staff and board members)?
❑	❑	❑	Are work conditions and expectations for staff realistic?
			Skills and Qualifications
❑	❑	❑	Does the facilitator have experience and training in adult literacy and in the principles of adult education?
❑	❑	❑	Does the facilitator have experience and/or training in group facilitation skills?
❑	❑	❑	Do program staff have experience and training in early childhood education, parent education and life-skills coaching?
❑	❑	❑	Are staff paid fairly for their training and experience?
❑	❑	❑	Do staff members model attitudes of equity, dignity and respect?
			Training and Support
❑	❑	❑	Has the program paid for staff to attend training in family literacy?
❑	❑	❑	Do staff receive support to attend workshops and training events on a regular basis?

- ❑ ❑ ❑ Are staff members encouraged and supported to actively learn more about family literacy including adult literacy and emergent literacy of children?
- ❑ ❑ ❑ Are staff members encouraged to keep up-to-date on new developments in family literacy by reading relevant journals, newsletters, new publications and using the Internet?
- ❑ ❑ ❑ Do you have a plan to support the development and training of staff, volunteers and board members?

Evaluation

- ❑ ❑ ❑ Do you have a regular evaluation process for staff?
- ❑ ❑ ❑ Do you encourage staff to give constructive feedback about the organization and the program?

Working with Volunteers

Quality family literacy programs may use volunteers in the programs. Volunteers can be an asset to the program because they broaden the experience of the group and help the facilitator.

Yes	No	N/A	
			Recruitment and Screening
❑	❑	❑	Do you recruit volunteers in a variety of ways?
❑	❑	❑	Do you encourage people who have participated in your programs to become volunteers?
❑	❑	❑	Do you have a thorough screening process to ensure that your volunteers are suitable for the work they will be doing?
			Placement
❑	❑	❑	Do you place volunteers in a way that makes sure that their contribution helps the organization at the same time as it allows them to participate in a way that meets their needs?
❑	❑	❑	Do you look at ways to ensure the safety of children and reduce the risk of liability (i.e. make sure that volunteers work ONLY with groups of children and are NEVER alone with individual children)?
			Training
❑	❑	❑	Do you give all volunteers an orientation to your agency and the family literacy program?
❑	❑	❑	Do you train volunteers for the work you expect them to do? (i.e. Provide initial training in family literacy including adult literacy and emergent literacy of children.)
❑	❑	❑	Do you give volunteers follow-up training and opportunities for professional development?

Supervision and Support

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you give volunteers job descriptions and clear directions about specific tasks?

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you provide volunteers with the support and materials necessary for them to do a good job?

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you record the number of hours that volunteers contribute to the program?

Evaluation

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you give volunteers regular and constructive feedback?

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you ask volunteers to give feedback about the program?

Recognition

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you make sure to recognize volunteers' contribution in appropriate, meaningful ways?

Family Support Services

Quality family literacy programs provide quality support services and refer families to other agencies when they need support in areas beyond the mandate of the program and organization hosting the program.

Yes	No	N/A	
❑	❑	❑	Is an atmosphere of trust developed, so that participants are comfortable identifying their support needs, and accessing the needed resources?
❑	❑	❑	Are facilitators/group leaders familiar with local support services, such as childcare, transportation, counseling, information and referral for economic, cultural and social needs?
❑	❑	❑	Are participants made aware of family support services available locally?
❑	❑	❑	Do staff help families to get the specific support services they need? (i.e. are staff willing and able to make initial phone calls, rehearse dialogues, take them to other agencies, etc.)
❑	❑	❑	Do you have a policy that ensures confidentiality about participants' personal lives?
❑	❑	❑	Are participants and staff made aware of this policy?

Assessment

Quality family literacy programs use many different methods to assess participant progress and evaluate program success. Processes are in place to: identify the skills, interests and goals of participants when they enter the program; monitor progress towards personal goals and assess learning outcomes upon completion of the program. Assessment processes include finding out how the program has affected the lives, attitudes and actions of participants.

