

EVALUATION OF PROJECT L.O.V.E.

**TOUGH CHALLENGES: GREAT REWARDS
IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE**

January 31, 2003



*"I can read better,
and I love my L.O.V.E. lady.
She is so nice to me.
I get to read the books I like to read."*

~Elementary School Student

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SUMMARY

The goal of this project was to conduct a formative evaluation of Project L.O.V.E. (Let Older Volunteers Educate), using qualitative methodologies, to determine the effectiveness and value of this program to both Island children and seniors. This was accomplished by developing and delivering a questionnaire to students, teachers and Project L.O.V.E. volunteers.

PROJECT L.O.V.E. DESCRIPTION

Project L.O.V.E. (Let Older Volunteers Educate) is a provincial organization which promotes inter-generational literacy. It has been in operation for nine years. Its mission is “to provide students and teachers with a positive role model of older persons, thus encouraging a change of attitude toward aging; to develop opportunities for older persons to do volunteer work with students in a meaningful way; and, to facilitate inter-generational activities.”

Project L.O.V.E. finds older or retired volunteers to help students in school who have been identified as having literacy challenges. Project L.O.V.E. has 240 older volunteers in 34 community locations across the Island. Volunteers work with elementary school students in over half of the schools in P.E.I. They typically volunteer one half-day per week, and work with one student at a time, or with a small group of students.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

- ▶ The coordinator of Project L.O.V.E. provided the evaluator with all school and volunteer contact information. She was also consulted to aid in the development of the evaluation instruments.
- ▶ Two questionnaires were developed: one for the volunteers and one for the school contacts. In total, 220 questionnaires were mailed out to volunteers, with a response rate of 49% (107 completed and returned evaluations). This response rate is very high in terms of a mail out survey.
- ▶ A questionnaire was developed and sent to 34 school contacts with a response rate of 50%. Again, this is a tremendous response rate.
- ▶ The objective was to gather information from children who have had a Project L.O.V.E. volunteer. This was achieved; however, instead of conducting interviews, which involved consent forms from the children, parents, teachers, and school

boards, it was decided to develop a questionnaire and have teachers administer the questionnaire to one student in their school that they felt had been affected by Project L.O.V.E. This worked relatively well. Out of 34 schools, 15 children responded (44%).

FINDINGS

Students

Students expressed several positive outcomes from having a Project L.O.V.E. volunteer in their school. Their responses can be grouped into three main categories: 1) students enjoyed reading to the volunteers, 2) they liked someone reading to them, and 3) they enjoyed the time with the volunteer because they liked to have someone different to converse with. Their verbatim comments demonstrate that students felt comfortable with the volunteers and that the experience was positive for the children.

A collection of their verbatim comments have been included:

- ▶ *Gets my work done quicker?*
- ▶ *I like reading to Mis. Howit.*
- ▶ *I like spending time with her, she helps me with words and gives me stickers.*
- ▶ *She helped us on our writing.*
- ▶ *It is so nice and quiet away from all the class, to read out loud and be told how well Im doing and get extra help and stickers for my book.*
- ▶ *I like reading. It is fun.*
- ▶ *I get to read with them and I also get to talk to them.*
- ▶ *I think the best part of coming up to Project L.O.V.E. is free help. It is helpful to me.*
- ▶ *That I get to spent time with her, reading to her, since I was in grade 1 I had a different one, and I like that too*
- ▶ *When he reads me animal and space books. He is really nice.*
- ▶ *We talk about hockey. We talk about P.E.I. We play games.*

Students were asked what they have learned about themselves while working with a Project L.O.V.E. volunteer. The largest number of comments were regarding their perception that they could read better from the experience.

