

Celebrating literacy and Mi'kmaq History Month with first Mi'kmaq board book for babies

(Halifax October 2, 2009) - In celebration of Mi'kmaq History Month, the Read to Me! Program launched the Mi'kmaq version of Sheree Fitch's popular baby book *Kisses Kisses Baby O!*, translated by Mi'kmaq linguist Bernie Francis, and the Mi'kmaq edition of the Read to Me! bag at Indian Brook House of Learning today. The Mi'kmaq bag contains *Weska'qelmut Apje'juanu* (*Kisses, Kisses Baby O!*) and other books and reading resources for Mi'kmaq families. *Weska'qelmut Apje'juanu* is the very first Mi'kmaq board book for babies.

"It is important that our literacy resources reflect the diversity of culture and language in Nova Scotia," says Carol McDougall, Director of the Read to Me! Program. "I am excited to add the Mi'kmaq bag to our growing collection of literacy resources."

"It's incredibly important to have books in Mi'kmaq to help maintain our language and culture," says Francis. "Sheree's book provides a good foundation for early literacy for Mi'kmaq families."

Since 2008, this book has been provided with sponsorship from the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union and is now available in three languages: English, French and Mi'kmaq.

"The teachers of Nova Scotia understand how important it is to root education in culture," says NSTU president Alexis Allen. "We're proud to be a part of enhancing early literacy in the Mi'kmaq language and our continued support of increasing literacy rates in Nova Scotia."

"We recognize the health, education and social benefits of early literacy," says NSNU president, Janet Hazelton. "Literacy is an important determinant of health, and nurses in Nova Scotia are very pleased to offer continued support of the Read to Me! Program and the legacy of long-term health benefits it can provide to our communities."

Fitch and Francis read *Weska'qelmut Apje'juanu*, (*Kisses Kisses Baby O!*) to a class as part of the celebration. Indian Brook Mi'kmaq Elder Ellen Robinson began the event with an opening prayer, followed by the singing of the honour song by Indian Brook students. Sister Dorothy Moore, a Mi'kmaq Elder from Membertou and a member of the Read to Me! Mi'kmaq Advisory Committee presented the first Mi'kmaq Read to Me! bag to families in attendance.

Through the Read to Me! Nova Scotia Family Literacy Program, the family of every baby born in Nova Scotia receives a free bag of books and literacy resources at the hospital bedside. The program encourages parents to talk, read and sing to their babies to support early language development and nurture a love of reading. Since the launch of the program in 2002, Read to Me! has distributed 57,000 bags.

Kisses Kisses Baby-O! is completely homegrown. It was written by local author Sheree Fitch, illustrated by local artist HildaRose, published by Nova Scotian publisher Nimbus Press and supported by both the Nova Scotia Teachers Union and the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union.

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