

The Weekly Westerner

Box 4572, Station C, Calgary, Alberta T2T 5N3
Grey Eagle Hotel, 3777 Grey Eagle Drive (Corner of 37 St SW and Glenmore Drive)
Mondays 12.10 pm - 1.30 pm

President: Gerry Meek **President-Elect:** Bill Fitzsimmons **Past President:** Tim Anderson
Secretary: Karl Herzog **Treasurer:** Judy Cochran
Directors: Marlene Doherty, Darren Grierson, Ken Montgomery, Alex McFadden

Together We Are People of Action - Building Community

June 15, 2020 Edition: 53.38 Reporter: Duncan Stanners Editor: David Williams

Once again we held the meeting on-line using the Zoom tool.

Guests

Krista Poole, Amanda Carbaja, Jayne Clarke, Nada Jerkovic, Gwen Schaefer from Can Learn.

President Gerry Meek started the meeting on time, and then turned it over to **Duncan Stanners** for the "Inspirational Moment".

Duncan told the story of the first water project in Honduras. He was first inspired by **Steve Rickard**, who introduced him to microfinance and whose goal was to end world hunger. He then spoke of how the poor people of Honduras inspired him with their dignity, hard work and love for their children. Duncan was also inspired by the power of Rotary, and showed the picture of how \$10,000 from our club grew into \$600,000 with leverage from Rotary, the Alberta government and the federal government. Finally, he was inspired by the joy and celebration of the villages of Chiquita Quebrada and Las Camelios when they finally received sustainable fresh water.

Guest Speaker

President Gerry then introduced our guest speaker, Krista Poole. Krista joined the CanLearn Society as Chief Executive Officer in 2012, where she leads a talented and creative management team.

Before joining CanLearn, Krista was the Executive Director of Calgary Learns; a granting agency that works closely with the Government of Alberta. Before Calgary Learns, she was a Senior Manager with Chinook College and the Education Manager with YMCA Calgary.



Krista is well-known in the non-profit sector as a big picture thinker, innovator, connector and influencer. She has a deep interest in working with at-risk-populations and ensuring access to learning for people with learning challenges.

Krista has been a recipient of the United Way Spirit of Gold award for her work in diversity and was awarded the Outstanding Contribution to Community Adult Learning Award in 2010. Under Krista's leadership, Calgary Learns was the recipient of an organizational leadership award from Literacy Alberta.

Krista holds a BA in International Relations, a TESL certificate, a B.ED with Distinction, and taken an MBA-related stakeholder relations course. Krista has been involved in the Leadership Calgary, XD (Executive Directions) and Fast Pitch programs, and has developed a close-knit and collaborative network of non-profit, business and government colleagues throughout Calgary and Alberta.

Krista first thanked our club for our funding in 2019 and for our participation in the 12 days of giving when we donated many books.

Krista introduced the members of her team who were present at the meeting.

- Nada Jerkovic, Manager of the Literacy Programs, who is known as an innovator and has spent 25 years at Can Learn
- Amanda Carbaja, who runs the Taking Charge program for adults
- Jayne Clarke, who has over 20 years with Can Learn and runs the Magic Carpet Ride program
- Gwen Schaefer, who runs the Share the Magic and Word Play programs

The main reason for them attending today was to report on the "Potential for Learning" (P4L), the program our club funded. The purpose of P4L is to:

- Increase engagement/motivation for learning
- Increase confidence/self-esteem
- Increase social emotional skills with the objective to improve high school graduation rates.

The program was run in three cycles of 10 weeks each, with 1-1/2 hour sessions. Participants were from grades 7, 8 and 9 including indigenous people and visible minorities. Sometimes they would have only 4, and others we would have 10. Over time, their average attendance increased (6 to 7 to 9), and they were able to register more youth (9 then 12 then 15). They had many new youth try the program (13, then 11, then 6), but these numbers are not reflective of registration because



youth would try the program, but find it wasn't for them in the first cycle, or register in the third cycle, but not attend regularly because of the large group size, or program length. However, there were youth who would come consistently, and repeat the program because of the connections they formed with the volunteers and facilitators. Several youth formed close connections with volunteers because the volunteers went above and beyond, like Isabel going for a walk with youth after program, Larry teaching arm wrestling, or Bill playing along with different nicknames.

