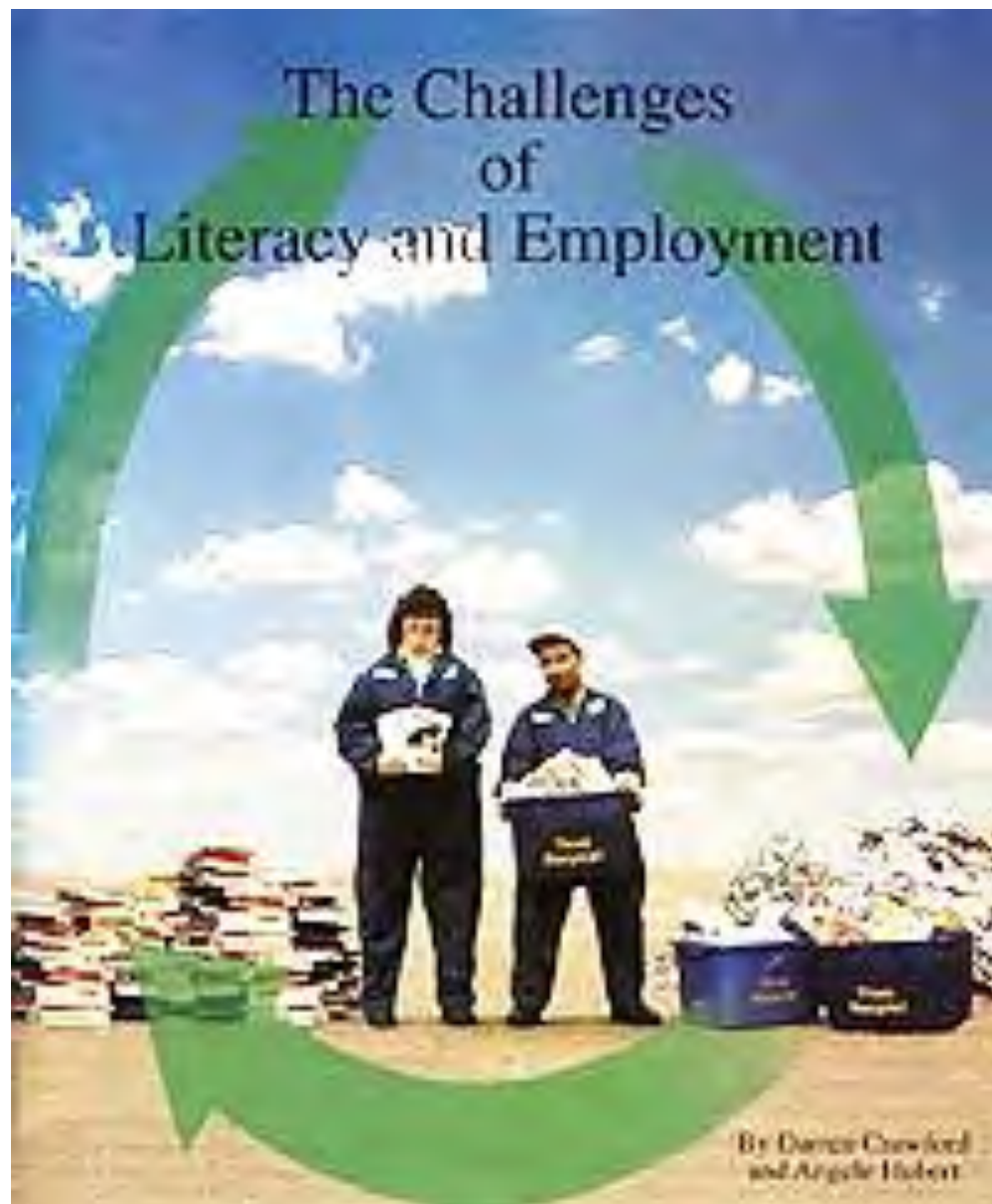


The Challenges of Literacy and Employment



By Darcia Crawford
and Angela Hubert

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The Challenges of Literacy and Employment

by
Darren Crawford and Angele Hubert

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Cover design by Steven Nederveen**



Literacy and employment. The two sort of go together don't they - like a good book and an easy chair, or the newspaper and a cup of coffee.

