



Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Valley
LITERACY NETWORK

Promoting Lifelong Learning

ANNUAL REPORT

For the fiscal year from **September 1, 2019 to August 31, 2020**

Presented May 12, 2021

Mission Statement:

To promote lifelong learning by providing adult education opportunities and encouraging Family Literacy within the rural communities served by our Network.

Our Network is a community learning organization that is supported by the Province of Nova Scotia through the Department of Labour and Advanced Education under the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learners program.

Values:

We work closely with the adults that walk through our doors and enter our programs. We support them in whatever capacity we can and advocate for their success. Our team of coordinators and instructors has our learners' best interests at the forefront of their work. Our success is a result of our ability to hold our learners in the highest regard.

Services:

We work toward our mission and goals by offering Adult Learning programs at various levels up to and including GED Preparation classes. In addition, we are always on the lookout for Grants that allow us to offer Lifelong Learning workshops and programs covering employability and essential skills, digital literacy, financial literacy, food literacy, mental health, music and art literacy and appreciation, as well as those that encourage the love of literature and reading. We encourage literacy across the lifespan by partnering and hosting family literacy programs, events, and book giveaways that provide families with the opportunity to learn together in fun, interactive, and engaging ways.

ESMV Literacy Network is a member of Literacy Nova Scotia, whose Vision Statement is as follows:

*All Nova Scotians achieve their learning goals
and fulfill their potential.*

12% of Nova Scotians (25-64) have no certificate, degree, or diploma.

We served 16 adults in our NSSAL programs during this 2019-2020 fiscal year, 30 plus adults in other funded programs, and over 1200 adults and children in our Family Literacy programs.



Areas Served and Contact Information:

The Eastern Shore: east to Ecum Secum and west to West Ship Harbour

22756 Highway 7, Suite 216, Sheet Harbour (Bluewater Building)

Vicki Rutledge: 902-391-0014, esmv@adulteracynetwork.ca

The Eastern Shore: east to East Ship Harbour and west to Lake Echo

325 Porters Lake Station Road, Porters Lake (MusGo Rider Building)

Crystal Legere: 902-891-0286, crystal@adulteracynetwork.ca

The Musquodoboit Valley: north to Upper Musquodoboit and south to Dutch Settlement

12280 Highway 224, Unit 4, Middle Musquodoboit (Pharmasave Building)

Dawn Parks: 902-891-0503 dawn@adulteracynetwork.ca

This rural area covers approximately 3000 km² of land (Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Community Health Board, 2018)

Our Sheet Harbour and Musquodoboit Valley locations are supported by third party organizations through the sharing of rental costs. Our Musquodoboit Harbour and outreach community is served out of our space in Porters Lake in the MusGo Rider building for a reasonable and affordable cost. These partnerships serve ESMV Literacy as a conscientious effort to responsibly manage rental funds and maintain positive community relationships. We thank the following community partners:

