Section 7 Readings

Section 7
Readings

7.1 Introduction

This section contains additional readings on (or related to) the topic of literacy and people with intellectual / developmental disabilities. Many are learner writings.

Here are some details on the readings in this section:

➡ *Parkland Society Adult Literacy Program a Great Success!* describes a computer-centred literacy project being undertaken by a SARC Member agency in Yorkton, SK.

➡ *New Literacy Program is a Joint Effort* describes a literacy project for people with developmental challenges in Walkerton, ON.

➡ *Keys to Success: Literacy for Persons with Developmental Disabilities* was originally printed as a *Rehabilitation Review* article by the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRI) in Calgary, AB.

➡ *Literacy Enhancement: The Bridge to Community Access – National Literacy Secretariat Grant 2000-2001* describes a literacy project being undertaken by Cosmopolitan Industries, a SARC Member agency in Saskatoon, SK.

➡ *The* Way to Work *Program Offers Post-Secondary Opportunities* describes a workplace literacy program for people with intellectual disabilities delivered at the Kelsey Campus of the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) in Saskatoon, SK.

➡ *Opening of Cypress Hills Ability Centre Library* is a report on the creation of a new learning space in Shaunavon, SK.

7.2   Parkland Society Adult Literacy Program a Great Success!

Bev Lacusta of the Parkland Society for Aid to the Mentally Handicapped in Yorkton wrote the following article for Update*, the regular publication of the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres (SARC). The article discusses that agency's use of a computer system to assist adults in developing their literacy and numeracy skills.*

Parkland Society for Aid to the Mentally Handicapped is in its fourth month of running the computerized Speech Assisted Reading and Writing program (SARAW), and a computerized Speech Assisted Math program (SAM), according to Program Adminstrator Bev Lacusta, and the programs are a big success.

The SARAW and SAM programs are two new programs offered by the Parkland Society for Aid to the Mentally Handicapped (PSAMH). These programs commenced October 25, 2000 and provide ten hours of instruction per month to the eighteen individuals participating in the program. These individuals are presently enrolled in the Parkland Society's Supportive Living Program and Group Homes.

Patricia Switzer and Bev Lacusta beside the SARAW workstation

SARAW and SAM, as they are known, are talking computer programs developed by the Neil Squire Foundation. These programs are designed to teach basic reading, writing and math skills to adults with disabilities in order to create opportunities for independence.

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Parkland Society initially ran a pilot last year and received equipment on loan from the Neil Squire Foundation for a couple of months. "Due to the success of the Program, I have striven to bring this important resource to our Organization," says Bev Lacusta. That determination is what led to financial assistance from the Special Needs Program Unit with Saskatchewan Post-Secondary Education, and the donation of equipment to run the programs from the Muttart Foundation, which

The SARAW program loaded on a computer. The DECtalk speech synthesiser module is on the right.

provided a Dell computer, monitor, and $1,700.^{00} for the purpose of a DECtalk, which provides the voice for the SARAW / SAM programs. Funding has also been received for the five individuals from the Group Homes through the Family Literacy Services, Saskatchewan Post-Secondary Education and Skills Training.

With the funding and equipment in place, Parkland was able to hire SARAW / SAM instructor Patricia Switzer, a certified Rehabilitation Worker with excellent computer skills. Switzer was also the instructor for the SARAW / SAM pilot project.

Patricia explains that the SARAW / SAM program gives individuals the opportunity to improve their quality of life and increases their chances for employment in the community. "The SARAW program is made more effective when used in conjunction with a solid assessment stage and development of a comprehensive individualized lesson plan," notes Patricia. "Many people find this computer [program] helpful, including people who are non-verbal, or have difficulties with speech. The SARAW system will read what one types, give suggestions on what topic to write about, or will read a story on a related topic. The basic alphabet can be taught using the Sounding Board portion of the program. The Sounding Board allows the individual to review the letter, the sound of the letter and also words beginning with that sound," says Patricia.

SARAW is a versatile program that can conform to the user's needs with adjustments made to the program as the learner's skills increase. SAM is a math program based on a mastery level design. As the individuals make progress, the computer accommodates that progress, increasing the level of difficulty. When the individual succeeds at mastering a task, he / she moves on to the next level. "This form of learning permits the individuals to learn at a rate that is comfortable to them," says Switzer.

