



## **Canada's Premiers Announce 2023 Literacy Award Recipients**

**OTTAWA, September 8, 2023** – On the occasion of International Literacy Day, Canada's Premiers today announced the recipients of the 19<sup>th</sup> annual Council of the Federation Literacy Award. Presented in each province and territory, the Award celebrates exceptional achievement, innovative practice and excellence in literacy.

The recipients of the 2023 Council of the Federation Literacy Award are:

**Society of Brooks Community Adult Learning Council** — Alberta  
**Greater Victoria Alliance for Literacy** — British Columbia  
**Hamdi Warsame** — Manitoba  
**ABC Life Literacy** — Newfoundland and Labrador  
**Colette Frees** — New Brunswick  
**Joanne McIsaac** — New Brunswick  
**Aurora College Literacy Outreach Centre** — Northwest Territories  
**Shelley Gray** — Nova Scotia  
**Jeena Kadlutsiak** — Nunavut  
**Louise Lalonde** — Ontario  
**Dean Ramos** — Prince Edward Island  
**Djénébou Drabo** — Québec  
**Prince Albert Literacy Network** — Saskatchewan  
**Susan McCallum** — Yukon

“On behalf of Canada's Premiers, it is my great pleasure to congratulate the outstanding recipients of the 2023 Council of the Federation Literacy Award,” said Tim Houston, Premier of Nova Scotia and Chair of the Council of the Federation. “As a result of their hard work and determination, the 2023 recipients are all truly deserving of this special 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.

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.

## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

### 2023 Council of the Federation Literacy Award Recipients

#### **Society of Brooks Community Adult Learning Council – Alberta**

The Society of Brooks Community Adult Learning Council (SBCALC) has provided adult literacy programs in its community for over 40 years. SBCALC offers language training and employment training that assists adult learners including newcomers to acquire English Language Learning skills, marketable labour skills and knowledge to facilitate their participation in the community. SBCALC also offers many other programs that have improved the literacy, foundational learning and essential skills of adult learners. SBCALC has constantly promoted and raised awareness about literacy and foundational learning needs in its community. SBCALC is committed to reducing barriers so that learners can access programs and services. SBCALC partners with other community organizations in order to provide the best service to learners in its community. SBCALC has demonstrated itself to be a community leader that promotes inclusivity in society for adult literacy learners in Brooks.

#### **Greater Victoria Alliance for Literacy – British Columbia**

Greater Victoria Alliance for Literacy (GVAL) is the catalyst that brought the literacy community together in the Capital region. GVAL supports local literacy organizations through public outreach and promotion of literacy services, provides networking opportunities, literacy forums and professional development workshops, and represents the literacy community on various advisory committees. GVAL also mentors and provides student placements for University of Victoria students learning about community agencies, has created the Literacy Hubs guide that lists free tutoring and programming spaces in the region, and supports alliance members to procure volunteers and have access to additional professional development workshops through its membership with Volunteer Victoria. As a result of GVAL's leadership and responsiveness, local literacy agencies have a champion, region-wide support, and representation for their important initiatives.

#### **Hamdi Warsame – Manitoba**

Hamdi Warsame is from Somalia. Growing up, she was denied a formal education. In 1993, she immigrated to Canada, setting aside her dream to learn to read and write to raise her family of seven. In 2021, tragedy struck when she lost her husband to COVID-19. Alone, she moved her family to Winnipeg to join her daughter, a student at the University of Manitoba. In March 2022, Hamdi finally pursued her dream and enrolled at LiteracyWORKS Inc. She has worked diligently on improving her literacy and numeracy skills, and says, *“Achieving one new word at school is better than staying at home and learning nothing. I feel more confident and have big dreams for my future such as graduating from high school. I want to get a job.”*