Nova Scotia Department of Justice

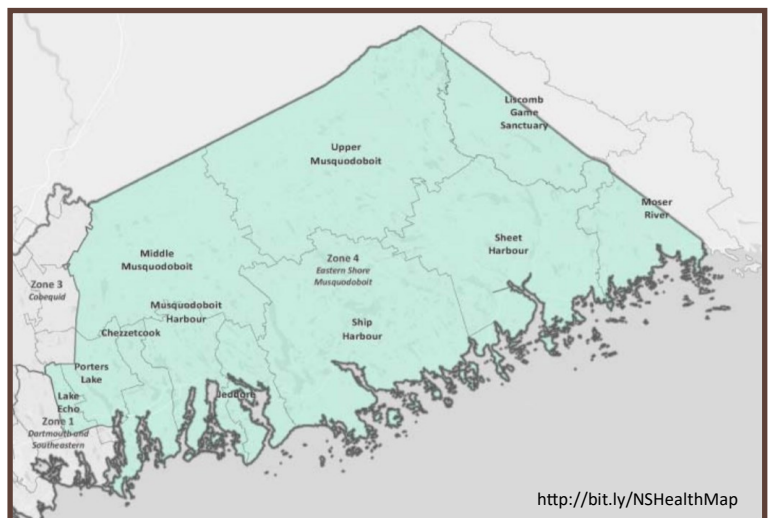
Sheet Harbour office/classroom space

Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Community Health Board

Musquodoboit Valley office/classroom space

MusGo Rider Rural Transportation Association

Porters Lake office/classroom space



ESMV Literacy Board of Directors

Earline Sharpe – Board Chair - Moser River

Ena Spears – Treasurer - Sheet Harbour

Susan Burt – Secretary - Port Dufferin

Jessie Greenough - Director - Musquodoboit Harbour

Tracy Lowe – Director - Sheet Harbour

ESMV Literacy Staff

Vicki Rutledge – Executive Director

Tobbi Dyer – Administrative Coordinator/Support

Crystal Legere – Adult Literacy Coordinator

Dawn Parks – Adult Literacy Coordinator

Irma Snyder – Adult Learning Program Instructor

Justin Legere – Adult Learning Program Instructor

Lola Hill – Adult Learning Program Instructor

Acronyms

ALP – Adult Learning Program

ANSCLC – Association of Nova Scotia Community Learning Organizations

CLO – Community Learning Organization

GED – General Education Diploma

LAE – Department of Labour and Advanced Education

LNS – Literacy Nova Scotia

NSSAL - Nova School for Adult Learners

A Message from The Chair:

Since 2001 I have had the privilege of being a part of the Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Valley Literacy Network. During that time, I have witnessed many changes, a few challenges, and significant progress. Despite all the changes that have taken place throughout the years, and continue to shape our lives, the organization has remained and continues to grow. Our services are a vital part of our communities on the Eastern Shore and the Musquodoboit Valley. They have allowed people to hope and dream; to hope for a better future for themselves and their families, and the opportunity to dream of possibilities never imagined. This is due to the dedication of the staff and volunteers who share a passion for literacy, a commitment to our communities, and the individuals that live here. With that in mind I would like to thank all the staff for their tireless work. Without each of you none of what we do would be possible. I would also like to thank the members of the Board for your ongoing support. Just like our learners, we continue to grow, to learn, and to support each other.

Respectfully,

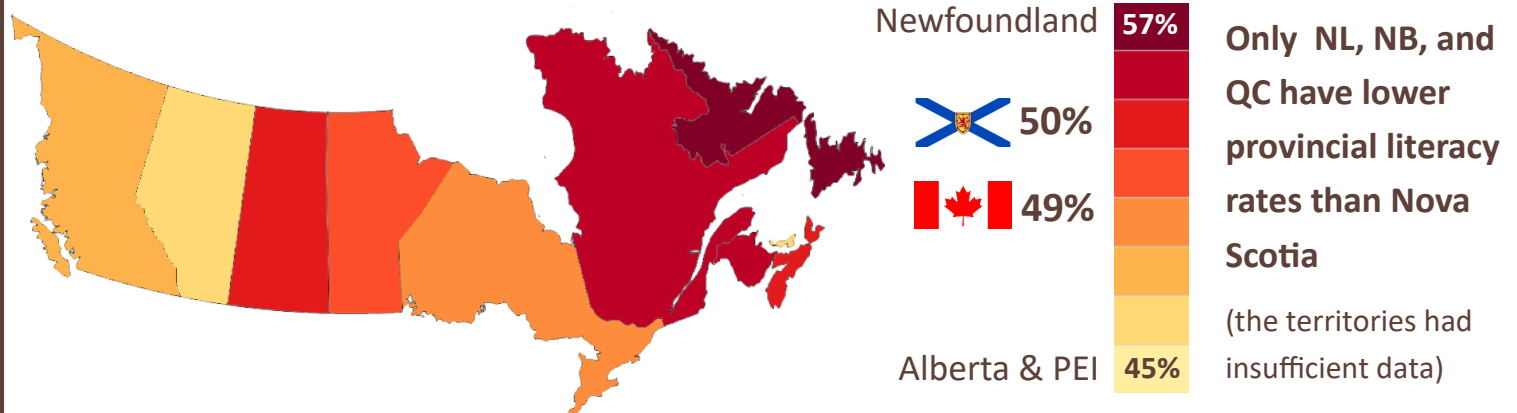
Earline Sharpe, Chair

About Us:

Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Valley Literacy Network, known as ESMV Literacy, is supported by a governance Board of Directors as well as by the Department of Labour and Advanced Education (LAE). ESMV Literacy reports to Area Education Coordinator, Stephanie Patriquin of LAE in the Northern Region. In previous years, our CLO was supported by the Halifax Region of the Dept of LAE. We joined the Northern Region during this reporting period. Though we are geographically considered HRM, our organization serves rural communities and their populations. Being a part of the Northern Region allows us to come together during Regional Planning Team meetings with other like-minded Community Learning Organizations (CLOs) serving rural Nova Scotia. It also provides us with a network of CLOs to collaborate with and explore avenues to overcome challenges and barriers faced by our rural folks. We celebrate successes, share creative, innovative ideas, and explore relevant programming.

Literacy in Nova Scotia

Low Literacy Rates in Canada (Level 2 or Below)



Nova Scotia School for Adult Learners Review and Results

The Department of Labour and Advanced Education fiscal year ended in June of 2020. July of 2020 began a new funding agreement for our CLO. This new funding agreement brought with it changes from the Department's review, listed as follows:

- Health and Dental Benefits (cost shared with employees)
- Registered Retirement Plans (cost shared with employees)
- Part-time Administrative Support Staff for all Executive Directors
- Part-time Bookkeeping positions
- Salary equity for Executive Directors, Instructors, and Tutor Coordinators

Unfortunately, as a result of the review, ESMV Literacy experienced a significant loss of hours for Adult Literacy Coordinator positions/staff. These positions provide support to the Executive Director as well as to Instructors in our outreach communities of Musquodoboit Harbour and the Musquodoboit Valley. They promote our Adult Learning programs, promote and facilitate our Life Long Learning programs and Family Literacy programs/events, work with community partners to support rural Nova Scotians, and are often the link between our learners and our Community Learning Organization. The justification of the loss of these hours from the Department is that ESMV Literacy is a stand-alone, among 32 provincial organizations, that had this support structure in place. A goal of the NSSAL review was to bring equity to CLOs across the province.

Programs and Projects

Adult Learning Program:

The **Adult Learning Program** (ALP) is our core program and is funded by The Department of Labour and Advanced Education. This program provides support for adult learners who have an interest or need to increase their education. This program includes a wide range of learning opportunities that provide basic literacy skills instruction, such as supporting adults who want to learn to read or increase their reading skills, to developing essential skills that relate to immediate learning needs, such as digital skills or, up to and including GED prep classes.

We worked within our communities to promote the **Adult Learning Program**, inclusive of GED prep classes. ESMV Literacy enrolled and served 16 adult learners. We supported our adult learners with the necessary tools to assist with their education journey. Our instructors were available for 15 hours of teaching time per week in Musquodoboit Valley and Musquodoboit Harbour, and 18 hours of teaching time per week in Sheet Harbour. Our teaching centres are inclusive, safe spaces that provide opportunities for our learners to engage with each other,

forge new friendships, and work together to develop new skills. We were challenged during Covid-19 to be able to continue to welcome our learners into our spaces. We adapted to the needs of our learners to the best of our ability.

We collaborated and networked with our community partners and stakeholders by attending meetings, face to face prior to the pandemic and through Zoom during the pandemic. Meetings included:

- Regional Planning Team meetings, (LAE meeting with our Area Education Coordinator).
- ANSCLO Board meetings (our provincial organization).
- Tri-Communities Coalition meetings (comprised of many community partners). These meetings provide our Network with the opportunity to promote our programs and to stay informed of issues and concerns facing our rural communities such as: lack of resources, transportation barriers, food security, mental health and health care issues/concerns, employment concerns, housing shortages, employment shortages, and updates from the Department of Community Services. The meetings also keep us up to date about services, grants, and opportunities available.

