

It's Smart to Read Between the Lines
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By Rob Mills, Dartmouth Express, November 22, 1986

If you read this far, Janet Smart's not particularly concerned about you. That's because she's concerned about people who can't read – the illiterate.

There are a number of groups helping the illiterate in Dartmouth under an umbrella organization, the Dartmouth Literacy Network, which includes the Dartmouth Regional Library, the Dartmouth Work Activity program, Dartmouth Continuing Education, the Halifax Literacy Council, the Nova Scotia Hospital and Dartmouth social services.

Robert Nichols, director of Dartmouth Continuing Education says there is no way to know how many people in the city are illiterate, but he believes the problem of literacy has to be addressed.

Working towards that end, Mrs. Smart has been hired through an 11-week federal grant to act as literacy co-ordinator for the network, compiling a book which will list and describe the literacy programs in the city.

At the heart of the network are the volunteers who give of their time teaching adults to read.

Mrs. Smart says it's important to provide the right volunteer teacher with the right client – the adult who cannot read.

That's because some volunteers can bring their backgrounds to bear in teaching. Special clients – like the elderly, the mentally ill, and adults living in poverty – can benefit from volunteers who are trained to deal with those particular problems.

Thus, the book describes the various organizations available to help people.

It's necessary to have a proper bureau for volunteers to call," says Mrs. Smart, noting a bureau which would co-ordinate the volunteers and make the best use of their talents would be valuable here.

Besides getting the information for the booklet together, Mrs. Smart is helping organize Dartmouth Literacy Awareness Day on Dec. 5th in council chambers.

The day will feature a panel discussion, she says, and she hopes representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, the penal system, social services, and industry will attend.

The idea is to get people talking about the problem of literacy in Dartmouth.