

# Team Spirit

*When parents and teachers work together, everybody wins — especially the children.*

by Abby Armstrong

In 1995, with the active encouragement of the principal, several parents founded a parent council at my children's school, Huron Centennial in Brucefield, Ont. Our school is a smallish, very rural school, all the students being bused in.

Right from the start, our parent council made a big effort to reach out to the principal and teachers at the school. Teachers were included in all our meetings, and we made it clear that we were there to support their work with our children in any way we could.

The parents who made up the council had many interests, one of which was primary reading. There was a general feeling that this was an area where things could be improved.

One of our teachers had a friend in the Dufferin board who was using a program called *Open Court* with good results. It sounded wonderful, and so after discussion, our principal arranged a visit to the school in Grand Valley, Ontario. As a group (parents and staff), we were invited to sit in on classes and meet with the principal to discuss their experiences with the program and the innovative way they had scheduled their school to make the best use of the program.

As one of those who went, I can attest that we were simply blown away by what we saw at Grand Valley. The children were engaged, happy, and achieving at phenomenal levels — and so were the teachers! We all knew right away that we wanted *Open Court* for Huron Centennial.

Because *Open Court* is not on *Circular 14*, the province's list of approved texts, our principal had to approach the school board to get permission to use the program. Permission was duly granted — but not funding! Even the province's extra money for textbooks wouldn't have helped us, because of the *Circular 14* problem. We had to come up with the money ourselves.

First off, we negotiated a deal with the publisher whereby we got the texts for half price. But we still needed to come up with roughly \$6000. Even though we all hated fundraising, we held our noses and raised the money.

Almost more exciting than the improvement in the children's reading has been the enhancement of the team spirit in the school. The teachers, for example, organized a raffle and donated the entire proceeds to the school council to spend as they saw fit.

None of this would have happened without the whole-hearted participation of everyone involved — the parents, the teachers, and the principal. We make a great team!

by Bill Marsh

I am a grade 2 teacher at Huron Centennial School, and I am in my third year of using the *Open Court* program.

Up until just over two years ago, our school's primary reading program was probably pretty typical for Ontario. Each teacher had developed his or her own program and we were operating more or less independently of each other. We were all working really hard and doing our best, but we just weren't seeing the results that we would have liked.

When we heard about a school in Grand Valley

that was using a good program, we decided to go for a visit. We all liked what we saw, and so we asked the parent council if they could raise enough money to buy the *Open Court* materials. They were obliging enough to agree to do so.

In August of 1997, the primary teachers had a one-day training session, and the next month we started implementing the new program. Of course, my class hadn't had the benefit of the *Open Court*

program in kindergarten and grade 1, and consequently I had to use a special transition kit for the first four months.

Even at that, I noticed a big difference in the children. Their reading was better — more fluent and expressive, and they had better comprehension. Their writing improved as well, especially their spelling. And possibly the biggest difference of all was how much they loved to read. In fact, sometimes they are so engrossed in their reading that I have to ask them two or three times to put their books away.

The *Open Court* program is not the only programming we use. There are still a few children who struggle with reading and they receive additional help from the resource teachers. As well, the program involves a lot of hard work and co-ordination on the part of all the teachers.

But overall, everyone concerned is delighted — the parents, the teachers, the principal, and the children. In the words of my Wednesday volunteer: "I can't get over how the children can read at this school."