SARAW / SAM teach skills that enable an individual to lead a fulfilling life in the community. "Reading, writing, adding, subtracting… all skills people need or want to obtain are at their fingertips, literally. With the touch of a keyboard the clients of the Parkland Society are taking steps to improve their lot in life by educating themselves with the help of the computer system," says Patricia.

Bonnie Y., an individual in the SARAW program says, "I like it (SARAW program). It is teaching me to read…. I'm going to get a better job."
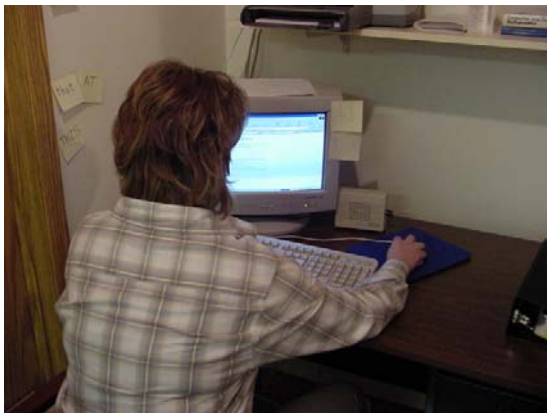
Patricia Switzer demonstrates some of the interesting features of the SARAW computer program

Dennis K. comments on how he can now go to the grocery store and read labels on the soup cans, fresh produce and packaged items.

"I feel better about myself since I started the program. My goal is to learn to read and write so that I can find a job in the community. I would like to get my driver's license, and maybe buy a Harley motor bike someday," says Dennis.

"I feel that there is definitely a need for a literacy program such as this, not only in Yorkton, but throughout the province. Adults with intellectual disabilities were not given the same opportunities for learning as today's children who are integrated into regular classrooms," says Bev Lacusta.

The grants end in October of 2001. Already, Bev Lacusta is seeking funding to continue this valuable and educationally-rich programming.

7.3 New Literacy Program is a Joint Effort

The following article, written by Sue Ann Ellis, appeared in the Walkerton Herald-Times on June 10, 1992. The Herald-Times is a weekly, paid-circulation newspaper serving southern Bruce County in Ontario.

Herald-Times

A new program for the developmentally delayed has just been completed at Walkerton District Secondary School on Thursday nights.

A 15-week literacy program has helped developmentally delayed adults learn the alphabet and numbers.

It is an experimental program, the first of its kind in Bruce County and very likely the first anywhere for adults of this type, said Bill Turvill of the Bruce County Board of Education.

It was a joint effort of the Walkerton Literacy Council, Walkerton and District Community Support Services and the Bruce County Board of Education, which funded the program.

Turvill got the program together through the Adult Basic Education Program which is available through the province.

The program is geared toward adults without a Grade 8 education and, now it has been expanded to delayed adults, said Turvill.

"There is now interest in other towns of Bruce County. We were using Walkerton as a prototype," he said.

Cindy Davidson, Literacy Council co-ordinator, said the students responded well and the teachers saw a lot of improvement.

The program is run like a regular night school program but the students call it a "fun school".

"Some of these adults haven't been to school at all and others have but found it too hard," said Davidson.

Teachings are geared toward real life situations and the students responded well, she said.

Katherine Janossy and Tracy Heyden are the teachers. Two classes were divided according to the students' capabilities.

Janossy remembers the first night of classes and how apprehensive the students were.

One appeared especially tense and when Janossy asked her what was wrong, she said, "I'm remembering school."

"Some of these people had frightening experiences as regular students."

Janossy said she is really happy with the results and has seen amazing improvements.

"It's been fun getting to know them and realizing what great people they are."

Student Brenda Hargrove delights in the Maple Leaf stamps that are awarded for progress and achievements.

"I got another star today," she takes great pride in telling her classmates.

Janossy began using the stamps to monitor the number of pages the students finished but it turned into such a novelty, that in the end they were rewarded for completed work.

At the beginning of each class, the students had to write their name on a piece of paper to be entered into a draw. The name drawn received a small prize.

The name writing started as a way to take roll call and to monitor the students' progress.

The prize was an incentive for them to stay for the entire class as some would leave before it was over, said Janossy.

"It's a real treat for them."

