

2008 Summer Tutoring Program for Kids

Final Report



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About the Summer Tutoring Program for Kids

Background

The Summer Tutoring Program for Kids (STPK) runs for eight weeks during July and August every year. It is offered free of charge.

The program began in 1998 with 5 tutors tutoring 97 children in 8 libraries across PEI. Since 2001, the PEI Literacy Alliance has been the community sponsor for the STPK. In 2008, 25 tutors tutored 762 children in 25 libraries, schools, and community centers.

Purpose and Benefits

The purpose of this program was to support the learning objectives of the school system by offering an alternative learning environment during the summer months. The program offered numerous benefits for children with reading difficulties, including:

- personal attention for one hour per week
- learning made fun
- knowledge of how to use a public library and its databases
- introduction to reading as an activity that continues outside the classroom
- introduction to a wide variety of library books
- increased self-esteem and confidence

Objectives

1. To offer children with reading difficulties a chance to maintain their literacy skills over the summer months.
2. To provide relevant summer career employment for qualified students.

Target Group

This program was offered to Island elementary school aged children. Resource teachers in each school identified the children most in need of additional reading. Participants came from grades 1 to 6.

Staffing

The PEI Literacy Alliance hired a program coordinator to oversee the STPK. The coordinator had experience tutoring and was a graduate of UPEI in the Education Program. She developed a training program for the tutors, mentored the tutors, and made sure the program ran smoothly.

In 2008, we hired 25 tutors. Some were returning tutors from previous years. These tutors had to be enrolled in school in September 2008 and be passionate about teaching children. All tutors took part in the training sessions. They met with the resource teachers, library staff and contacted parents before they began tutoring. They were responsible for creating unique lesson plans to meet each child's needs. They were also responsible for creating a positive learning atmosphere to promote personal development and confidence.

2008 Supporters

This program is made possible through funding from Service Canada's Youth Employment Strategy Program. We also received funding from the following sponsors to help pay for the travel expenses, resources, and to pay for the Coordinator's wages as well as part of the tutors' wages:

- PEI Literacy Alliance - Community Sponsor
- PEI Department of Education
- CanWest Raise-a-Reader - The Guardian Newspaper and Journal Pioneer Newspaper
- PEI Provincial Library Service – Department of Communities, Cultural Affairs and Labour
- Eastern School District
- Western School Board
- French Language School Board
- Club Richelieu
- Charlottetown Rotary Club
- Service Canada's Youth Employment Strategy
- RBC through the RBC Foundation

Program Coordinator's 2008 Final Report

The Summer Tutoring Program had a very successful summer with 917 elementary-aged students being referred from across the Island. 762 were able to take part in the program. The students were tutored in libraries, schools, and community halls province wide.

We had 25 full time tutors. We provided tutoring in French, English and English as an Additional Language.

Orientation and Training Sessions

Two of the three training sessions were held at the Sherwood Business Center conference room at 161 St Peters Road.

The first training session was held on June 16th at the Carrefour Isle St. Jean room at Francois Buote School in the morning. In the afternoon we went to the Confederation Center Public Library where Branch Services Librarian Norma Collier explained how to use the provincial public libraries.

For the first session, retired educator Sterling Stratton talked about never giving up on students. He explained different strategies he has used to get through to students. I would definitely recommend asking him to speak again next year. We also had Language Arts Specialists, Linda Inman Hyson and Jackie Hicken present together about reading strategies for elementary students. They had great handouts and information to share.

I went over the program details with the tutors. They filled out the necessary forms and I gave the tutors their student referral forms so they could start contacting parents and resource teachers.

The second training session was held on June 19th. We discussed lesson plans and I presented successful strategies that I have used as a past tutor. I had the tutors design practice lessons from various books.

In the afternoon, UPEI Education Professor Ray Doiron presented to the new English tutors about reading material for boys and girls and how to keep a session interesting.