Lifelong Learning Programs: E3 (Essential Skills)

Eat, Read, Love Book Club

Eat, Read, Love launched in our previous year with support from our local Community Health Board. The financial support to launch this project allowed us to build a library of books that we can share among our network which allows us to sustain the project for sessions to come. Participants come together to cook and share nutritious food, learn ways to support their mental health, engage with others, and discuss the shared book they have chosen together to read. Feedback on this program is very positive and people appreciate the group engagement and the opportunity to take time for themselves to read each week. One of our locations was actively engaged in **Eat, Read, Love** and two were organizing the reopening after March break when, unfortunately, Covid-19 struck. We had to discontinue meeting face to face and discontinue our plans to re-launch. However, we connected with our participants to offer support, suggested book titles, and self-care tips during the pandemic.



Food Literacy Programs

The goals and anticipated outcomes of food literacy educational initiatives are to teach skills that help reduce food insecurity experienced by folks living with financial hardship. Programs are designed to help people stretch their budget, learn skills that encourage a “cook once eat twice” strategy, understand nutrition value, learn some basic and fun cooking skills, and reduce loneliness. It is also our goal to engage older adults and youth, allow an avenue for folks to share their own knowledge and wisdom, and to teach how food and healthy choices affect mood and learning. These programs also address additional essential skills such as measuring, calculating, planning, and ordering activities.

Food Matters

Food Matters began in the fall of 2019 and was funded by the Department of Culture and Heritage - Food Access program in the amount of \$8,500.00. This program served the Sheet Harbour community and was delivered in partnership with LEA Place Women’s Resource Centre. We also received support from other community organizations.

Gerald Hardy Memorial Society helped with the provision of vegetables from their Community Garden and also provided some volunteer hands-on support in preparing produce.

We broadened our relationship with The Deanery Project in Ship Harbour. The knowledge of relevant skills for food literacy shared by facilitators of the Deanery Project was very appreciated and left us with an “appetite” for more. We were disappointed that, as a result of Covid-19, we were not able to host the planned visit to the Deanery.

We had anticipated extending the program to our Musquodoboit Harbour community but, again, due to pandemic restrictions this was not possible. We don’t anticipate being able to complete this program as designed, however we hope to be able to purchase food-related materials to continue to support participants.



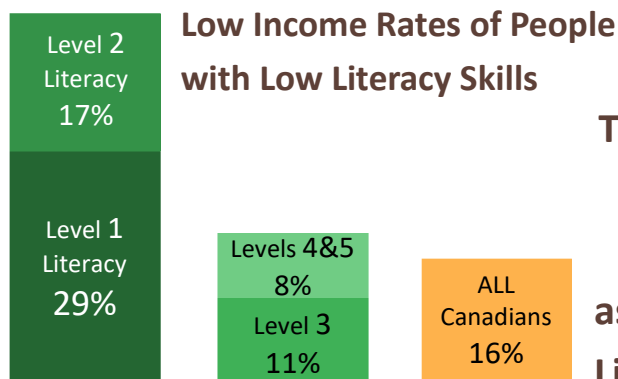
Thoughtful Food Committee

The Thoughtful Food Committee is made up of community partners within the Musquodoboit Valley and was initially formed as a sub-committee of Musquodoboit Rural High School's Healthy Schools Healthy Communities Committee. The committee's goal is to inspire a healthy attitude and perspective on the connection between food, health, and community, while addressing some of the issues of food security faced by youth and seniors in the Musquodoboit Valley.

