



**Canada's Premiers Announce 2024 Literacy Award Recipients
and Mark the Award's 20th Anniversary**

OTTAWA, September 6, 2024 – In honour of International Literacy Day, Canada's Premiers announced the recipients of the 20th annual Council of the Federation Literacy Award and celebrated the Award's milestone anniversary. Presented in each province and territory, the Award recognizes exceptional achievement, innovative practice and excellence in literacy.

The recipients of the 2024 Council of the Federation Literacy Award are:

County of Lethbridge Community Learning Council — Alberta

Maureen Kehler — British Columbia

Ayni Ahmed — Manitoba

Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador — Newfoundland and Labrador

Murray Grasse — New Brunswick

Martine Cadieux — New Brunswick

NWT Literacy Council — Northwest Territories

Mary 'Lorenda' Harper — Nova Scotia

Patrick Woodcock — Nunavut

Kayla Dufault — Ontario

Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI — Prince Edward Island

Sylvie Héon — Québec

nêhiyawak Language Experience — Saskatchewan

Denis Vachon — Yukon

"On behalf of Canada's Premiers, I want to extend a heartfelt congratulations to the recipients of the 2024 Council of the Federation Literacy Awards for your outstanding work in advancing literature and education," said Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario and Chair of the Council of the Federation. "Thanks to your dedication and hard work, countless Canadians have access to essential literacy skills that will help set them up for long-term success at their workplace and in their communities. Your contributions are deeply appreciated."

Premiers recognize the importance of literacy in enabling participation as a full and active citizen in all areas of society. Created in 2004, the Award celebrates adult learners who undertake literacy training, as well as the valuable contributions made by Canadians in the field of literacy, including family, Indigenous, health, workplace, and community literacy. The Award is presented to learners, educators, volunteers, community organizations, and businesses in each province and territory. Over the past 20 years, the Award has highlighted the importance of literacy across the country, and how it brings people together to not only create a more prosperous life for themselves, but also contribute to Canada as a whole.

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

The Council of the Federation comprises all 13 provincial and territorial Premiers. It enables Premiers to work collaboratively, form closer ties, foster constructive relationships among governments, and show leadership on important issues that matter to Canadians.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

2024 Council of the Federation Literacy Award Recipients

County of Lethbridge Community Learning Council – Alberta

The County of Lethbridge Community Learning Council (CLCLC) has provided adult literacy programs to the region since 2015. Staffed by only two people, Melanie Patenaude and Roxanne Samoleski, CLCLC is a key learning organization in the area, particularly in the provision of English Language Learning (ELL). Patenaude and Samoleski work collaboratively with the community to support adult learners in overcoming barriers to learning. CLCLC works with newcomers and Low German Mennonites to learn English, navigate Canadian society, and engage with the larger community. Employers recognize the value of helping their non-English speaking employees learn English, in one case paying Spanish-speaking staff to attend ELL classes. CLCLC exemplifies inclusion through its approach to strengthening communities by innovative, collaborative, ELL and literacy programming.

Maureen Kehler – British Columbia

Maureen Kehler is a longtime literacy practitioner and champion whose vision and innovative leadership has had a positive, far-reaching impact on literacy work throughout B.C. Through encouragement, problem-solving, and collaboration, she leads Decoda Literacy Solution's network of literacy outreach coordinators. Her extensive contributions enable work at the grassroots level to support learners in 400 communities, as they develop the skills they need to grow and thrive. What distinguishes Maureen is her unwavering commitment and understanding of how literacy can help people. As a catalyst for positive change, she continues to raise awareness and strengthen connections between community organizations, businesses, and government. Advocating for literacy as a human right, Maureen continues to have a positive lasting impact on B.C.'s literacy community.