At the same time, Christine Thibaudier-Ness presented to the French tutors about choosing appropriate reading material and reading strategies. I took the returning English tutors with me and we came up with a list of helpful hints for new tutors a list of good books to use.

We all came back together and the returning tutors shared what they came up with. I think this was really helpful for everyone. I also gave a presentation on some common problems tutors face and then groups came up with solutions.

The third training session was held on June 25th. We had Reading Recovery Specialist Jeannine Tremblay talk to everyone about writing techniques. She was good choice. I suggest that she talk to the French group while someone else talks to the English group at the same time in order to give the French tutors another French session. We came up with some ideas for rainy-day and sunny-day activities. We also went over some good ice breaker activities for the first week of tutoring.

I would also suggest spending more time on lesson planning. I think this is an area that tutors can always spend more time on. Maybe at the end of the second training session tutors could be asked to write down what they'd like to focus on for the third session. Overall the speakers were well received and each had something very useful to contribute.

School and library visits

On June 16th I informed the tutors that they were to contact and meet with the resource teachers to discuss further details about the student referrals. They were also asked to visit their tutoring locations to familiarize themselves with them and see if they needed a key to access the building.

The tutors had mixed success when getting in touch with the resource teachers and parents. Many tutors said that resource teachers provided more information in person than they included on the referral forms. It was challenging for some tutors to get in touch with the resource teachers. The end of the school year is so hectic that they were too busy wrapping up other projects to find a meeting time together.

A good suggestion from a tutor was to ask the resource teacher to include as many phone numbers as they can on the students' referral forms. Other tutors suggested that the referral forms be set up so the resource teacher could include reading level, interests and areas to work on over the summer. This may help the resource teachers who write very vague descriptions. It is also important to include if a student has any special needs the tutor should know about.

I called each resource teacher to ask them if they had informed the parents of the students that their child has been referred. This was a problem in the past when tutors called the parents to set up appointment times and the parents

had no idea that their child needed tutoring. We sent brochures to the resource teachers to send home with each child who was referred and many schools asked for a commitment from the parents before they would refer the student to the program.

Contacting Parents

After meeting with the resource teachers and contacting or visiting the location the tutors were asked to start contacting the parents to set up appointment times.

Tutors were given two weeks before the tutoring began to get in touch with as many parents as possible. The biggest problem was parents who had disconnected phone numbers or who did not return their messages.

This was the most frustrating part for the tutors. There is not much that can be done if a parent doesn't have an answering machine or if they are not returning phone calls.

Borrowed Books

We borrowed French and English leveled books from the Department of Education. Each tutor received about 80 books, which were extremely helpful to have on hand. The Department sent 16 bins of books -- all at the grade 3 level. Next year, I would suggest making sure that when contacting the Department to borrow the books, ask if they would include additional lower level books.

The tutors were allowed to trade their books to keep their supply fresh for the students. They were responsible for keeping track of the number of books they had. I tried to see that they got the same number of books but we received extra books in the middle of the summer and the French tutors weren't given as many English books so there were exceptions.

Resources

This year we bought \$1,000 worth of leveled books. I ordered low level English books (A, B, C and D levels) and mid-level French books (for grades 3-4). I suggest the same is done next year. Some more graphic novels for boys and girls would be well received by the older students.

I was able to replace or replenish tutor supplies throughout the summer.

Each tutor received \$10 for photocopying or purchasing additional supplies for their totes or prizes for their students.

The whiteboards are by far the biggest hit in the totes. Some of them may need to be replaced in 2009. In addition, I would give some more craft supplies. I would also pick up some more flash cards. Everyone had 2 or 3 boxes of flashcards but any French ones would be much appreciated as well as more sounds/sight word sets. More loose leaf would be a good idea too.

All of the totes had first aid kits with sunscreen, gloves, Kleenex, hand sanitizer, antiseptic wipes and band aids. This was appreciated by the tutors.