The difference between their name writing from the first class to now was remarkable, she said.

"This class has been a real confidence builder for the students. We really have a good time together."

7.4   Keys to Success: Literacy for Persons with Developmental Disabilities

This Rehabilitation Review *article (Volume 11, Number 10, October 2000) was co-written by Richard Lockert of the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres (SARC) and Jeanette Coombe of the Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRI).* Rehabilitation Review *is published monthly by the VRRI Research Department with funding from the Alberta and Calgary PDD Boards. The article reviews four keys to literacy education success which have been significant for learners with intellectual / developmental disabilities. These are: specific tutor qualities, adopting learner-centred approaches, selecting appropriate written materials, and fostering networks of support and outreach. It reproduces some information given in the* SARC Supplementary Tutor Handbook. *It is also available online at:* http://www.vrri.org/rhb10b00.htm

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"I want to improve my reading and writing and I want to learn to work on the computer and do some math. I hope that by learning new things that I can have a more independent life. I would like to be able to stay at my own apartment and take care of my banking. I feel that if I upgrade my skills that I can one day be making my own decisions." (Sandra Busch, Literacy Learner and Self-Advocate, Beausejour, MB).

Building literacy skills can be a meaningful experience for any adult, but doing so can be even more significant for adults with developmental disabilities. With improved reading ability comes higher expectations, improved self-esteem and more opportunities including employment possibilities. In many cases, community living becomes easier and more successful, and literacy allows adults with developmental disabilities to become active citizens and more effective self-advocates.

Learners with developmental disabilities may face more challenges than the typical adult learner. Insufficient instruction in the past, lack of retention, slow learning pace, short attention span, generally poorer language skills, low confidence and even transportation to the learning site are all potential barriers. Volunteer literacy tutors and learners' own networks play important roles in helping individuals overcome these barriers. This *Rehabilitation Review* will look briefly at each of four keys to literacy education success which have been identified as significant for people with developmental disabilities – tutor qualities, learner-centred approaches, written materials and support and outreach. These keys come from the *SARC Support Inclusion! Literacy Project*, conducted by the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres (SARC), the literature and our broader experience.

Tutor qualities

Rehabilitation workers or tutors working with people who have developmental disabilities need certain characteristics and aptitudes to ensure successful learning relationships. Obviously, they must embrace the belief that the adult learner can learn, and they must feel competent and confident in their ability to instruct. The Roeher Institute (1994) cites respect for the learners, good communication skills, perseverance, enthusiasm, interpersonal sensitivity and concern for the whole person as vital qualities for an instructor. Other qualities include creativity, awareness of needs, basic training and supports, a sense of humour and the desire to celebrate success.

Learner-tutor interactions should always be egalitarian rather than hierarchical. In essence, both participants are learning and benefiting from the relationship. Student and instructor should always treat each other in a manner they would find acceptable for themselves. And it is also important that the tutor does not impose herself or himself on the student by, for example, "fixing" writing, or suggesting topics.

Learner-centred approaches

As much as possible, adult literacy learners with developmental disabilities should generate their own learning goals, based on their own interests and needs. Being in control of their own learning builds self-esteem and helps retain interest.

In some cases, the tutor may need to help the learner set goals for learning. We've learned that the tutor may also need to work with the learner to set realistic small steps which lead toward a larger goal. And, although a balance will need to be struck between immediate literacy needs (such as reading medicine labels) and longer term goals (such as reading a mystery novel), it's important to remember that reading has recreational as well as functional uses.

Educators of people with developmental disabilities emphasize that

➡ most learners have an attention span of 15-30 minutes for one activity,

➡ progress can be very slow— measured in months rather than weeks— and dependent upon the frequency and consistency of instruction,

➡ students are concrete learners, so stories linked to their own experiences will be easier to understand,

➡ tutors need to be creative and flexible with instructional methods, adapting the learning needs to the interests of the student,

➡ tutors should use as many different activities as possible for each concept being taught, and, above all

➡ progress will be faster when both student and tutor are having fun!

Written materials

Use "high interest, low vocabulary" reading materials that are meaningful to the interests, life experience, and self-identified "needs" of the reader. According to van Kraayenoord (1992), appropriate written materials should

➡ be age appropriate and not pedantic,

➡ provide the opportunity for learning,

➡ be meaningful for the reader,

➡ have simple sentence structure, avoiding complex syntax or abstractions,

➡ follow a logical progression and avoid time displacement (future or past),

➡ use natural, everyday language, and

➡ be presented in a clear, uncluttered format, with illustrations linked to the text.