#### **ABC Life Literacy – Newfoundland and Labrador**

ABC Life Literacy Canada has been a steadfast presence in Newfoundland and Labrador, fostering strong connections with community literacy and learning organizations. As a national charitable organization, ABC Life Literacy has shown its dedication to advancing literacy by empowering adult learners, increasing awareness, and providing support to the adult learning sector. Through the Activate Learning program, ABC Life Literacy has helped foster a culture of lifelong learning and reduce stigma. By offering workshops, learning resources, and custom workbooks, ABC Life Literacy has made significant strides in supporting diverse learner groups, families, and community organizations across the province. With impressive reach and impact, ABC Life Literacy's Activate Learning

program served 24,216 learners in Newfoundland and Labrador from November 2019 to April 2023 through 680 workshops, home learning activities, and workbook downloads. ABC Life Literacy has consistently received excellent feedback from participants seeking to improve their soft skills, financial literacy, and health awareness.

### **Colette Frees – New Brunswick**

“Madame Colette” is an exceptional teacher from the Restigouche region known for her passion, commitment, and dedication to her learners. She always succeeds in innovating according to the learning needs of all. A tireless teacher, constantly seeking to help multiple clients from different backgrounds, she knows how to create a climate of trust that fosters success. Whether it is with Adult Community Learning classes, at the Correctional Centre, at the Restigouche Hospital Center or in Workplace Essential Skills training, she knows how to reach everyone and help them improve their level of skills and literacy. The versatility of Ms. Frees makes her the ideal person for any new initiatives. An asset and a source of pride that the region cannot do without.

### **Joanne McIsaac – New Brunswick**

Joanne McIsaac has been the face of adult literacy in the Woodstock area, having been teaching at the Community Adult Learning Program for Western Valley Adult Learning Regional Committee for 21 years. Her impact is deep; she has directly influenced over 240 learners in their endeavors. In Joanne, you see a warm and soft-spoken woman with a big heart. She always roots for the underdog and goes above and beyond by connecting learners to post-secondary education and helping them further along the way, after her mandate has ended with them. She can be found on many noon hours, evenings and weekends, providing tutoring for learners in secondary and post-secondary subjects. Joanne’s embodiment of what it means to be an educator makes her truly deserving of this award.

### **Aurora College Literacy Outreach Centre – Northwest Territories**

More than just reading and writing, literacy is a way to understand and be a part of the world around you. Being able to read and write, and have the skills, knowledge and understanding to manage your personal and work life are all part of literacy. The Aurora College Literacy Outreach Centre in Yellowknife works with people who want to improve their English literacy levels but who are not ready to enroll in Adult Literacy and Basic Education courses. The Literacy Outreach Centre (LOC) offers a gateway to lifelong learning that is open to everyone. The Yellowknife Literacy Outreach Centre is a partnership with Inclusion NWT and offers a number of programs both on-site and in the community to individuals with or without disabilities. Programs offered by the Yellowknife LOC include: Adult Literacy Classes, Introduction to Computer Basics Levels 1 & 2, Family Literacy, Tutoring Services, Baker Centre Book Club.

### **Shelley Gray – Nova Scotia**

Shelley Gray left high school before she could finish her studies. At age 52, Shelley found herself a single mother and unemployed while raising her two daughters. After working in seasonal production jobs for many years and facing health issues, Shelley realized that it was time for a change. This led her to enroll at the Valley Community Learning Association to complete her education. She successfully completed four General Educational Development (GED) exams and hopes to complete her last GED exam this summer. In July 2022, Shelley accepted a job offer and is working full-time providing support to individuals with intellectual disabilities, helping them live within the community. Shelley’s determination and hard work made her a role model and mentor to her daughters, fellow adult learners and co-workers.