Yes	No	N/A	
❑	❑	❑	Do staff members assess participants skills and knowledge before, during and at the end of the program?

Initial Assessment

❑	❑	❑	Do you have an initial assessment process in place?
❑	❑	❑	Does this assessment process reflect participant goals?
❑	❑	❑	Do assessment practices reflect the values and beliefs of families participating in the program?

Ongoing Assessment

❑	❑	❑	Is ongoing assessment a part of your program? (e.g. portfolios, interviews, goal setting and monitoring, observation, etc.)
❑	❑	❑	Are facilitators encouraged to think critically about their own practices?
❑	❑	❑	Do you involve staff, participants, volunteers and any other relevant individuals in ongoing monitoring of program quality? (e.g. organizations that refer people – health, schools, social services, etc.)
❑	❑	❑	Do you use ongoing evaluation results to respond to the changing goals and needs of participants over the course of the program?

Final Assessment

- ❑ ❑ ❑ Do staff members and participants work together to make decisions about final assessment processes?
- ❑ ❑ ❑ Do you use both traditional and non-traditional assessment methods to document program outcomes?
- ❑ ❑ ❑ Do you interview each participant at the end of the program to find out how s/he benefited from the program?
- ❑ ❑ ❑ Do you record anecdotes from participants, staff, volunteers and other community members about how the lives of participants have changed for the better? Such records should include evidence of:
  - increased involvement in community activities,
  - improved relationship between home and school,
  - higher self-esteem,
  - more literacy-related activities in the home,
  - more effective parenting practices,
  - enhanced problem solving skills,
  - a move towards educational and career planning, etc.
- ❑ ❑ ❑ Do you arrange for a final session (facilitated by an outsider, if necessary) during which group members may brainstorm and identify what they liked about the program and what they think could be done differently?

Administration

Quality family literacy programs ensure timely and accurate record-keeping, recording and reporting. The expectations of staff are clear, and data collection is supported with appropriate time frames and tools.

Yes	No	N/A	
❑	❑	❑	Do you maintain accurate and up-to-date financial records?
❑	❑	❑	Do you maintain accurate and up-to-date program records?
❑	❑	❑	Do you provide regular reports to funding sources?
❑	❑	❑	Do you provide regular reports to participants, volunteers and the board?
❑	❑	❑	Do you have adequate liability insurance?

Funding

Organizations that deliver quality family literacy programs try to obtain long-term core funding so that they can effectively develop partnerships and projects around short-term funding sources. Family literacy programs are accountable for what they set out to do.

Yes	No	N/A	
			Funding Sources
❑	❑	❑	Do you have and follow a detailed budget?
❑	❑	❑	Does your organization provide direct funding or in-kind contributions to support the delivery of the program?
❑	❑	❑	If you require additional funding to maintain or further develop your program, do you have a plan to seek additional funding sources?
❑	❑	❑	Have you researched national funding options such as the National Literacy Secretariat, foundation grants, etc.?
❑	❑	❑	Have you researched provincial funding options such as the Department of Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training, CanSask Centres, the Saskatchewan Municipal Government's Associated Entities Program, the Saskatchewan Literacy Foundation, etc.?
❑	❑	❑	Have you researched local funding options such as service clubs donations, local fundraising efforts, etc.?
❑	❑	❑	Have you completed all funding request forms in full and promptly returned them?
❑	❑	❑	Do you have a plan for securing long-term funding for your program?
			Community Partnerships
❑	❑	❑	Have you researched ways to cost share your program through in-kind donations and community collaborations or partnerships?

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you collaborate with other community agencies to make the best use of available resources?

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you have a written partnership agreement that outlines the roles of each partner?

❑ ❑ ❑ Have you looked for ways in which family literacy can fit into and enhance existing programs?