My name is Susan Devins. I am a literacy coordinator with Prospects Literacy Association. I recently had the opportunity to work with two people, Darren and Angele, for whom the relationship between literacy and employment is not nearly so comfortable. It is a challenge.



This is a book about Darren and Angele meeting that challenge. As you read along, you will find that they are two people who are as uniquely different as the books they read. Yet they are similar in three ways. They are both adults with disabilities, they both work at the Edmonton Recycling Society (ERS) in Edmonton, Alberta, and they are both students at Prospects, where they learn reading writing and mathematics.



They have written these stories with their own words. Words that reflect desire, frustration, hope anger, and excitement.



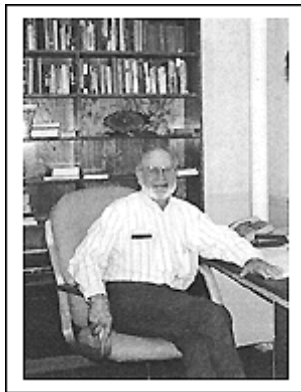
Words that define the emotions of two people who see literacy and employment as a challenge.



My name is Darren. I am a sorter on the line. I help bale mixed wastepaper, plastic, magazines, and milk jugs. It is hard work.



I was in the community hours program and I decided to work off my hours at ERS. I learned my lesson and that is how I got hired at ERS.



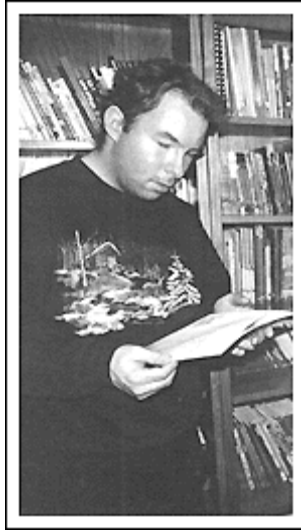
I don't see myself working there my whole life. My big goal is to become a counsellor to help out handicapped people. Peter is the counsellor at work. see him every week. He helps me with a lot of things. I think what he does is important.



I think I could help people by showing them how to do things like coping with stress and dealing with other people.



I think handicapped people are treated like garbage. I see it every day. People put them down as if they have a disease. Handicapped people don't have a disease, they are just like you and me. I think they are special because they do things that other people don't do.



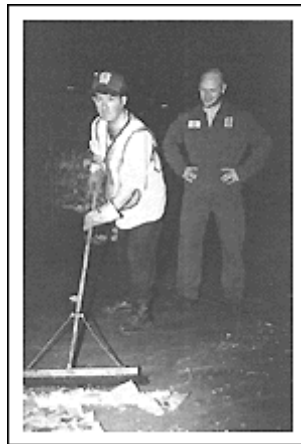
I have Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. That's not a disease. That's reality. I got it from my parents. Now I have to deal with it.



I get very angry. I have mood swings. It affects my job because I work on a team. When you work on a team, you can't be thinking about you as an individual. You have to think of the team.



Cornelius is my boss. He is a very smart man. He knows what he is doing and he knows what to do with waste in the plant. He tells us how to do a better job and *we feel* good about ourselves.



Lyle is my supervisor. We work good together and we have fun, and he talks to me when I have a problem. He is funny. Sometimes he can be very strict.



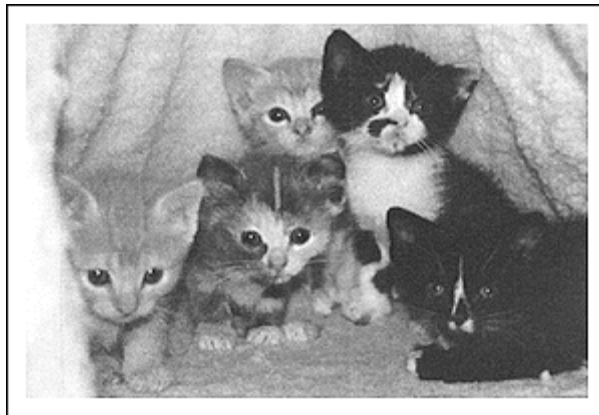
I get support at work. Elsie, who is the coordinator of production, has been supportive of me living on my own. She has helped me keep a positive attitude on life. She keeps me on my toes all the time. I am lucky in have her in my corner



The people at ERS helped me buy a condominium with my own money. I love it. I am lucky to be living in my home with my girlfriend. My girlfriend's name is Dianne. We went out for five years and now we are living together.



