



News Release

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NMCC early childhood education students launch “In Their Hands” literacy program

Aroostook County - A newly formed student group at Northern Maine Community College is taking on a project to create a unique literacy initiative for children in Aroostook County that extends beyond putting books into the hands of children.

The *In Their Hands* project, an initiative of the NMCC Early Childhood Education Student Organization, a group of twenty students working under the direction of instructor Heidi Broad-Smith, is designed to engage children, their parents, and local care providers by providing books complete with accompanying material, including related activity ideas.

“Lesson plans and activities will be prepared by our students to go along with the selected texts. Props or manipulatives to accompany the books and lessons will also be provided,” said Broad-Smith. “The thinking is that our students will create book bags containing the book, lesson plans for the teacher, and all the required material to carry out the lesson plans.”

The bags will be given to the dozen child care facilities and educational agencies around The County where NMCC students are currently placed for the hands-on component of coursework required for the ECE program. They will be available on-site for use by the teachers and child care workers, and, in many places, be available for parents to sign-out and use at home with their children.

According to Broad-Smith, the donated items will also serve as a “thank you” to the agencies that provide support to the ECE program by opening their site for NMCC student placement. The book bags will be especially meaningful as the College students will themselves create the lessons plans and accompanying activities.

“I wanted to link all parts of the ECE curriculum here at NMCC by having every student have some part in the creation of the lesson plans. Through this project, the students will have real ownership of the plans and still be in a position to share their work with ‘real kids’ and the supporting sites,” said Broad-Smith.

The NMCC students have already selected the books and are currently developing the lesson plans and activity guides that will complete the book bags. Upon completion, the material will be delivered to the childcare and educational facilities.

“Our plans are to bring the books and materials to each center and read the book and then do the projects with the children at the site. We will then leave the book bag behind at the center for future use,” said Charity Keenan of Presque Isle, an ECE student participating in the project. “We are hoping the activities get children excited about reading by getting them involved in the story.”

Keenan and her fellow classmates participating in the *In Their Hands* project are excited about the opportunity to both give back to the community and work on a project that will have impact in childcare centers throughout the region.

“I am excited about it,” said Kimberly Jandreau of Fort Fairfield. “This is a great opportunity for all of us involved in the ECE program to take what we learn and use it to benefit others. I hope the children will look at books more often and that teachers and parents will be encouraged to read to their children more.”

The concept for the *In Their Hands* project is the result of a brainstorming session between Broad-Smith and her son Stephen Smith, a junior at Bowdoin College in Brunswick.

The two were following up on a discussion and classroom assignment centering on social justice that emanated from a class of Stephen’s taught by Bowdoin Professor Doris Santoro-Gomez.

“Our thoughts centered on literacy and creating an on-going program to help the children and teachers at the site placements,” said Stephen Smith. “Success depends on the ability to read from an early age. *In Their Hands* is dedicated to providing all students an avenue to succeed in reading, to succeed in life-long learning, and to be excited about reading.”

To ensure the project concept became reality Stephen enlisted the help of his housemates at Bowdoin’s Howell House, a campus residential facility. The students raised \$433.75 for the project, and presented the money to the NMCC Early Childhood Education Student Organization to purchase the books for *In Their Hands*.

“Ideally, we want to be able to continue to provide more funding for this program as a house,” said Stephen Smith.

For now, NMCC ECE students are working with the generous donation they have received to purchase the books and get the new program off the ground.

“The students will walk away with an understanding that a sense of collegiality needs to exist in the field of child care and education. The whole idea of ‘it takes a village,’ encompasses not just the schools, but the care and education that children receive prior to ever walking through the doors of formal schooling. The connections or network (as it is called in the business world) needs to exist between care providers as well. The NMCC campus can serve as a great central hub for this kind of networking opportunity for students in the field,” said Broad-Smith.

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Stephen Smith of Blaine (left), a junior at Bowdoin College, presents a check for \$433.75 to Northern Maine Community College early childhood education program students (left to right) Christy Bartlett of Presque Isle, Christina Merrill of Cary Plantation, and Suqi Yu of Presque Isle. The money, raised by Bowdoin students who reside in Howell House, a campus residence facility, will be used to launch the **In Their Hands** project, a new literacy initiative coordinated by NMCC ECE students.