This year, Musquodoboit Rural High School assumed the cost and planning of the monthly communal meals. As a result of this, the Thoughtful Food Committee was able to focus our efforts on a new method of bringing healthy groceries and food to families (particularly seniors), through an initiative called **Good Food Bags**. The pilot project for this subsidized grocery subscription ran from October 2018 through April 2019 and has since been continued with the support of volunteers, the ESM Community Health Board, and Musquodoboit Valley Family Resource Centre. ESMV Literacy does not assume a hands-on role with **Good Food Bags**, however we support this great community project by sharing advertisements on our social media pages and referring learners to the program when relevant. The ESMV Literacy Coordinator continues to support the **Thoughtful Food Project** communal meals by working hands-on with the high school students once a month on meal preparation and by sharing information and advertisements via our social media platforms.



Financial Implications of Low Literacy Skills



The low income rate is nearly

4X



as high for the people with the Lowest Literacy Level compared to the Highest

Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Community Health Board Wellness Grant Projects:

Three innovative and distinct community programs (\$3500 awarded March 2020)

Lifelong Learning Series

Our **Lifelong Learning Series (LLS)** is designed to promote and provide the opportunity to engage in fun, creative, educational, and interactive, presentations, workshops, and events with an emphasis on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) and music in the Musquodoboit Valley. Bringing the **LLS** program to the community alleviates the stress, time, and cost associated with travelling to the city for these types of events; reaching participants who may not have the means to travel and therefore providing an opportunity to learn, grow, and connect with others.

ACES to Mental Health Literacy

ACES to Mental Health Literacy will focus on supporting ten of our adult learners (current or previous) to address the locally identified health priority of having access to more mental health services, especially coping skills and wellness/prevention programming. The five-module curriculum will focus on mental health & mental health problems, substance related disorders, anxiety & trauma related disorders, mood related disorders, and psychotic disorders. In a safe, supportive environment, learners will gain skills to take more control of their health, and that of their families, through understanding mental health information and supports available.

Music Moves Me

Music Moves Me is designed to support parents with children's language and literacy development through the lyrics and engagement with music. The program is also designed to engage people of all ages through the love of music and its benefits to mental health. The objective of adding music to existing community programs is to enhance the programs, encourage more participation, and support our community partners. Parents/caregivers will learn how music can impact child development and improve social skills, while participants of all ages will have the opportunity to experience benefits such as reduced anxiety, improved cognitive functions and positive social interactions.

LEARNER SUPPORT PROGRAMS

Helping Hands

Helping Hands adds a little more to our services. This project is a “wrap around” support for our learners. We were able to secure funding from our supporting organization, Literacy Nova Scotia, to provide transportation and nutritional support for our learners. We are grateful for these funds that help reduce barriers to allow our learners to access our programming without the worry of added, or insurmountable, financial burdens. We continue to look for funding opportunities that afford us the ability to provide this valuable support to our learners. As a result of the Covid-19 shut down, monies not spent within the allotted time frame for this grant were redesignated to support promotion of our programs and to purchase learner classroom supplies.

Family Literacy Program

Our goal for our **Family Literacy** programming is to promote and encourage literacy development by creating, developing, and facilitating fun, interactive, and educational, community events, programs, and initiatives, that bring families together. We promote the philosophy that learning happens everywhere and we believe in lifelong and experiential learning. We host and partner in events and workshops that provide families with the opportunity and resources to learn through games, reading, cooking, science experiments, crafts, and other STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) activities.

Research shows that by participating in fun **Family Literacy** activities, adults sharpen their own literacy skills while assisting in improving their children's skills. **Family Literacy** programming focuses on engaging parents, grandparents, and caregivers to improve the reading, writing, and numeracy skills of the whole family while strengthening the family bond and creating pathways that encourage lifelong learning. Research also shows that the number of books in a child's home greatly affects their literacy level - even for university graduates, therefore an important goal of our **Family Literacy** program is to get books into the hands and homes of children.