Ayni Ahmed – Manitoba

Ayni Ahmed always wanted to attend school, but as the oldest of seven children, never had the chance. Arriving in Canada in 1984 as a refugee from Ethiopia, she had to forgo her dreams due to family and financial responsibilities. In 2022, while running a successful Ethiopian bakery with her family, Ayni returned to school at LiteracyWORKS Inc. She has demonstrated exceptional dedication to improving her literacy skills while being an active community member, parent, and business owner. Ayni encourages her classmates every day and is a true leader and a friend: *Returning back to school as an adult has brought me so much joy. I have become a happier and more confident person because, against all odds, I am pursuing my dreams.*

Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador – Newfoundland and Labrador

The Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (LDANL), based in St. John's, is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting individuals with learning disabilities across Newfoundland and Labrador. LDANL offers a wide range of services, including adult tutoring, support groups, screening, and community outreach programs, all aimed at promoting awareness, providing resources, and advocating for the rights and needs of individuals with learning disabilities and their supporters. Working closely with schools, educators, healthcare professionals, and the community, LDANL strives to enhance understanding and support for individuals with learning disabilities, empowering them to achieve their full potential. LDANL, known for its positive impact, collaborative spirit, and innovative practices, continues to make a difference in the lives of diverse learners and vulnerable populations in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Murray Grasse – New Brunswick

Murray Grasse's tenure as a teacher with Central Valley Adult Learning Association for over a decade has been marked by passion, tireless effort, and a desire to empower learners. He goes above and beyond to ensure that his students not only grasp the content but also understand its practical applications in real-life situations. His teaching is tailored to meet the diverse needs of his learners. He creates personalized lessons for students needing support, recognizing that each learner's journey is unique. From a former student: *If I had a teacher like him in high school, I would not have fallen through the cracks. Murray is conscientious and diligent. If you don't understand something the first time, he will rephrase it until you understand. He gave me time and space to figure out my mistakes, so I had a chance to know what was wrong. I never felt like I was left hanging.*

Martine Cadieux – New Brunswick

Martine Cadieux is a mother, elementary school teacher, educational leader and advocate for reading and literacy in New Brunswick's Francophone School District – Sud. She encourages reading among children; not only those who are French-speaking, but also English-speaking children wanting to learn the French language, and all the people around her. A jovial and passionate person, she makes you want to embark on the world of children's literature. During her maternity leave and the pandemic she created *La boîte de Mme Martine* on social media, hosted 120 story hours for children virtually, and led dance classes and story hours for toddlers. Her passion, commitment and remarkable work have earned her two prizes: the *Prix Éducation en Francophonie internationale* and the *Prix Anime ta francophonie*.

NWT Literacy Council – Northwest Territories

The NWT Literacy Council (NWTLC) is a dynamic learning organization with highly skilled staff who work in Family Literacy, Adult Literacy, Youth Literacy, Indigenous Languages and Literacy, and non-formal English Language and Literacy for immigrants. The Council was founded in 1990. Since then, the board has consciously chosen to promote and support literacy in all the NWT's official languages and to support communities in their community-based literacy initiatives. All the Council's programs provide information, training and resources to community members interested in or working in literacy in general and adult literacy in particular. Since 1996, Family Literacy has been a cornerstone project of the NWTLC, supporting community development through the Family Literacy Training Institute, community literacy projects and special events. The Council has recently moved to include a direct delivery approach with programs such as Skills for Success offering pre-employment skill development integrated with cultural connections, and supported job training.

Mary 'Lorenda' Harper – Nova Scotia

Mary 'Lorenda' Harper returned to school after years of working in a factory cafeteria. Despite initial fears, especially about math, she enrolled in Colchester Adult Learning Association (CALA) and passed all five GED tests, including math, in 2023. At CALA, Lorenda is known for her active participation. Her curiosity and determination create a positive energy in the classroom, inspiring others to participate more actively. Lorenda's instructors describe her as "a model of adult learning principles, problem-focused, self-motivated, and excited to learn." Post-GED, Lorenda continues to learn and most recently went back for Digital literacy courses. Beyond academics, Lorenda volunteers with Girl Guides and MADD Canada, contributing to her community.

Patrick Woodcock – Nunavut

Patrick Woodcock has worked with United for Literacy in Iqaluit (formerly Frontier College) for almost 2 years. Mr. Woodcock has worked tirelessly to develop a formal literacy program for incarcerated Nunavummiut. Patrick works four days a week at Nunavut's minimum-to-maximum security Aaqqigiarvik Correctional Healing Facility (formerly Baffin Correctional Centre) and three days a week at the Nunavut Women's Correctional Centre, where he teaches people one-on-one. Not only does he help them improve their reading and writing skills, but he has also taught history, geography, math and other courses. When a person is released, Mr. Woodcock continues to work with them at Uttaqivik Community Residential Centre (the halfway house in Iqaluit) or within the community. In addition to his work as a literacy leader, he also acts as a character reference for incarcerated clients needing to travel between Iqaluit and other communities in Nunavut or elsewhere.

