Carnegie Literacy Needs Assessment

June 1998

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<u>Recommendations</u>

These recommendations are intended as starting points for discussion and program development between the Learning Centre[1], the City staff, Carnegie volunteers, and, most of all, the learners at the Carnegie Community Centre.

Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to:

- promote literacy at Carnegie without adding to the workload of Carnegie staff by incorporating literacy programming and support into existing activities;

- maintain close ties to the different programs at Carnegie. In particular, the Community Literacy Worker will work to improve follow-up between Carnegie staff and the Learning Centre with regards to needs and referrals by "checking-in" on a regular basis with the staff throughout the building;

- facilitate the organisation of events, projects, and programs at Carnegie. In particular, the Community Literacy Worker "bring out" the literacy and community development aspects of these activities. Where possible, the initiative for these projects should come from community members;

- promote and support informal tutoring Carnegie by building up a core group of community tutors. This could include: identifying people as potential tutors; taking them to lunch; talking; identifying areas for potential peer tutoring;

- collect and disseminate information about advocacy and support services for people in the Downtown Eastside, refer people to these services, and act as a liaison with other community organisations.

Learning Centre and City staff to work together to promote a vision for Literacy at Carnegie. This will be accomplished by:

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[1] In these recommendations, the term "Learning Centre" is used to refer to the whole Learning Centre community -patrons, learners, volunteers, tutors, and staff.

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- staff from both organisations continuing to attend each other's meetings;

- co-operating in the development of Centre-wide responses to some of the key community issues. This could include a program of "Rights Education" that includes welfare rights, human rights, communication, assertiveness, self-esteem;

- discussing ways to establish literacy training at a staff level;

- exploring the possibility of establishing a welfare advocacy service at Carnegie.

Learning Centre to continue to develop programming that meets the needs of Downtown Eastside residents by:

- continuing to support initiatives in First Nations education, and continuing to explore alternatives for First Nations programming;

- encouraging the development of a variety of educational opportunities through one-to-one tutoring and small group work;

- gearing some literacy programming towards very basic reading, writing, and computation skills;

- when necessary, offering learners immediate assistance with filling out forms and other tasks requiring basic literacy skills.

- initiating training for volunteers in helping people fill out official documents.

- routinely finding out whether students experience difficulty with learning because of poor eyesight or hearing.

Learning Centre to focus on building the community of learners and tutors by:

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- maintaining a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the Learning Centre;

- promoting one-to-one learner-tutor relationships and small group work in a manner which fosters a sense of belonging, personal growth, and community awareness;

- improving communication about its programs with the rest of the Carnegie Centre and with the surrounding neighbourhood.

Learning Centre to promote the power of the learner-tutor community to give direction to their learning by:

- continuing to hold regular student-tutor meetings;

- holding regular tutor discussion meetings;

- facilitating learner and tutor participation in board meetings;

- creating a forum for community issues by holding public discussion circles, special workshops, and community walk-abouts.

Learning Centre to become a resource for the Carnegie volunteer program by:

- setting up supports in the Learning Centre for specific Carnegie volunteer jobs. For example, procuring a cash register for learners to practice on in the Learning Centre.

- continuing discussions with Carnegie Volunteer co-ordinators about how to promote peer training for new volunteers.

- attending the meetings of the Carnegie Volunteer Committee and acting as resources around literacy issues there.

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Future research projects at Carnegie should continue exploring ways to involve interviewees as subjects, not objects, of research.

Carnegie Literacy Needs Assessment
Submitted by Sarah Evans
June 30, 1998

Introduction

This research took place at the Carnegie Community Centre. The Carnegie is a busy, active place on the corner of Main and Hastings streets in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Traditionally referred to as "Skid Row," the Downtown Eastside has fought for many years to have its community identity recognised (Cameron, p.19). Since it opened in 1980, the goal of the Carnegie Community Centre has been to act as the Living Room of the Downtown Eastside. Local residents, many of whom live in tiny single-room occupancy hotel rooms, can come to play pool, to eat in the low-cost cafeteria, borrow books from the Reading Room, watch TV, attend community meetings....

The Carnegie community is also very actively literate. The popularity of the Carnegie Reading Room, the Carnegie Newsletter (now in its second decade of publishing), and the Carnegie Writer's Group indicates that there is an active reader and writer community in the Downtown Eastside. At the same time, however, the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood in which the Carnegie is located has one of the lowest levels of literacy in the City.[2] Clearly, a focus on literacy needs to be part of day-to-day programming at the Carnegie.

Many everyday activities at the Carnegie involve reading and writing: scanning the menu-board, reading posters about meetings, dealing with recipes in the kitchen, counting tickets at the volunteer desk. Basic literacy skills are needed to access information about crucial community issues: visits from health nurses, community planning meetings, missing persons notices, support groups, advocacy information. Broader literacy skills are needed to enable residents to meaningfully participate in their community and beyond.

Many people who participate in the life of the Carnegie seem to understand the centrality of reading and writing. Staff,

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[2] The Statistics Canada survey of 1989 showed that overall only 12% of Vancouver's population were classified as having little or no reading skills. In the Downtown Eastside this number rose to 41% (Quigley et al., p. 15).

patrons, and volunteers who I talked to told me stories about stopping in the middle of their day to help people read documents, write letters, address envelopes, fill out forms. However, past programs that have focused narrowly on reading and writing have not been able to address the literacy needs of Carnegie community members. There is a need for a broad and alternative approach to literacy education, one that would address literacy in the context of promoting learners' abilities to participate in the Carnegie community -and beyond.

My purpose in the Needs Assessment was to document some of the ways in which literacy learning is already taking place throughout the building and not including the Learning Centre, as well as some of the un-met needs for literacy learning. The result of this research was to be a document that gives both a snapshot look at literacy at Carnegie, and some recommendations for change. My general question was:

> In what ways is "literacy" part of the daily activity at Carnegie, and what could be done to support staff, patrons, and volunteers with literacy-related activities?

History of Needs Assessment

In the Fall of 1997, Fay Blaney and I, Sarah Evans, were hired as Community Literacy Workers with the Carnegie Learning Centre project. We are employed by Capilano College. The project is a partnership between the College, the Carnegie Community Association, and the Vancouver East Community Skills Connection.

Conducting the Literacy Needs Assessment was part of our job. The original proposal to do this research was written by a literacy consultant, Lee Weinstein, together with the Carnegie Community Association. The money for the research came from a cost-shared grant with the National Literacy Secretariat and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Training, and Technology.

Fay and I brought different backgrounds to the projects and this took our research in different directions. I have been involved at the Carnegie for the past six years as a volunteer, a tutor, a community organiser, an educator, and a project co-

ordinator. Fay is new to the Carnegie with a background as a strong advocate and educator for First Nations people. I focused on literacy within the Carnegie. In her research, Fay explored the un-met literacy needs of the First Nations community at Carnegie and in the Downtown Eastside. I explored ways to better serve the people who use the Carnegie. Fay interviewed a group of people who don't use the Carnegie in order to determine what could be done to meet their needs. I did "In-Reach" and Fay did "Out-Reach." Our hope was that our reports could be viewed as complementary.

Definition of Literacy

What do we mean when we talk about "literacy"? Early on in the process, Fay and I adopted a definition given by Lorraine Fox of the Native Education Centre at the First Nations Literacy Gathering, which was held at Carnegie in December 1997:

> Literacy is the ability to fully participate in one's own life -to be able to listen, to understand, to express oneself verbally and in writing in order to be able to belong, to not feel excluded from the group.

We also used the International Adult Literacy Survey, which defines literacy in terms of a mode of adult behaviour, namely:

> Using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential (OECD, p.14).

