

Effective Outreach Strategies
From Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Program



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Outreach needs to be viewed within a new framework, and built into proposals in unique ways. It is not about a quick flyer run to promote a program. Outreach should play a more significant role in project development. Well-thought out plans are necessary for outreach to be effective. Allotted funding in a budget is also required to do it properly. In fact, Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Program has started to look at outreach in terms of substantial "outreach programs" with sufficient time allocated to run them. Through more effective strategies, our objectives are to: create awareness, to encourage families to become involved in a number of our programs, and engage parents that have both pre-school children and low literacy skills in family and adult literacy programs. These strategies address barriers faced by parents with limited resources and/or low literacy skills.

The development of an outreach model has entailed utilizing a number of strategies. These outreach avenues have included:

1. Utilizing Kingston Literacy's Existing Programs as Outreach Tools
 - The Reading And Parents Program (RAPP)
 - Family Literacy Workshops
 - Parent Upgrading Programs
2. Outreach Programs
 - Key Components
 - Two Highlighted Outreach Programs
3. Community Partnerships
4. Connections with Parents
5. Factors Affecting Participation in Parent Upgrading Programs
6. Promotion
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1. Utilizing Kingston Literacy's Existing Programs as Outreach Tools

The Reading And Parents Program (RAPP)

When Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Program was in its infancy, we needed to begin to build a connection with families in the community. Instead of trying to bring parents to our centre at that point, it was decided to create a resource that could be taken out to established programs where families with young children already congregate. As part of this outreach process, the Reading And Parents Program (RAPP) was developed in 1990. Book packs were created; each one containing a quality children's book, reading and language hints, poetry and fingerplays, a craft idea with the necessary materials for each child, and younger and older activity sheets all relating to the theme of the book. Additional books are included in packs based on the ages and interests of the children in each family. Therefore, the individual packs are tailor-made.¹

RAPP has continued over the years to be an important, thriving component of our family literacy programming in both urban and rural locations. RAPP is offered at resource centre playgroups throughout the community, an elementary school and at our own learning centres. Parents and caregivers can borrow book packs on a bi-weekly basis from RAPP staff, when visits are made. Maintaining strong community partnerships with such agencies as Better Beginnings for Kingston Children (BBKC), the Kingston Military Family Resource Centre (KMFRC) and the Ontario Early Years Centre (OEYC) has been crucial to the growth of RAPP. These community organizations serve families with young children.

An important aspect of RAPP is the conversation that takes place between the parent and the RAPP facilitator about the pack being returned and the new one

¹ As noted in Hayes (1990), the most effective way to reach and recruit potential adult participants is by creating outreach programs that are tailored to the needs of specific groups and individuals.

being received.² In order to be effective and provide the most appropriate materials in each pack, ongoing feedback from parents is crucial. Because of this RAPP format, our staff comes to know families over a sixteen to twenty week period. Establishing a rapport with the parents who receive RAPP through other agencies has provided us with the opportunity to inform them about other services Kingston Literacy offers. Presenting information in person to a parent where a connection has already been made is a very direct and effective way to do outreach. RAPP is a gentle approach that often leads parents to participate in other workshop series that we offer; it can be a stepping stone to outreach programs or directly to upgrading programs. For adults to consider registering in programs such as upgrading, there often needs to be a level of comfort and trust.

In terms of RAPP, partnerships are essential not only for meeting families but also with funders. Because family literacy currently does not receive core funding, the program relies on project-based sources of funding. RAPP is a program in and of itself or a tool used within other programs we facilitate. Therefore, RAPP has been woven into different proposals, where over time, the staff has been able to continue to use, develop and build the RAPP resources. Proposals have focused solely on RAPP or have included it as part of other models. Occasionally, workshop series have been a way to introduce the lending of the RAPP packs. When parents continue to borrow packs beyond a program, it may introduce them to a new site such as our upgrading centre or another organization and its services where RAPP is delivered. Sometimes, promotion of other agencies' programs is done by RAPP staff with their flyers included in the packs. Therefore, RAPP can be an outreach tool for other agencies as well. Agencies such as BBKC, the Health Unit and the Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre have home visitor programs as support for families we might not necessarily otherwise meet. On a small scale, RAPP resources are being

² This is a crucial moment for outreach – the time that program staff and potential participants spend discussing opportunities that the organization has to offer. Research has shown potential participants often decide against pursuing literacy training after having bad experiences with unfriendly or unhelpful literacy program staff (Long & Middleton, 2001; Long & Taylor, 2002).

provided through home visitors with one agency. Even though this approach is a more indirect link with parents, it creates new possibilities to reach families and extends the involvement of staff from other agencies.

Family Literacy Workshops

Our Family Literacy Program offers a variety of programming at different times depending on current project funding and parent interest. Kingston Literacy facilitates programs developed by its own family literacy staff, and utilizing available resources and training, we also offer programs created by other family literacy organizations: From Lullabies to Literacy, Parents' Roles Interacting with Teacher Support (PRINTS) and the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program. Outreach happens naturally through such programs.

The implementation of the PRINTS program at the Family Literacy Centre provides an excellent example of promotion and how outreach can be a step-by-step approach. A number of parents were recruited for PRINTS through a BBKC RAPP group offered in the room next door to the Family Literacy Centre at a high-needs elementary school. Over a fourteen-week period, parents participated in PRINTS. During this time, there were a number of opportunities to discuss other upcoming programs and hand out information. Three participants went on to take part in the bookmaking workshops happening at our adult learning centre, and finally all three started the sixteen-week parent upgrading program. These parents were able to meet with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) staff to determine their needs in the upgrading program while attending the bookmaking workshops. The transition from one program to another was not abrupt: the amount of involvement, type of programming and location shifted over time. For several parents, they participated in these series of programs approximately over a ten to twelve month period, which is a substantial commitment. This process demonstrates that outreach depends on existing connections.