*During this fiscal reporting year, we hosted, facilitated, and supported various programs, and initiatives that promoted and enhanced **Family Literacy**, as listed below:*

- Primary Welcome Packs - September 2019
- Christmas Craft Morning – November 2019
- Seasons Readings – December 2019
- Festival of Trees – December 2019
- The Gift of Reading – December 2019
- 3rd Annual Holiday Social – December 2019
- Wild About Reading - Family Literacy Day Celebration - January 2020
- Food and Fun - Family Literacy Day Celebration - February 2020
- Bach to Beatles - Lunch & Learn with the J.O.Y. Seniors group - February 2020



These events were held in the communities of Sheet Harbour, Middle Musquodoboit and Musquodoboit Harbour in various venues such as: ESMV Literacy offices, Old School Community Gathering Place, Lions Club, Halifax Public Library, Harborview Lodge Nursing Home, Sheet Harbour Legion, Musquodoboit Valley Family Resource Centre, Lake & Shore Community Recreation, Musquodoboit Valley Education Centre, and Natural Resources Education Centre.

Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Valley Literacy Network attended community events, networked with our partners whenever possible, and were present on any occasion available to us when possible.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

Programs:

The March 2020 Covid-19 lockdown occurred just past mid-way through our program year. We were not mandated by the province to shut down, however we chose to close our office spaces and have staff work from home out of concern for them and our learners.

ESMV Literacy staff continued to support learners on their learning paths during the Covid-19 lockdown through a variety of approaches. We implemented a blended learning approach wherein learners were supported by email, telephone, online, and through no-contact deliveries etc. Staff prepared, printed, and dropped off lessons for GED learners and followed up with them by phone and/or email. We also supported learners by conducting wellness checks, dropping off packages, and promoting available community supports for grocery cards, etc. Useful Covid-19 and other resource information was shared on our Facebook page and Instagram to further assist learners and the community. We continued to create announcements, infographics, inspirational posts, and engaging literacy focused contests for our social media sites to update, inform and support our learners, program participants, and partners. In addition, the ESMV Literacy Network team stayed closely connected to support one another while we worked through these unprecedented challenges.

Most of our **Lifelong Learning** and **Essential Skills Programming** that were affected by the closures required creative solutions to reach adapted projected outcomes. For example, our **Music Moves Me** program, designed to bring live music to local programs for preschoolers, teens, and seniors, will be adapted as posted videos on our new YouTube channel to share with a wider audience, and community partners.

Family Literacy:

While we were able to complete most of our **Family Literacy** activities, due to Covid-19 restrictions we had to cancel the planned Lake and Shore Community Recreation Centre March Break event and were unable to plan or attend any spring events.

Other programming had to be adapted in order to meet the original program goals. Our planned **Summer Book Giveaway** was cancelled so, in lieu, we provided fifty children's books (stamped with "compliments of ESMV Literacy") and dispersed them between three Free Little Library Boxes in Musquodoboit Valley communities (one each in Dutch Settlement, Carroll's Corner, and Middle Musquodoboit). We used social media to remind community members of the Free Little Library boxes in these communities and to inform them of the new books added.

In partnership with our local Community Health Board and other community players (LEA Place, Musquodoboit Valley Family Resource Centre, and Eastern Shore Family Resource Association), ESMV Literacy obtained family demographics for low-income community members receiving grocery hampers supported by the Mobile Food Market, and prepared new children's books and rack cards to contribute to the packages.

Staff Activities:

As a result of the shutdown, we developed the concept for online digital learning to support learners from home and sought compatible funding opportunities. We applied to the quick response Emergency Community Support Fund being provided to communities by the Government of Canada through the Red Cross of Canada, The United Way, and the Rural Community Foundation of Canada.

ESMV Literacy staff worked together to develop our grant proposal and applied through the NS Rural Community Foundation. We were awarded \$20,782.00 to support our new program, **Connected Together**. This program allows us to purchase technology to support a blended learning approach that includes the capacity to lend technology and paid internet service through MiFi devices (portable mobile broadband routers) to our learners. The grant also supports the cost of personal protective equipment (PPE), Covid-19 cleaning supplies, and Zoom subscriptions for ESMV Literacy staff and teaching/office space.