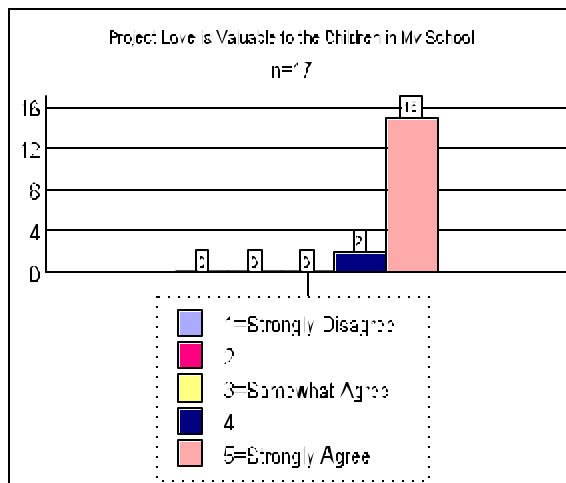
A selection of verbatim comments are listed below:

- ▶ *She has taught me some everyday manners too.*
- ▶ *To talk about the things in the books.*

- ▶ *I learned that I can figure out big words all by myself.*
- ▶ *That I like to read different kinds of books.*
- ▶ *They help others. I learned that we can read too. Also that I can read with them too. I did my journal with them. They helped me get my ideas in my journal.*
- ▶ *I learned that I could do stuff myself.*
- ▶ *I like to read and getting better at it.*
- ▶ *I can read better, and I love my L.O.V.E. lady. She is so nice to me. I get to read the books I like to read.*
- ▶ *I am good at reading.*
- ▶ *I like getting to know an older person.*
- ▶ *I learned how to read better I learned if I'm really stuck all you need to do is break it down. I learned how to have fun - for sure!*
- ▶ *I know lots about space and it makes me feel good.*

Teachers

Teachers were asked to respond to three statements. Their responses have been graphed below. In addition, there was space for teachers to comment. The comments are discussed after each graph.



Statement #1: Project L.O.V.E. is valuable to the children in my school.

Teachers were very positive regarding their opinion of Project L.O.V.E. without exception all teachers felt that the project was valuable to Island children.

The following themes emerged from the comments:

Teachers expressed the value of having the Project L.O.V.E. volunteers interact with students for several reasons: 1) the one on one attention, 2) the opportunity to interact with an older member of the community, and 3) the extra reading time children received.

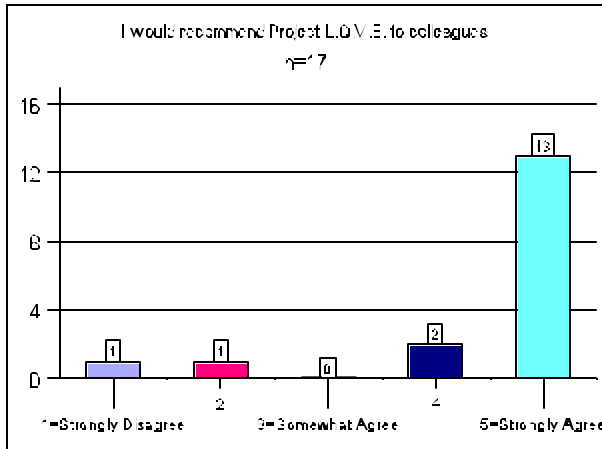
- 1) Teachers stated that the one on one attention was so important for some of the students - - particularly those students who did not receive this type of attention typically. They also stated that the visits with the L.O.V.E. volunteers provided an intimate setting for a child to feel comfortable in and learn away from the classroom setting.
- 2) The opportunity for children to interact with older members of the community presented as a strong theme. Teachers considered this interaction to be extremely beneficial for the children. One reason it was considered valuable is that many children do not have grandparents; therefore, the bond, formed between volunteer and student, was really special. Teachers suggested that the care, attention, praise and compliments volunteers extended to the children are valuable to their self-esteem and growth.
- 3) The academic benefit of having some extra reading time for students was also mentioned by many teachers. Teachers felt that this is equally important to have someone listen to students read as it is to have someone read to the children. Teachers stated that the opportunity for children to discuss what they read was another benefit.

The following are teachers' verbatim comments which support their viewpoints:

- ▶ *It gives the children an opportunity to read to the volunteer and receive individual attention & praise. It also gives the children an opportunity to be read to by an older, grandparent figure.*
- ▶ *It provides opportunities for children to work in a more intimate setting. It brings the community together.*
- ▶ *There are many who just need some special one-on-one time with a caring person. Anything academic they get from the experience is a real bonus but the special "caring" time is certainly a highlight for many.*
- ▶ *Gives individual time to a student who might not otherwise receive attention*
- ▶ *It reaches the children who have no help or interest at home to help the child. _____ is a great help to the teacher to have that one on one time with a helper and an older person, as some of those pupils don't have grandparents handy to help them too.*
- ▶ *Children get extra help/practice with reading or math.*
- ▶ *Children have the opportunity to build a relationship with a senior in their community. The extra one-one-one attention helps to improve their reading skills.*
- ▶ *As a Resource/Special Ed teacher I know how many children are unable to handle the classroom program without some support, not to mention how well the*

majority of students respond to the 1-1 (makes them feel special - another connection).