Networking

❑ ❑ ❑ Have you contacted the Saskatchewan Literacy Network to get information about potential funding sources and contacts?

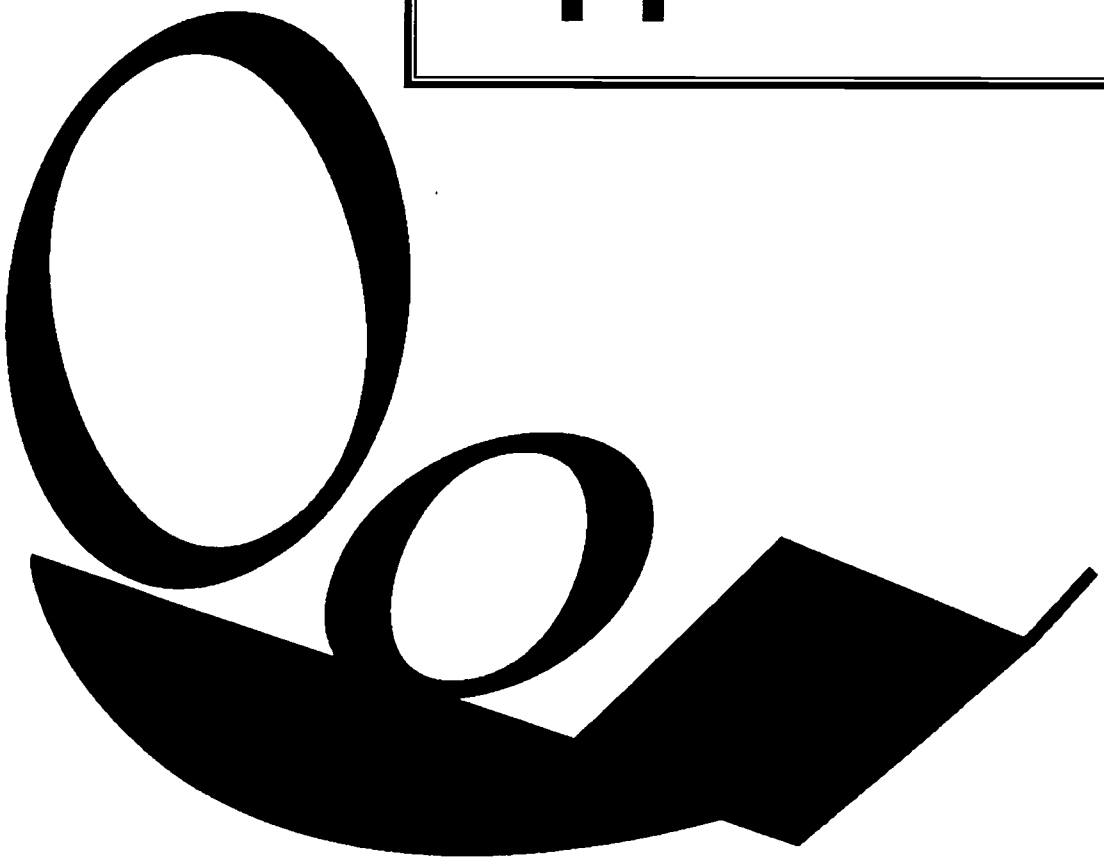
❑ ❑ ❑ Have you followed up on all available leads to increase your knowledge base as well as your contact list and your funding information?

❑ ❑ ❑ Are you a member of a local literacy network/coalition?

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you have access to the Internet?

❑ ❑ ❑ Do you participate in family literacy discussion groups on the Internet?