Both definitions view literacy not as an abstract skills (simply knowing how to read and write), but as a set of skills *with usefulness*. This implies that literacy is relevant to the extent that it can be used to really change someone's life.

In my experience, literacy at the Carnegie is not just about reading, writing, and computation; literacy is first about building relationships and creating community. Literacy is about developing structures so members have a say in the Centre, and can share their perspectives and knowledge with others. Literacy is about deepening our analysis of the society in which we live - and working together to have a voice in that society. Literacy

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is about the power to define who we are and the power to act on that definition.

Context

Since the Community Centre first opened its doors, there has been a Learning Centre at the Carnegie. **Currently, the Learning Centre is part of the Carnegie Community Centre, but receives the bulk of its funding from Capilano College. The mandate of the Learning** Centre is to provide volunteer tutor training and literacy education. However, the Learning Centre has not always been effective at attracting the participation of Carnegie patrons and people from the wider Downtown Eastside community. Many people at Carnegie are reluctant to "go to school" in the Learning Centre. In 1995, an informal survey of patrons revealed that most had little contact with the Learning Centre, and that those who did saw it as a place where

> formal or classroom type learning occurs. Although those people knew that was the place to go if they wanted to take a course, they were afraid they would find themselves in a situation where they would "fall behind the rest of the class.[3]

Concerns about the accessibility of the Learning Centre lead the researchers, Lee Weinstein and Louie Ettling, to suggest "that the Learning Centre staff needs to see the entire building as their classroom." The Carnegie Association decided to look at ways of doing literacy differently at the Carnegie, and the idea of In-Reach was born. This Needs Assessment is the first step in that process.

Volunteerism plays an important role at Carnegie. Many of the services and activities offered at the Centre would not be possible without the efforts of the volunteers. Volunteerism is a way for local residents to get involved in their neighbourhood and to meet other people. Volunteerism brings skill acquisition, political empowerment, self confidence, free meal tickets.... The existence of a vibrant volunteer community at Carnegie

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[3] It was noted that although these perceptions do not reflect the pedagogy of the people running the Learning Centre, they certainly show how many people think of the Learning Centre.

suggests that the promotion of a Centre-wide volunteer tutor base could be possible.

Process

Almost all of the interviews took place at the Carnegie Community Centre. One took place in a local cafe, and one took place in the interviewee's home. Sometimes the interviews were scheduled; very often, however, I simply approached staff, volunteers, or members of the public as they were going about their general business. At a full Carnegie staff meeting, I announced that I would be approaching staff to talk about their views on literacy. As well, an announcement outlining the basic premise of the Needs Assessment was placed in the Carnegie Newsletter.

Unless I sensed that the interviewee felt uncomfortable, I took notes during the interviews. I typed up all of my transcripts and gave copies to the people I interviewed. Many of the interviewees edited and clarified the transcripts, and I made the changes they requested. Going over each interview in this way was a lengthy process, but I am glad we did it. I feel that this report is, as a result, a closer representation of what people really wanted to say. In only a couple of cases, I was not able to re-connect with the interviewee for this second step.

Although I had a skeleton framework of questions to follow, I tried to keep my line of questioning flexible, and to listen for cues in what people were saying. The feeling was more of a conversation than an interview. I tried to create a casual and friendly atmosphere. Some interviews took as little as ten minutes, but frequently I chatted with the interviewee for up to an hour.

A Joint Needs Assessment Advisory Committee was struck early on in the process. Committee members met half a dozen times throughout the assessment process to offer advice, feedback, and problem-solving to both Fay and myself. The Committee then split, as the two Needs Assessments took divergent directions. A final joint committee meeting was held at the end of the assessment process.

Chapter Two

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Carnegie Member Interviews

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Introduction

The community members interviewed here are various: they are new volunteers, veteran volunteers, temporary volunteers doing community time, volunteers in supervisory roles, volunteers with undefined roles, patrons who have unofficial community volunteer roles, and people who hang out at Carnegie. Some interviewees talked about themselves and their issues; others talked about what they perceived was going on for other people. I have included them in this section together because the more people I interviewed, the more the patron/volunteer distinction seemed to break down. Everyone is part of the learner community at Carnegie.

I asked one set of general questions to Carnegie patrons. Then, if the interviewee turned out to be a Carnegie volunteer, I asked some specific questions about the types of reading and writing they use on the job and the needs they identify. My goal was to try and understand how an In-Reach program might be able to facilitate the literacy learning of Carnegie volunteers.

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<u>Member Interview Questions</u>:

1) Is there anything you would like to learn?

2) What would you be able to do with better reading/writing/math that you can't do now?

3) How would you like to learn? How do you think we could help people to learn?

(Questions 4-8 asked to Carnegie volunteers only)

4) What kinds of reading, writing, and math are used by volunteers on the job?

5) Do you have any problems with tasks involving literacy? Do you know of any volunteers who do?

6) What kind of training and support is there for volunteers?

7) Are volunteers limited in what they can do because of trouble with reading, writing, or counting?

8) How could we improve literacy support for Carnegie volunteers?

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Responses From Carnegie Members

Connecting with patrons and volunteers was sometimes difficult:

"I don't want to do your interview. We've been interviewed to death."

"With all due respect, I think it's fucking useless."

There is a sense that Carnegie patrons are far too often the objects of research reports in which they have no say and which do not offer them any real results.

Future research projects at Carnegie should continue exploring ways to involve interviewees as subjects, not objects, of research.

Although I tried to present the broad definition of literacy that this report uses, many of the responses I received indicate that people at Carnegie think of literacy and of learning in terms of traditional academic reading, writing, and computation programs -and that they don't want to pursue this kind of learning. In some cases, reading and writing was not identified as relevant:

"We don't have that problem."

"The teaching side is less crucial than the service side. This is an emergency situation."

"I don't have much to say about that [reading and writing]. It takes me over an hour to read one row of this [newspaper]."

"I read, write, and do math as well as I'd like to."

"I'm fine just as I am."

In other cases, people spoke of the fear of learning, of failure, of judgement:

"The main thing I've noticed is that people are very
embarrassed if they're limited in their reading and
writing. They're embarrassed to admit it to someone."

"I'm afraid that people are going to be better than I
am and that's why I don't go [to the Learning Centre]."

"There's two or three volunteers who can't read or
write, but what I've learned about being illiterate is
nobody wants to admit it... If you're telling people
they're gonna learn something, they'll go, No way! No
way!"

*Successful literacy projects also do not have to be overtly
related to reading and writing. Literacy support can be offered
in the context of other activities.*

Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to facilitate
the organisation of events, projects, and programs at Carnegie. In
particular, the Community Literacy Worker "bring out" the literacy
and community development aspects of these activities.

1) Is there anything you would like to learn?

There was great variety in the types of things people were
interested in learning. Sometimes these needs are quite
contradictory:

"I'd like to see more marketable skills, especially in
the computer room... There is an assumption on the part
of people deciding on programs that people at Carnegie
don't want jobs."

The interviewee listed: computers, life skills ("Some
people don't even know how to dial the phone!"),
literacy ("You can't turn it into an academic
discussion!"), health care and hygiene ("Do it with
some respect!"), anger management, ironing your clothes
("Do a two-hour workshop in the theatre."), boiling an
egg, measuring soap in the laundromat, basic rules of
manners ("Like saying no thank-you."), police lectures

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("Don't tell them to go to Hell!"), basic nutrition, [programs for] young single mothers.