- ▶ *My weak readers need someone to listen to them read.*
- ▶ *Provides the students not only an important one on one reading opportunity but also the development of an important relationship with senior members of our community.*

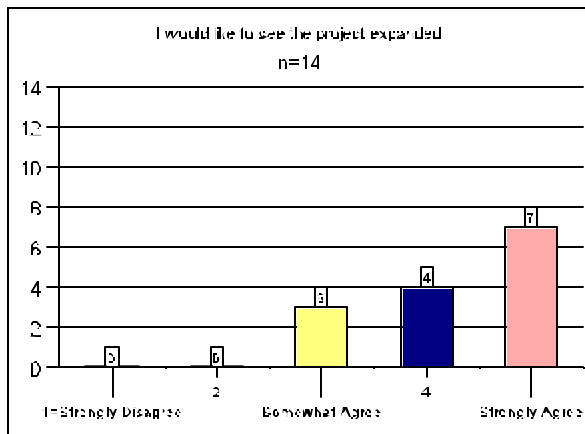


Statement #2: I would recommend Project L.O.V.E. to colleagues in my school for students in their class.

The vast majority of teachers (76%) strongly agreed with this statement whereas one teacher strongly disagreed with this statement.

Teachers expressed the value of having this type of program in the school and the positive experience they have had with the program. Many stated that they have already recommended it to colleagues.

- ▶ *My experience with Project L.O.V.E. has been nothing but positive. It is a positive experience for everyone involved.*
- ▶ *Have already. Three grade levels are currently involved. Older children are (gr. 4) happy to work with the volunteers.*
- ▶ *Everyone understands the value of the program.*
- ▶ *There's always a need for students to either read aloud or have some of the content read aloud to them. Depending on the age and need of students, these volunteers provide a real boost to helping some struggling students.*
- ▶ *It is a great source of personal satisfaction.*
- ▶ *Project Love is available for most classes in our school.*
- ▶ *This project has been running successfully at our school for 9 years. I don't have to recommend it anymore the staff come to me wanting to be involved.*
- ▶ *Project Love is successful. When students are in need in Reading and/or writing, we always look at the Project Love schedule.*
- ▶ *The students have found our volunteers to be helpful and knowledgeable. Work with the volunteers provides extra reading practice and boosts their confidence. They are very helpful in working with students on individual programs.*



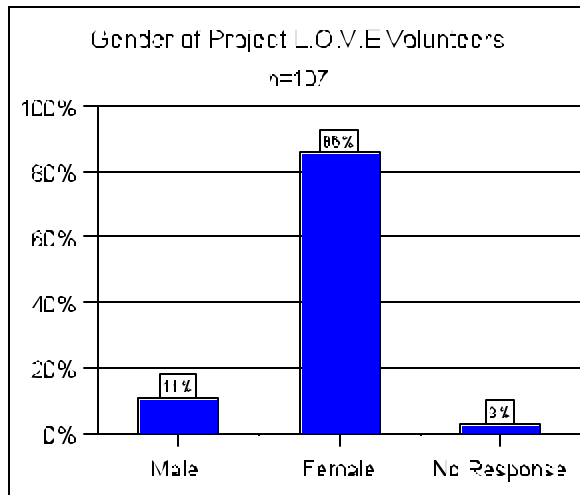
Statement #3: I would like to see this project expanded.

Many participants would like to see this project expanded; whereas some are content with the way the project operates currently.

