

# Oceanside Building Learning Together



## The BLT Tree: Year End Manager's Report 2014/2015

*Oceanside Building Learning Together Society believes in enhancing life-long learning by supporting strong family relationships and building community capacity through effective learning opportunities.*





*Roots, trunk and branches, leaves and flowers. If BLT were a tree, how tall would we be? How strong is our structure? Do we have knots in our wood? Do we shade the ground with our many leaves and flowers? Do we stand alone or are we a part of a forest?*

*The following pages include:*

***The Roots*** – *Where have we been and how are we formed?*

***The Trunk & Branches*** – *Where do we get our stability and connections?*

***The Leaves & Flowers*** – *How do we measure the fruits of our efforts?*

***The Forest-*** *Can we see the forest for the trees?*



## The Roots ~ Where have we been and how are we formed?

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As the new manager since June 23, 2014, I have journeyed through a vast amount of learning and change. Much of my understandings has been through listening and paying attention to the climates around BLT. I was very fortunate to have the trust, support and guidance of school district administration. I quickly became impressed with the staff and their expertise and passion for BLT. Our community partners also had a big impact on me. Over the year I developed a sense of belonging and synchronicity with them. Most of all, I was amazed at the dedication of some of our volunteers including those on the board for the years and years that they have made BLT a priority. They have formed many of the roots for BLT. A few of them will be performing a “letting go” as they retire from their volunteer life. That commitment will be hard to duplicate.

REAL LEARNING IS A PART OF CREATING RELATIONSHIPS”

~Lorraine Seline, Wow Bus Coordinator

With all of the people I have just mentioned, I have formed relationships. I truly believe that that is how BLT roots have been formed.....through relationships. The path of relationship building started many years ago, so those roots have had time to take hold and nurture the BLT tree. As the quote below underlines: it would be hard to learn without having relationship, and conversely, it is hard to have relationship without learning. Relationships form roots.

“A TREE WITH STRONG ROOTS LAUGHS AT STORMS”

~ Malay Proverb

My goal for BLT from the beginning was about sustainability – keeping those roots strong. How can we continue to do what we already do so well without having to apply for more and more grants and create more programs to accommodate those grants? As I have learned, we still need grants, as well as donations and fundraising efforts, but we also need to thoroughly support our existing programs and have our fingers on the pulse of what is needed in the community when it comes to learning and literacy.

## The Trunk and Branches ~ Where do we get our stability and connections?



School District 69 is an integral contributor to our stability. We would not be able to provide free early learning drop in programs without them. They were a part of the roots, and have continued to provide the strength and viability in our “trunk”. The staff who work in our programs offer stability. They are passionate and caring about BLT and what it offers. Our Community partners also provide the steadiness needed for the BLT tree as do the recipients our programs. We learn from all of the parents, children and seniors who continue to show support and gratitude for what we do in the community. Our BLT tree continues to grow stronger. We do not have to bend as much in windy times.

This past year we have listened to each other and paid attention to community needs. Early on, we were able to add space to Qualicum Beach Munchkinland (QBML) by requesting the adjoining empty classroom. This prompted a number of grant applications to upgrade the existing QBML and to outfit the new area to reflect the renovated space.

Storybook Village and Alphabet Gardens were needing attention. Again, we see how stability and sustainability is needed. How do we those programs healthy, and does the community actually want to? Through a community meeting, the answers came to us: Yes! Keep Storybook Village; we just need to figure out how. It will take a community to help our village. Due to the wear and tear and fewer children at the now re-invented school building, the BLT board of directors made the decision to dismantle Alphabet Gardens to make way for something new. Sometimes, in growth, there is also change.

The BLT Coalition of Community Partners has had many round table discussions this year with a common theme of connecting in a digital world. Many community programs witness parents or caregivers either using a device to placate a child or use a device instead of playing or engaging with a child. This prompted an exploration of Heart Mind Wellness. Through the Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education, and with the support of part of a grant through the School District, we were able to sponsor a community workshop on the subject. That important and inspiring conversation still continues.



Community collaboration is a powerful thing and BLT was built on it! BLT was fortunate enough to participate in a program in Errington for vulnerable children who attend that community's school. We brought our BLT2Go bus, and through the language of music, were able to be a part of a unique after school project. This will continue into the next year with the help of a portion of the Community Gaming Grant.

Prior to my arrival, a New Horizons Grant for Seniors was successfully applied for and from that emerged the "My Story" project. Initially, there were challenges with delegation of duties for the project, but with the help a few dedicated staff, we were able to forge ahead, adapting and learning as we went. The end result was a great video series, a book, and many seniors finding interesting ways to tell their fascinating stories.

Other new endeavors include a very improved and re-invented website. It has a very clear calendar for our programs and we can now accept donations online. For the first time we held a Family Night in Family Place Munchkinland (MLFP) to celebrate Family Day. It was a great success and will be repeated again.

It was a busy and fulfilling year for me and for BLT. As we look ahead, I see continuity in what we are doing, the promise of some of our dreams and excitement of potential new growth stemming from our trunk and branches.

"TO BE ABLE TO WALK UNDER THE BRANCHES OF A TREE  
THAT YOU HAVE PLANTED IS REALLY TO FEEL YOU HAVE  
ARRIVED WITH YOUR GARDEN."

~ Mirabel Osler

## The Leaves and Flowers ~ How do we measure the fruits of our efforts?

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Have we arrived with our garden? How do we know? We know that free drop in early learning programs in the Oceanside community has increased substantially compared to 15 years ago when BLT first pioneered their Early Learning initiatives. We know that attendance in our programs continues to rise despite the many options out there. We also know that kids are still showing many vulnerabilities once they show up for kindergarten. How can we help? We need to keep asking questions, joining together with other service providers and community partners and meeting needs as they arise.

Our leaves and flowers show our health and provide some of what the communities families need. Under our canopy of leaves and flowers there is a place to play, to learn, to grow and to become.

## The Forest ~ Can we see the forest for the trees?

“LISTEN TO THE TREES TALKING IN THEIR SLEEP, SHE  
WHISPERED, AS HE LIFTED HER TO THE GROUND. WHAT  
NICE DREAMS THEY MUST HAVE!”  
~ LM Montgomery, Anne Of Green Gables

When we see needs, we start to dream. What can our tree bear? How can we fit into this community, this forest of families and seniors? Who are we missing? Who would access us if we changed the way we do things? To meet needs we need to consider to branch out by:

- ❖ Offering workshops in TLC on Saturdays
- ❖ Take BLT2Go to the Library on Saturdays
- ❖ Have a BLT Breakfast and Play on Saturdays
- ❖ Take the WOW bus to the Salvation Army Soup Kitchen
- ❖ Create Welcome to Kindergarten events with kindergarten teachers
- ❖ Create a cross generational music festival experience

..... And more!

All of this requires funding, some more than others. There are a few missing links, and always goals to work on. Strategic plans and fundraising plans need to be developed to give that stability that trees like to have and to promote the growth that trees like to do. It is time to check in with our community. A survey would help us find out about what is working and not working for the families including youth and seniors in Oceanside. By doing this, we would provide the fertile ground from which we would continue to flourish and subsequently nurture our surrounding forest: the community of Oceanside.

Respectfully submitted,

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Literacy Outreach Coordinator