Parent Upgrading Programs

Recently, we facilitated two distinct program models offering the same child development program on-site but with different parent literacy program components: upgrading based on a family literacy curriculum and a regular LBS small group format. Both programs were offered two mornings a week for sixteen weeks and had an interactive parent-child time.

The Upgrading for Parents with Preschoolers (U.P.P.) model focused on improving reading and writing skills through family literacy content. The U.P.P. Program covered such family-related topics as self-esteem, nutrition, shopping, menu-planning, budgeting, healthy lifestyles, and language, cognitive and physical development. This small parent group met in a separate setting where other adult programming was not happening at the same time. The parents in the Family Literacy/LBS Program took classes in English, math and computers with other adults at Kingston Literacy's Community Learning Centre, Kingston (CLCK). Participants tended to take two or all three subjects offered. Each parent had her own schedule based on subject level.

In both on-site children's programs, emergent literacy and pre-literacy skills were fostered daily by: using songs and poems, reading several books, and interacting with the children during most activities. This approach enabled the staff to foster language skills by encouraging conversations, introducing new vocabulary, asking children to repeat words correctly and asking children to try fuller sentences. Through both program models, parents could borrow RAPP packs to take home and share with their children.

One family literacy upgrading model may serve as an outreach tool for another model. For example, a parent and her children who participated in more than one delivery cycle of the Family Literacy/LBS Program had previously joined many family literacy workshops. She had also taken part in another parent upgrading program model we had offered in the past. This other model was a combination

of the U.P.P. and Family Literacy/LBS Programs in terms of format and curriculum. Family Literacy intergenerational programs can potentially be the catalysts which give parents the confidence to continue to learn by registering with an ongoing adult literacy program.

The regular LBS channels have provided a platform for outreach. An adult recruited through CLCK was able to attend classes there because a children's program was available. She participated in the parent-child time at the end of the morning. Another parent already taking classes at CLCK did not need to access childcare for her young children. However, she did borrow the RAPP book packs, as did other parents in the LBS Program. As well as small group work, CLCK offers a one-to-one tutoring program for adults. If requested, RAPP packs are incorporated into individual tutoring sessions for learners who are parents.

2. Outreach Programs

The main objective of family literacy outreach programs is to reach parents not accessing services or who could be potential learners, and expose them to new programs, resources and upgrading opportunities.³ Planned outreach workshops are essential. Parents are more apt to attend an upgrading program if they have already made a connection with someone from an organization. Starting with family literacy workshops can eventually lead parents to upgrade their skills.

Outreach tools vary in intensity. RAPP is an example of a separate program that also happens to serve as a low key outreach format. In comparison, parent upgrading programs that specifically concentrate on family literacy curriculum such as the U.P.P. Program model can lead to regular LBS programming. Therefore, time-limited family literacy parent upgrading programs can be considered an outreach tool as well, with much more focus and connection to the adult literacy delivery model. Designated outreach programs fall in the middle of the continuum; they are specifically built into proposals to recruit new families and serve as a springboard for other programs. Key components of outreach programs and two models are highlighted below. Many of the components are also applicable for recruiting parents for upgrading programs (e.g., children's programming and transportation).

Key Components

Children's Programming:

Offering a children's program while parents attend workshops has been a major incentive. Parents may not have alternative care for their children nor be able to afford the expense, so could not otherwise attend. They like the fact that their children are participating in a program at the same time and in the same location as their own; the children are nearby and in good care. Also, the adults seem to

³ For a discussion of several educational programs that were specifically designed to recruit learners into an organization's regular literacy and upgrading programming, see "Learning brokerage: Building bridges between learners and providers", by Thomas et al. (2004).

enjoy a bit of time on their own with other parents. For organizations planning similar projects, a well-developed, enriched children's program is recommended. Our children's coordinator provides consistency, structure and quality programming. She builds a rapport with the children within one outreach program but also over a number of programs. Depending on which program is being offered, she is able to do informed but casual observations or more formal assessments. In order for parents to access upgrading programs, it is extremely important to provide childcare if needed.⁴ With a childcare component built into a regular upgrading model, intake can be more continuous. There is not the same pressure to have all participants registered on the first day. Parents seem pleased to be able to bring their children. They feel that they are doing something good for themselves and also for their children. When we have offered family literacy upgrading as part of the regular LBS programming, we received positive feedback about the concurrent children's program. One parent viewed it as the families were going to school together. Parents spoke highly of the children's coordinator and her facilitation of the children's program. Her support was appreciated.

Confirmation Calls:

Once families have registered for outreach or parent upgrading programs, we tend to phone closer to the start date and check that they will still be coming.⁵ It provides an opportunity to ask if they have any questions and to address concerns. For practical purposes, the number and ages of children attending needs to be confirmed because additional childcare staff may have been hired to accommodate the families registered. After parents have started participating in a program, but attendance is inconsistent, they are phoned. The idea is not to make parents feel badly but to let them know that they are missed and address

⁴ Lack of childcare has been frequently cited as a major barrier to participation in literacy and adult education programs (Hart et al., 2002; Long & Middleton, 2001; Manson, 2002).

⁵ The failure of program staff to call program participants with follow-up inquiries after the participants had made their initial contact with a literacy organization has been cited as a reason why many people get discouraged and end up not participating after making their initial inquiries into what literacy programs have to offer (Middleton & Bancroft Planning and Research Associates, 1999).

any worries. Sometimes if parents do miss a session or two, they feel too far behind with the rest of the group, therefore, reassurance is key. However, reminders are given that program space has been reserved for both themselves and their children, and that phone calls are appreciated ahead of time, when possible, if a family will not be able to attend on a given week.

