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## LITERACY CAMPS: SUMMER SCHOOL SUPPORT PROGRAM TO COUNTER LEARNING LOSS IN READING

Over 30 years of research confirm that young students experience learning loss in reading during the summer period. For some, this loss will have significant impact on the next school year. This phenomenon is even more pronounced among students who have limited access to books and other learning resources outside the school and who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2013). However, during the summer months, Aboriginal children living in communities often have little access to books (Stone Path Research Group, 2015) and to daily supervised activities; this causes a significant loss of reading skills, sometimes equivalent to three or four months of academic progress (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2013).

Learning programs offered during the summer period have been identified as an effective way to counter this loss of learning and to promote academic success (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008). Frontier College, a national literacy organization, coordinates literacy camps for First Nations, Métis and Inuit children to reduce the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in terms of school success. These literacy camps, in the form of day camps, take place within the participating communities. They are free for children and provide fun and structured activities focusing on reading development and writing skills, in the Native language as in the second language. In addition, children enrolled in the camps have access to a wide selection of books throughout the summer, which is also one of the keys to maintaining reading achievement between two academic years (Paul Murphy, 2013).

This project was initiated in northern Ontario in 2005 in collaboration with five communities of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation. Ten years later, 99 communities across the country that hosted a camp. In Quebec, 22 literacy camps were established in 2015 through partnerships with the Cree School Board, the Kativik School Board, and the First Nations Education Council. These camps had a significant impact on children who participated, both in terms of academic achievement and of their confidence and self-esteem.

**100% of surveyed teachers said that literacy camps had improved school readiness and transition for back-to-school in September.**

### THE GOAL OF THE LITERACY CAMPS: TO COUNTER LEARNING LOSS IN READING

The goals of literacy camps are many. However, they primarily aim at reducing learning loss in reading that occurs in children during summer time. According to the study, this loss can be countered simply by reading a minimum of five books during the summer or by at least 30 minutes of reading a day and providing an easy access to a variety of books (Kim, 2004).

Community and parental involvement is also one of the literacy camp objectives. Parents, Elders and





## IMPACT ASSESSMENT

To assess the impact of the literacy camps, several tools have been developed, including an array of daily activities on a daily basis (developed in partnership with Ryerson University). In addition, the number of books read by every child and the number of minutes reading is recorded. Questionnaires intended for campers, parents and teachers are distributed and collected at the end of the camps. Testimonials and letters of support also complete the evaluation of the impact in a more qualitative approach.

**In the summer of 2015, 530 children had the opportunity to take part in the camps.**

## BRIEF CASE STUDY: LITERACY CAMPS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CREE SCHOOL BOARD

Frontier College and the Cree School Board have partnered in 2013 to organize a camp in each of the nine Cree communities of Quebec. The four-week camps, located in the elementary schools, are free of charge for all participants. Each camp reached between 30 and 70 children, according to community size.

## SOME RESULTS

In the summer of 2015, 530 children had the opportunity to take part in the camps. The number of participants increased steadily for three years, from 411 children in 2013 to 530 three years later. The number of facilitators hired locally is also growing: 18 local facilitators were hired and trained in 2015 in addition to the 22 instructors from the South and 4 local assistant-facilitators, compared with 12 local employees in 2014.

The results regarding the maintenance of reading skills are convincing. Indeed, the children read approximately 50 minutes a day and an average of 8 books each, which is almost double the number of reading recommended in research to prevent learning loss in reading during the summer. The children had access to 400 books in the camps, many of which were of culturally relevant content. Thus, a total of 3600 high-quality children books remained in the community upon camp completion.

Parents, Elders and other community members were invited to take part in activities on a weekly basis. A total of 184 parents, for an average of 20 per community, took part in the activities at least once during the four weeks. In addition, 44 community members, including young Chiefs, Elders, the police and athletes came to host an activity for the young campers.

The results collected through questionnaires for parents also confirm the positive impact of camps on children. Of the 67 parents who completed the questionnaire, 95% said that their child had a bet-