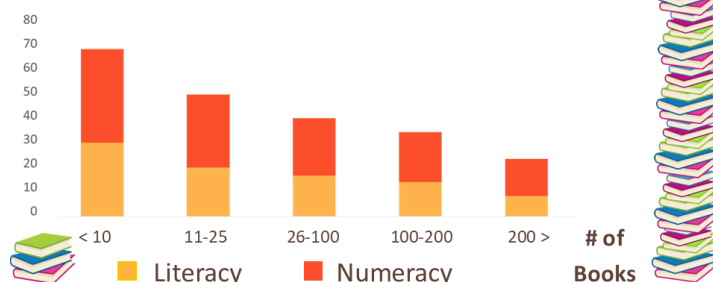
We applied to the Family Literacy Initiative Endowment Fund (FLIEF) and were approved for \$11,400 to support a new and innovative program designed to serve our rural families with children up to age six. **Love of Learning (LOL)** will support the mail out of seasonal literacy subscription boxes directly to people's homes. These **LOL** boxes will include books, small toys, song lyrics, rhymes, craft instructions and supplies, along with information to enhance literacy activities with the included materials.

The Executive Director worked throughout the summer with colleagues from our provincial organization, AN-SCLO, on a Covid-19 re-opening ad hoc committee. The committee researched the most recent relevant information, in line with Public Health protocols, to build policy and procedures to be used as a reference for Community Learning Organizations for safe practice guidelines. This Covid-19 reopening plan was used to support and ensure the health of our learners and staff in preparation of the re-opening of our CLOs in September.

In response to the NSSAL review, ESMV Board members and the ED advertised, interviewed, and hired new staff for the September 2021 year. We said goodbye to Sherri Murney, our instructor in Musquodoboit Valley. Sherri served our Network for three years and was a respected member of our team. We wish her well.

% Canadian-Born University Grads with Low Literacy Based on # of Books at Home at Age 16

% of Grads
(age 25 -65)
with Literacy
Skills at Level 2
and Below



Even a university degree doesn't compensate for not growing up with lots of books in the house

Promotion/Networking

- We submitted two applications for the Federal Literacy Award: Canada Life Innovation Literacy Award on behalf of two learners. Though neither of our learners were the successful recipient, each learner received acknowledgement from the Government of their achievements.
- With the support of Literacy NS, we were able to “Hang our Shingle” at two of our locations. One overhead sign at the Haverstock Building in Middle Musquodoboit and one building sign installed on the front of the building at MusGo Rider in Porters Lake. These signs provide more visibility and community awareness of our locations and our services.
- Our Adult Literacy Coordinators were present at the Wellness Grant celebration, with Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Community Health Board, to accept the money for our successful grant-funded projects. (Music Moves Me, Mental Health First Aid, and Lifelong Learning series)
- We maintained and updated our Facebook and Instagram presence
- We developed and launched our first Literacy Look quarterly newsletter
- We attended Tri-Community Coalition - Zoom meetings
- Affordable Housing Association: ESMV Literacy staff supported the association’s initiative to gather data regarding people living with low/no housing by sharing their survey with our learners.

Professional Development

NS Foundational Training for Adult Literacy Practitioners

This training is provided by Literacy Nova Scotia and is presented in an online platform. There are nine course subjects plus practicum provided in this training, and a certificate completion requires six plus the practicum. The work required is intensive and requires a time commitment that can go beyond paid staff hours. All staff employed in the 2019-2020 year with ESMV Literacy have completed this training.

Literacy Nova Scotia Conference

LNS offered the PD Conference for Practitioners: Reducing Barriers, Opening Doors in October of 2020. This 2-day conference hosts a variety of workshops for practitioners and administrators of Community Learning Organizations and is funded by the Department of Labour and Advanced Educations. The conference was attended by the Executive Director, Coordinators and Instructors of Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Valley Literacy. This conference was very informative and useful for the work we do in our network and provided us with necessary tools as service providers to help our learners to succeed.