Duration:

Based on experience, it takes at least eight to ten family literacy outreach workshop sessions to provide the opportunity for facilitators to begin to establish a connection with new families. It also takes time for parents to feel that they are part of a group.

Flexibility:

In order to maintain credibility within the local service delivery system, organizations need to reflect on pertinent questions. Where are the gaps? Is another agency offering a similar program? Will the information in a workshop series be useful and interesting to parents? Have parents indicated a preference for certain workshops? Before a program begins, facilitators need to explore what will work best for parents in terms of when, where and how often a program should happen. For outreach programs and parent upgrading programs, it is important not to be locked in to a prescribed curriculum. As facilitators, it is imperative to be constantly assessing program sessions and to be asking for feedback. Acting upon feedback, incorporating suggestions and making changes demonstrates a willingness on the facilitator's part to make it a better experience for parents. Otherwise, families may not complete a program or join other programs your organization offers. If space is available, parents should be able to join part way through a program because this may be the only opportunity to establish a connection.

The U.P.P. Program provides an example of flexibility.⁶ Some experimentation was done in the U.P.P. Program with the timing for the parent and child component. The facilitators for the parent's and children's programs tried restructuring their schedules in order to find an ideal routine for the families. Later in the morning worked best for this program model. At the beginning of the morning, the children needed time to play with the toys and move around more. If the parent-child component was offered in the middle of the program, children did not want the parents to leave after they had already separated from them once. By offering this component at the end of the morning, children knew they would then leave with their parents. Being open to modifying a program means that facilitators are not waiting until the end of a program to evaluate it.

Focused Recruitment for Outreach Programs:

Because outreach programs are meant for hard-to-reach families, they involve a more focused recruitment. If a general promotion is done, the program could fill quickly with people already accessing a number of programs. Because a children's program is always incorporated, there are a limited number of spaces for children based on room size, ages and available staffing. Therefore, the program could reach maximum capacity quickly without having included the targeted hard-to-reach group.

How do you concentrate your efforts for outreach and promote a program if you want to attract parents who may have low literacy skills, limited resources in the home, or limited access to community programs? Community partners are essential in this process. As with RAPP being taken to community playgroups, part of the promotion plan can be to offer a service through another particular organization where parents are informed of other programming being offered. If the organization primarily focuses on families from a community that face a number of barriers, then promotion of an outreach program becomes general at

⁶ See Huget (2002) for a discussion of the importance of offering flexibility with the schedules and curriculums of upgrading programs.

that level. All families associated with the organization have access to the information; individual families are not centred out within groups. If a partnering organization has a universal mandate, then promotion for outreach programs within their general programming would not necessarily work. Instead, the promotion could be with that agency's staff who might know of families who would benefit from the information or by promotion through very specific programs it offers such as Good Food Boxes or a group for teenage mothers. With focused recruitment, the incentives include the provision of food, childcare and transportation, and the fact that the program is free. Therefore, these features need to be clearly stated in flyers, and to families and staff from other agencies.

Food:

A snack is always included for both the children's and the adult's portion of any outreach programs we offer.⁷ Participants appreciate the snack. Another option, depending on the program budget, is for families to take food home each week, as well as being provided with a snack during a workshop session. Taking it one step further, a meal may be offered in conjunction with a program.

Locations:

Facilitating an outreach program within another agency's space serves as a promotion of your program and organization. If the agency serves a hard-to-reach population, then being based in their space increases the opportunity to meet potential participants for present or future programs through their staff and other parents. Connections between agencies can be strengthened by this direct arrangement. Their staff will be reminded each week of your service by virtue of program visibility, and then continuous intake becomes important as informal referrals may be made by their staff. The reverse can also happen in that

⁷ For further discussion of the importance of offering food as part of family literacy programming, see "Pathways sourcebook: A guide for family literacy coordinators and facilitators to attract parents into community programs", by Coldblatt & McBean (2002).

participants may be introduced to the services of another agency by your presence in their space.

To offer outreach workshops in the same location as future family literacy workshop series or parent upgrading programs, potentially introduces parents to other staff and services within your own organization and reduces concerns of the unknown. However, a location may be selected for an outreach program based purely on proximity to a particular community and appropriate space availability for specific outreach program requirements (e.g., church basement). Location impacts on transportation issues and program scheduling. Ideally, for economic purposes and proximity of service, it works best if outreach programs and upgrading programs are offered close to where potential participants live. In terms of travel time, distance to a program and older children's school schedules may impact negatively on recruitment of parents. As an example, a parent who attended an outreach program in her children's school near her home considered upgrading at CLCK and went for an initial assessment. In the end, this parent decided not to participate because it felt too hectic for her to get the children to school, travel to class with her youngest child and make it back in time for lunch, even though accommodations were being considered in terms of transportation and class scheduling.

Program Approach:

Outreach programs require a very welcoming, low key approach. They provide an initial opportunity to establish a rapport with families and a reason for parents to become involved in an organization without extensive commitments on their part. Through this format, facilitators can casually inform parents about other programs. A form of promotion can be to weave samples of other workshops into an outreach program (e.g. playgroup/make-and-take workshops highlighted below). If parents sense that they will not be put on the spot or made to feel

uncomfortable at an outreach program, they may be more willing to try other types of programs recommended by the facilitator, such as upgrading.⁸

In order to retain participants in programs, a supportive environment is required. Do parents feel that a facilitator is sensitive to their circumstances? Are they being heard? It becomes even more crucial when people start upgrading classes because they may feel vulnerable.⁹ The teachers or facilitators need to be motivating and accepting. One parent in an LBS upgrading program summed it up well. She said, "I really feel comfortable in class. Nobody laughs or anything when you aren't as good at things as they are. I like the fact that if I need help over and over again on the same thing I am not made to look stupid, and I am not afraid to ask for help in front of people." Parents have commented that the teachers in the LBS program were non-judgmental, and the atmosphere was relaxed.