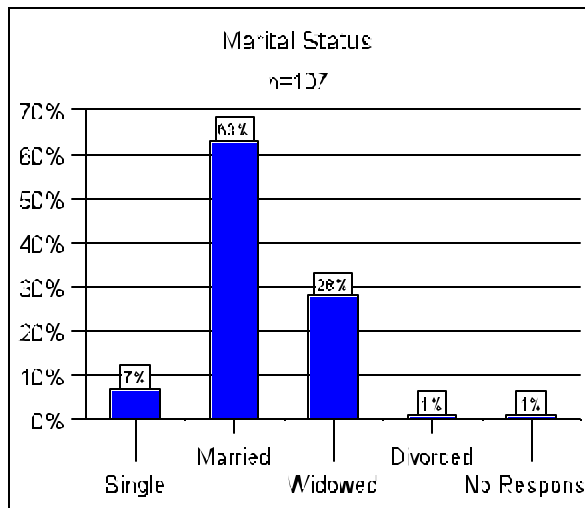
Teachers were asked what they would change about the program. Their responses varied. There were no strong themes that ran through the comments. Some teachers would like to see more volunteers in their school, and others feel the program is working well and there does not need to be any changes. A collection of verbatim comments have been included below.

- ▶ *I explain to my volunteers at our organizational meeting in the fall we provide the schedule and the clients - the work will come to you. Our volunteers support mostly reading and classroom work. We may be doing Project Love slightly different than other schools but it is what works best for us.*
- ▶ *Have it in the school daily.*
- ▶ *Nothing - it is working wonderful the way it is.*
- ▶ *I think it's an excellent addition to the school. Our volunteers are flexible. They sometimes work on skills other than reading (focusing attention to task) if a student requires this.*
- ▶ *P.S. To a great deal of youngsters, Project L.O.V.E. is very important to them. One gave up his computer time to attend LOVE time. Needless to say I was delighted.*

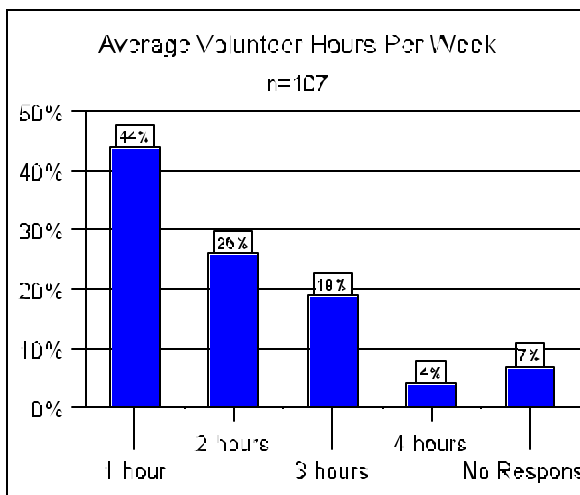
Demographic Profile of Volunteers:



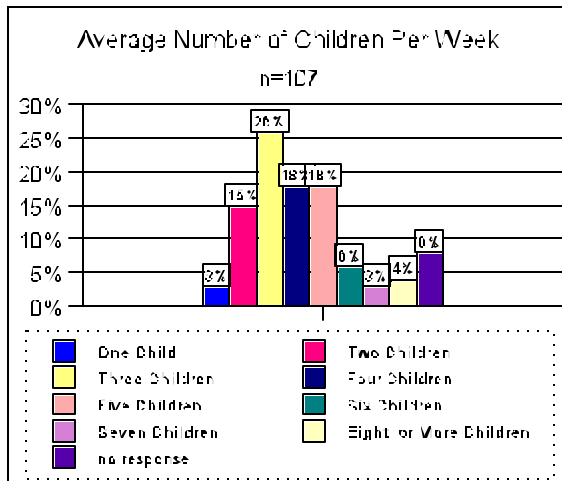
The majority of respondents were female (86%) and (11%) of respondents were male.



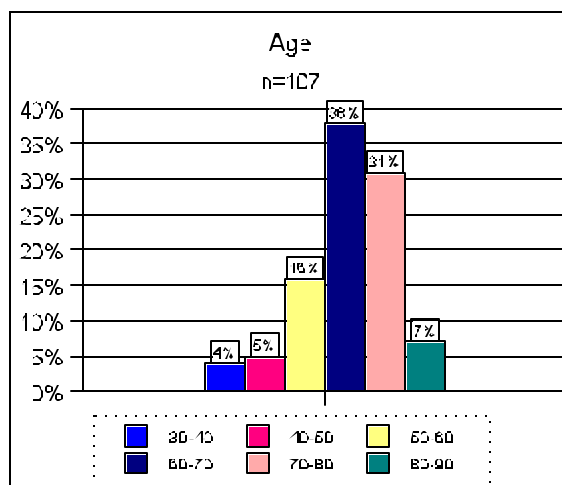
Most of the respondents (63%) were married, 28% were widowed, 7% were single and less than 1% were divorced.