Appendices



Saskatchewan Literacy Network
SLN
ERIC

Family Literacy Standards

Alphabetical Listing

Access

Administration

Assessment

Content

Effective Communication

Family Support Services

Funding

Participant and Community Involvement

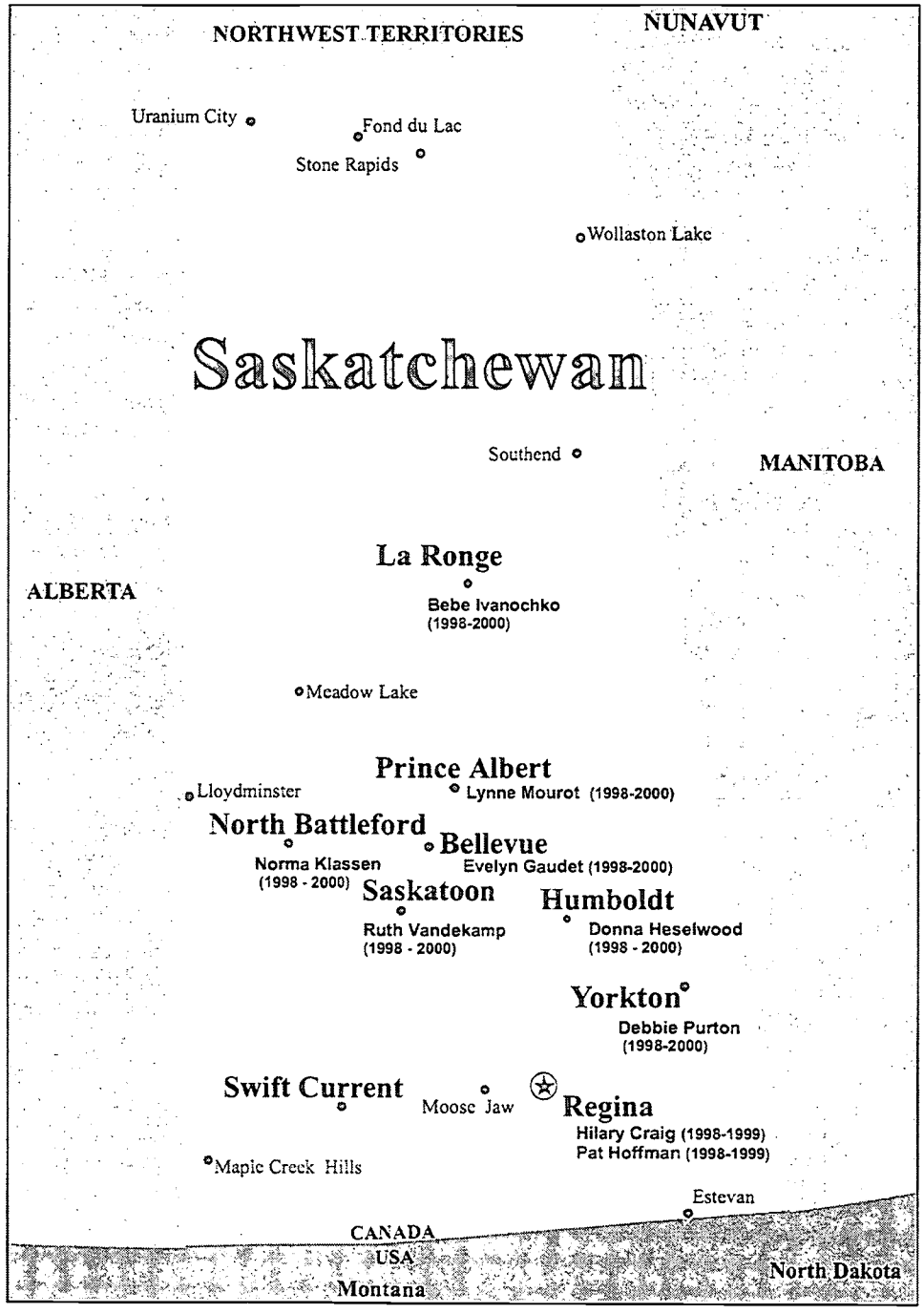
Philosophy

Recruiting and Supporting Participants

Staffing

Working with Volunteers

Best Practices Committee



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