



L'accueil chaleureux

A two-year CPF initiative in BC supports new FSL teachers socially and culturally

Situated on the beautiful east coast of Vancouver Island is the seaside city of Campbell River, a gateway to British Columbia's many outdoor adventures. With a population of under 40,000, the community has a friendly small-town vibe. It has also become an epicentre of an initiative launched by Canadian Parents for French, BC & Yukon branch, to help address a significant French language teacher shortage in the province.

With the participation of the Government of Canada and the Ministry of Education and Child Care of British Columbia, **L'accueil chaleureux** is a two-year project aimed at retaining French second language teachers who are in their first three years in a community. Out of the 24 school districts with teachers who have signed up so far, Campbell River has the largest contingent.

A dozen of the 80 FSL teachers who have joined the project since November 2022 work in the city touted as the "Salmon Capital of the World". **L'accueil chaleureux** is intended to help those teachers feel better connected socially and culturally in their new home communities.

"We were able to organise a large social with all the new teachers from one elementary school," explains Shaun



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Scandrett, treasurer with the volunteer CPF chapter in Campbell River. “They had a chance to connect and relax outside of the regular school setting. It is building a sense of community that will keep a new teacher around, and their peers are the best place to start that.”

Social & Cultural Connections

L'accueil chaleureux includes two components, each of which provides funding to support activities to help retain teachers who are new to a school district.

A ‘social connection’ component provides funding to volunteer chapters to welcome teachers. Community hosts offer to meet with new teachers to introduce them to the community—helping to make social connections and show them what makes the area a special place to live. Every time a volunteer meets with a teacher, the chapter gets \$100 to either cover the cost of the outing or to save for a future French language activity.

“It was lovely to meet the (CPF) members,” says Kim Ethier, a Port Alberni teacher who connected with local chapter volunteers as part of the project. “They were wonderful and are very passionate about French in the school system.”

The ‘cultural connection’ component provides a grant to support new teachers to organize a French language activity for their class, school, or community. Eligible teachers can access up to \$1,000 towards the cost, and they can utilize CPF staff

assistance to coordinate everything. By supporting teachers to put on an event, CPF hopes to improve their confidence and enthusiasm for teaching French.

“I think it's very important to have activities where we help students feel confident and safe speaking the language they are learning and have fun doing so,” notes Ingrid Broussillon of Griottes Polyglottes, which provided improv workshops in schools in Maple Ridge through CPF’s teacher retention project. “(The students) enjoy more what they are learning and can apply it right away.”

Key Strategy

Both components of the project are focused on retention, a key strategy in the effort to address the shortage of French language teachers. In British Columbia, there is no definitive data to describe the extent of the teacher shortage. But examples of the effect of the shortage can be found at schools throughout the province. In 2021, *L'Association canadienne des professionnels de l'immersion* (ACPI) and the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) identified a deficit of nearly 10,000 qualified FSL teachers to meet the demand across the country.

While recruitment and training can help increase the number of available teachers, surveys indicate many teachers in their first few years are questioning their future or even leaving their jobs.

A CASLT study released in 2023 revealed more than half of participating FSL teachers were considering leaving the profession.

“Teachers who leave their positions for a variety of reasons add to the challenge of maintaining and growing French education programs in our public school districts,” says CPF BC and Yukon branch President Alex Hughes. “This project gives us an opportunity to work with our volunteers to let those teachers know they are valued.”

Momentum

It took a few months of regular and persistent communications to get the word out and encourage teachers to sign up, with 85% of registrants having enlisted between April and December 2023.

Teachers’ and volunteers’ busy schedules have created another challenge in scheduling activities. That feedback led CPF to assign a coordinator to look after event logistics. The coordinator has also created a list of options for activities that teachers can consider.

With the project currently funded until the end of the 2023-2024 school year, the CPF branch and its volunteers are focused on taking advantage of the opportunity to welcome new FSL teachers and help them organize unique activities for their students. ■