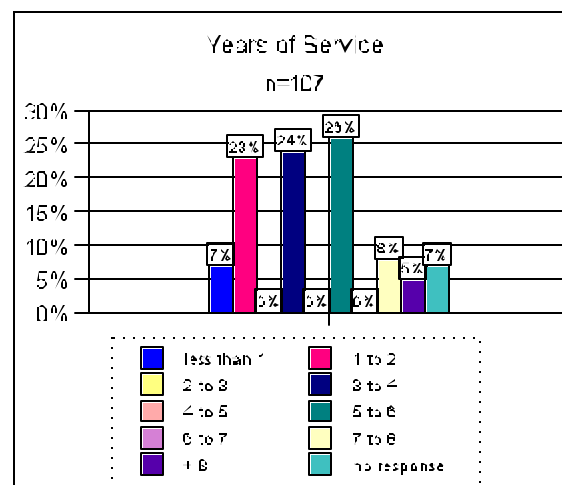
On average, the majority of respondents (70%) volunteered with Project L.O.V.E. one or two hours per week.



The average number of children volunteers worked with each week varied, 3% worked with only one child, whereas the majority (62%) worked with 3, 4 or 5 children.



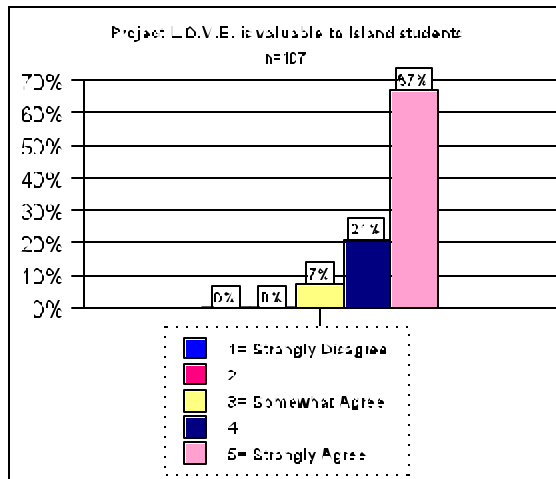
The largest age category for volunteers was the 60-70 year range (38%), followed by 31% in the 70-80 range, 7% in the 80-90 range, 16% in the 50-60 range, 5% in the 40-50 range, and 4% in the 30-40 range.



Many of the volunteers had a substantial number of years invested in this project. Seven per cent have less than one year, 23% had one to two years, 24% had three to four years, 26% had five to six years, 8% had seven to eight years, and 5% have over eight years.

Volunteers

Participants were asked to respond to several statements. Their responses have been graphed for Statements #1 and #2.



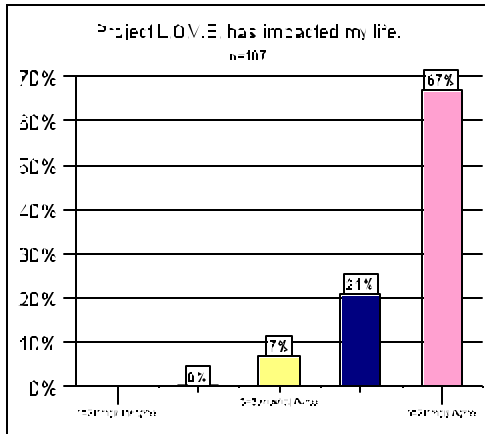
Statement #1: Project L.O.V.E. is valuable to the children in Island schools.

Several themes emerged from this statement. The themes were similar to those of the teachers. Volunteers expressed the benefit of the one on one attention for the students, stating it makes the children feel special, improves reading, helps the teachers, helps the children that do not receive attention in their home environments, and provides children with a positive interaction with an older person who is always glad to see them.