One interviewee stressed his desire specifically to improve his reading and writing skills:

"If I could write better, maybe I get another job. Sit in office somewhere, making big buck. I don't hang around here! I couldn't write my tests in Engineering Electrical. If I could write like you, I'd be an Electrical Engineer -big guy. My whole life, that's the thing that hold me back is reading and writing. If I can read and write, I can do everything they can do. Lots of things I can do that they can't."

One interviewee stressed his desire to improve his ability to organise in the community:

"Access Internet. Do funding proposals. Develop documents on computer. Gain political support within the community."

One interviewee said he would like to get his GED. When I asked him why, he mentioned that the GED could help him with numbers and communication:

"When you're out working, they want you to cut something with numbers and all that... It makes you speak a lot better, plus it makes you write better, too."

Some people spoke of the need for First Nations language literacy:

The interviewee mentioned First Nations languages and public speaking.

"I've got to relearn the Sechelt language... The written part of it is Greek to me."

Some people spoke of the need for advocacy:

"My main problem right now is getting my Social Worker to listen to me."

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"I know the workers want me to go to work and all that [instead of going to school], but there's not that much [work] out there."

"You need someone up there with a phone who can help people with problems with their landlord or need a place to go."

Some people wanted to learn computers:

"Computers... I would like to do the data base. Add addresses and stuff like that... I can't do it any more because computers have taken over."

"For quite awhile now, I've been thinking about the computer thing. All I know is how to turn it on... I'm curious I guess is the best way to put it."

Clearly, there is great interest in learning at Carnegie. People expressed interest in a wide variety of learning activities.

Learning Centre to continue to develop programming that meets the needs of Downtown Eastside residents by:

- encouraging the development of a variety of educational opportunities through one-to-one tutoring and small group work.

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2) What would you be able to do with better reading/writing/math that you can't do now?

I was unable to get to this point with many of the people I interviewed. Talking about learning seemed to be very personal and often painful for people. However, those answers that I did get, while inconclusive, are interesting and relevant:

The interviewee listed two things: i) get a better job because they want grade twelve. "But in my case they would not hire me [anyway] because they are prejudiced against my disability." ii) "Peace of mind."

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The interviewee's most important reason for learning
was "to get along better with family members; to be a
better parent/grandparent."

I asked the interviewee what he wanted for himself. He
said, "To stop getting into trouble."

The interviewee describes to me a woman who is a role
model: "It used to be she was downtown, drinking...
She showed up in the eighties and drank for a couple of
years... She decided to quit one day... Now she's
going to school... She talks in front of people...
She's a lot nicer than what she used to be... I think
she wants to be a secretary... Her boyfriend has a
job... He's also going back to school... Plus he goes
to anger management... They are two of the nicest
people I have ever met. They were talking about the
future yesterday. Me, I haven't even got to that part
yesterday!"

Although diverse, these interviews convey a strikingly similar vision of learning: interviewees did not speak of acquiring skills, but about learning to have some control over who they are and how they are in the world.

Learning Centre to focus on building the community of learners and tutors by:

- promoting one-to-one learner-tutor relationships and small group work in a manner which fosters a sense of belonging, personal growth, and community awareness.

There was also a need expressed for some education about rights (human rights, welfare rights, etc.)

Learning Centre to promote the power of the learner-tutor community to give direction to their learning by:

- continuing to hold regular student-tutor meetings;

- holding regular tutor discussion meetings;

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- facilitating learner and tutor participation in board meetings.

- creating a forum for community issues by holding public discussion circles, special workshops, and community walk-abouts.

Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to:

- collect and disseminate information about advocacy and support services for people in the Downtown Eastside, refer people to these services, and act as a liaison with other community organisations.

3) How would you like to learn? How do you think we could help people to learn?

Interviewees spoke of patience, respect, caring, and a sense of belonging as the most important factors in helping people learn:

> "You've got to really stand there and explain. Be patient."

> "Repetition."

> "People are being treated like second class citizens. Tell them they don't have to have someone yell and curse at them here, but they have to be polite too. Make sure they feel they're doing something important. Make them feel as important as the teachers. Make sure you speak to them one-on-one as equals. Try to get so they have someone to talk to so they won't feel so all alone."

> "We need the ability to go to staff and talk about feelings. That makes you feel really cared about. A quiet corner to go and talk... If you have a major problem, people will listen, but it has to escalate into something major first."

> "A few years ago, someone told me to go to the Learning Centre, but I told him straight out if I wanted to learn something, I'd go elsewhere." I asked the interviewee why, and he replied, "Attitude, no respect

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at all. I found the same thing in the kitchen, so I
went to the Senior's. At least there I've only got
myself to contend with."

"I don't feel First Nations people are welcome. There
is also discrimination towards people with Special
Needs."

Some interviewees stressed the need for an Aboriginal learning
environment:

"Maybe all-Native. They [Welfare Officer] sent me
downtown. It was all White people. For some reason,
it wasn't comfortable."

"I'd like to see a First Nations focus with inclusion,
not exclusion."

Some interviewees said that they prefer to learn by themselves or
from their own experience:

"I always prefer to work by myself... When I was at the
sawmill, the only teaching I had was watching... It's
adventurous. Experience is the best teacher."

"It's good to have someone to show you... I like to
learn how to do it and then by myself."

Some interviewees spoke of the need for programs that go at their
own pace and that look to them for direction:

"The old Learning Centre was good. If I needed help,
they would ask me."

"It took a long time... She took me step by step. The
more she talked to me, the more it seemed easy."

*I understood that <u>environment</u> is an important aspect of any
program at Carnegie.*

Learning Centre to focus on building the community of learners and
tutors by:

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- maintaining a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the Learning Centre.

There was a need expressed for First Nations programming.

Learning Centre to continue to develop programming that meets the needs of Downtown Eastside residents by:

- continuing to support initiatives in First Nations education, and continuing to explore alternatives for First Nations programming.

Responses from Carnegie Volunteers

4) What kinds of reading, writing, and math are used by volunteers on the job?

> "The weight room is OK for people who cannot read. [And] in the pool room they only have to write down their name."

> The interviewee told me that math is involved in what he does: he counts change, he deals with people's stamp cards, he knows the prices of items, he has a float. At the end of his shift, he has to count the $50 float. Then he has to itemise, count up, and write the totals for all the other cash (usually about $40-$60).

> The interviewee said that the reading, writing, and counting involved in her job is: the tally of tickets to be distributed to volunteers and the writing of names and identification numbers in the log book.

Interviewees conveyed that basic reading, writing, and computation skills are needed for volunteers to function effectively in many of the volunteer positions at Carnegie.

5) Do you have any problems with tasks involving literacy? Do you know of any volunteers who do?

Only one person I talked to mentioned having problems of their own:

> The interviewee described a situation which arose when he was doing his community hours as a volunteer at the Carnegie. Part of his job was answering the phone. He said, "I'd be fumbling, mumbling, and all that. Didn't know what to say on the phone."

Many interviewees identified problems with other volunteers:

> "Sometimes other volunteers aren't so good at addition and they make mistakes."

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"Reading the menu board is a problem for some people."

"People don't know what 'tsp.' means, or how to double recipes, or how to handle knives -they'll be waving them around in front of your face. There are serious safety concerns in the kitchen."

"I have run up against a couple of people who can't write their name. I've said that I was too busy -but eventually it dawned on me... "

The interviewee told me an anecdote about two volunteers he heard arguing. Neither one of them wanted to write the name down in the book: "You write it down!" "No, you write it down!" He said that these people problems get ignored, and the situation often escalates into anger.

As we were talking, someone came up and asked him how to spell "correspondence." He helped them , then turned to me and said, "See? It's the little things like that that scare people."

Many of the volunteers I interviewed have experienced difficulty with many of the reading, writing, computation, and communication aspects of their volunteer positions.

