



## Bridging Barriers to Learning

by Glenn Kissmann, Kelowna, BC.

When bright, motivated learners cannot meet their goals because of their financial situation, they are often forced to give up on their dreams. In 2003, Project Literacy in Kelowna, BC established a *Bridging Barriers to Learning Fund* to assist learners who were experiencing barriers to their success. The committee realized that one major barrier was a lack of money for basic needs. Many learners were unable to attend sessions with their tutors because they needed funds to cover food, transportation, vision care, etc. Without this support, they were not able to move forward in their career and educational goals.

Money for the Fund is raised through the sales of note cards. The artwork for the cards was created by a previous learner, and current board member, Rob McFarlane. Growing up in Scotland, Rob was told he had "brain damage" because he could not master reading. He spent his childhood struggling with dyslexia, taking up art as his own way of coping with his disability. When the company that Rob worked for went out of business, he decided to get some literacy help. Rob turned to Project Literacy Kelowna Society for assistance. Now, years later, Rob wants to support the organization that helped him. In order to raise money to help other deserving learners, he developed the *Bridges to Learning* note cards.



A bridge scene from one of the note cards featuring artwork by Rob McFarlane

The package of 6 note cards with bridge designs sells for \$10 or 2 packages for \$15. Funds raised go to the Bridging Barriers Fund. You can order them by contacting Project Literacy in Kelowna at tel: 250-762-2163 or email: [admin@projectliteracykelowna.org](mailto:admin@projectliteracykelowna.org).

Money in the *Bridging Barrier to Learning Fund* has been awarded to several learners over the past year. One such learner is Sabrina Collie. She is exactly the hardworking and ambitious learner that the Fund was set up to help. Read *Sabrina's story* on page 2.

### Celebrate International Adult Learners Week

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO has announced that Canada will join in international celebrations of adult learners in 2005-06. They will have an official launch of information materials on the week of September 8-14, 2005 but each province and territory is creating their own dates to celebrate. Contact your provincial or territorial literacy coalition to find out about dates and events near you or visit: [www.adultlearning.unesco.ca](http://www.adultlearning.unesco.ca).



# Education really is a family affair

Based on an article in the *Truro Daily News*, December 2004, available at:

[www.ns.literacy.ca/learner/brenda.html](http://www.ns.literacy.ca/learner/brenda.html)



Brenda St. Jean, middle, was recently awarded a \$500 bursary from Literacy Nova Scotia for returning to school. St. Jean's two daughters, Marie, 16, and eight-year-old Rachael are supportive of their mother's efforts to improve her education.

Going back to school after being away from a classroom for more than two decades is quite a challenge. Just ask Brenda St. Jean of Stewiacke, Nova Scotia. She is raising her two daughters (aged 8 and 16) while working hard to get her Grade 12 diploma. "It's a whole new ball game now," said Brenda from the Adult Literacy program at the Nova Scotia Community College in Truro.

Like many other people in Nova Scotia, Brenda dropped out of high school and moved on with her life before knowing exactly what she was going to do. As her children grew up Brenda had a number of odd jobs, mostly in the service industry, but now she has something to prove to herself and to her two girls.

"You can't even wash dishes now without your Grade 12 (diploma)," she said. "I try to tell my children they can't get a good job unless they get a proper education." The lesson isn't lost on her 16-year old daughter, Marie, who wants to pursue a career as an English teacher when she graduates from high school.

Living up to the expectations Brenda has for her own children is a great motivator for her to finish her education. Even moreso, the support she gets from her children has kept her going

through long nights of homework and endless days of doing chores and attending classes.

Brenda says the sheer volume of homework is one of the greatest challenges of improving her education. But learning new things and meeting new people are among the best things she'll take away with her, besides the graduation diploma.

Because of Brenda's determination and commitment she was recently awarded one of three \$500 Literacy Nova Scotia bursaries at a special ceremony last fall. "I want to set a good example for my children," said Brenda. "That's all I want to do."

## Sabrina's Story



Sabrina is a single mom in Kelowna, BC, who left school in grade 9. She needed her G.E.D (General Educational Development) in order to apply to the Culinary Arts Program at Okanagan University College. She

and her tutor worked on all areas of the GED, with a focus on math. However, when she felt she was ready to write the exam, Sabrina was unable to pay for the testing fee.

The *Bridging Barriers Fund* (see story on page 1) covered the cost of the testing. Sabrina received very high marks in all areas of the exam and is now succeeding in the Culinary Arts program at the college. She has already obtained part time work at a popular Italian restaurant, Agostino's.

Sabrina is now on her way to fulfilling her dream of running her own catering company, thanks to Project Literacy and the *Bridging Barriers Fund*. Congratulations, Sabrina!