Kayla Dufault – Ontario

Kayla is the definition of resiliency and perseverance. After a challenging childhood, she dropped out of high school to marry and have a child. She worked minimum wage jobs but always knew education was the key to a brighter future. In 2016, Kayla enrolled in the Academic Upgrading program at Sault College to earn her grade 12 equivalency and start college. However, she would have to stop and re-enroll several times for personal reasons. In 2020, she took a cook job in a long-term care home, putting her education on hold until 2023 when she returned to finish her grade 12 equivalency and enroll in the college's culinary arts program. This led to a full-time job, employer sponsorship of her culinary program, and upcoming promotion.

Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI – Prince Edward Island

For over a decade, the Employment and Skills Team at the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island (MCPEI) has been helping Indigenous people across PEI by offering adult education and training opportunities of all kinds. Starting in 2014 with a Workplace Essential Skills Program in Lennox Island First Nation, MCPEI's Indigenous-led Employment and Skills Team has shared encouragement and increased skills among adult learners by prioritizing a safe and accessible learning environment, meeting participants where they are, and adapting and being responsive to community needs. The level of consistency and support has been met with much appreciation by participants, Indigenous communities, and the province as a whole, and has empowered countless participants to overcome barriers and trauma and to find meaningful employment.

Sylvie Héon – Québec

At 54 years old, Ms. Sylvie Héon, single mother of three children, is an example of courage and determination. Aspiring to a better future, she returned to studies at the Rimouski-Neigette Training Centre in the fall of 2023. Thanks to her efforts, she made spectacular progress in her learning, which has enabled her to increase her independence. Involved as a volunteer with an organization that helps victims of intimate violence, she is also a source of pride for her children, and her story shows that despite the obstacles, all dreams are possible. Based on her life experience and thanks to the support of the core team, she will pursue university studies in the psychosocial field. Her engagement and her perseverance will certainly allow her to achieve her goals.

nêhiyawak Language Experience – Saskatchewan

The nêhiyawak Language Experience (nLE) has been a leading organization in the preservation and enrichment of Cree language and literacy in Saskatchewan for two decades. They have provided language experience and education to thousands of individuals coming not only from across North America but other continents. What sets them apart is their commitment to integrating Cree values and worldviews into the curriculum, fostering not only language proficiency but also cultural pride and identity. Their community development philosophy is based on three elements: access, affordability and education. nLe's origin is in Sturgeon Lake First Nation, SK and it is here that they founded a Multifaceted Language Revitalization Project. They engage in language revitalization research and contribute to the restoration of Cree literacy through workshops, presentations and community projects. Notably, nLE has hosted summer literacy immersion camps since 2004, that provide hands on experiences in land-based learning, reinforcing cultural connections and language skills. Their programs have been described as medicine contributing to therapeutic nourishment and healing.

Denis Vachon – Yukon

Denis bravely nominated himself for this award in the hopes of inspiring others. A determined individual, Denis persevered through a difficult childhood that didn't support his literacy needs. He returned to school as an adult and learned to read and write in French. With support from L'Arbralette in Québec and his classmates, he would eventually receive his high school diploma, two additional diplomas, and a certificate in mycology. Today, Denis continues his pursuit of literacy in the Yukon. He spends two hours each day studying English vocabulary and conversation at Yukon University. He is an avid volunteer and previously dedicated more than 450 hours in a single year to a non-profit organization in Whitehorse. Talking about the challenges he faced, Denis said, "Being illiterate is an extremely difficult reality and a handicap one carries every day." He hopes his story will inspire others who face literacy barriers to never stop pursuing their dreams.

- 30 -

For more information:

Paola St-Georges

Manager, Events and Communications

Council of the Federation Secretariat

(343) 961-5811

paola@canadaspremiers.ca