Many of the youth dreaded going to school. They were aware that they had difficulties with behaviour and feelings of anger and that life is meaningless, but no idea what to do about it. Because of their challenges they were often bullied, and had difficulty making friends. These were youth for whom it was a big deal if they participated in a program and tolerated one another. But they had hope that this program would help them, and they were excited that the program offered them choices. They were very motivated to attend (running back, and behaving at school). By the end, some of the youth had started to make and bring in friends. They also had found a voice in the program, and were using it to give a lot of feedback about what they wanted, like more exercise time, which was carried forward into future cycles.

Youth, school administration, and even family members were left with a very positive impression of the program. A youth's grandparent told one of the volunteers of the positive impact on his grandson, and that youth told about how he had learned to deal with his bullies. The school wanted to learn what it has been doing so teachers could apply this knowledge in the classroom.

At the beginning of the first cycle, the kids faced:

- A lot of challenges with school
- Awareness that they have difficulties with behaviour and emotions
- Loneliness and being bullied
- Hope

At the end of the cycle:

- Bringing friends to the program
- Finding their voice
- Positive impression
- Dealing with bullies without resorting to name calling/violence

For cycle 2 we sought out new youth. Many of these youth were very shy and quiet because they had very low self esteem and had challenges with being bullied. Group work had been off the table in the previous cycle, but these youth were willing to try, and wanted to learn about things that might help improve their lives. In this cycle we were much more focused on building up those



relationships in small groups, due to volunteer feedback from the previous cycle, and it showed. With these stronger relationships, the quiet youth started speaking up more, and realizing that they had strengths, and feeling more confident. Some of the more exuberant youth were settling down and stopped using self-deprecating humor. They starting thinking of group work as fun, and applied their learning to their own lives, which became apparent with the COVID situation when youth came up with a variety of ways to show kindness and gratitude while social distancing.

At the beginning of cycle 2

- Many shy and quiet youth
- New challenges with bullies and self esteem
- Difficulty working in groups
- Desire to learn

At the end of cycle 2

- Youth coming out of their shells
- Awareness of strengths
- Can work together toward a common goal
- Application of learning

In the third cycle, there is a need to adapt to offering the program online, which came with some boundary testing on the part of the youth. Many of the youth only participated through chat because they were too shy to speak openly, or had complicated family events occurring in the background. Everyone had also experienced some technical difficulties. Feedback was also received from parents that their teen was intimidated by the large number of participants and adults, and that an hour-and-a-half was a long time to keep staring at a screen. So there was a need to adapt. The youth were asked what they wanted to do, and started playing more games, and introducing youth-led activities. The last half hour became optional free time for youth, during which they were very chatty. So far they are embracing a growth mindset, by thinking they can do things if they try, learn new things, and bounce back from disappointments. They have also developed skills for school success, like being organized and concentrating in class.

In future programming, it is recommended giving the youth a voice in the program. The youth have very complex lives in which they have little say, so giving them choice and voice helps improve their confidence and engagement. It is also recommended there should be smaller groups, as some youth left the program in the third cycle because they were intimidated by the group size. It has been suggested that there should be no more than 10 youth in a program, and to have volunteer numbers reflect that group size. Feedback from both youth and volunteers indicated that their



most meaningful conversations occurred in smaller groups, which also highlights the need to focus on building relationships. A big piece of feedback received from volunteers was that with the move to online, the relationships with the youth suffered, and from the stories shared today, it is clear that those relationships are the foundation for helping increase engagement, confidence, and social emotional skills.

In future, to help maintain a more consistent group at the outset, it should be ensured that what youth can expect in program is clearly communicated. A lot of feedback has been received from volunteers that the level and quality of communication was good, but facilitators thought it would be important to more clearly communicate roles and whom to contact in future programs to make for a smoother experience where volunteers could more clearly see the impact of their participation.

Finally, although the expected number of youth was not reached, the program had a meaningful impact on the youth reached, so there are some very rich stories that can be told about the impact that has been made, and how it helps with its purpose.

