



Council of the Federation Announces Literacy Award Winners for 2012

July 24, 2012 – Canada’s Premiers today announced the recipients of the eighth annual Council of the Federation Literacy Award. The award recognizes outstanding achievement, innovative practice and excellence in literacy. It is presented annually in each province and territory to educators, volunteers, learners, community organizations, non-governmental organizations and businesses.

The recipients of the 2012 Council of the Federation Literacy Award are:

Lisa O’Blenis – Alberta
Literacy Alliance of the Shuswap Society (LASS) – British Columbia
Tina Bergen – Manitoba
Maria (Candy) Mateo – New Brunswick
Elizabeth Cormier – New Brunswick
Karra Dillon – Northwest Territories
Kimberlly (Kim) Nielsen – Nova Scotia
Annie Neglak – Nunavut
Community Literacy of Ontario – Ontario
Terry Affleck – Prince Edward Island
Romain Audet – Québec
Gordon Li – Saskatchewan
Doris Roberts – Yukon

“On behalf of all Premiers, I congratulate the 2012 recipients of the Council of the Federation Literacy Award,” said Darrell Dexter, Premier of Nova Scotia and Chair of the Council of the Federation. “The determination of literacy learners and the devotion of literacy advocates are an inspiration to all Canadians. The recipients of this award are all truly deserving of this recognition.”

The award recognizes the valuable contributions made by Canadians across the entire spectrum of the field of literacy, including family, Aboriginal, health, workplace and community literacy. Premiers created the award in 2004 to recognize the importance of literacy as a major factor in Canadians' ability to participate as full and active citizens in all areas of society.

Each recipient receives a certificate, signed by the Premier of their province or territory, as well as a Council of the Federation Literacy Award medallion.

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The Council of the Federation comprises all 13 provincial and territorial Premiers. It enables Premiers to work collaboratively to strengthen the Canadian federation by fostering a constructive relationship among the provinces and territories, and with the federal government.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

2012 Council of the Federation Literacy Award Recipients

Lisa O’Blenis – Alberta

Lisa O’Blenis is a volunteer tutor with the Calgary Public Library’s Learning Advantage Program, which pairs volunteers with adult literacy learners to achieve their reading, writing and numeracy goals. O’Blenis is committed to lifelong learning and to helping adults overcome their literacy challenges. By customizing lessons and supporting her students, O’Blenis goes above and beyond to provide learners with the necessary literacy skills for the home, workplace and further education. Thanks to O’Blenis’ help, one of her students received his Canadian citizenship and will now be attending the University of Calgary. When not volunteering as a literacy tutor, O’Blenis works in volunteer management, supporting and coordinating a team of over 500 volunteers. O’Blenis has a positive impact on her students and is a true champion for literacy in Alberta.

Literacy Alliance of the Shuswap Society (LASS) – British Columbia

LASS approached the literacy scene with the attitude of “what can we do to help or support you” rather than “this is what we’re doing.” In addition to fostering community collaboration and partnerships, LASS has delivered a variety of well-received literacy programs that target learners across all ages and sectors. For example, the One-to-One Children’s Literacy Program has involved over 200 community volunteers across 13 schools. In only four months, participating children significantly increased their reading speed and their reading accuracy. LASS exemplifies commitment to innovative literacy practices and positive literacy outcomes for all learners as they work to weave literacy into the culture of the communities in School District 83 – North Okanagan Shuswap.

Tina Bergen – Manitoba

Tina Bergen had a passion for learning as a child in Paraguay where her schooling stopped at age 12. She moved with her young family to Canada, where “a whole new world opened up and it was like her mind had come to life.” When Bergen was laid off from the local manufacturing plant there was an opportunity to pursue a job in the Residential Care field. This work required a grade 12 diploma so she enrolled at South Eastman English and Literacy Services to improve her writing skills. Within six months Bergen finished Stage 3, wrote a book, *Turbulence, Transitions and Triumphs* and enrolled in high school courses. She inspires other learners through her writing, volunteering on the board and her successful transition to the adult learning centre.

Maria (Candy) Mateo – New Brunswick

Maria (Candy) Mateo came to Canada from El Salvador in 1994. Her desire to learn English inspired her to improve her literacy skills. Mateo struggled to communicate with Canadian friends, find work and read the Bible. Attempting various methods of learning the language – including using a Spanish-English dictionary, borrowing books from the library and watching Sesame Street – she began her quest to get a GED, as she wrote, “before I start walking with a cane.” It has been a long journey but in May 2012, Mateo achieved her GED. Her goal is to go to college and train to find meaningful employment. Mateo notes it was with the support of her family and friends and her deep faith in God that she was successful.

Elizabeth Cormier – New Brunswick

Elizabeth Cormier left school at the age of 18 because she was pregnant. School was not important to her – until the day she became a mother. She came to the realization she had responsibilities as a parent and no education. Cormier obtained work, but nothing that paid well, and it was hard living on little money. She did not want her daughter to be in the same situation, so she made her a promise she would finish high school, obtain her GED and go to college. At 35, Cormier decided to go back to school and is now on her way to achieving her goal. In her own words, “I am going to graduate with honours; the honour of creating a better future for myself.”