We love each other very much. We will be getting married in July, 1996. If it wasn't for Dianne, I don't know where I'd be.



We have a cat named Dede and she just had five kittens.



I see writing as a support for me. I would like to write a story in the Edmonton Journal. It would be about the way handicapped people are treated so poorly.

I would write it to open people's eyes.

It would be explosive



The thing I would like to tell other people is, "Look at yourself before you look at others."



I can't write that yet though. I am not comfortable enough with my writing yet. I need more time. I have to practice more.



Susan makes me practice more. She is good to me. She makes me feel that I belong here. We do reading, writing, and math together. We play games with fake money so I can learn more about it. Those are my favorite. If I learn more about money, I can become more independent.



I think learning to write better is very important. Maybe it would help me get over some of these things. I would get along with others at work better.



I get excited when I think about reading and writing. I would like to be a counsellor someday and I think writing would help me.



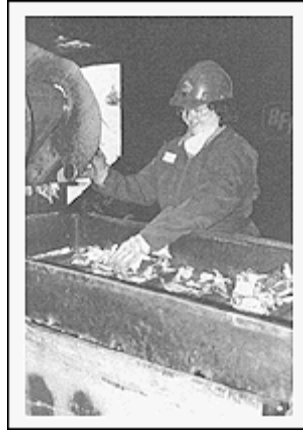
I don't want handicapped people to feel as bad as I do sometimes.

I want them to feel as good as I do sometimes.



My name is Angele. I have been working at ERS for five years. I go to work on my own sometimes. I feel good about that.

I have to keep my mind on my job, work fast and get along with everyone else.



I work on a line that separates aluminum and steel with a magnet. It's very noisy! We have to wear earplugs, gloves, coveralls, a hard hat, safety glasses, a mask and safety boots.



I get along well with my supervisors and I try to do my job well. I love coming to work every day because I want to help get all the work done and I like talking to other people here. It's the friends I have here. They make it easier for me. They know I have difficulties and they don't make fun of them.



I live at home. I pay room and board to my parents. I clean my bedroom and my t.v. room in the basement and wash the sheets. My mom does the cooking, but sometimes I help. I look for recipes we can make.



My family is wonderful. My mom is a piano teacher. My dad does many different things. He was involved in setting up ERS. My family enjoys camping in the mountains. We do a lot of hiking when we're there and play games around the camp fire in the evenings.



Tansy is my dog. She is black with white on her front, her paws, and the tip of her tail. She barks a lot at cats and dogs.

My sister's name is Laurel. She likes to read a lot.



I would like to read as much as Laurel. I would like to read to the little kids at my church. I would read bible stories and other books. Once a month I look after the little children when the parents go into the service.



I want to get better at reading so I don't stumble over the words. I have a tutor at Prospects. Her name is Anita. I like her. We do lots of reading together.



Reading restaurant menus is difficult for me. I always have to have someone read it out loud. If you want to rent a movie and you want to read what it's about - that's difficult for me. Just to read the movie title. I just give up. I also want to read the newspaper and books so I know what's going on.



I am reading more now. I am practicing. My family is happy that I am starting to read more.



Writing letters is hard for me. I say it and my mother writes it out for me. Then I copy it. I want that to change.

I would like to write more letters to my brother and to Rosy, a girl I sponsor in Calcutta, India. Every Christmas Rosy sends me a pretty Christmas card. I would like to write her more letters.



I always wanted to go to a different school like my brother and friends. I went to a special school L.Y. Cairns - a school for people with disabilities.

I feel mad and sad at how people treat me. I do not have the same chances. I get tongue-tied and can't say what I want.



Without school and work my life would be boring. People who don't work or go to school sit at home and do nothing. They don't get satisfaction from working.



I think it is worthwhile to develop my literacy skills. It would make my mom's life easier because I could do more things by myself. But I like where I am right now.



With ambition and enthusiasm, Darren and Angele have taken on the challenges of literacy and employment, and they feel good about it.

Through pride and satisfaction in their work with an innovative employer - Edmonton Recycling Society -they are developing skills and attitudes necessary for success in the workplace.

Through goal setting and with help from tutors and staff at Prospects Literacy Association, they hope to gain further skills that will help them to lead independent and fulfilling lives.



Way to go Darren and Angele! Thank you for telling us your stories.