The overall impact:

- Youth reached were vulnerable and at risk of dropping out, including some who had rather significant challenges with behaviour and self regulation
- The program helped increase their confidence and self esteem
- The youth in the program learned social emotional skills, especially growth mindset
- The youth in the program began to engage more in learning as they were given more of a voice
- Therefore, the program was beneficial to the youth, and the volunteer component was valuable and much appreciated

Krista then thanked the 11 members of our club that took the time to volunteer. Feedback from volunteers shows most were satisfied with their volunteer experience, and we were very satisfied with them because the volunteer component of the program was very valuable and much appreciated. It was not a part of the original program, so it was developed on the go and we definitely had some shaky moments in our first cycle. But all the volunteers showed flexibility, and things improved.

Many of the volunteers provided feedback expressing concern about the level of impact, and feedback shows they believe they had at least a little, or moderate, impact. Moderate was not enough though, and they were always looking for ways to try to do more, or learn more, so that the impact could be improved.

For example:

- **Bill Fitzsimmons** was the one to bring bullying to our attention in the first cycle so that we could begin to support that youth and I remember his main concern was that he didn't know how to help that youth but, he really wanted to.
- **Dalbir Rattan** heard that some of the youth were struggling with math, so he dedicated time outside the program to find tutors and figure out how to incorporate this into the program. That desire to do more and learn more made for an innovative approach to working with vulnerable youth.

Thank you for all your time and support !!

Krista then turned it over to Amanda to talk about the after-school reading program they call Word Play. The need arises from:

- Until the third grade, a child learns to read. After the third grade, a child reads to learn.
- Children experiencing challenges in the process of learning to read
- Parents with limited proficiency in English who face their own literacy challenges

The program targets kids in grades 1 and 2, as studies have shown that if kids can't read by grade 3, they are likely destined to fall further and further behind, and are liable not to finish high school. The program runs once a week for six weeks, with 1-1/2 hour sessions in an after-school setting. Parents are invited and encouraged to attend. The kids enjoy a snack, read engaging books and play fun word games.

Here is some feedback from attendees:

Students

- The children asked for activities they could take home and share with their parents.

Parents

- "It is nice to see the children so excited to read."
- "Thank you for letting me participate in the program with my child. We have learned some new activities to help her get excited about reading."
- "Thank you for the fun ideas to use with my child. It is nice to have something fun and different to do at home."

Teachers

- "WordPlay is a wonderful gift!"



Krista then called upon **Bill Quinney** for his story. Bill's middle granddaughter couldn't read in grade 3. She was taken for assessment at the U of C and provided with a program. She just graduated grade 8 with honours!

In the near future, the P4L program is being put on hold, as it seems the online approach imposed by Covid-19 is not a good fit for the junior high group.

Going forward, there will be opportunities for Rotarians to participate in book donations, games and reading to children in the Share the Magic program.

President Gerry thanked our speaker.

Announcements

Terry Felton

- We need more volunteers for the July 23/24 casino. Specifically, we're looking for people under 65 because of Covid-19 risk.
- We have been looking into a new fundraiser, an online raffle, that will start on August 1 and run for six weeks. More info to come

President Gerry

- Make a donation to Endpolio.org by June 17
- There is a virtual global conference from RI on June 20-26. More info is available on both District and RI websites
- The meeting next week is at 7 pm, a virtual club assembly
- Congratulations to all fathers for Father's Day next Sunday

President Gerry's closing thought: "If all else fails, immortality can still be achieved by spectacular failure."

Coming Events

June: Rotary Fellowship Month	
1	Zoom Meeting: Calgary's National Music Centre
8	Zoom Meeting: Mark Neufeld, Calgary Police Chief
15	Zoom Meeting: Can Learn Presentation
22	Zoom Meeting: Gerry Meek Day. Programme
29	Zoom Meeting: Canada Day Special - Immigration and New Canadians: Peter Veress
July Stampede and Okanagan Cherries Month	
3	Parade Breakfast
6	Stampede Yahoo!??
13	TBA

Calgary
Rotary
West



The Weekly Westerner

June 15, 2020

20	TBA
27	TBA

May 1 - 3, 2020: District Conference, Calgary
June 6 - 10, 2020: Rotary International Conference, Honolulu