### **Jeena Kadlutsiak – Nunavut**

Jeena Kadlutsiak of Igloolik, Nunavut is a Kindergarten to Grade 3 teacher at Ataguttaaluk School. Jeena assists in curriculum development for schools across Nunavut and mentors other teachers to use and teach Inuktitut. She shines through her vital support of reconciliation through language revitalization. Jeena is promoting literacy in her own classrooms by coaching teachers, hosting Elders and holding meetings to plan for and promote Inuktitut language learning. Jeena is implementing Inuktitut curriculum in K-3 classrooms and spends much time gathering and distributing resources to teachers. She has a deep understanding of components required by the Inuktitut curriculum and supports staff to implement these literacy goals. She is a positive role model for promoting literacy in her community, Nunavut's education system and the territory.

### **Louise Lalonde – Ontario**

Louise Lalonde is an iconic figure in the field of literacy and basic skills (LBS) in Ontario with a career that spans more than 40 years and includes being the Director of the Moi J'Apprends Centre which proudly has five points of service. As a pioneer in her field, she has made a significant contribution to LBS through her pivotal role in creating Ontario's adult literacy curriculum framework and her expertise in developing quality resources. In addition to her accomplishments within the Francophone network in the province, Louise has promoted the field by establishing collaborations that have expanded the impact of literacy across the country. Today, Louise continues to leave a lasting imprint that inspires current and future generations of actors engaged in this important field.

### **Dean Ramos – Prince Edward Island**

Dean moved to Prince Edward Island from the Philippines in June 2022. He worked extremely hard on improving his English skills and studying towards his GED which he obtained in March 2023. Dean has overcome many barriers through hard work, determination and personal sacrifice. Dean's strong work ethic and determination has inspired many of his classmates. While studying for his GED, Dean would always find time to help others, with the concepts that he had already mastered. His instructor would quite often refer to him as "Teacher Dean" and he wholeheartedly embraced this title. Dean plans on continuing his education by upgrading his English at Holland College with the hopes of ultimately attending the Journalism program.

### **Djénébou Drabo – Québec**

Djénébou Drabo is a student at the Centre d'éducation des adultes des Navigateurs, who has shown an exceptional level of commitment to her general adult education studies over the past three years. Despite being uprooted by immigration and having a low level of literacy, this mother of three young children has shown that perseverance and hard work can lead to unexpected levels of proficiency, as well as helping her to better integrate into Québec society. Thanks to Djénébou's diligence, commitment and the effort she has put into her learning, she has obtained the prerequisites that will allow her to follow vocational training at the Centre de formation professionnelle de Lévis in Care for people in institutional settings and at home that, she hopes, will lead her to a job as a care attendant.

### **Prince Albert Literacy Network – Saskatchewan**

The Prince Albert Literacy Network (PALN), established in 1988, provides community literacy leadership by engaging with others to recognize the many ways that literacy enhances the everyday lives of everyone in the community. PALN has ensured that community events such as parades, family expos and the farmer's market include a literacy component. PALN distributes Story Sacks, hosts regular StoryWalks®, provides family literacy kits and free little libraries to increase access for families to books. The commitment to adult learners is equally as strong with free and flexible tutoring programs for those new to Canada and support for those where literacy is a barrier. The PALN works tirelessly to create awareness about the positive impact of literacy in unique, inclusive and culturally responsive ways.

### **Susan McCallum – Yukon**

Susan McCallum has dedicated her life's passion for illustration to helping keep the Yukon First Nations languages strong and thriving. Susan has illustrated dozens of First Nations children's books in several languages. She has created Native literacy board games, flash cards, curriculum, and a Native language app. Her most recent achievement is having the book, "Shëtsey - My Grandpa", written by Georgette McLeod and illustrated by Susan, selected for the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. In addition to creating works of art, Susan is also a highly sought-after artist in schools. She has worked with thousands of students at schools in both the Yukon and British Columbia. Her work has opened doors to positive learning for children through creativity, learning and respect for nature and Indigenous Cultures.

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### **For more information:**

#### **Paola St-Georges**

Manager, Events and Communications  
Council of the Federation Secretariat  
(343) 961-5811  
[paola@canadaspremiers.ca](mailto:paola@canadaspremiers.ca)