EAL students (English as an Additional Language)

We had 21 EAL students referred to the program this year. This was the sixth year that EAL was included in the tutoring program. We had one primary EAL tutor who was based in Charlottetown. She used the Association of Newcomers to Canada when trying to get in touch with some of the families of her students. Many of her students did not show up on a regular basis which she found disappointing because many of these students needed help.

French Tutors

We had eight full time French tutors. Three in Western PEI and three in Eastern PEI were enough to cover the French students as well as some English students. We could have used another French tutor between Cornwall and Charlottetown to catch the overflow of the full time French tutors. It would also be good to have another part time French tutor in Summerside to catch the overflow there too. The number of French tutors needed would depend on the number of referrals in each area.

Onsite Visits

I visited each of the tutors during the third week of tutoring, this gave them two weeks to get settled and used to the program. I emailed everyone and asked if they needed anything and I brought the requested items with me. I had also received some lower level books after the orientation sessions so I brought them with me. I observed the tutors while they tutored for about 10 minutes. Then I asked if they could find some independent work for the student to do while I talked to them for a few minutes about any problems, questions or concerns they had. It was great to see them in action and I was pleased that I had no concerns about any of them at the end of my visits.

I made my second visit during the first week of August. Again, I saw no problems or concerns with the performance of the tutors and I took a picture with the child that they were tutoring and mailed two copies so they could each have one and give one to the student as a little keepsake.

Mid-Summer Meeting

On July 25th, from 1-3 pm we had a meeting at the Sherwood Business Centre conference room. The tutors were asked to bring two ideas, books or activities that have been successful for them. They shared what problems they've faced so far and we tried to come up with solutions together. The most common problem was no-shows, we decided that the only thing to do is try calling about 10 minutes into the appointment time to remind the parent.

Many tutors suggested that there should be some sort of penalty for the parents who don't show up week after week and don't bother to get in touch with the tutors to tell them. I think there is an abuse of the program by some parents because it is free.

I bought each of the tutors a little prize: stickers, a huge calculator, note pads, pens, markers, erasers, bendy straws etc. They could either use it as a gift for a student or keep for themselves. They seemed pretty happy to get a little extra treat to use. I also had new craft supplies, white board markers and activity sheets to give out.

The tutors were asked to bring their books and board games to swap with another person. They were also asked to turn in their permission slips.

Problems that arose

1) We had one Charlottetown parent cause a stir involving three tutors. She had a step daughter and another girl in her care referred to the program. Both girls were with different tutors because there was no way to know they had the same caregiver when I was assigning students to tutors.

This woman was argumentative and very demanding. We tried to accommodate the children and offer them convenient tutoring sessions. The woman remained dissatisfied. This situation has been documented just in case it needs to be referred to in the future.

2) One of the French tutors in Charlottetown had an experience with a library shelver mocking the answers that she and her student were saying during a tutoring session. The tutor confronted the man and then told the senior branch technician of the incident. She also reported to me and I was in touch with the technician to see how the situation was resolved. The shelver was spoken to and the tutor was satisfied with the outcome of the situation.

3) There were two tutors in Montague, one of whom didn't receive a message that the building wouldn't be opened one week because of a death in the family. One tutor received the message and the other was stuck outside, not knowing what to do with his first student who showed up. This is an issue that seems to come up in some form every summer with key sharing or having to rely on someone else so you can gain access to a building. This was a minor incident and we were able to arrange a third party to come and let the tutor in for that particular day. Communication and contact numbers are important to have with you at all times.

4) At the beginning of the summer when I picked up the French books from the Department of Education, I was given a package of about 15 books for 8 tutors. It was quickly realized that I was given the wrong package and the rest of the books were delivered to me.

Attendance

This is a recurring problem for the tutors who have students miss appointments without notifying the tutor beforehand.

To help attendance as much as possible we gave fridge magnets to the tutors to give to the parents with their appointment time on them.