Learning Centre to continue to develop programming that meets the needs of Downtown Eastside residents by:

• gearing some literacy programming towards very basic reading, writing, and computation skills.

6) What kind of training and support is there for volunteers?

For some, the training and support offered to volunteers on-the-job seems to work:

"I knew how to add in the first place, but [the Volunteer Programmer] trained me himself."

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"We have been teaching them on the job. We taught one volunteer how to make change."

"If I run into trouble, I ask one of the other coffee sellers, or Sandy for help. Sandy is our Co-ordinator in the Senior's coffee, so we can go to her for help."

Some people mentioned receiving little or no training:

"When I first started volunteering here there was no training. I worked on the free phone. Every night I'd be in a fist fight, even with Security there. I had no training whatsoever. It was wide open."

"I worked professionally for twenty years. I can handle it... There's not training here."

One person remembered a time when training and support was, in her estimation, better:

"In 1992, I was given such good training. My orientation wasn't five minutes. They showed me how to operate every piece of equipment."

Some people pointed out shortcomings in the current on-the-job training and support program:

"Usually the first couple of volunteers come in and the cooks just say, What do you want to do? Unfortunately, the staff are busy doing their thing. I guess they just naturally assume that that person knows what they're doing."

"Nobody's there to help [the volunteers]... The staff's not there for them. They like it that you can do it - but if you can't, there's certain staff here that don't have time for you... Not all staff, just some... Staff are very busy, especially when volunteers don't show up. There is no time to show people."

When it is available, personal training and support for volunteers has been very successful. Often, however, it seems that the training and support are skipped, due in part to time pressures.

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7) Are volunteers limited in what they can do because of trouble with reading, writing, or counting?

> "If they couldn't do it, we'd have to ask them to volunteer in another area."

> "If a person can't read or is having trouble reading, they're not going to go on the cash. You can't bluff your way through that."

> "I don't know no other jobs. I only got experience in the kitchen. My English is not good. I come to you to learn ABE and writing."

> "Somebody who didn't know how to read, they couldn't do the job."

> "There's not so many people in there who don't know how to read and write. They've all been pushed out... Volunteers are not given the opportunity to expand - they are all pigeon-holed into a job."

> "There's a fair amount of people who'd like to volunteer here but because they have little education, they feel intimidated. There was a guy last night on the second floor. New. He nearly quit because he didn't know how to count. They never asked him."

Some volunteers have felt that inadequate support and training has lead to people being pigeon-holed into jobs, to people leaving their volunteer jobs, and to people simply staying away from volunteering. Greater one-to-one support would help the volunteer program.

Learning Centre to become a resource for the Carnegie volunteer program by:

- setting up supports in the Learning Centre for specific Carnegie volunteer jobs. For example, procuring a cash register for learners to practice on in the Learning Centre;

- continuing discussions with Carnegie Volunteer co-ordinators

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about how to promote peer training for new volunteers;

- attending the meetings of the Carnegie Volunteer Committee and acting as resources around literacy issues there.

8) How could we improve literacy support for Carnegie volunteers?

Interviewees had some really good ideas:

"You could tape the recipes in the kitchen."

"Adding, subtracting... These things can be taught in the Learning Centre. We need a cash register up there."

One interviewee described a whole system for peer tutor training:

The interviewee suggested peer training, where veteran volunteers like herself could go in and help people learn the things they need to know to function well in their area. She said that it is probably better when volunteers do this training, not staff, because people "respond more to people they think of as an equal."

The same interviewee described how literacy can be built into other activities:

"If you do things like this, like making chocolate cookies, and you say you're going to triple the recipe so that there's one-third for Carnegie, one-third to eat now, and one-third to take home with you, then people learn how to read the recipe, how to triple it, and how to make cookies... In the kitchen, that's how you go about it. When you're taking [a product] home, that's an accomplishment. It makes them feel better."

The interviews conveyed that it is within the current capacity of the Carnegie and the Learning Centre to offer more -and more diverse- support and training to the volunteers. The In-Reach literacy worker could work with volunteers and staff in the different areas of Carnegie to develop project-based learning

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opportunities, like writing a manual for the kitchen, or holding baking classes.

Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to:

- promote and support informal tutoring Carnegie by building up a core group of community tutors. This could include: identifying people as potential tutors; taking them to lunch; talking; identifying areas for potential peer tutoring;

- facilitate the organisation of events, projects, and programs at Carnegie. In particular, the Community Literacy Worker "bring out" the literacy and community development aspects of these activities.

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<u>**Part Three**</u>
<u>**Carnegie Staff Interviews**</u>

<u>Introduction</u>

Interviews with Carnegie staff are a significant part of this research. I would not normally have chosen to focus a Literacy research report on staff. In principle, I believe that it is the learners themselves, not the staff, who are the experts when it comes to defining literacy needs. However, literacy at Carnegie is not just a matter between the Learning Centre staff and the learners: City staff as well have a great deal of experience responding to literacy needs at Carnegie.

The following is a list of the ways in which Carnegie staff are involved in literacy at the Centre:

1) Many City staff have a history of trust with the potential learners, and they were therefore able to provide this research with insights that outside researchers would not have been able to access.[4]

2) The role of City staff will only increase as the In-Reach work starts to take place: since "In-Reach" is about nurturing the literacy-related aspects of everyday programs at Carnegie, it requires the participation of the staff who run those programs.

3) Any literacy program that is developed at Carnegie in isolation from the staff and programs there is at the mercy of ever-changing funding structures. The recommendations of this Needs Assessment have more chance of being effective and long-lasting if they can be incorporated into the running of the Carnegie as a whole.

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[4] In many cases it seemed better to talk to staff than to potential learners. I was reluctant to delve into the personal issues of potential learners because I could not guarantee their involvement in the research as subjects.

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Staff Interview Questions

1) What does literacy mean to you?

2) What literacy needs have you perceived among the people that come here? What kinds of things do people ask you for help with?

3) How is literacy part of participating at Carnegie?

4) How or in what way do you perceive these literacy needs? What kind of clues do you get when talking to a person that they might be having trouble with reading and writing?

5) When are you able to help people with literacy-related needs?

6) When are you *not* able to help people with literacy-related needs?

7) What could we do more of or better?

In the course of the interviews, three areas of interest were added to the interviews. These topics emerged out of the interviews themselves, and are concern specifics of literacy-related programming at Carnegie. Interviewee comments on these topics appear at the end of this chapter, together with further explanations.

8) What do you think of the "literacy buddy" idea?

9) What are the literacy aspects of the Compact Disc project?

10) Comments about the Learning Centre.

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<u>Responses from Carnegie Staff</u>

1) What does literacy mean to you?

Some people gave straight-forward definitions:

> "It seems to be about reading and writing."

> "It sounds like just reading and writing."

Many people automatically linked literacy with being able to do the things you need and want to do:

> "Reading and writing, even to the most limited ability.... Not knowing how to read and write is like being without a backup in terms of self-support. I can't imagine what it's like if you're on welfare."

> "Being able to communicate with people. Being able to read simple things like signs, easy books. The difference between being able to get a job and not having a job."

> "For a person to be able to get their needs met functioning in the language that's required."

> "Literacy is about access to information of any kind. Literacy is about having a level of reading and writing that can allow you to access information, and about the means to get the information you need...."

One person gave a broad definition of literacy as new learning in general:

> "[Literacy is] learning something new. It doesn't necessarily mean learning speaking, reading, and writing. If there's something you don't know how to do and you're learning to do it, that's literacy."

Interviewees demonstrated a range of definitions of literacy. However, all definitions included reading, writing, and computation, which we know to be fundamental to the ability to

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"fully participate in one's own life" (definition used in this study).

