

ADULT LITERACY FREDERICTON 2017 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
GUEST ADDRESS BY JULIA STEWART, FREDERICTON PUBLIC LIBRARY DIRECTOR

Thank you for the wonderful opportunity to speak at Adult Literacy Fredericton's 2017 Annual General Meeting. Adult Literacy Fredericton's long history and track record of achievements is something to be very proud of and something that makes our city great. I am honored to be surrounded by so many who have the same passion and am thrilled to hear about all your successes.

I am relatively new to Fredericton and I have to say I am impressed with the community and its commitment to making this city a wonderful place to live, work and play. We all strive, in different ways, to improve the literacy skills that are so very important in creating healthy, vital communities. Since joining the exceptional team as Director at Fredericton Public Library, I am thrilled to lead people who are passionate about customer service, literacy, and making a difference in their communities. Working with this group of energetic and dedicated people is one of the reasons I get up in the morning and am so very happy to go to work.

Every day, library front line staff hear stories from people just like you about the important role libraries play in their lives - whether they are searching for a job on one of our public access computers, watching their child participate in story times and developing early literacy skills, attending one of many diverse programs, receiving a book they've been looking forward to reading, or borrowing one of our movies, board games or even a ukulele. The library makes a difference. Libraries connect people. Libraries matter to communities. They are so very important.

As our Premier, Brian Gallant says in the government's recent literacy strategy, "Literacy is a key foundational skill that empowers New Brunswickers to reach their potential in the workforce and thrive in their communities." We all know literacy matters and that it is essential to be successful. The dedicated tutors and learners of Adult Literacy Fredericton show how much it does.

The Fredericton Public Library is located in the heart of downtown with a sister branch across the river at Nashwaaksis Middle School. Since May of 2016 the downtown branch is open 7 days a week, all year round and the Nashwaaksis branch is open 6 days. With the commitment from our provincial government and the city of Fredericton, the Fredericton Public Libraries welcomed nearly 300,000 people through its doors in 2016. It was a very successful year! People borrowed and returned 470,000 items and we signed up 7,000 people for new library cards. We offered over 1600 programs such as Zumba on Wednesday afternoons for kids and parents, books clubs, author talks, knitting circles, and many other partnerships with community groups. Just over 50,000 people of all ages participated in these programs. These numbers show how important the library is to our community and how much Frederictonians value the services we offer and more importantly the impact we make on people's lives.

We do lots of things for all sorts of people. We are the busiest library in the province and we're the busiest public building in the city. However, sometimes it is ONE person that has the most impact, or that ONE story that people remember. This could be the story of the young woman who was re-entering the workforce after a period of time away, who was required for a course to visit the library with her group. She had never visited the library before, and she couldn't read, but after her tour she was so excited about the things going on that she now visits a few times a week and has built relationships with the library staff. And she's now reading! Or it could be the story of the little boy, age 10, who gives part of his allowance every year to buy children's books for his favorite library, which just happens to be Fredericton's. Or it is the Grandma who has never used a computer who attends computer classes to learn how to navigate Facebook so she can see pictures of her grandchildren, who live in Vancouver. The library is the ONE place where everyone feels welcome, where everyone is treated the same, and where some of the barriers of life are removed and people can begin again.

Reading the stories of learners on Adult Literacy Fredericton's website and listening to the personal stories I've heard this evening really illustrates the important role we all play in building a healthy, literate community. Whether working in the library, or volunteering as a tutor, or making the commitment to learn, we are all part of the solution in making our community a better place to connect, to read, to learn, to play, to create and, ultimately, to succeed.

Congratulations to Adult Literacy Fredericton learners and tutors and much encouragement for continued success. I hope to see each one of you at the Fredericton Library someday soon.

-April 20, 2017