



Reading University: *Recipient of the ASBA "Friends of Education" award*

Reading University, a community partnership project of dedicated parents, three local school boards, and GPRC, is now the proud recipient of an award recognizing those who are demonstrably committed to the improvement of education for Alberta students.

The Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) Zone 1 Friends of Education Award recognizes organizations in the community who have made a special contribution to education in Alberta. Each of the three Boards in the zone typically submits a nomination for this award: In 2011, the Reading University was the unanimous choice of all three!

Last July, a record number of grade three students were busy in the classrooms and computer labs at GPRC – and by their graduation ceremony three weeks later, those 80

children were confident readers and ready to enter grade four as strong learners.

The Reading University project, launched in 2009, is the brainchild of concerned parents, patterned after a similar initiative in Camrose. It is designed to help students read at grade level, and has met a recognized need.

"Up to and including grade three, our children are learning to read," says Linda Side, one of the volunteers whose dedication has helped establish the program in Grande Prairie. "By the time they reach grade four, the model shifts and they are reading to learn. This is a tipping point. If our children are not reading at grade level here, they may miss their opportunity to ever reach grade level reading and comprehension. This is not Summer Camp. This is not Summer School. This is Reading University."

As parents and as community leaders, Linda Side and sister Rhonda Side are passionate about the importance of literacy for student success. They are also passionate about the importance of removing obstacles to learning by providing transportation, nutritious snacks and lunches, and other incentives such as field trips, prizes, backpacks, books and t-shirts.

"Ultimately, every child that has need should be able to attend," say the Sides. "This is a community driven program and while GPPSD acts as the banker board and provides the expertise in terms of instruction, the key is inclusion and ultimately, access to all those who need it regardless of where they attend school in the region."

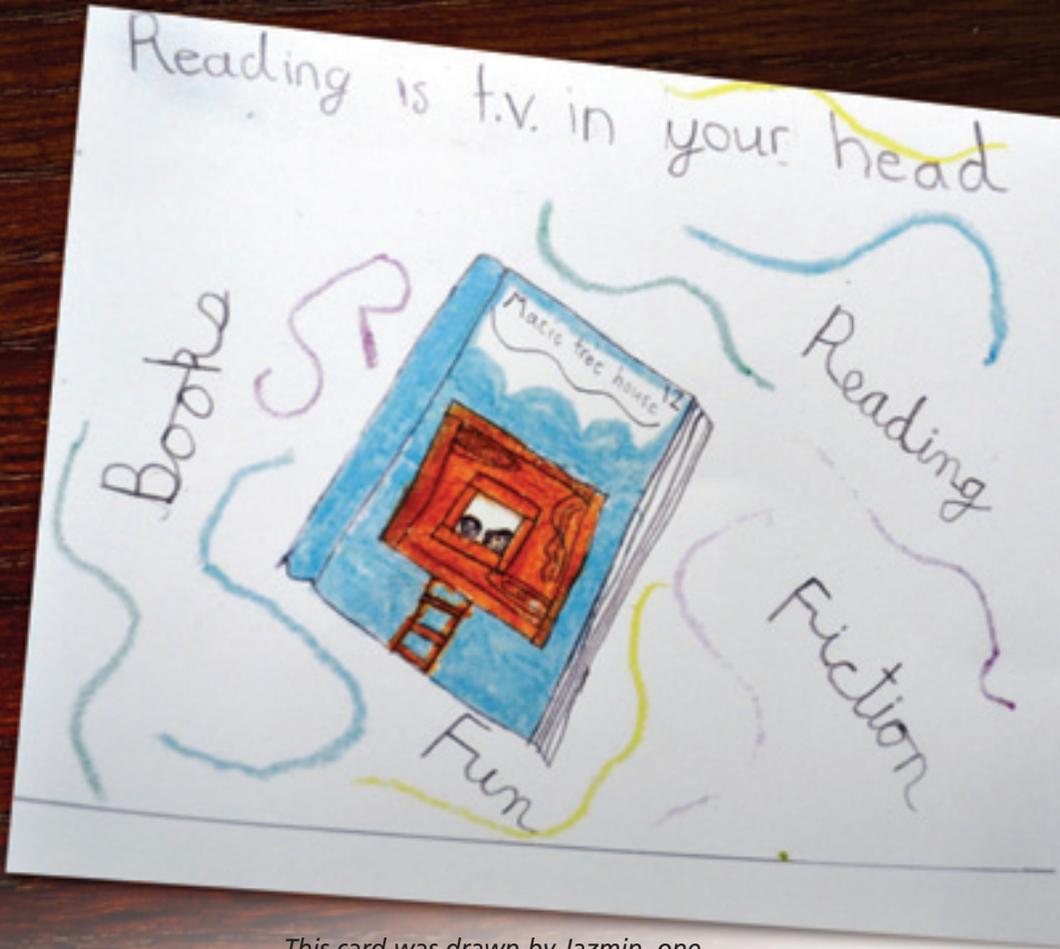
This is a community driven program and there is no Alberta Education funding for this initiative. Organizers such as Rhonda and Linda Side have been working diligently to secure ongoing funding from organizations and individuals to stabilize the future of the program. At present some 20 businesses and individuals have endowed the project, and gift-in-kind donations from numerous others have helped to defray costs.

GPRC provides the required classrooms and computer labs for the three weeks of the Reading University program, and the DJ Cardinal Performing Arts Centre for the graduation ceremony. In addition, the GPRC Foundation this year provided \$1,000 which purchased a refrigerator for the nutritious snacks and lunches which are part of the program.

"For me this is personal," says Susan Bangrove, Vice-President Academics and Research. "The future of our society is these children. We want them to be successful and to love reading and learning. GPRC is a natural partner in this initiative – nothing is more valuable than educating the youngest people in our community."

Bangrove makes it a priority to meet the children at the beginning of the program, welcoming them to "university," and is delighted by the change in confidence level she observes from the beginning to the end of the program. "These children are gaining skills and tools to create a new future for all of us. I really believe in the goals and efficacy of this initiative, and admire the parents whose passion has made it possible."

GPRC is proud to partner with parents and educators to provide Reading University to the children of our community.



This card was drawn by Jazmin, one of the Reading University graduates.

GPRC welcomes the new communities in our stewardship footprint!

We are delighted to now be providing opportunities in post-secondary education for learners in:

- Edson
- Hinton
- Grande Cache
- Jasper