Comments:

- ▶ *It helps children who are experiencing problems with reading to improve their reading skills and hopefully alleviate or erase one problem.*
- ▶ *Reading skills are so important to everything you do in life. This one-on-one attention has to be helpful in improving this skill for the child, whether they are trying to do the reading or you are reading to them.*
- ▶ *Project L.O.V.E. gives children extra reading which helps them and also the teacher, it gives them individual attention.*
- ▶ *Project love is necessary because so many parents don't have the time to spend with their children reading.*
- ▶ *Many children don't seem to get help from home. Maybe some parents are not educated enough to help. In Ontario my favorite job was as replacement for*

guidance maternity leave. I just love talking and helping what the young are having difficulty in.



Statement #2: Project L.O.V.E. has impacted my life. Almost 70% of volunteers strongly agreed that Project L.O.V.E. has positively impacted their lives, another 27% somewhat agreed to agreed that the program has impacted their lives.

The majority of comments from the volunteers focused on the satisfaction and personal reward that they have received from knowing that they are helping children. They state that the work is rewarding, satisfying, and they feel appreciated by the students and teachers. Secondly, volunteers enjoy the children. Many are parents and grandparents and they enjoy the interaction with the children and enjoy being part of the school. Many have grandchildren that live off the Island and this project keeps them in contact with young people. The volunteers expressed their love of children. They feel privileged to meet the young people in their communities. They enjoy having the children know their name out in the community and pointing them out to their parents. They can see the appreciation from the little faces they help.

Most stated that they feel useful and like they are really contributing to society by helping the children. Many stated that this was the most rewarding work they do and how they look forward to their time in the schools each week. All comments from volunteers were positive in nature. Many of the volunteers' verbatim comments have been included.

- ▶ *I receive the satisfaction of knowing I have helped a student reach a higher level of learning.*
- ▶ *It gives me a sense of satisfaction to see the progress of a student or students come the end of a school term. Often the class teacher will make the same comment. I have a strong respect of the children in the Grade 4 and Grade 6 classes with whom I am involved. As a result, I feel rewarded by being recognized by any of the children downtown, whether they are alone, with a friend or parent.*
- ▶ *The L.O.V.E. program - has been quite an impact on me - it has given me a chance to help some children - that truly need it. At the end of the year - all the thank you cards - etc - have certainly made the year worthwhile.*

- ▶ *As a Senior, who has raised a large family, who have graduated from High School and gone on to successful careers, I find a great deal of satisfaction with being able to help children who are struggling with their reading skills. I doubt these children will ever know just how exciting it is for me to see them progress from “reading because they must” to “looking forward to reading” in just one short year. I have given them each a book at Christmas and at the end of the year and have received feed-back that they treasure them. As for myself, I treasure the time I have spent with the children.*
- ▶ *I feel I am doing something very worthwhile when I can help students improve their reading skills.*
- ▶ *I very much enjoy listening to & interacting with the child. It is very rewarding to be able to help in this way - it is also a controlled & safe venue for both child & volunteer.*
- ▶ *Really enjoy the contact with the children.*
- ▶ *It gets me out 1 hr. each week and I look forward to it. When a child I read with last year comes up and hugs you it is a great feeling. The children look forward to it to, when you say I cannot make it next wk.(appt.) they seem disappointed. I asked a little boy “would he miss me” and he said “yes.” Makes one feel appreciated.*
- ▶ *Project L.O.V.E. has had a positive impact on my life in that having retired I miss working with children. L.O.V.E. gives me the opportunity to enjoy again the wonderful experience of seeing young people bloom and grow. This is a special privilege. L.O.V.E. also gives me an opportunity to share some of the wonder of childhood with the students. They unfailingly bring to the time we have together a sense of fun and joy in living. This has a profoundly stimulating and comforting effect in that a sense of continuity of one’s own experience and learning is shared. L.O.V.E. also affords the opportunity to meet other volunteers who are unfailingly interesting and compassionate people. Meeting also the school staff and enjoying the beautiful atmosphere of the school where I volunteer is a tonic in itself.*
- ▶ *Volunteering in this way also gives me a sense of staying involved and feeling appreciated, something that is very precious when one is retired. It is a wonderful way to stay in touch with life and somewhere to put my energies.*
- ▶ *Being with the children and listening to them read, knowing I helped a bit makes a person feel good.*
- ▶ *I have really enjoyed being a L.O.V.E. volunteer. It’s fascinating to see the development of the kids reading ability (I’ve had the same class through grades 3 4, 5). It’s an easy volunteer activity as there’s no preparation & no follow up work. (e.g. minutes to write up or meetings to plan).*
- ▶ *It has enabled me to utilize my education and life experiences to assist young children.*

