

Summer tutoring program helps children become better readers

More than 760 children who have difficulty reading are getting help to maintain and improve their reading skills when school is out this summer.

The Summer Tutoring Program for Kids helps children in Grades 1-6 who are most in need of additional reading instruction. Throughout July and August, they have attended weekly sessions offered by trained tutors at 28 local libraries and schools across the Island.

The program prevents and reduces the loss of literacy skills that many children experience over the summer when they are away from books and classroom learning. Studies show that during this period, which is also known as the summer slump or the summer brain drain, most children lose one to three months of grade level equivalency.

Students are referred to the summer tutoring program by their teachers. The program is administered by the P.E.I. Literacy Alliance.

Most of the 25 tutors are post-secondary students who assist children in English, French, aboriginal and English-as-a-second-language programs.

Education Minister Gerard Greenan said participation in the program is at an all time high.

"This is very encouraging because helping children read well at an early age is one of the single

most powerful things we can do to help them achieve success in school and in life," he said.

Now in its 10th year of operation, the summer tutoring program is 10 times larger than it was when it was introduced in 1998.

The reputation of the program has also grown. It receives strong support from parents who say that it keeps children reading over the summer, builds confidence in reading, and helps children develop a love of reading at an early age. These are all qualities that translate into higher levels of reading attainment and student achievement.

The summer tutoring program has become the summer job of choice for UPBI bachelor of education students.

It is also highly regarded highly by teachers who see the benefits of the program when students return to school in the fall.

Librarians estimate that students in the program will read more than 4,000 books this summer. Norma Collier, acting provincial librarian, says the summer tutoring program works well because it provides children with one-to-one reading instruction based on their individual needs.

"They learn about the many good books that are available at their local library, how to choose a good book and how to use the library service," she said.

Catherine O'Bryan, executive director of the P.E.I. Literacy Alliance, says that a key reason for the success of the program is that the tutors use fun tools and activities to deliver the program.

"The program is not just about reading. It's also about fostering a love of learning and making learning fun. Math activities, pre-reading skills, music, arts and crafts are all part of the program to strengthen listening and reading skills," she said.

The program is made possible through assistance of several partners, including Service Canada, P.E.I. Literacy Alliance, Raise-A-Reader, Department of Education, Provincial Library Service, The Rotary Club of Charlottetown, Holland College, Club Richelieu Port-LaJoye, Mi'kmaq Confederacy and the three school boards.

The Summer Tutoring Program received an additional \$31,000 this year through the Raise-A-Reader campaign which was sponsored by The Guardian and the Journal Pioneer last fall.

The new funding was used to offer the program to more students and to purchase needed resources.

The next annual Raise-A-Reader event will take place Wednesday, Oct. 3. On that day, Islanders can support literacy by purchasing newspapers from local celebrities across the Island.