Many of the resource teachers asked for a commitment from the parents before they referred any student to try and eliminate those people who weren't really interested in having their child in the program.

Parents were informed of a waiting list so if they could not commit to an appointment time, the space would have to be given away to someone else.

Recommendations for next year

The coordinator's position goes from an extremely high level of activity to a low one once the tutors are trained and out. I would recommend that one day a week the coordinator have the opportunity to tutor in Charlottetown. This would help with the waiting list as well as keep the coordinator busy.

Although we did have a waiting list in some areas that we couldn't get to, I think this shows a stronger interest in the program as well as a stronger commitment by the parents to get their children to the tutoring sessions. If anything, I think this indicates that we should have 1 if not 2 more tutors on staff.

I was very excited to be a part of the program again this summer. I was a tutor for three years with the program and I enjoyed the opportunity to see the other side of the program. I like seeing the program grow and I think it's a wonderful opportunity to help students maintain some of the skills they develop in school over the summer. Every parent should take advantage of this program if they have the opportunity to do so.

Susan Gillespie
Program Coordinator for 2008

Evaluations

Children's Evaluations

When we asked students if they liked coming to their tutoring sessions, 91% answered "yes," 3.5% said they didn't know, and 5.5% said "no." However, even those that said "no" wrote about the fun things they did and indicated that they had learned over the summer to read better or that they were smart or special.

The majority of the children enjoyed the hands-on activities. They really enjoyed the games, science experiments, and using the computers. They also enjoyed becoming more familiar with the library and discovering new books.

We asked each child, "If you were a tutor, what would you do differently?" Many commented that they would do nothing different. However, there were many who wrote that they would "play more games," "have more treats," "go on the computer more," and "go outside more."

We asked, "What did you learn about yourself this summer?" Most children responded that they could now read better and that they like reading. The children's responses to this question were very positive and confident. "I am a good reader," "I am smart," "My French is good," and "I am special."

Here are more examples of the childrens' responses to "what did you learn about yourself this summer?"

- I know that I can read better
- I enjoy reading and learning about new stuff
- I am smarter than I thought
- That I read good the books I like
- I learned I'm good at writing stories
- That I like going to the library
- I am going to read good in grade 2
- Reading can be extra fun
- I learned I like the white board
- I'm a better writer
- I can meet any challenge
- I learnt new words
- That I am smart
- To listen
- Everything
- I like reading books
- I'm unique and I realized I'm a good reader

- I can read if I try my best
- If I keep reading I will be a better reader
- I can do everything
- I am myself
- I like writing in my journal
- You can do anything if you try
- All about having fun!
- I love myself
- I get smarter
- That I love cats and dogs
- That I should be reading more
- That I am a good artist
- That I'm patient
- I learned I'm a fast reader and a good writer.
- That I really like reading.

To view all the responses from the students, please visit www.pei.literacy.ca and click on *Literacy Programs*. Then click on *Summer Tutoring Program for Kids*.

Parent Evaluations

We received 282 parent evaluations. 97% of these parents said the program was helpful. Most commented that it was very helpful, and beneficial to their child. The remaining 3% said that they weren't sure if it was helpful or that it was somewhat helpful.

When asked in what ways the program was helpful, most parents remarked that the child enjoyed having the one on one time, that it was great to have the practice reading over the summer, that it helped build their child's confidence, and that the child was now reading more at home. Many commented that their child's reading skills had remained the same or had improved over the summer. This is great feedback as it indicates the program has successfully reached its goal.

We asked parents "in what ways could the program be improved?" Most indicated they would not change anything. However some suggested that the

sessions should be longer or more frequent. This suggestion is one we receive from many parents every year. Unfortunately, without more funding to hire many more tutors this is not something we are able to do.

Many parents also suggested that there could be better feedback from tutors to parents as to how the child is doing mid-way through and at the end. This is a suggestion we hear each year and we continue to encourage tutors to do this during their training sessions.

