



## **Canada's Premiers Announce 2020 Literacy Award Recipients**

**September 8, 2020** – On the occasion of International Literacy Day, Canada's Premiers today announced the recipients of the 16<sup>th</sup> annual Council of the Federation Literacy Award. Presented in each province and territory, the Award celebrates outstanding achievement, innovative practice and excellence in literacy.

The recipients of the 2020 Council of the Federation Literacy Award are:

**Portage College Community Adult Learning Programs (CALPs)** – Alberta  
**Story Studio** – British Columbia  
**Awet Biagaber** – Manitoba  
**Elaine Johnson-Chafe** – Newfoundland and Labrador  
**Peter Sawyer** – New Brunswick  
**Élizabeth (Betty) Levasseur** – New Brunswick  
**Delores Vittrekwa** – Northwest Territories  
**Malak Alahmad** – Nova Scotia  
**Charmaine Okatsiak** – Nunavut  
**Fatuma Hassan** – Ontario  
**Linda Fraser** – Prince Edward Island  
**Absa Diop** – Québec  
**Rena Lech** – Saskatchewan  
**Liard First Nation Language Department** – Yukon

“On behalf of all Premiers, I congratulate the 2020 recipients of the Council of the Federation Literacy Award,” said François Legault, Premier of Québec and incoming Chair of the Council of the Federation. “The hard work and achievements of this year’s recipients, all of whom have shown an exceptional commitment to literacy, are truly deserving of this recognition.”

Premiers recognize the importance of literacy in enabling participation as a full and active citizen in all areas of society. Created in 2004, the Award celebrates adult learners who undertake literacy training, as well as the valuable contributions made by Canadians in the field of literacy, including family, Indigenous, health, workplace, and community literacy. The Award is presented to learners, educators, volunteers, community organizations, and businesses in each province and territory.

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Each Award recipient receives a certificate, signed by the Premier of their province or territory, as well as a Council of the Federation Literacy Award medallion.

The Council of the Federation comprises all 13 provincial and territorial Premiers. It enables Premiers to work collaboratively, form closer ties, foster constructive relationships among governments, and show leadership on important issues that matter to Canadians.

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**For more information:**

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION**

### **2020 Council of the Federation Literacy Award Recipients**

#### **Portage College's Community Adult Learning Programs (CALPs) – Alberta**

Portage College's Community Adult Learning Programs (CALPs) offer learner-centred foundational learning programs that allow adult Albertans to develop the necessary skills for further learning, employment and/or increased quality of life. The programs serve the communities of Bonnyville, St. Paul, Elk Point, Frog Lake First Nation, Cold Lake First Nation, WhiteLake/Goodfish First Nation and Kehewin Cree Nation. CALPs work closely with community leaders and partner agencies to identify and address learning needs in ways that are accommodating and respectful of each learner.

#### **Story Studio – British Columbia**

Story Studio is a non-profit, literacy-focused organization that inspires, educates and empowers youth to become great storytellers. Starting in 2011, Story Studio facilitators and volunteers have worked with almost 10,000 youth, taking a fun and creative approach that improves literacy skills and builds self-confidence. Bringing together kids of all ages with authors and illustrators, they produce nearly 1,500 youth-authored books annually. Working at the community level, 80% of their programming is directed towards meeting the needs of vulnerable youth and lower-income families to transform lives and strengthen communities. Story Studio partners with a broad range of community organizations to maximize their accessibility. They also lead workshops for teachers, parents and other adult learners, inspiring others to support youth writing and storytelling.

#### **Awet Biagaber – Manitoba**

Awet Biagaber is a determined and resilient learner with a passion for mentoring youth. Having overcome painful and challenging life experiences including traumatic injuries, Awet is determined to succeed in his education and commitment to helping others. Through volunteering with organizations such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), he shares his life experiences to assist and motivate others. Since beginning to attend literacy classes through the Elmwood Group of Adult Learners (GOAL) program in September 2019, Awet has made remarkable gains in literacy and numeracy. Awet's goal is to become a Social Worker to help at-risk youth.

#### **Elaine Johnson-Chafe – Newfoundland and Labrador**

In 2019, Elaine Johnson-Chafe made the life-changing decision to obtain her high school diploma. After leaving school at an early age and working the same job for over twenty years, Elaine became unemployed and saw an opportunity to fulfill the dream of improving her education. Her positive attitude, passion for learning, hard work and determination to succeed have allowed her to improve her literacy skills and progress through the Adult Basic Education program at a rapid pace. She describes the experience as having improved her confidence and preparing her for success. Today, Elaine is close to achieving her high school diploma and plans to enroll in a post-secondary education program. She is excited for the future and the possibility of a career, not just a job.

### **Peter Sawyer – New Brunswick**

Peter Sawyer has worked in adult literacy since the late 1970's. As Chair of the Greater Moncton Literacy Council he aided in establishing Laubach Literacy Canada. Peter is the founding member of the Laubach Literacy provincial chapter and has been involved with the provincial Literacy Coalition and Writer's Federation and the bilingual literary Frye Festival, to name only a few. He has volunteered in various capacities and is often sought after to assist in new initiatives. Through numerous daunting tasks, including fundraising, Peter remained hopeful and recognized the need for change. He is honoured daily by his colleagues who often ask themselves "What would Peter do?" His motivation, passion, and dedication towards improving literacy levels have enriched many lives.