# SARAW helps students find their voice

SARAW (Speech Assisted Reading and Writing) is a talking computer program that teaches basic reading and writing to adults with disabilities. Recently there was a national project called the Literacy and Disabilities Study (LaDS) to study the literacy programs that serve adults with disabilities. As part of the project, they created a book called *Learner Stories* which includes over 20 stories that were written or dictated onto the SARAW computer. Here's a shortened version of two stories in the book for you to sample!

## Mike Szabo, Calgary, Alberta

*My name is Michael but I like to be called mike. I was born 1976 and i have a twin brother Andrew. I have cp [Cerebral Palsy] but that doesn't hold me back. I lived at home with my mom until a year ago i now live in a new home and share it with two other boys. I enjoy attending Bow valley college as it gives me my independence and that makes me feel good. My life is good, i spend a lot of time meeting people but the most important thing to me is my family.*



## Nancy Taylor Woodstock, Ontario

*"People with learning disabilities can learn but they learn in a different way and a different rate than most people."*



*Hi!!! my name is Nancy Taylor, I am 47 years old. When I was in kindergarten I started having some problems I could not follow my classmates in math and reading and I had to get help from my teacher. I had a learning disability and stil have it. My parents understood but a lot of people in the community do not understand. When I talk fast I stutter I need things written down. How was I going to get a job? I started at my work with someone called a job coach she helps me for the first month. Bob is my employer and with the help of my job coach, Bob understands my learning disabilities. I know I can be taught, I learn in a different way. My Perspective are I know I could not learn the way everyone else does but I learn in a different way. I've come a long way. I notice employers are hiring handicapped people. Bob is a special person and I have worked for 15 years at Miss Woodstock.*



If you have experience or know about other learners using useful technology supports, please share your experiences with us! Email the Editor at: [fiona@literacy.ca](mailto:fiona@literacy.ca).

You'll find the *Learner Stories* book online at: [www.nald.ca/fulltext/study/learner/stories.pdf](http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/study/learner/stories.pdf). You can also buy it for \$15 from the Bow Valley College bookstore at email: [bookstore@bowvalleycollege.ca](mailto:bookstore@bowvalleycollege.ca). For more information about the LaDS project, contact Belle Auld at [belle\\_auld@eLit.ca](mailto:belle_auld@eLit.ca) or phone (403) 410-1503.



# Literacy changes lives

The *Book of Changes* is a collection of stories by learners from across the country. It was started



3 years ago as a way of showing government decision-makers how important literacy programs are in the lives of real people across Canada. We received dozens of submissions. Some were long, some were short but all of them were special, unique and heartfelt. The one common message was that learning literacy skills changes lives in many different ways.

Since 2003, the *Book of Changes* has traveled to Parliament Hill and other important meetings. Some of the messages have been included at conferences and in reports. The stories are posted online at: <http://www.literacy.ca/lan/bookchng/cover.htm>.

This fall, we need your help to build our collection again. **We want to expand the Book of Changes.** Many decision-makers have told us how powerful it is to find out about the experiences of adults with low literacy. Learners are encouraged when they read the stories and realize that they are not alone

**Please tell us how literacy has made a difference in your life!** All stories will be included if you give your permission for us to publish it. Everyone who sends something will receive a certificate. We'll also enter your name in a draw for prizes. Please email us at: [fiona@literacy.ca](mailto:fiona@literacy.ca) or go online to: [www.literacy.ca/lan/lan.htm](http://www.literacy.ca/lan/lan.htm) (click on Learners Section) or mail your story to the address below.

# Seeing STARs in Alberta



Literacy Alberta's student and tutor activity resource (STAR) system is focused on providing professional development opportunities for both students and tutors in different parts of the province. Each of the province's eight regions has a STAR Resource Person (RP) to help local persons or teams plan the activities they need. Sometimes the RP is a literacy coordinator.

The interests and goals of tutors and learners guides the STAR activity planning. For example, in two regions the STAR coordinators worked closely with a 'team' of students and tutors to develop and plan professional development activities. These teams were an opportunity for students and tutors to learn new skills and raise awareness about literacy. In all of the STAR activities students and tutors have an active role.

In the past year there have been four one-day regional conferences funded by Literacy Alberta. The conferences were planned by the STAR team and the RP from their regions. The conferences offered a wide range of workshops like: adults and the law, creative writing, resume writing, Readers Theatre, ESL tutoring, math, how to use e-mail, self-esteem, yoga. Thanks to the STAR system, about 200 students and tutors from across the province had professional development opportunities. The students and tutors who attended had a wonderful time.

The funding from Literacy Alberta has allowed these activities to be held at very little cost to students and tutors. The average cost of the day is \$10.00/person, which includes food, beverages and a membership to Literacy Alberta. Literacy Alberta will continue to support this important service. They plan to have four more conferences within the next year.