2) What literacy needs have you perceived among people that come here? What kinds of things do people ask you for help with?

When asked about literacy needs, many interviewees identified needs other than reading, writing, and computation:

> "We have to ask is learning to read and write a priority in people's minds? I've noticed that people who do say they really want to read and write in a traditional school-type setting, those people burn-out. Maybe people displace their other needs onto school, thinking, If only I could read and write better, my life would improve. These people tend to get discouraged because the quality of their life does not improve proportional to their efforts. The most successful students we have had in the Learning Centre are the people who have found their voice in some way. People do need our help -but in a different way than we expect as teachers. There are very few `successes' at a literacy level. Unless they find their voice. It usually happens by us being here and encouraging people in whatever they do. It's not anything we do."

> "People are upset and fighting because they lack communication skills and listening skills."

> One-interviewee identified self-esteem as a literacy need. She told me an anecdote. The other day, someone had some candies and he held out two -one for her and one for another man. She chose the orange one and left the yellow one for the other man. He took it and said, "I guess I'm the lemon."

It came across that literacy programs at Carnegie should focus on human aspects of learning.

Learning Centre to focus on building the community of learners and tutors by:

• maintaining a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the Learning

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Centre;

- promoting one-to-one learner-tutor relationships and small group work in a manner which fosters a sense of belonging, personal growth, and community awareness.

Learning Centre staff to promote the ability of the learner and tutor community to give direction to their learning and their lives by:

- holding regular tutor discussion groups;

- continuing to hold regular student-tutor meetings;

- facilitating learner and tutor involvement in Carnegie Board meetings.

Interviewees identified some very basic reading, writing, and computation needs:

> "At the least you can hope that they can sign their name, remember their address and postal code."

> One interviewee told me a story about a man who she sent to Lenscrafters in Pacific Centre to get a free pair of new glasses. He had a piece of paper in his hand with the address on it. He phoned her from there to find out if he was in the right place. The interviewee said, "He's in Lenscrafters, but he doesn't even know he's in the right place. Do you know how many people could not find Pacific Centre?"

> "She didn't even know where to mail her info because she couldn't read the address written on the envelope. Somebody had told her it was going to the Welfare office, but the address on the envelope was in Victoria."

> "They know what they need but they don't know how to go about looking it up."

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"We are continually asked questions, all kinds of questions.... They're coming in and wanting something and not even being able to ask."

One interviewee listed: people need help with basic reading and writing; they need help with reading and understanding signs, filling out forms. Math skills are a literacy need: making change, using recipes, estimating. Reading maps on trips is another literacy need.

"One of the most intimidating things in the library is the postal code book... Those kinds of skills where you have to interpret the order of things, like the Blue Government pages."

"There are a number of people who come in here and need to have their eyes tested.... There's one guy who always borrows the magnifying glass. That's one thing we could really encourage -getting your eyes tested."

"We [at Carnegie] are the first step in the literacy ladder. If people keep getting help in the first step, then eventually they'll initiate the second. But we don't have to be that second step. We can keep being the first step over and over and over."

Learning Centre to continue to develop programming that meets the needs of Downtown Eastside residents by:

- gearing some literacy programming towards very basic reading, writing, and computation skills;

- routinely finding out whether students experience difficulty with learning because of poor eyesight or hearing.

Other interviewees emphasised that the need for literacy learning and assistance is closely related to people's day-to-day life and to their survival:

"With the word literacy, I think a lot of them wouldn't know what that meant. If you're talking to people, it's better to offer to help them read the things they

need to know, like counting money, or dealing with Welfare."

As I was asking my questions, literacy often seemed very far from the urgent needs of daily survival in the Downtown Eastside:

"We are overwhelmed. There are so many vulnerable people with fewer resources being made available for them, i.e. housing, medical and psychiatric care, detoxes, etc. Carnegie is an oasis in the Downtown Eastside, but we feel we've been abandoned by the governments at all levels who are doing less for them instead of more."

The need for help with forms was repeatedly identified:

"Filling out forms. That's a really big need here. Could you help me fill out this form? Could you help me spell this word?... It's not a standard person who knows how to look in a dictionary... I enjoy doing that. It's not part of my job description."

"They [the forms] are incredibly complex."

Interviewees identified a need to have people available on-site to help with forms:

"People want a form filled out, they want it now. It would be a good idea to designate someone. We send them upstairs, but it is kind of vague. We don't know who we're sending them to."

Interviewees also identified a need to provide training for people who help with forms:

"A tutor wouldn't know all the answers. You need to know how these people get extra money."

Interviewees also spoke of a need to help people understand the systems behind the forms:

"Seniors can get a bus pass for $45 a year. Nobody gets it. They don't read the info and they don't fill out the damn form.... People don't even know how the bus system works... Many don't understand how the

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system works: welfare, benefits, health, the Carnegie
Board. They get angry and upset because they don't
know where to put their input."

"Does that [Needs Assessment] mean you are going to be
giving people workshops on welfare and that? Because
that's what we need."

In the same vein, interviewees also spoke of a need for advocacy:

"People are inadequately defended for dealing with
bureaucracy."

"[We need to] help smooth relations with the learner's
FA worker."

Other literacy needs were identified:

"Computer literacy."

***Clearly, literacy programming at Carnegie has to be closely
linked to people's human needs and survival needs. Interviewees
identified many paperwork needs, mostly having to do with
navigating and advocating for oneself within the Social System.
These needs have to do with rights: welfare rights, housing
rights, legal rights, human rights.***

Learning Centre and City staff to co-operate in:

- the development of Centre-wide responses to some of the key
  community issues. This could include a program of "Rights
  Education" that includes welfare rights, human rights,
  communication, assertiveness, self-esteem;

- exploring the possibility of establishing a welfare advocacy
  service at Carnegie.

Learning Centre to continue to develop programming that meets the
needs of Downtown Eastside residents by:

- when necessary, offering learners immediate assistance with
  filling out forms and other tasks requiring basic literacy

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> skills.
>
> • initiating training for volunteers in helping people fill out
>   official documents.

> Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to:
>
> • collect and disseminate information about advocacy and support
>   services for people in the Downtown Eastside, refer people to
>   these services, and act as a liaison with other community
>   organisations.

3) How is literacy part of participating in the Carnegie?

The ability to interact with all this written material came up as
an important part of participating in the Centre:

> "I know a lot of people can't read the signs and are
> being informed by others. Often they'll come because
> they heard by word-of-mouth that they can get help.
> They'll say, 'I heard you do...'"

> "At the Xmas Dinner this year, you had to get your
> tickets in advance. They were free, you just had to
> pick it up. There were signs all over the
> neighbourhood telling people to pick up their tickets
> in advance. When the dinner day came, all these people
> showed up without tickets. Nobody had read the signs!"

Literacy is also part of programs at Carnegie:

> One interviewee explained that literacy is central to
> many of the tasks a volunteer in the Carnegie kitchen
> volunteers could undertake. Examples include: reading
> and increasing recipes, increasing recipes, converting
> imperial to metric measurements, counting change.

> "The PAC terminal.[5] It's not a card catalogue now."

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[5] The PAC terminal is the Library Public Access Catalogue. The Carnegie Reading Room has one PAC terminal.
Using this, one can search the Vancouver Public Library collection. The Carnegie Reading Room collection is not
included in the PAC. The Reading Room collection is a browsing collection organized by genre and subject.

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Many people had a holistic approach to literacy. At Carnegie, learning is part of participating and belonging in the community:

> "It's a whole big process of being here, being alive - is learning things."

> "All the groups here are literacy groups."