We found very few people producing written materials intended specifically for adults with developmental disabilities. The Norah Fry Institute in England produces information sheets (called *Plain Facts*) on a variety of topics (see http://www.bris.ac.uk/Depts/NorahFry/PlainFacts). The Roeher Institute in Toronto is another source for plain language products. And the VRRI also creates plain language materials.

However, the shortage of appropriate materials means that tutors and rehabilitation workers need to be creative. Many tutors recommend using English as a Second Language (ESL) materials, as they are intended for adult learners, use clear language, and include many pictures and illustrations. Others use the Language Experience Approach, in which the students dictate their ideas to the tutors and then learn to read these created texts, first with assistance and then alone. Repetition and the predictable text are helpful to the learner.

Support and outreach

For both young and adult readers alike, new literacy skills must be practised and reinforced in different contexts daily. So, it is essential that all people involved with the individual are aware of what the student is learning, and how they can help in the transfer of skills to other areas of that person's life. Communication and co-operation between support networks and learners in the home, teaching and work environments can maximize "learning in context" opportunities. In fact, recent work by Beck and Hatt (1998) indicates that such support networks can be crucial in helping learners in "early literacy stages" advance to the point where they are prepared for entry into more mainstream literacy programming.

Koppenhaver and Erickson (1994) emphasize how important it is that learners with developmental disabilities have exposure to written materials, regardless of their current literacy levels, in their home or social environments. Keep pencils and paper at hand, and use the local library so learners can choose the books, videos or tapes they are interested in. Learners benefit from watching others use print materials, listening to others read and having opportunities to discuss books, re-tell the stories or ask and answer questions. Doing homework regularly and having someone to provide help when necessary can also be important in supplementing literacy instruction.

There are endless opportunities to reinforce literacy skills through day-to-day activities. Learners understand and retain more when words in their new vocabulary are directly related to their real-world activities. Some ideas include

➡ reading recipes while cooking,

➡ marking important events on a calendar,

➡ reading traffic signs,

➡ making a shopping list before going to the store, and

➡ choosing what to watch on TV with the help of the printed television listings.

Conclusion

The reality is that literacy programs often don't have adequate knowledge of the particular learning needs of people with developmental disabilities, while staff who work in the field often think they don't have adequate experience in teaching literacy skills. Therefore, it is crucial that literacy and disability organizations co-operate and consult to serve this unique population and, by doing so, help them become fuller participants in their communities.

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7.5 Literacy Enhancement: The Bridge to Community Access – National Literacy Secretariat Grant 2000-2001

Coralea Propp, Functional Academic Coordinator / Volunteer Coordinator at Cosmopolitan Industries in Saskatoon wrote the following article for Update*, the regular publication of the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres (SARC). The article discusses that agency's project, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, to help participants with intellectual / developmental disabilities to increase their workplace literacy skills. Lou Bakota is the primary staff person delivering the literacy instruction.*

Our year long grant is coming to an end on July 31, 2001. Our goal is for adults with moderate to severe intellectual and / or multiple disabilities to have increased access and support towards community involvement through functional literacy. A total of 47 participants are currently involved in literacy programs through the grant.

Each selected participant was assessed for literacy needs and individualized programs were implemented. Literacy barriers in the workplace were discussed with employers and work environments were assessed for literacy skills necessary for employees.

The literacy programs required and offered are:

➡ **Community Awareness** (street signs, social sight survival signs / words, street safety, strangers, crisis planning / problem solving, appropriate social distance, bus etiquette, WHMIS signs and community resources),

➡ **Reading** (community signs, personal identification information / I.D. cards, individual choice of reading material, i.e. books, newspapers, recipes, T.V. Guide),

➡ **Money Skills** (bus fare, coin identification, coin value, purchasing and safety with money),

➡ **Time Telling** (coffee break times, lunch times, bus times, key times, and environmental cues),

➡ **Communication and / or Telephone Skills** (communication with co-workers and boss, using a telephone and phone numbers), and

➡ **WHMIS** (Work Hazardous Materials Information System – symbols, precautionary measures, safety and emergency situations).