### **Élizabeth (Betty) Levasseur – New Brunswick**

Betty Levasseur has been involved in literacy for more than thirty years. She first started in the Adult Learning Centre in Clair when learning centers were supported by municipalities and fundraising activities were the major source of funding. Betty has played an important role in this area while supporting the center in all aspects. She later joined the Alpha la Vallée Inc. Regional Committee and is the Former President. For the past twelve years, she has served there as Counsellor, Vice President and President. Betty is a very hardworking and passionate volunteer who is convinced and persuasive about the need for programs offered by learning centers.

### **Delores Vittrekwa – Northwest Territories**

Delores Vittrekwa has lived in Fort McPherson her whole life. She has been running literacy programs for toddlers, children, teens, young adults, adults and elders for the past 8 years. She enjoys running programs at the school, outside in open areas, helping others and creating new ideas. Delores enjoys being part of school year events such as running the annual Scholastic Book Fair or signing new babies up for a free book from the Dolly Parton Imagination Foundation. Delores is appreciative of the territorial Literacy Council and Get Active program, the District Education Authority and the Chief Julius School for their continuous support in any 'small or big' idea she has in mind, and most of all of the community for their involvement.

### **Malak Alahmad – Nova Scotia**

Malak Alahmad came to Canada with her family from a Jordanian refugee camp in 2017, after having fled the civil war in Syria. As a young mother of four who had no English language skills, Malak set out to adjust to her new life in Canada in stride. In less than three years, she has achieved a level 5 in English and has now enrolled in courses to improve her math and science skills. Her instructor noted that Malak's positive attitude and her willingness to help others make her a great role model to her fellow learners and instructors. Malak has also made time to give back to her community and mentors new refugee women to help them adjust to life in Canada.

### **Charmaine Okatsiak – Nunavut**

Charmaine Okatsiak's passion for helping Rankin Inlet youth learn and speak Inuktitut comes from her mother, an Inuktitut teacher, and father, a youth program coordinator. After years working at Leo Ussak Elementary School, Charmaine is finishing the Nunavut Teacher Education Program at Nunavut Arctic College. Concerned with losing

her own ability to speak Inuktitut, Charmaine volunteers on local radio to practise and to encourage others to learn it and speak it. This year, she launched the *Inuktitut Revitalization Project*, a summer program for youth, where she volunteers countless hours to apply for funding, recruit staff and participants, and develop course curriculum and program materials. Charmaine is very open about her imperfect Inuktitut and she encourages youth to be unafraid to make mistakes in their efforts to speak their mother tongue.

### **Fatuma Hassan – Ontario**

Fatuma Hassan came to Canada as a government assisted refugee in December 2015. In Somalia, Fatuma never had the opportunity to attend school and had never learned to read or write. When Fatuma started her English as a Second Language literacy class at Women's Enterprise Skills Training of Windsor (WEST) in 2016 she spoke no English and could not even write her own name. Fatuma cherished this learning opportunity and continues to be committed to her studies with excellent attendance and tremendous diligence. After three years of hard work, Fatuma's speaking, reading and writing skills have improved greatly. Fatuma is continuing her learning at WEST with the goal of attending the Early Childhood Education program at college and ultimately finding employment helping others learn.

### **Linda Fraser – Prince Edward Island**

Linda Fraser began teaching Adult Education in Abegweit First Nation in 2008 through a partnership with Mi'kmaq Confederacy of PEI, Abegweit First Nation, Holland College and the Province. As an educator, Linda understands the importance of literacy as a foundational skill to participate in daily life including education and employment. Linda teaches and mentors 10 new learners per year on average, creating a safe and inviting classroom environment. She champions the success of her students and motivates them to meet their goals. Many of Linda's students have pursued post-secondary education as a result of her efforts. Furthermore, Linda took it upon herself to create an after-school program in Abegweit First Nation to include the children of her learners in a cycle of positive learning.

### **Absa Diop – Québec**

Absa Diop is an adult literacy student at the Centre de formation L'Impulsion. Originally from Senegal, Absa arrived in Québec in 2008. Not having had the chance to study in her country and not speaking French, she first studied that language. In 2019, she returned to literacy training. Thanks to her perseverance and determination, she is making progress in reading, which allows her to be more independent and to better support her children in their education. Absa is also pursuing studies in order to realize her dream of opening a restaurant that will allow people to discover the tastes and flavours of Africa.

### **Renae Lech – Saskatchewan**

Renae Lech is a literacy volunteer who began volunteering for the Great Plains College English as a Second Language program in Gravelbourg in 2015. Since she began volunteering attendance has improved due to her sincere interest in the lives of newcomers and their families. In addition to her clear ability to support and advance learning, her work outside the classroom is equally impressive. Renae's belief in

fostering English-language skills and deepening relationships between community members have led her to organize social events for newcomers and their families in order to practice English on a more social basis, connect newcomers and their families to the community through the completion of volunteer work, and support newcomers in completing job applications or forms.

### **Liard First Nation Language Department – Yukon**

The Liard First Nation Language Department has worked for decades to promote, preserve, revitalize and maintain the Kaska language. The departments' collaborations with researchers and academic institutions have contributed to the study and understanding of the Kaska language and Dene languages more broadly. The department has produced materials to preserve the Kaska language and support present-day learners and researchers. They are now digitizing their extensive language resources to make them widely accessible. Elder Leda Jules, the late Richard Charlie, Jocelyn Wolftail, Martina Volfova, Paul Caesar, Emeral Poppe, Josephine Caesar and many others have contributed to this work. The Kaska language is inseparable from its people, culture, traditional knowledge, land and heritage. The Liard First Nation Language Department will continue its work to protect it for generations to come.

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