Resources:

If the goal is to reach families who may not be accessing services and who may have limited resources at home, then it is important to provide additional family literacy resources through outreach programs. Resources can be borrowed by families (e.g. RAPP packs) or made and taken home to keep (e.g., learning game). They can be a major component of the program or serve as an enhancement to it. As noted, the RAPP program serves as an initial outreach tool to involve families in our outreach programs. However, the RAPP packs can also either be a resource that is continued or introduced through an outreach program. Once a program is completed, RAPP can then serve as a way to stay connected with families, continue to provide valuable resources and remind parents of upcoming programs.

⁸ Coldblatt & McBean (2002) discuss the importance of building trust with potential participants in order to ensure their participation in upgrading programs.

⁹ Participants can feel particularly vulnerable if they have negative perceptions of schooling due to bad experiences in the past (Long & Taylor, 2002).

Staffing:

If we look at outreach as a step-by-step approach, then to have some continuity of staffing from one program to the next is part of a smooth transition. Parents may be more apt to attend another program if they or their children have already established a connection with someone from an organization. For example, the children's coordinator for Kingston Literacy facilitates all of the children's programming whether it is for an outreach program, a family literacy upgrading program or for the regular LBS program. As well, she provides RAPP in the community, and facilitates parent-child playgroups and music circle programs. Therefore, this particular staff member serves as a link between many of our programs.

Transportation:

In order for parents to attend outreach workshops as well as access upgrading programs, it is crucial to offer some level of transportation support if needed.¹⁰ Not only is the cost inhibitive but travelling with an infant or more than one young child can be a challenge. Especially in the winter, parents may be deterred by unpleasant weather, snow covered or icy sidewalks, late buses, and having many items to carry. A transportation budget should be built into projects if the goal is to reduce barriers. It can be a substantial amount in terms of the total budget for a project, but it is worth the money spent. Because parents may not have access to a car, availability of transportation is one of those components that make the whole process so much easier for them. Transportation may be the determining factor as to whether a parent registers for a program or not.

¹⁰ Lack of transportation has been cited by nonparticipants as a major reason why they did not complete a literacy upgrading program even though they thought of doing so (Long & Middleton, 2001; Hart et al., 2002).

Two Highlighted Outreach Programs

Bookmaking Workshop Series:

Originally, a request came from another adult upgrading agency to do workshops for the learners who brought their children to school and accessed the on-site childcare. Our connection with this organization was established because RAPP was a service they already had utilized over the years. Several individual bookmaking workshops were offered to the group which primarily included English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners. The potential to expand on the concept of making books or learning materials with parents to share with their children was quickly realized. The hands-on workshops appealed to the parents, were very relaxing and the parents seemed to like that they had something to take home. From there, Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Program developed a whole bookmaking workshop series. The first full series that was offered utilized space at a community centre run by The Boys and Girls Club. Food, childcare and transportation were built into the expenses. Food played a more significant role in that funding was allocated to provide not only a snack for the families at the workshops but also food (e.g., blocks of cheese) for the parents to take home, along with their handmade learning materials.

By making a variety of books and lending similar children's books or RAPP packs, early reading strategies are highlighted and reinforced. Through these hands-on workshops, parents learn how to make low-cost children's books in a comfortable environment. As with other outreach programs, we have always offered a children's program at the same time. Parents enjoy having time to make something for their children and having an opportunity to gather and talk with other parents while working on their projects. In a casual but focused setting, information about early literacy is discussed. On different occasions, guest speakers have been invited, such as a worker from the Health Unit's Early Expressions Program, and a librarian from Kingston Frontenac Public Library. Parents have either taken a snack break from their projects or kept working on their books while they listened to a presentation. Both formats have worked,

although sometimes parents are eager to return to their projects, so are actually more attentive if they can listen and work at the same time. Parents almost always want to stay longer than the allotted time, which we take as a sign of their enjoyment of the bookmaking workshops.

Shorter bookmaking blitzes have been offered as well as full ten-week series for two hours per week. There is an incredible amount of versatility with the use of these workshops. Even one isolated workshop can be run purely as a service to a partnering organization or it can serve as a promotional tool for an outreach program. A full series of ten workshops can be offered as a self-contained project or as a stepping stone to another program. Parents can even retake the series because the content may not be exactly the same or they may decide to make the same type of resource for a different child in the family. The workshops have a broad appeal with parents. They have been facilitated at church halls, community centres, a school and learning centres. The resources are considered special to the children because the books or learning games were made by the parents.

Bookmaking workshop series have served as an outreach strategy for two distinct parent upgrading models: the one that focused on family literacy as part of regular LBS delivery and the U.P.P. Program that was based on specific family literacy curriculum. The locations for the outreach programs were part of the strategy. One bookmaking series was held right at our adult learning centre where a parent upgrading program was to take place. Parents were introduced to CLCK in a very positive way. They had an opportunity to observe other adults participating in classes at the centre. A number of parents who registered for bookmaking had already been involved with family literacy programming (RAPP, PRINTS). From bookmaking, three families then went on to take part in the Family Literacy/LBS Program. Another workshop series was held at Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Centre, which is based at a high-needs elementary school. The goal again was to link parents with the LBS program. A parent

previously involved in a number of our programs also worked part-time for a partnering agency, and when she enthusiastically informed families about our bookmaking workshops, three of them became participants. One of these three parents then joined and became quite involved in the Family Literacy/LBS Program.