> "That's what this Community Centre is about -have the group be part of the make-up of what you do."

One interviewee spoke of the importance of creating a sense of belonging, because:

> "A lot of people don't make them feel wanted."

It came across to me that literacy is already part of many Carnegie programs.

Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to:

• facilitator the organisation of events, projects, and programs at Carnegie. In particular, the Community Literacy Worker will "bring out" the literacy and community development aspects of these activities. Where possible, the initiative for these projects should come from community members.

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4) How or in what way do you perceive these literacy needs? What kind of clues do you get when talking to a person that that person is having trouble with reading and writing?

I asked this question because I wanted to get a deeper sense of how literacy is part of staff's interaction with the people they serve.

Most of the interviewees indicated that what they know about literacy is what they have picked up along the way:

> One interviewee said that at first she was pretty naive about the extent of literacy barriers, and she gradually came to get a sense of its challenges from working with volunteers. For example, she would ask

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someone to get something from the fridge and they would
come back with the wrong thing. She'd go in with them
and then see that the correct item was there, in front
of them and labelled -but the volunteer had been unable
to read the label.

"There's a guy I know. I've known him for twenty
years. The other day he told me he couldn't read. All
those years. I'd be handing him stuff to read, say a
funny story. He'd laugh. He was faking it."

"I try to help out as much as I can..... I didn't go to
school to learn how to do these forms and stuff. It's
just common sense. And when I talk to people, they say
I did it right."

Many people recognise clues about literacy difficulties:

"Often people will ask to take the volunteer
application form home and bring it back to me
tomorrow."

"[You detect literacy problems] by not doing everything
for them -it's doing it with them. Like with the
Income tax or the Christmas cards. Ask people, Is this
hard for you to do because...?"

"They say they forgot their glasses."

Many interviewees seemed sensitive to issues around literacy
problems:

"It was so intimidating for her just to be able to go
up there... it was embarrassing for her to admit that
she didn't have the literacy skills.... It takes a lot
of courage."

"Whatever you do, it cannot be identified with
`literacy' as we call it. I'm willing to wager that
the people here who have `literacy needs' have all had
unpleasant if not dreadful experiences in school."

"It is very important not to embarrass them!... Don't
ask people if they can read and write. They then
believe you think they do.... Never judge.... Wait for

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> them to admit.... Sometimes I put the thing to be read
> in front of them and put myself at the same level....
> Sometimes people will admit, 'I'm scared.'"

> "Asking people, `Would you like to learn to read and
> write?' sounds scary... It's better to introduce
> things slowly to gain trust.... For many adults, to
> learn to do better scares them so greatly that they
> won't even attempt it."

Some interviewees didn't know what to say:

> "I really don't know."

> "I have no idea..."

One interviewee felt there is a need for staff literacy training:

> "And for staff, too. There should be some kind of
> acknowledgement of how to work with people with
> literacy problems. I mean, how many times have you
> been in the cafeteria and heard them say, The
> sandwiches are written on the board?"

Carnegie staff came across as strikingly sensitive towards the needs of the patrons. Staff obviously care a great deal for the people they work with. However, there are was also a sense of mystery surrounding the whole idea of how to recognise and approach reading and writing problems.

Learning Centre and City staff to work together to promote a vision for Literacy at Carnegie by discussing ways to establish literacy training at a staff level.

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5) When are you able to help people with literacy related needs?

Several interviewees stated the importance of being available for people, having time for a one-to-one interaction, and creating an atmosphere of belonging:

> "Making yourself available, even if it's only for five
> minutes. I think that's big."

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"Being understanding, try to understand what problems a person might have when they try to tell you something."

"A lot of people don't make them feel wanted."

Other interviewees stressed how literacy help is successful when offered as part of other activities:

One interviewee told me an anecdote about one volunteer who went on a Carnegie trip and learned to play Bingo. The real reason he couldn't play Bingo is because he didn't know the numbers, but he would never admit that. The person who showed him how to play never said it either.

"It's a combination of seeing what's going on and letting them know that [you] are there to support them in any way. Like [the AIDS Group] -I end up doing postering for them. Maybe they want to come up with pamphlets or something like that. I don't know what the literacy needs are there...."

"Build up trust while giving a service."

"That's what this Community Centre is about -have the group be part of the make-up of what you do."

Interviewees showed that an atmosphere of caring is crucial to the success of a literacy program.

Learning Centre to focus on building the community of learners and tutors by:

- maintaining a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the Learning Centre;

- promoting one-to-one learner-tutor relationships and small group work in a manner which fosters a sense of belonging, personal growth, and community awareness.

Interviewees also conveyed that literacy is often best approached as part of other activities. The examples of the AIDS group and

the Bingo lesson show how literacy can be integrated into other activities at Carnegie.

Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to:

- facilitate the organisation of events, projects, and programs at Carnegie. In particular, the Community Literacy Worker "bring out" the literacy and community development aspects of these activities. Where possible, the initiative for these projects should come from community members.

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6) When are you *not* able to help people with literacy related needs?

Although many staff said that they help patrons every day with reading and writing, there is one big limitation on what staff could offer patrons and volunteers: time.

> "I am able to help them when I understand what they want... but sometimes you don't have time to listen to them.... You've got to sort of question a little bit more to find out what they do need. You need the time to question like that."

> "With specific item questions I can help. Otherwise, only when there's time. When we're on the desk, we are usually alone. So if someone comes in and says, could you read this paragraph?... I never put them off. I say, I will read it, but you're going to have to come back later when I've had time...."

> The interviewee said that in the kitchen they try to show volunteers how to do tasks like converting recipes, and if the volunteer understands, they can do it for themselves. If not, staff take it and do it instead. She said there could be a role here for a volunteer tutor, someone with more time to spend with the volunteer learning new things.

> "He needs someone with him to show him and help him... The... staff don't have the interest or the time... They get really pissed off at him."

> "If I'm busy, I'll give them the phone book. Sometimes they'll admit [they are having trouble], but not usually."

> "They [volunteers on shift] are coming to us for help, but a lot of us staff, we just don't have the time."

As a response to time pressures, many staff refer people with reading and writing needs to the Learning Centre:

> "If I can't do it, I'll refer them on... I encourage them to go upstairs."

> "[I refer people to the Learning Centre] for anything to do with reading and writing, Math, Social Studies. For help filling out documents. We don't have the time. For resumes, computers, faxes."

However, there seems to be little communication about these referrals, and no sense as to whether people are actually getting the help they need:

> "They're not coming back down and complaining at us so we don't know if they've gotten help."

> "Sometimes they come back because there's no one in those places, or no one that can help them with their specific need, especially taxes. I know there's people frustrated."

> "They seem to be getting help."

Clearly, staff at Carnegie are stressed.

> Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to promote literacy at Carnegie without adding to the workload of Carnegie staff by incorporating literacy programming and support into existing activities.

Interviewees also conveyed the need for stronger communication between the Learning Centre and other areas of the Carnegie.

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Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to maintain
close ties to the different programs at Carnegie. In particular,
the Community Literacy Worker will work to improve follow-up
between Carnegie staff and the Learning Centre with regards to
needs and referrals by "checking-in" on a regular basis with the
staff throughout the building.

9) What could we do more of or better?

One area that was not spelled out in my questions, but that
emerged strongly in people's answers, is the need for collective,
group learning around community themes:

> "At the Carnegie, we don't do very much literacy about
> learning how to read and write and having kind of plan.
> What we do more effectively is issue-related stuff."

> "There are some themes that are really important in
> this neighbourhood, like AIDS. They should be part of
> everyone's job description. We need to come together
> as a staff over these issues. Everyone can work on them
> in their own way.... Why is it that our jobs are
> constrained by programs rather than by the fact that
> some issues affect everything we do?"