Karra Dillon – Northwest Territories

Karra Dillon is a young Inuvialuit woman living in her home community of Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories. She left school at an early age to start a family and returned to school in 2010 in order to pursue a career. This spring she graduated from the Aboriginal Language and Culture Instructor Program at Aurora College in Inuvik, NT. Dillon came to the program as an emerging speaker and has worked hard to become a very skilled Siglitun Inuvialuktun speaker. Dillon’s love of her language and culture is also expressed through traditional drum dancing. Dillon plans to pursue additional upgrading towards her new goal of entering the Bachelor of Education Program.

Kimberly (Kim) Nielsen – Nova Scotia

As a single mother of four children, when her youngest was ready to leave for university, Kim Nielsen decided to go back to school. Her first step towards this goal was to enroll at the Queens Adult High School, a decision that ultimately changed her life. As a student she stood out due to her dedication, her leadership qualities and her commitment; she will graduate in June 2012 with honours. Nielsen participated in a wide range of activities ranging from fundraising to volunteering in a technology mentoring program in a seniors’ residence. She plans to attend the Continuing Care Program at a Nova Scotia Community College. Nielsen will no doubt thrive in the health care profession as she is a nurturing, trustworthy, talented individual with a sparkling personality.

Annie Neglak – Nunavut

Annie Neglak spent her early years growing up as her ancestors had for many years – on the land near the outpost camp of Bathurst Inlet, in western Nunavut. Separated from her family and sent away to residential school, she was denied an education because she was considered “too old”. Instead, she was put to work at the school. Neglak always desired not only to right this personal wrong, but also to advocate for her people. In her late fifties, she began the journey toward literacy. Neglak completed Adult Basic Education and then enrolled in the Social Services Worker Program at Nunavut Arctic College. She continued to return to Adult Basic Education for upgrades that allowed her to complete her college diploma. Neglak has become a passionate promoter of literacy. As an elder, she is a role model to all Inuit who struggle with adversity, and continues to give back to her people.

Community Literacy of Ontario – Ontario

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) is a network of community-based literacy agencies. CLO was created in 1994 and is located in Barrie. They have a passion for literacy, for learning and for the power of community. Their mission is to provide resources, information, and practitioner training. They believe in making practitioner training highly accessible and were an early adopter of online learning. CLO offers face-to-face training, online workshops, webinars, self-study training modules, podcasts, online videos and more. While CLO may be small, they have always dreamed big and worked hard to support Ontario's community-based literacy agencies in the important work they do in helping adults to improve their literacy and numeracy skills.

Terry Affleck – Prince Edward Island

At the age of 63, Terry Affleck learned to read and today at the age of 66, he is one subject away from achieving his grade 12 equivalency. In the 1950s, early in Affleck's schooling, low self-esteem and rebellion set in and literacy became problematic. He decided to quit school in order to work and his parents accepted his decision. Affleck was always a good worker and found employment easily. He believed he did not need more education until children arrived on the scene and he could not help them with their homework. For years, Affleck was convinced people thought he could read until a good friend suggested he take advantage of a literacy tutor. After two years with a tutor, Affleck experienced a dramatic change – he could read and enjoyed it, but most of all he realized that with a little more effort he could finally complete high school.

Romain Audet – Québec

When he began his literacy journey at the Saint-Prosper Centre d'éducation des adultes, Romain Audet could read and write a little; his math skills were non-existent. This led him to be extremely shy around others. After a while, his taste for learning grew, as did his self-confidence. His progress now enables him to go to the library, make a budget and use tools such as grammar books, dictionaries and the computer to upgrade his skills. Audet has also formed new friendships and varied his hobbies, which allows him to enjoy life more within his circle of friends. In short, as he himself says, "My life has changed. I'm no longer alone. I feel good about myself!"

Gordon Li – Saskatchewan

When Gordon Li came to Canada more than 20 years ago, he was fluent in Chinese and Russian but had few English skills. He attended community-based literacy programs, including those at the Regina Public Library, Regina Open Door Society, the Lifelong Learning Centre and the Regina Literacy Network. He considers society to be his classroom. Li is dedicated to promoting learning and literacy engagement among adult learners. He is a peer tutor, a volunteer interpreter and assists immigrant entrepreneurs. He is currently a learner leader and the treasurer for the Regina Literacy Network as well as a member of Saskatchewan Literacy Network's provincial speakers' bureau and adult learner focus committee. In 2010, Li received *Celebrating Seniors*, the first provincial senior volunteer award.

Doris Roberts – Yukon

Doris Roberts is an elder of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in from Dawson City. She has made it her life's work to study, recover and teach her traditional Hän language. Upon returning to her family after residential school, Roberts worked hard to re-learn the language she had not been allowed to speak. She then began teaching others. Roberts also played a pivotal role in recovering Hän language and songs that had been entrusted to the Tanacross of Alaska. Her teaching now includes songs, stories and performances that had been missing for 100 years. The Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in now perform these traditional songs at their gatherings. Because of Roberts' efforts and dedication to the Hän language, community members are hopeful that Hän will once again be a strong and vibrant language, and a strong part of their culture.

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