For both outreach bookmaking workshop series, a worker from the Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre took part to understand more about what we do. In the first series, the worker was going as support for a parent who she felt might not come to the group on her own and who would benefit from an upgrading program. In the second series, another worker attended as a parent and interestingly, she already had positive connections with a few other parents in the group. Several bookmaking workshop series were offered at our new Family Learning Centre, where the intergenerational program (U.P.P.) would take place. Therefore, a familiar location and staff can be important for both the parents and the children. Two parents who had taken bookmaking workshops at the Family Learning Centre participated in the U.P.P. Program.

Playgroup:

Recently, an outreach program has been launched in the form of a ten-week parent playgroup to attract area residents to our new Family Learning Centre in a part of the city where we have not been previously based. The focus is families with pre-school age children in a high-needs area where there are limited services available in close proximity. Parents and children attend one morning a week. Over a five week concentrated period within the ten weeks, there has been additional childcare support for part of the program. During this time, parents learn about emergent literacy skills and early child development, and make low-cost activities to take home for their children. The make-and-take workshop portion stemmed from the bookmaking series but utilized it within a different format. At the same time as the workshops, the children benefit from an enriched childcare program on-site and then the parents rejoin the children in the

playroom. Previous to this ten-week outreach program, there was a short summer drop-in playgroup where parents could pick up RAPP packs at the same location. Extra childcare was not allocated for this drop-in because the parents stayed with their children. The first program fed into the second because the idea of a fall playgroup was promoted. Some of the families who continued at the centre brought new people through the door.

Offering a time-limited casual playgroup allows people to “try out” a new situation or centre without feeling like they have been locked into an extensive commitment.¹¹ However, when a make-and-take component supplements a playgroup, the numbers of children need to be confirmed for the childcare portion. In the playgroup setting, parents can become comfortable, meet new people and find out about other programs that an organization has to offer. A book or resource lending program such as RAPP can be incorporated as part of a drop-in without requiring additional childcare because parents remain with their children. As was done with the make-and-take projects, elements of workshop series can be woven into the program to give parents a taste of other services being offered. A playgroup alone requires one main equipped room. However, to add a parent workshop component, two spaces would be needed.

Continuously attempting to look at components such as space and community linkages from new angles each time an organization wants to offer a program and meet new families can only improve outreach outcomes. For example, Kingston Literacy’s LBS program is located in the basement of a library. We rent additional space adjacent to our adult learning centre in order to offer programming for the children of parents upgrading their skills. Considering the space, the Family Literacy Program can investigate new programming concepts. For example, one idea is to offer a parent-child playgroup in the children’s space.

¹¹ The need to commit to a long-term program can be a deterrent for some potential participants in literacy programs (Sceviour, 2001). Furthermore, the desire to graduate programs at their own pace, also related to program length, has been expressed by some study respondents (Hart et al., 2002; Huget, 2002).

In the vicinity of CLCK, there are not many existing playgroups. Our goal would be to reach new families, and link them to not only our upgrading program but also the library. Over the course of the playgroup duration, a variety of activities linked to the adult learning centre could be incorporated: touring the centre, making a children's book on the computers, and meeting staff and teachers. Another possibility is to ask an agency working with families who have young children to consider renting such a space from the library and then offer additional services to complement their program.

3. Community Partnerships

Collaboration with agency partners has become a key element in the operations of Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Program, as opposed to offering programming in isolation. Our partnerships have been mutually beneficial and longstanding.¹² In the attempt to reach families with limited resources or in particular those who have literacy difficulties, it has been an effective strategy to integrate with other organizations where overlapping goals exist. RAPP, for example, has been incorporated into existing services with established reputations. Through this type of reciprocal relationship, we reach new parents and other agencies have their programming enhanced through our workshops and distribution of resources for families. A greater understanding and promotion of services takes place between agencies, when such collaborations are in progress. Because of proven partnerships, agencies have been willing to learn more about the outreach and upgrading programs we offer, contemplate how these programs could benefit their participants and highlight them with both staff and clients. Working in conjunction with another agency strengthens the relationship and introduces families to the services of both organizations.

Partnership Options

The connections with a partner can be utilized in a variety of creative ways. In conjunction with another organization, our Family Literacy Program may:

- be involved in their events such as an Open House
- present an individual workshop at one of their programs (e.g., emergent literacy topic) or be a guest speaker to promote our own services
- invite guest speakers in to discuss pertinent topics (e.g., Health Unit's Early Expressions worker at a parent upgrading program)
- offer a program within their programming (e.g., RAPP at a family resource centre playgroup)
- do a joint project with them (e.g., co-facilitating a workshop series)
- facilitate our own separate program in their space

¹² Beder (1984) discusses the importance of collaboration between educational agencies, and notes that the collaborating agencies need to create clear, written agreements at the start of their relationship, in order to avoid conflicts and to detail their resource and time commitments.

- offer a program on their behalf in the community (e.g., purchase of service arrangement with the Ontario Early Years Centre)
- run the initial portion of a program in their space then transfer to a second location such as an adult upgrading centre for the remainder (new idea)
- hold a special event together at their location (e.g., Family Literacy Day at the library or the Ontario Early Years Centre)
- invite one of their staff and participants to attend our program together
- arrange for their staff and participants to tour our agency's adult learning centre
- encourage them to utilize one of our organization's available spaces. They could hold a workshop, program or event at our site, and then opportunities for linkages will present themselves. In fact, the development of the new Family Learning Centre in Kingston West involved a committee of various, pertinent agencies. Kingston Literacy sought the committee's input about the layout of the centre because we wanted the space to suit other agencies' potential programming needs as well as our own.