- ▶ *Gives me the opportunity - to interact with young children - that I would not normally have. Makes me feel that, hopefully, I've contributed something worthwhile to the child.*
- ▶ *Being older and having a little spare time, it makes me feel like I'm helping some young children again. With my own children grown, I like the feeling of going to the school again. I missed that before L.O.V.E.*
- ▶ *It has let me meet a younger group of children in my community that I wouldn't have known. It is really nice to meet these children outside of school and to know their names and have them know mine.*
- ▶ *Such a short session last year I had volunteering but enjoyed it immensely as long as it was English/reading. Math I said I would not help with as the teaching of it is so different.*
- ▶ *It makes me feel good when I encourage a child.*
- ▶ *I always liked teaching and working with children and even at my age now, its great to have such a chance to work with the L.O.V.E. project.*

Suggestions for improvements:

Volunteers were asked for suggestions for improvement in the program. They had many constructive suggestions. They would like to: have more access to books and learning materials; see the program grow so that each school has its quota of volunteers; see more publicity for the program, involve more men in the program, expand the program, and have more time with each student. A few volunteers suggested that they would appreciate either a dedicated location in the school or an area with better lighting and more space.

Many volunteers stated that they could not think of improvements as they felt the program was excellent as it is. One suggestion was made, by four volunteers, that on occasion they arrive at the school and the children are unavailable. This does not happen all the time, but it does occasionally which is frustrating to those volunteers.

- ▶ *I would like to have greater access to more books and learning tools.*
- ▶ *I would like to see Project L.O.V.E. grow to the point that all schools on Prince Edward Island would have their quota of volunteers to fill their need.*
- ▶ *More publicity. Schools in urban areas seem to have more students and less L.O.V.E. volunteers.*
- ▶ *Whenever I go to the school I always have to "find" a place to sit with the child - I wish there could be a place set aside for LOVE volunteers. Just one corner of a library maybe!*
- ▶ *One aspect of change I would like to see happen is that more people become involved with Project L.O.V.E. I think the children would also appreciate more male volunteers - the grandfather type perhaps or even the father figure.*

- ▶ *I am happy!*
- ▶ *Nothing I think they are doing an excellent job.*
- ▶ *I like it the way it is.*
- ▶ *It seems to be working well for me.*
- ▶ *I would like to see the staff commit to making sure that the students are available each week.*
- ▶ *I would also like to see L.O.V.E. happening on more days or perhaps on the same days but for longer periods and extended to more grades. Perhaps even more subjects could be worked with, not simply reading. However, in order to fulfil requirements of the curriculum this may be impossible. It seems a pity that more use is not made of the vast reservoirs of experience available in the community, especially since budget cuts have caused so many inadequacies in our education system. There are many children in need of tutoring, for example, and perhaps L.O.V.E. could be extended in this way.*
- ▶ *I would reimburse volunteers for mileage. I know a number of adult who would gladly donate their time but find the travel costly.*
- ▶ *To see the program extended to older children. There are plenty of children in the higher grades who need help. Also to spend more time with the children.*
- ▶ *Sometimes, I wonder if L.O.V.E. could take place after school; as I feel there is sometimes stigma attached to children leaving class "to read."*

Conclusions

It is clear that this is a program that is helping everyone concerned. It helps the children in public schools with reading, confidence, and social skills. It helps the teachers by providing one on one attention to some of the most vulnerable students in the classrooms, as well as to those that are doing well. This program does not discriminate. The program is very beneficial to the seniors who participate as volunteers by making them feel like they are contributing greatly to children and society in general. It also gives them an outing each week to look forward to and helps to forge relationships that span the generations. In addition, the interaction with the children and the extra reading the seniors do also helps to keep their literacy skills sharp.

