



# READ *expands*

By HUGH NASH  
Gazette staff writer

Approximately 10 per cent of all Canadians have some sort of learning difficulty. Just under 30 per cent of Canadian adults have less than grade nine literacy skills.

Members of the Victoria Reading Evaluation And Development Society (R.E.A.D.) are doing what they can to reduce these percentages by providing specialized, individual attention to both students and adults.

R.E.A.D. opened their third office in September. It's upstairs, via a rear entrance, above the Westbrook Shopping Centre on Goldstream Avenue. The other two offices are in Victoria and Sidney.

The two teachers at the Langford office, Lina Farrar, a R.E.A.D. founder, and Sandi Mikuse now have close to 25 students ranging in age from six to 40. Farrar says they could take about 15 more themselves and, if enrollment went above that, they would draw on R.E.A.D.'s part time teaching staff to help.

R.E.A.D. is holding an open house January 26, 4-5:30 p.m., to acquaint parents, local teachers and anyone else interested with the Society's services.

The classrooms are two big but sparsely furnished rooms. On the walls is the usual collection of cards and posters found in most elementary school classrooms. A few bookshelves stand on the

One room is a spare. The other contains a screen dividing one end into two 'classrooms' each containing only a table and couple of chairs. Nothing fancy.

The teacher sits opposite her student. The blackboard is a sheet of plastic on the table between them. Felt pens are used instead of chalk and a sponge, not a brush, rubs the 'board' clean.

The teachers can print upside down as quickly and easily as right side up. In addition to the usual books and notebooks, on the table is a die which the students use to roll the degree of difficulty for words in a spelling lesson. A four gets a word from the grade four list.

A three-minute egg timer puts a little stress on a student when he's asked to complete a few questions before the sand runs out.

"Yes, that's good Robert. Very good. Now you've got it," says Farrar over and over, positively reinforcing virtually every bit of progress Robert makes. The words he misses in a reading lesson are written down on tiny flash cards. These are reviewed when the reading is

over.

Classes are usually only one or two students. Only on rare occasions are there three students in a class. The service is not cheap. Two hours a week cost \$124 a month and three hours of class time a week cost \$186 a month.

Usually the extra tuition costs are paid by the student or their parents, but in other cases government agencies or service clubs pick up the tab.

Individual attention, and working on coping strategies geared to help the student, are the keys to overcoming a variety of learning problems such as listening difficulties, poor memory and inability to recall sequences, Farrar says. "We review, and review and review."

Although most of R.E.A.D.'s students are school children with whom R.E.A.D. teachers work to bring their reading and/or arithmetic skills up to the required level, some are adults.

One adult student came to R.E.A.D. because he wanted to be able to read newspapers; another because he ran a small business, couldn't read, and needed to be able to. Faking it wasn't working any longer.

People who can't read develop coping strategies such as spelling phonetically, reading only the words they know but picking up the meaning of a passage extremely well, or just plain guessing.

"One man always patted his chest when he was stumped," Farrar said. "He was pretending to search for his glasses, but he didn't have any. He had used the excuse 'I'd read it but I forgot my glasses' so often that he patted his chest automatically whenever he didn't know a word."

Farrar started teaching marginally educated students 25 years ago in Scotland and has specialized in problem students both there and in Canada ever since.

"I wouldn't go back to regular teaching for anything," she says. "What I'm doing now is much more likely to produce results."