Network of Partnerships

Creating a web of partnerships with a number of organizations increases the opportunities for meeting parents, strengthens community support and lessens the likelihood of families being somehow missed or overlooked. The interactions between an elementary school, our agency and another organization illustrate an effective network of partnerships. A "Passport to Literacy" Open House at the high-needs school where the Family Literacy Centre is based has taken place for two years. In order to have their name entered into a draw, each family needed a stamp from certain rooms in the school to complete a passport. Our centre was one of the stops where parents could also find out about our services. Delivering RAPP to the families attending BBKC's playgroup in the room next to our centre has happened periodically for a number of years. A more recent development at the school has been the provision of RAPP for families through BBKC's School Readiness Program and through the junior and senior kindergarten classes. Potentially, parents of children entering junior kindergarten will be familiar with our book packs already through the School Readiness Program and may want to continue with the service if funding is available. In this case, the Family Literacy Program serves as one of the bridges for families between two other organizations' programs. With RAPP, the link with the parent is crucial. The

packs are meant for the parent to share with their child because the message we promote is that the parent is a child's first teacher. The family literacy staff supports the parent in this role. The challenge with the kindergarten programs is to find an unhurried time for us to interact with parents. Families whose children are at the school but no longer connected to one of our programs are still welcome to visit the centre and borrow packs.

Promotion for Parent Upgrading Programs

Promotion was ongoing through our community agency partners for parents to become involved in the two upgrading models we were offering during this past year: the Family Literacy/LBS model and the U.P.P. Program.

Venues for promotion through presentations and/or flyers of these two models included:

- a Healthy Babies, Healthy Children staff meeting at the Health Unit
- a staff meeting at KMFRC
- connections with the Ontario Works Education and Training Literacy Assessor (e.g., information newsletter for case managers; flyer mail-out with monthly cheques)
- BBKC staff and participants
- the Teen Moms Mentoring Program
- the Good Food Box program at OEYC
- the Katarokwi Native Friendship Centre
- community committees
- the Neighbourhood Sharing Centre (used clothing and toys)
- a special assembly for parents and children called a 'Celebration of Literacy' at the elementary school where the Family Literacy Centre is based
- Kingston Literacy Learning Centres

With strong partnerships, other agencies may more actively promote your program or consider innovative arrangements that can make the difference with outreach. For example, a worker may attend a program with her own young children. By participating, the worker understands more about the program, acts as a support for those parents who might not otherwise attend on their own, shares her experience first hand, and may refer other parents.

4. Connections with Parents

Time and word-of-mouth are two interconnected outreach factors that influence the success of recruitment for a program.¹³ Time allows an agency to build connections and trust with parents in a community who then become contacts to other families. In our experience with family literacy, the power of word-of-mouth should never be underestimated. Often, parents who have enjoyed past programming act as advocates and promoters for our Family Literacy Program. Inviting past participants to take part in more workshops even if upgrading would not be their goal is important. They bring new families with them because there is a social component. When talking to past or current participants, we ask them to spread the word, take extra flyers or bring a friend or neighbour with them to a group. Re-visiting community groups where there are established connections provides an opportunity to meet up with familiar faces. The establishment of a positive reputation does not happen instantly.

Outreach has to happen over time. It involves connecting and re-connecting with families over an extended period. The timing might not be right for a family at one point to join a program. However, if a connection is maintained, another available service might work for them. The recruitment of families is an organic process; one formula or structured method cannot guarantee parent involvement in family literacy programs. For agencies planning to start a family literacy upgrading program, it is important to aim for a realistic number of participants to recruit. Another consideration is the staff time taken to interact with parents and children who start the process but do not necessarily finish a program. The interaction with some parents may entail a phone call, an assessment or participation in a few classes but then they do not continue beyond that point. Again, these parents may end up being involved in another program at a later date.

¹³ Coldblatt and McBean (2002) highlight the importance of encouraging word-of-mouth in the community as an outreach tool for Canadian family literacy programs.

One of the positive outcomes of a program is if volunteers identify themselves as a result of attending a program. Past and current participants can become involved as volunteers. A few parents were part of an advisory committee to help select books for our RAPP program for two years in a row. Another parent came forward at the end of the U.P.P. Program wishing to volunteer at the Family Learning Centre. She had been an excellent team player within the upgrading group and has proven to be a wonderful addition to the centre by preparing RAPP packs. Currently, we plan to recruit and train several parents and other volunteers to deliver the RAPP Program to groups, as well as prepare packs. Also, we have been able to offer some part-time work to one parent as a program co-facilitator and supply childcare staff.

Through a continuum of programming, family literacy staff develops an ongoing relationship with families over years as opposed to weeks or months. Resources and information can be introduced and re-introduced. Even in terms of evaluation, it is often well after a program is over that a parent might comment on something that happened with their child that related to a topic discussed at a program. Therefore, a program's value may not be fully appreciated until a later date. Family Literacy programming is not necessarily a series of isolated programs but a commitment to families over a longer period. We have been involved with families as their children go through different stages of development or as there are new additions to families.