> The interviewee talked about the big issues facing the
> neighbourhood. She listed HIV and Hepatitis A as
> examples. She felt that everyone should be having a
> Hepatitis A shot, and that we should be educating
> around the effects of the disease. Recently, nurses
> were at Carnegie giving Hep A shots. Someone could
> have been standing in line with people to see who read
> the pamphlets and who didn't, and to talk to people
> when the nurse didn't have time.

> "It's really exciting what [the Carnegie AIDS group]
> does -the AIDS dinner, a nice dinner and information.
> And his Thursday night meetings. That kind of
> information and advocacy is really exciting to me....
> That kind of informal get-together with information -
> that's where literacy happens and that's where you get
> the real experts from the neighbourhood."

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"Insofar as staff and tutors are familiar with the issues and problems, are we going to be valuable in providing literacy support?"

While literacy should focus on themes of community interest, these themes do not always have to be political in nature. A key element is that the themes have the potential to draw people together and create community:

"[The activity] doesn't always have to be politically or socially relevant -but people come together. Like that Baroque music thing -it draws a lot of different people from different parts of the Carnegie."

"[Literacy tutor training] wouldn't have to be that formal. All the groups here are literacy groups. You have to go into those groups and offer training. You can't just drop down and be there as something other than those folks."

"Insofar as things are successful here, its because they are done in an egalitarian manner"

One way to promote collective learning is project-based literacy. This means providing literacy support and education as one component of projects that are not specifically about literacy *per se*.

"Do your literacy in a project-oriented manner... You create an experience in which people will have the opportunity to improve their literacy skills without them being identified as literacy... Projects are where we are all working on something together as equal partners."

One interviewee gave an example of project-based literacy. She talked about a Radio Project for literacy that took place a few years ago with Co-op radio, a local community radio station:

"A tutor was always present when they were putting their programs together. They hired a tutor who had been trained at the storefront... That's why that Radio Project worked: it had a literacy trainer involved in it."

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Other Needs:

> "Knowing how to motivate someone. Find things they are
> interested in, they need, they want to do. You have to
> help people recognise the opportunities."

> The interviewee suggested developing an accessible
> training manual for the kitchen.

> "We should be teaching people how to do income tax, how
> to budget on a small income."

> "You could have food to get people in."

> "More Internet. The library sign-up sheet is always
> filled up by 11 am."

> "I don't need any support, other than the concrete,
> like money."

*These responses convey a need at the Carnegie Community Centre
for a collective approach to literacy learning. Such an approach
would focus not just on improving an individual's reading,
writing, and computation skills, but on bringing groups of people
to learn together about issues that are important to them.
Collective learning is consistent with the definition of literacy
that this report uses. That definition states that literacy is
about belonging in the community and having some power over one's
own life and the life of the community.*

Learning Centre to promote the power of the learner-tutor community
to give direction to their learning by:

- creating a forum for community issues by holding public
  discussion circles, special workshops, and community walk-
  abouts.

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10) What do you think about the "literacy buddy" idea?

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In the course of my interviews with Carnegie staff, I learned of the "literacy buddy" idea. The "literacy buddy" system would match volunteers throughout the Carnegie with literacy tutors. The tutor would be available to help the volunteers with literacy needs on-the-job. I followed up this idea with staff.

One interviewee said that a "literacy buddy" system would be a good way to support new volunteers, or volunteers moving into new areas:

> "If we have people that were coming in that we want
> -that we think would benefit from working with a tutor,
> you could work with them by explaining that there is
> this opportunity."

One interviewee cited an instance when she was trying to help someone get new glasses. He phoned her from Pacific Centre because he was unable to read the address on the paper she had given him. This is where a flexible and mobile "literacy buddy" would come in handy:

> "If we had a peer tutor, we could talk to him about
> it.... A lot of the need is in getting about town."

However, many people questioned whether such a peer tutor system could be formally structured:

> "The buddy system might work. Not peer tutor or some
> other thing with words people wouldn't understand.
> Something casual with no system on it, no nothing."

> "It always to me theoretically seems good. But in the
> context of the Carnegie, it's too... it's a structure
> that people are not going to fit into... It isn't the
> reality of people to show up regularly. It doesn't
> even work in the Learning Centre."

> "I don't know. Who would be available like that?
> Volunteers don't necessarily do their regular shift.
> Patrons aren't regular either. A lot of people can't
> handle schedules. I don't know if it would work."

It seems that informal literacy training that focuses on community would be most appropriate:

"It wouldn't have to be that formal. All the groups
here are literacy groups. You have to go into those
groups and offer training. You can't just drop down
and be there as something other than those folks."

Several interviewees encouraged an informal, community-oriented
approach to literacy training. They listed the following steps
towards creating a community of peer tutors:

Identify people as potential tutors. Take them to
lunch. Talk. Identify areas for potential peer
tutoring.

***Many people identified with the need to provide more literacy
support to volunteers on the job; however, problems were
identified when it came to how to structure the buddy system. It
seems that things function best at Carnegie when they are kept
fluid.***

Capilano College to hire a Community Literacy Worker to:

- promote and support informal tutoring Carnegie by building up
  a core group of community tutors. This could include:
  identifying people as potential tutors; taking them to lunch;
  talking; identifying areas for potential peer tutoring.

**11) Could you tell me more about the literacy aspects of the
Compact Disc project?**

One of the staff members interviewed is working with a group of
Carnegie patrons on a Compact Disc project. They have been
meeting weekly for over a year to plan the printing of a CD
featuring Carnegie musicians. Since the idea of "project-based
literacy" had emerged from this Needs Assessment, I decided to
interview the staff member about the literacy aspects of the
Carnegie Compact Disc project.

The interviewee mentioned: meetings, communication,
reaching consensus, getting your ideas across, reading the
minutes, planning a project -breaking it down into parts and
moving towards completion, letter writing.

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The interviewee explained that the group gives her ideas and she writes them up and brings them back to the group:

> "The idea came from the group. It had nothing to do with the Programmer. People don't have the facilitation skills needed to complete the project, so that is where I step in. That's what I'm trying to model, and that's what they need -the facilitator, the secretary so they don't have to do all the details....
> If I really banged them over the head with the literacy stuff, I don't think they would proceed... Doing this kind of incidental or nebulous literacy work is 100% appropriate and worthwhile... The actual nuts and bolts of reading and writing is just consequential.
> And this kind of literacy-related activity happens all the time at Carnegie...."

This is an example of how to incorporate literacy and community development as part of other activities.

12) Comments about the Learning Centre

Although I did not ask any questions specifically about the Learning Centre, many of the people I interviewed offered their ideas for the Learning Centre.

One interviewee spoke of the need for the atmosphere of the Learning Centre needs to be welcoming and caring:

> "Work with people as a group, but also be there for them as individuals. That's a hard thing to do, but I don't think people are seeing that welcoming presence in the Learning Centre now."

Many stressed the need for a more intimate link between Learning Centre and Carnegie:

> "If we feel comfortable with the tutor, then the person we're introducing them to will feel comfortable too. Right now, they can refer people to go to the Learning Centre and find a tutor. But tutor is a scary word. And you don't want to just send someone over to the

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Learning Centre. It is too removed, like you don't
care."

"The Learning Centre -they feel responsible for all
these things -but these guys [the volunteer
programmers], they're hired -it's their job to do it.
You span yourself very thin. The tutoring -it's all
part of that -the recruiting, the scheduling, the call
backs... To do it on your own, there's no way. You
need the help."

Better communication would be part of this link:

"We don't know what's happening. We only hear through
the grapevine."