All the parents except for two said that they would recommend this program to other parents. The majority of the parents felt that the extra help during the summer was very beneficial to their child. Most made comments on how wonderful their tutor was and how much their child enjoyed going. Many said that during the summer it is busy and easy for children to lose some of their reading and writing skills. This program helped their children to maintain their skills over the summer and be more prepared for school in September.

The final comments on the parent evaluation sheets were mostly parents thanking tutors, as well as the program. The majority of the parents had wonderful comments to add regarding their tutor.

Here are some quotes from the parents:

- Jayden seems more confident reading. Jayden feels "smart." He felt as though he'd been "stupid" in grade 2 because he'd forget stuff when on summer break.
- Cody really enjoyed this program and looked forward to going each week. As parents we are very thankful to have had the opportunity to make use of this program. Thank you for making this so enjoyable for Cody
- It was something fun to do every Wednesday - they looked forward to it and Brendon even got his own library card. He loves books.
- I am so glad this was recommended to my child. She enjoyed it very much. She felt good about herself when she left there. I think it's a wonderful program.
- Summer was crazy for us - I am a single mom with 5 kids and work seasonally (60 hours a week). I wish there was a program during the school year, evenings or weekends.
- Any extra help in reading is worth an hour a week! Reading, you use for everything as you enter the higher grades.
- I tell any Moms I know about this program because it has certainly been a positive and productive experience for my child.

- Summers are so filled with non-academic activities. Both parents and children allow days and even weeks slip by without practicing the skills they learned during the school year. This program gave us a scheduled time every week and for the child it was viewed as a fun time to be looked forward to.
- Yes it helped to keep structure in his summer and kept his head in the "school zone".
- The students chosen for tutors are talented and wonderful. Thank you for allowing Abby to be part of the program.
- Yes especially since he clicked with Verley. My son did not want to go but once he met Verley he could not wait for Tuesday mornings to come. As it was my son wanted to do work over the summer so he could please Verley. It made the summer less of a battle and much more enjoyable.
- Erika, the tutor my son had, was excellent with him. I only wish that it could have been two hours per week.
- If it were up to me twice a week would be great for my older child

To view all the responses from parents, please visit www.pei.literacy.ca and click on *Literacy Programs*. Then click on *Summer Tutoring Program for Kids*.

Conclusion

This program began in 1998 with 5 tutors and less than 100 children. Ten years later, the program has grown not only in size but in its confidence and sophistication. In 2008, there were 917 children referred to the program and 762 were placed. There are indications that this number is very small compared to the children who could be helped by this program. School resource teachers have one major complaint about the Summer Tutoring Program for Kids – they have many more children they would like to refer.

One of the goals of this program is to instill the love of reading in the children. From comments made in the evaluations we can see that the tutors accomplish this goal each year. This is important to do at an early age as we know students begin to disengage from school around grades 4 and 5. Recent research from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) looks at school engagement and engagement in reading and correlates them directly with higher achievement and future success in school and in life. Another interesting correlation in the PISA results is between confidence and achievement. We can see from the comments from both children and parents that confidence is raised.

The government of Prince Edward Island released *Excellence in Education: A Challenge for Prince Edward Island in 2005*. The recommendations included the importance of early childhood interventions, specifically developing an intervention program for children identified as being at risk. The Summer Tutoring Program for Kids is an example of how these children can be helped. A goal of the *Excellence in Education* report is to have all children learning to read by grade 3. This program aids in achieving that goal. We know from research that reading enjoyment and student and parent engagement are huge factors in reading attainment. Those results are evident in this report.

The Summer Tutoring Program for Kids is cost efficient, considering the benefits gained each year for over 700 children. In addition this program is a fine example of community engagement. It takes the whole community to raise literacy levels and this is reflected in our funding partners.

This program has proven itself year after year as a valuable community program which should be expanded in order to provide these benefits to a greater number of vulnerable children.