With a $5000.00 grant from the Saskatoon Foundation, staff were able to expand and develop a valuable resource library to help teach all the literacy programs. We have many new and useful teaching tools from across North America and, thanks to SARC, from across the world. With the invitations from SARC staff, we have been able to participate in a number of professional development workshops regarding literacy as well.

Some of the educational resources used by Cosmopolitan Industries.

"Progress was apparent in everyone who had the chance to participate."

The opportunity to teach a participant a required skill on-going for a year has been successful for all those involved in the literacy grant. We accomplished our goals and hope to continue teaching skills required once the grant is completed. Progress was apparent in everyone who had the chance to participate.

Cosmopolitan Industries Limited would like to thank the staff at SARC involved in literacy who have been supportive and helpful throughout this past year.

7.6 The *Way to Work* Program Offers Post-Secondary Opportunities

Sheila Bonny, an instructor with the Way to Work *program at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) – Kelsey Campus, wrote the following article for* Dialect *(September / October 1998), the regular publication of the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL). The article discusses the* Way to Work *program, and relates the experiences of some of the participants in that program.*

A 40-week employment preparation program for adults with intellectual disabilities is being offered at the Kelsey campus of the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST) in co-operation with SACL. The program originated through discussions between SACL and the Basic Education 10 Coordinator about the needs of adult learners at Kelsey. The two agencies had a vision of an inclusive society and shared a concern about people with intellectual disabilities. The result was the *Way to Work* employment preparation program that began in April 1996. Its success led to the 1998 Post-Secondary Educators of Distinction Award.

"The two agencies had a vision of an inclusive society and shared a concern about people with intellectual disabilities."

The *Way to Work* program combines classroom time at the Kelsey campus with workplace training in local businesses. Both SACL and Kelsey meet to assess progress and to locate full-time employment. SACL provides continued employment counseling for the participants after the program's conclusion.

The SACL and Kelsey jointly select candidates for the program. SACL's Employment Opportunities consultants refer potential candidates who are then interviewed to assess their motivation and readiness to work. The participants vary widely in ability levels and many have been labelled functionally illiterate. Some people have never worked, lived independently or had to make decisions of significance. The instructors work with each person to determine and develop their potential.

As SIAST students, the *Way to Work* students have access to Kelsey campus resources, including the library, fitness and weight rooms, the gym, cafeteria and counselling services, and are integrated into the social and recreational activities of the Basic Education Department and wider campus life. The students' presence on campus allows Kelsey staff to develop an understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with intellectual disabilities. Their inclusion encourages other Kelsey campus students to accept inclusion as the ordinary course of life and to think about how, as potential future employers and citizens generally, they can accommodate people with disabilities.

During the *Way to Work* program, participants have increased their social skills, strengthened their lifeskills, developed independent living skills, improved physical fitness, acquired awareness of socially acceptable hygiene and grooming, practiced communication skills, redefined their employment goals and learned new job skills. With each success, the students grew in confidence and self-esteem. Participants practised social skills when attending presentations and video showings at the public library, joined in concerts with other Kelsey students, and welcomed international English as a Second Language students who visited the program. They also proudly prepared for and hosted classroom coffee parties.

Once a month, the class enjoyed shopping for groceries, prepared nutritious meals and, of course, ate heartily together. They cooked such meals as jaloff rice, chili, salads, sandwiches, veggies and dip, fruit salad, instant puddings and Rice Krispie squares. One woman who had never cooked before showed real skill, took a new interest in food preparation and then tried a work placement in a hotel kitchen. Another student, having never lived before on her own, made excellent use of the cooking lessons as she had moved to the city to attend the *Way to Work* program. She made great strides toward independent living: Shopping, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry and making new friends. When it came time for her first work placement, she was frightened to ride the buses alone. However, after an instructor rode the bus route with her for the first time, she took the bus confidently, even to meet friends and to shop at suburban malls on the weekends.

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At the beginning of the program, many students lacked the stamina for a day's work. They received training in the use of Kelsey's weight room and exercise machines and had weekly exercise classes with activities like floor hockey, badminton, basketball, volleyball, aerobics, swimming and bowling. As a result of the exercise in the gym and at work placements, many participants showed increased endurance. One man proudly made a new notch in his belt to hold up his newly baggy jeans.