Appendices

Appendix A

November 15, 2002

Dear Project L.O.V.E. School Contact:

Project L.O.V.E. has been recognized, both provincially and federally, as a program that has had a positive impact on Island children. Recently, the National Literacy Secretariat approved funding for an evaluation of Project L.O.V.E. The purpose of this evaluation is to document the impact this program has had on the children. This evaluation will include input from Project L.O.V.E. volunteers, Project L.O.V.E. school contacts (principals and teachers), and students.

As the school contact for Project L.O.V.E., you are in a unique position to comment on this program as it relates to your students. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.

A survey has been enclosed asking for your opinions about Project L.O.V.E. In addition, a student questionnaire has been enclosed. We are very interested in hearing the opinions of children who are involved in the program. If at all possible, we ask that you seek out a child that you feel has been impacted by the program and ask him or her the two enclosed questions. Depending on the child's age, you may need to help record his/her response. Your completed survey and the child's questionnaire may be returned in the pre-paid envelope.

We thank you in advance for taking the time out of your extremely busy schedule to assist us in this evaluation. We ask that the information be returned by November 29th, 2002. Please contact me if you have any questions at 368-6498 or e-mail at clwood@gov.pe.ca.

Yours truly,

Cindy Wood
Program Evaluator
Project L.O.V.E. Evaluation

Project L.O.V.E. (Let Older Volunteers Educate)
Teacher Evaluation

Agree	Strongly Disagree			Strongly	
Question 1: Project L.O.V.E. is valuable to the children in my school.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Why or why not?</i>					
Question 2: I would recommend Project L.O.V.E. to colleagues in my school for students in their class.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Why or why not?</i>					
Question 3: I would like to see this project expanded.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Comments:</i>					
Question 4: If I could change one aspect of Project L.O.V.E. I would change . . .					

Appendix C

November 15, 2002

Dear Project L.O.V.E. Volunteer:

Project L.O.V.E. has been recognized, both provincially and federally, as a program that has had a positive impact on Island children. Recently, the National Literacy Secretariat approved funding for an evaluation of Project L.O.V.E. The purpose of this evaluation is to document the impact this program has had on the children. This evaluation will include input from Project L.O.V.E. volunteers, Project L.O.V.E. school contacts (principals and teachers), and students. This evaluation has been given the support of Laura Mair, Chair of Project L.O.V.E.

Of course, this evaluation cannot be done without your input. As a volunteer with Project L.O.V.E., your opinions are critical to giving us the information needed to begin to accurately evaluate the number of children being helped through this program and the impact it has on the children. In addition, we would like to know how this program affects you.

We have enclosed an anonymous survey and a pre-paid envelope. We would really appreciate hearing from all 250 volunteers by November 29th. We thank you in advance for taking a few minutes to respond to the questions. If you have any questions about the evaluation, please contact Mary Burke, Coordinator of Project L.O.V.E. at 368-4695.

Yours truly,

Cindy Wood
Program Evaluator
Project L.O.V.E. Evaluation

Enclosure

Project L.O.V.E. (Let Older Volunteers Educate) Volunteer Evaluation

Gender:

- Male
 Female

Marital Status:

- Single
 Married
 Widowed
 Divorced

Age:

- 40-50
 50-60
 60-70
 70-80
 80-90
 90+

Years Involved:

- Less than 1
 1-2 years
 3-4 years
 5-6 years
 7-8 years
 Over 8 years

Average Number of Children:

Per week _____

Project L.O.V.E. Volunteer Hours:

Per week _____

	Strongly Disagree		Strongly Agree		
Question 1: Project L.O.V.E. is valuable to the children in Island schools.	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Why or why not?</i>					

	Strongly Disagree			Strongly Agree	
Question 2: Project L.O.V.E. has impacted my life.	1	2	3	4	5
If so, how has it impacted your life?					
Question 3: If I could change one aspect of Project L.O.V.E. I would change . . .					

Project L.O.V.E. (Let Older Volunteers Educate)

Student Questions

Please ask one student the following questions and help record his/her response.

1. What is the best part of your visit with the Project L.O.V.E. volunteer?

2. What have you learned about yourself while visiting with the Project L.O.V.E. volunteer?