We engaged in Continuing Education Webinars and online courses such as:

- Social and Community Literacy needs around isolation due to Covid-19
- Distance learning ideas
- The Importance of Health Literacy During A Pandemic
- ABC Life Literacy Webinar Series on Remote Service Delivery
- How to support adult learners in a remote setting
- Social inclusion - historical importance of emotional connections
- Continual QuickBooks online training - Intuit
- Coursera - a platform that provides opportunities for professional development courses. Free and/or paid accredited courses.

Literacy Nova Scotia Certificate Ceremony at the LNS Conference



Dawn Parks (far left)

Sherri Murney (fifth from right)

THANK YOU to our Funding Partners who make our work possible!

- Department of Labour and Advanced Education
- Nova Scotia Rural Community Foundation (ESCF Federal Initiative)
- Family Learning Initiative Endowment Fund
- Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage
- Literacy Nova Scotia
- Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Community Health Board

THANK YOU to our community partners for their ongoing support:

The Deanery Project

Duncan MacMillan High School

Dutch Settlement Elementary

Eastern Shore Family Resource Association

Eastern Shore Memorial Hospital

Eastern Shore Musquodoboit Community Health Board

Gerald Hardy Memorial Society

Halifax Public Libraries

HRM Parks and Recreation

Lake & Shore Community Recreation

LEA Place Women's Resource Centre

MacPhee House Heritage Society

MusGo Rider Transportation

Musquodoboit Harbour Lions Club

Musquodoboit Rural High School

Musquodoboit Valley Education Centre

Musquodoboit Valley Family Resource Centre

Natural Resources Education Centre

Nova Scotia Department of Justice

Old School Community Gathering Place

Oyster Pond Academy

Royal Bank of Canada

SchoolsPlus

ScotiaBank (Sheet Harbour)

Sheet Harbour Legion

Sheet Harbour Lions Club

Upper Musquodoboit Consolidated Elementary

YMCA Nova Scotia Works

We are grateful to have so many supportive community partners, however we may have inadvertently overlooked listing some. Please accept our apologies and let us know, so that we can update our future reports.

Closing notes from the Executive Director

As I leave the 2019-2020 fiscal year behind, I am left reflecting on the many challenges we experienced. The pain of the pandemic was felt by all Nova Scotians and especially during the horrific massacre in April in the small rural community of Portapique. Many people struggled with depression, isolation, fear and helplessness. Our awareness that mental health realities affect us all has become an inescapable truth. As a result of the experiences we all shared, we have become a more compassionate and caring community. Together we have figured out ways to engage with each other, to support one another, to communicate, and to continue on in our ever-changing day to day. Our community online kitchen party, our Facebook groups, and our social media platforms have brought us together in ways we couldn't have imagined.

ESMV Literacy respected that some of our learners were especially vulnerable during this time. Our employees responded to the needs of our learners with care, compassion, and concern for their wellbeing and continued learning. We continued supporting learners and families by staying connected and engaged through phone calls, learners' packages, Facebook posts, contests, and other opportunities. I would like to say a sincere and warm thank you to the employees for their above and beyond flexibility and service to the learners and the Network. I would also like to say thank you to our Board of Directors, for their continued support.

I am thankful for the leadership of our core funders and for the collaborative engagement offered by our community learning organizations as we supported and helped guide each other during these unprecedented times. Together we worked on plans to move forward and keep each other uplifted. I offer an extended thank you to our funders for the support they provided our CLO beyond our financial needs, and to my colleagues.

Most importantly for me, I am grateful to our Premier, Stephen MacNeil and his strong words of encouragement and strong statement advising us all to "Stay the Blazes Home." I also feel the need to express gratitude to our amazing Dr. Strang for his guidance set within the Public Health protocols.

I am hopeful that next year we will begin to see a light at the end of the tunnel and that, as we move forward and away from the pandemic, we remember how valuable our connections with one another are.

Sincerely and respectfully,

Vicki Rutledge

Executive Director

ESMV Literacy