By participating in either the Family Literacy/LBS model or the U.P.P. Program, parents had the opportunity to learn how to use everyday activities and books to stimulate literacy events in the home. The effect of the program models on "literacy events" in the home was investigated. Follow-up was done with parents shortly after completion of the programs (up to three months) to track post-program "literacy events" happening in the home as a measure of program impact. Parents generally indicated that since participating in either the Family Literacy/LBS or U.P.P. programs, they were spending more time reading and

singing songs or telling rhymes with their children. Some parents were also looking at and talking about the pictures in books, and using the library more often with their children. Because of the children's program, they had more ideas when talking or playing with their children. Therefore, the full impact of a program may not be realized immediately by parents.

5. Factors Affecting Participation in Parent Upgrading Programs

Accommodation of Levels:

Parents who have participated in our family literacy upgrading programs have had a range of abilities and educational experiences. Because our adult learning centre offers both basic and more advanced classes in different subjects, parents taking the Family Literacy/LBS program were directed into specific groups, depending on individual skill level. With U.P.P., there was one small group of parents experiencing the same program format. Even though the U.P.P. Program was taught to parents with very different capabilities, a supportive group developed. The content consisted of topics relevant to parents of young children (e.g., language development). In order to meet individual upgrading needs, programming alternatives and adaptable material are necessary. Frequent opportunities for feedback through discussion with a group and individuals allow adjustments to be made to the program content and format.

Computers:

Access to computers seems to appeal to parents and therefore, may enhance recruitment to a parent upgrading program. Over time, with different delivery cycles, the feedback from participants in the Family Literacy/LBS model has consistently reflected that the use of the computer is an important element of a family literacy basic skills program. Parents have the opportunity to learn a variety of computer skills: keyboarding, word processing, desktop publishing, and use of the Internet. Through developing these skills, parents gain confidence in the use of computers. As one of the assignments, some parents have created number colouring books on the computer to enjoy with their children. The computer is both a tool for outreach and participant retention. As part of an existing adult upgrading setting, computers are more readily available. In the LBS program, there were specific computer classes. Alternatively, there was a minor component built in to the U.P.P. Program as it related to certain topics.

Duration of Programs:

The Family Literacy Program has experimented with a variety of parent upgrading models. Individual sessions have remained approximately three hours in the mornings. However, number of sessions per week and duration of program are two time factors that have been manipulated in different models.¹⁴ Both ten week sessions (two times a week) and twelve week sessions (three times a week) were originally offered. Most recently, delivery time was extended from twelve to sixteen weeks for all programs offered. Parents and children were involved in programming twice a week. Three parent upgrading models were implemented as part of the LBS delivery, with extensions beyond the sixteen weeks provided for two of them. Kingston Literacy was also able to pilot the U.P.P. Program that would provide a comparison to the LBS model.

Attendance was a prime indicator of the success of extending the program models over a longer period of time. Even though the overall registration numbers were modest, most parents who joined completed a minimum of fifteen weeks. Extending the duration of the upgrading programs to sixteen weeks allowed for a greater window of concentrated time for involvement. Two delivery cycles ran even longer at twenty and twenty-four weeks. It is always a challenge to interest adults in upgrading. For those families involved in at least a sixteen-week program, there is a greater opportunity to learn and practise skills. Also, as resulted with the U.P.P. Program, the small group had bonded well over the course of four months. Upgrading program models offered over longer timeframes allow for continuous intake, as well as providing more opportunities for parents to apply new strategies or ideas and use resources. Longer programs provide a cushion for missed sessions: sufficient time is available to make upgrading worthwhile. Circumstances for partial attendance have included: a child's illness, registration part way through the program or a parent only being able to attend one day a week instead of two because of another commitment.

¹⁴ Research is inconclusive about the ideal program length to maximize participation. However, Sceviour (2002) notes that participation levels do seem to drop as programs increase in duration.

By extending the duration of the program, the teachers of the adult programs and the children's coordinator were able to accommodate families and cultivate a rapport with them. Over a period of sixty weeks, eight parents (one without a child attending) and nine children participated in the Family Literacy/LBS model. For the U.P.P. Program, four parents and four children registered. It was beneficial to not only extend the duration of a program to sixteen weeks, but also to offer more than one delivery cycle relatively close together, as was done with the Family Literacy/LBS program model. Parents had the option to continue upgrading into another phase of programming. Beyond the regular program timelines, two of these families stayed for twenty weeks, while one parent participated for forty weeks.

Parent-Child Time:

Each time different parent upgrading models have been piloted at Kingston Literacy, not only has a children's program run simultaneously but there has been a designated parent-child time. Both the recent U.P.P. and Family Literacy/LBS program models had the interactive parent-child time for approximately 20 to 25 minutes at the end of each session. Sometimes parents in the LBS Program wanted to finish their work with the other adults as opposed to joining the circle time. Overall though, the response to the parent-child time by the majority of parents was very positive. They participated in circle time, learned the songs and heard one or two stories with their child each day. The parents liked the fact that they could practise different songs, be familiar with what the children were learning and do the songs at home with the family. When the parents joined the children, the other adults were able to continue their work. However, it gave parents their own time as a separate group with the children and the children's programming staff.

In general, parent-child time provides an opportunity for the children's coordinator to do some modelling with families. In the U.P.P. Program, time spent interacting with the children appealed to the parents as well. One mother

indicated that the circle time was her favourite part. The parent-child time has been used more as a retention tool as opposed to a recruitment strategy. Some outreach programs include a structured parent-child time.

6. Promotion

Promotion needs to be varied, clear, direct, repeated and ongoing. In order to have an impact, people need to experience information more than once in different ways.