With encouragement from instructors and peers, many participants made improvements in their personal hygiene and general grooming. They used checklists; some who didn't read used pictures to remind them to shower, shampoo, shave, brush their hair and wear clean clothes daily.

Peer encouragement also resulted in improved communication skills. Classmates urged, "Wait your turn," when participants monopolized class discussions and "Use complete sentences" when one man spoke using only single words. Soon everyone was taking turns and speaking confidently in complete, if short, sentences. They also supported one another as they practiced telephone skills by calling businesses for information. Role playing suitable solutions to conflicts with friends or workmates was a favourite activity. A five minute video "movie" of a *Way to Work* role play was played and replayed.

> **"Peer encouragement also resulted in improved communication skills."**

Other activities further contributed to the students' confidence and self-esteem. The Kelsey counsellor and community public health nurses taught, through lessons in sexuality and safe sex, that people have the right to control their own bodies. Instruction in rudimentary first aid and CPR gave students self-confidence in emergency situations. By volunteering to prepare mailings for READ Saskatoon and to distribute school supplies to other students in Basic Education, they contributed to the community and practiced cooperative group work skills. This also showed the general Kelsey student body that the *Way to Work* students have real abilities.

Participants also gradually gained confidence with technology. Learning to use calculators enabled people to comfortably complete exercises such as shopping, banking and catalogue ordering. Many participants had never used computers before they joined *Way to Work*. One new computer user enjoyed the daily 30-minute computer class more than any other activity. Later, when we visited her on a work placement, we found her during a break teaching another, non-disabled co-worker how to play a computer game. Smiling broadly, she told the class that, on discovering her love of computers, the staff at her work placement had begun to teach her how to write a letter on the computer. She was doing word processing.

The work placements served to help the participants redefine their employment goals, as well as learn new skills. Each participant tried four to eight different jobs. One man was determined to do kitchen prep work, at which he'd been successful ten years previously. He had two unsuccessful work placements in hotel kitchens where he complained of an aching back and his employers complained about his lack of initiative. Finally, he reluctantly agreed to try a placement washing cars. There, the employer found him to be cheerful, reliable and capable. He was hired as a regular employee. Another man had been labelled "unemployable," partly because he communicated little with others. However, the *Way to Work* program instructors found him to be "everlastingly cheerful, reliable and willing to work." With encouragement of his classmates, he spoke more and proved himself to be a capable worker. He was the first in the class to be hired and became an inspiration to his peers. His employer calls him "a keeper." One cheerful student with a strong work ethic has yet to be hired. However, her mother reports that she has never been happier or more confident.

All these accomplishments, whether in employment, self-esteem or living skills are viewed as successes for people who are facing challenges as they discover their abilities.

7.7　Opening of Cypress Hills Ability Centre Library

Jeanette Goohsen wrote the following report about the creation of a library at the Cypress Hills Ability Centre, in Shaunavon, SK. The Cypress Hills Ability Centre, a member of the Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres, was instrumental to the creation of the SARC Supplementary Tutor Handbook *by acting as a pilot agency.*

In June of 2000, we were able to open a library for use of clients and staff. Earlier in May, the public school in Shaunavon had a book sale. We were able to get 4 books for 35 cents. We went wild. I took two literate clients and our summer worker (who is the daughter of the public school principal). We bought about 150 books. I also informed the Grade 1 teacher that we were always looking for books. She said she would keep an eye open for us.

We took an old counter which was used for trophies and moved it over to the other side of the building where the computers were. Two of my literate clients and I re-painted the library in a beautiful turquoise colour. The clients then helped to categorize and sort the books into levels of readability. I also devised a plan by which there was some accountability when people took out books. The date, name of book and who took it out were written in a

Jeanette Goohsen and other staff are pleased with the new agency library.

scribbler. One of my clients who is very keen about books was placed in charge of checking off returned books.

In March 2001, a new Program Co-ordinator was hired at the centre. I was put in charge of a "Literacy Hour" which is every Wednesday afternoon from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. At this time all the clients are invited upstairs to sit. Usually three literate clients are invited to read a short story. At the end of the hour, I ask three other clients to pick out something to read that they are comfortable with for the next week. Now everyone wants to read every week!