"Like knowing whose doing resumes up there."

"More information about what you need to have these
programs, as far as schooling goes. What you have to
bring. Whether welfare will pay for it."

Learning Centre to focus on building a community of learners and
tutors by:

• improving communication about its programs with the rest of
  the Carnegie Centre and with the surrounding neighbourhood.

The Learning Centre could respond more to the specific literacy-
related needs of Carnegie programs:

One interviewee recalled approaching the Learning
Centre a few years ago to ask them for some charts of
measurement conversions. Apparently, the Learning
Centre could not help, and she went without the charts
until she had time to find her own.

There is a sense that the Learning Centre should, like the rest
of the Centre, be approaching the issues that are vital in
people's lives, and should be looking to the learners themselves
for direction around issues:

"Theme Units work. They work when coming from the
people themselves. For example, [the] Diabetes Group.

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> People become involved in their own issues and then get
> support from staff. It doesn't work as well when the
> Learning Centre staff set the agenda. At the same
> time, some people need to take leadership around
> issues. [However] this is different from the
> educational model of creating a whole process,
> structure, and curriculum. Any kind of Learning Centre
> program needs to be a place which people feel they can
> access as a resource and for support for their
> program... The Learning Centre should provide both
> outside information about stuff people perhaps wouldn't
> think about on their own, and support for issues/
> movements that arise from people themselves. Make
> connections to things that are already happening."

Some interviewees stressed the need for the Learning Centre to
organise around forms and welfare advocacy:

> "They [the Learning Centre] should have someone who'd
> be prepared like an Ombudsman, who could write letters,
> phone welfare, represent the people..."

> "The Learning Centre should get involved in Welfare
> Rights Advocacy."

An understanding of the funding structure of the Learning Centre
is an important piece in the creation of a closer relationship
between the Learning Centre and the Carnegie:

> "There is a sense that Carnegie staff would like to
> know more about the funding structures. A feeling of
> distrust, perhaps, towards the College because those
> structures seem opaque."

***These comments serve to re-emphasise many of the points made
earlier in this paper, specifically, the need:***

- ***to focus on the creation of community, starting with creating
  an open, accessible, and welcoming environment for potential
  learners;***

- ***to build relationships between learners and tutors;***

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- *to provide programming suited to the needs of Carnegie volunteers (like metric conversions);*

- *to offer educational opportunities related to community issues (through theme units, for example);*

- *to improve communication and co-operation between the Learning Centre and the rest of the Carnegie.*

Comments also revisited the idea that the role of the Learning Centre is as much to respond to community-driven initiatives as it is to create new programs.

Finally, the need for Welfare Rights information and advocacy cannot be over-emphasised.

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Appendix One:
Interviewee Demographics

Table One: Total Number of Interviews

	Members	Volunteers	Staff
Total	8	10	14

Table Two: Breakdown by Gender

	Members	Volunteers	Staff
Female	1	3	10
Male	7	7	4

Table Three: Breakdown by Ethnicity

	Members	Volunteers	Staff
First Nations	6	2	1
Asian	1	0	2
Caucasian	1	8	11

Table Three: Breakdown by Age

	Members	Volunteers	Staff
25 to 35	1	0	1
35 to 45	3	2	11
45+[6]	4	8	2

This report has not compared the make-up of the interviewee samples with that of the general Carnegie population, nor with that of the greater Downtown Eastside neighbourhood. There is, therefore, no way to state with certainty whether or not the make-up of those people who contributed to this report is representative of that of those larger communities. However, it is the sense of this researcher that the make-up of the sample

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[6] Carnegie Members become eligible for a Senior's membership at age 45. This report has kept to this definition of senior, and so a breakdown of ages above 45 is not available.

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size is inconsistent with that of the greater Carnegie and Downtown Eastside population on two counts: women and First Nations people seem to be under-represented.

Appendix Two:
Reading Room Needs Assessment

In the course of this research, I met several times with Andrew Martin, who is the Librarian at the Carnegie reading Room, and a member of our Needs Assessment Advisory Committee. Our conversations generated several recommendations, which are appended here. Much of our discussion stemmed from the previous recommendations of the Vancouver Public Library's Literacy Evaluation Project (1994; see bibliography).

Staff at the Carnegie Reading Room were interviewed as part of the Carnegie Literacy Needs Assessment, and their comments are included in Chapter Three, "Carnegie Staff Interviews."

Recommendations

Continue to offer the Reading Room as a place for quiet, recreational reading:

- Many regular patrons seem to use the Carnegie Reading Room as a place to pursue their own reading. Organised activities within the Reading Room during hours of operation could disturb these patrons.

Build a stronger relationship between the Learning Centre and the Reading Room:

- Reading Room staff to bring Reading Room news to student-tutor meetings on a regular basis.

- Learning Centre staff/Community Literacy Worker to bring Learning Centre update to the bi-yearly Reading Room meetings.

- Learning Centre staff to join Reading Room staff and Carnegie City staff in working together to develop centre-wide programming in response to key neighbourhood, such as Welfare rights, addictions, housing, etc.

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- Learning Centre staff to include Reading Room orientation in tutor training, to carry out frequent, casual tours of the Reading Room, and to encourage students and tutors to obtain Reading Room cards.[7]

- Learning Centre staff to encourage learner participation in the Carnegie Community Association's Library Committee.

- Learning Centre and Reading Room to continue collaborating on the book-give-aways and the International Literacy Day events.[8]

- Learning Centre staff and Reading Room staff to invite a group of students and tutors for a guided tour of the Reading Room, with a follow-up discussion focusing the literacy-accessibility of the Reading Room.

- Learning Centre staff and Reading Room staff to collaborate in the development of a shelf of learner material in the Reading Room; this new shelf would prominently display a variety of learning resources and mixed reading material that is popular in the Learning Centre. This shelf could also be used to display publications of new writings by Carnegie learners.

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[7] Carnegie Reading Room cards can be obtained without picture ID or proof of address -a piece of ID with the patron's name on it (such as a Carnegie Community Centre Membership card) is all that is needed. As well, fines are not levied on late book returns to the Reading Room. Both these measures improve the accessibility of the Reading Room to Carnegie patrons, who may not have picture ID, an address, or money for fines.

[8] The book give-aways are held on the front steps of the Carnegie Centre. The Reading Room receives donations of many more books than it can shelve, and the book give-aways are one of the ways that these books are distributed to the community. The International Literacy Day event is held every year in September. In the past, this event has been held in the Carnegie Theatre, and has featured food, speeches, and readings by local learner-authors. Both of these events have been consistently successful.

Appendix Three:
List of Service and Information Needs

During the Carnegie interviews, I heard great demand for help with forms and bureaucratic structures. I started compiling a list of the specific forms with which people interact. It was also clearly conveyed that the need for help with paperwork is part of a broader need to understand and learn to advocate for one's rights.

People need help with filling out forms. At the Carnegie, people deal with a vast array of paperwork as part of their daily survival. Some examples are:

- Old Age Pension forms and Guaranteed Supplement Forms
- Citizenship forms
- Tax Forms
- Applications for Housing
- Premium Assistance
- Medical forms
- Salvation Army food vouchers
- Applications for bus passes
- Police forms regarding break-ins and stolen ID
- Letters to Union about a pending pension
- Welfare letters for new glasses

People need help reading written information:

- Understanding prescriptions
- Location of Welfare Offices, Transition Houses for Women, Hostels, Detox, Hay'Way'Nok, Community Centres, Persons-With-AIDS Society, Health Centres
- Phone numbers
- Addresses
- Community events
- SAFER (a place Seniors can phone for help with their rent)

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