Door to Door Flyer Runs:

Flyers are effective as a reinforcement or reminder, but it is the connections with families or agencies that make the difference. As a team, we have delivered flyers directly to people's homes and apartment building mailboxes, and some local businesses in concentrated areas. Flyers can be e-mailed or faxed to agencies, but need to be backed up with a phone call to further explain the program. It is even better if staff can hand-deliver flyers and perhaps display material to agencies by directly speaking to a pertinent staff person, attending a staff meeting or sharing the information at a parent group.

Promotion by Parents:

When parents register for family literacy programs, we ask them to encourage a friend or a neighbour with young children to call about the program. Sometimes, parents take extra flyers for their building or area. As noted, word-of-mouth is extremely powerful. It is useful to always ask people how they found out about a program; their responses provide insight as to which outreach strategies are effective.

Promotional Material:

Because reducing the barriers parents face is of primary concern, Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Program has tried to address these issues, especially when one long term goal is parent upgrading. Therefore, the promotional material tends to highlight the fact that there is no cost for the training and that transportation, childcare and snacks are available.

It is important to produce well-thought-out promotional print material that utilizes clear writing principles. Poorly designed material, perhaps with unclear or extensive text creates yet another barrier for those that have literacy difficulties. One available tool to assist organizations with the creation of material is *Clear Writing and Literacy* (Revised Second Edition), prepared for the Ontario Literacy Coalition by Ruth Baldwin. Aside from print material, other avenues for promotion are radio and television public service announcements or interviews.

Special Events:

At an Open House, parents can view the centre and meet the staff in a casual way. It gives them a reason to stop by; they are able to assess an organization without feeling self-conscious because other families are visiting as well. Such events as a low key Open House can be held a few times a year, concentrating on a certain area and flooding it with flyers. This year, a well-attended neighbourhood Open House took place at the new west end Family Learning Centre as outreach for a number of programs including an intergenerational program (U.P.P.). It was promoted quite heavily in the neighbourhood near the new centre with flyer drops in mailboxes. Any families in the area who had phoned or stopped in to make general inquiries were contacted about the upcoming event. The Open House provided a forum to inform parents about our programs; we had flyers and sign-up sheets for particular programs being offered. It was important to have enough staff available so that everyone attending felt welcomed. The playroom was opened up, refreshments were provided and several draws were held for door prizes.

National Family Literacy Day is January 27th and for a number of years, Kingston Literacy organized a Family Literacy Day Celebration in conjunction with the Kingston Frontenac Public Library. Last year, we partnered with the Ontario Early Years Centre for the event. Traditionally, other community agencies have joined us on the day; each one providing information about their services and an activity to do with the children. With this type of outreach, organizations that focus on

families with young children were each encouraging their own participants to attend the celebration. Families had an opportunity to find out about other services in the community.

Visibility:

Operating a program in a high traffic area near hard-to-reach families serves as an outreach tool in and of itself. It is an additional benefit if other relevant agencies are nearby. In the past, Kingston Literacy had an upgrading centre in a north end shopping plaza. The Family Literacy Program was based at this centre and BBKC was located in the plaza. By being in such close proximity to the upgrading program and another key agency that focuses on families with young children, the connections were strong between programs and participants. This plaza was situated in a low socio-economic area that had the drawing card of a grocery store. More recently, the U.P.P. Program required a location where a parents' and children's program could be facilitated. Our new west end Family Learning Centre was chosen. This store-front property is highly visible, in a neighbourhood where there is low income housing and parents with young children. The centre has been designed to accommodate such programs as the U.P.P. model; it is equipped with a children's room, a parent room, office space, a kitchen and two bathrooms. The fact that the centre is in a new location means that it takes time to build a relationship with people in the community, and establish a positive reputation. Well-designed signage is crucial for promotion. As well, posters advertising upcoming programs are displayed in the windows for those parents just passing by the centre.

7. A Step by Step Program Approach

Kingston Literacy's Family Literacy Program views outreach to families as a complex system operating over a considerable period of time. The process requires a step-by-step approach whereby families can move from one program to another as part of a continuum. Within our organization, the family literacy programs are linked: promotion for one takes place in another, early learning information is reinforced, and there often is an overlap of staff. One program can lead to or build on another. With stages of programming, parents can progress through different types of workshops or programs starting with the informal and moving to the more involved and structured. However, a step-by-step approach does not imply that everyone starts and finishes with the same programs in only one order. Instead, it means that there is a plan in place to try to reach and accommodate parents with young children. Because of an established community partnership, we may introduce RAPP packs to a parent at a resource centre playgroup, who from there participates in a full workshop series in the community (e.g., PRINTS, From Lullabies to Literacy, or a Music Circle Program). She then takes another workshop series such as Bookmaking at one of our centres, continues with a parent upgrading program in the same location, and finally registers for a regular LBS Program. Programs can even come full circle where parents start to borrow RAPP packs again or do another cycle of upgrading. Short, isolated promotional attempts have a limited impact. It is important to step back from individual programs to be able to detect what factors are in play in terms of reaching families.

8. Multiple Outreach Sources

Outreach is not static nor always linear but rather fluid and organic. Sometimes the connections that lead to a family becoming involved in a family literacy program are not what could have been anticipated. Various combinations of outreach approaches and community linkages can trigger families to participate over time. Outreach needs to be deliberate and constant in its many forms even though the formula never remains the same. Having partnerships within other agencies or different departments of your own organization means parents may be receiving encouragement to join or remain in a program from a number of sources in a short time period. The following scenario is an example of an outreach network that reinforces participant retention. A new parent is referred from a community agency, attends the LBS program at the Community Learning Centre and brings his child to the children's program. The children's coordinator has previously met this parent at a Family Learning Centre Open House in a different section of Kingston. The parent was reassured that his child would receive quality childcare from a familiar face.

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