

# Painting a picture of literacy

**Literacy —  
why it matters!**



**REVISED  
FEBRUARY  
2013**

## 20 Reasons Why Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Programs Matter:

- 1 Literacy: a critical issue for Ontario
- 2 Employment
- 3 Unemployment
- 4 Poverty
- 5 Income
- 6 Access to education & training
- 7 Lifelong learning
- 8 Health
- 9 Civic engagement
- 10 New Canadians
- 11 Families
- 12 Youth
- 13 Seniors
- 14 The digital divide
- 15 Justice
- 16 The economy
- 17 The economic downturn
- 18 The labour market of the future
- 19 Skill shortages
- 20 Workplace health & safety



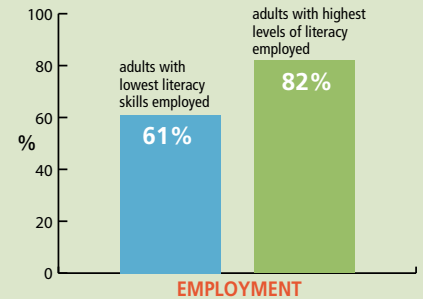
## 20 REASONS Why Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Programs Matter:

### 1 Literacy: A CRITICAL ISSUE FOR ONTARIO

Literacy is an essential foundational skill in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ontario. However, in our province, 42% of adults do not have the literacy skills they need for home, work and life. In fact, 1.3 million people (16% of Ontarians) struggle with very serious literacy challenges and have trouble reading even the most basic text. Another 2.1 million people (26%) can read but not well enough to meet the demands of today's society. As well, in 2011, 22.4% of Canadians between the ages of 25 to 64 did not have a high school diploma.<sup>1</sup>

### 2 Literacy and EMPLOYMENT

People with low literacy skills have much lower rates of employment. In Ontario, just 61% of adults with the lowest literacy levels are employed while 82% of people with the highest levels of literacy are in the workforce.<sup>2</sup>

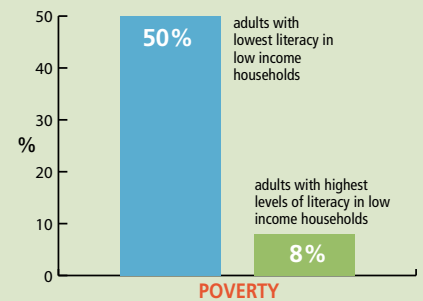


### 3 Literacy and UNEMPLOYMENT

People with low literacy skills are more likely to experience unemployment and they are about twice as likely to be unemployed for six months or more.<sup>3</sup>

### 4 Literacy and POVERTY

Close to 50% of adults with the lowest levels of literacy live in low income households, compared with only 8% of those with high levels of literacy.<sup>4</sup>

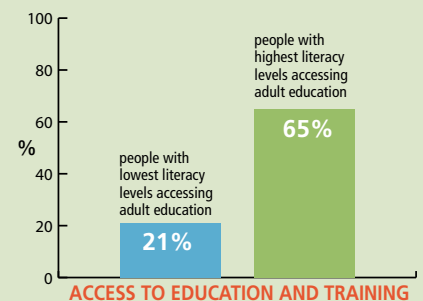


### 5 Literacy and INCOME

People with low literacy skills earn considerably less than those with high literacy skills and they are also more likely to receive social assistance from the government.<sup>5</sup>

### 6 Literacy and ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Just 21% of people with the lowest levels of literacy accessed some form of adult education and training in the year preceding the survey, compared to 65% of people with the highest levels.<sup>6</sup>



### 7 Literacy and LIFELONG LEARNING

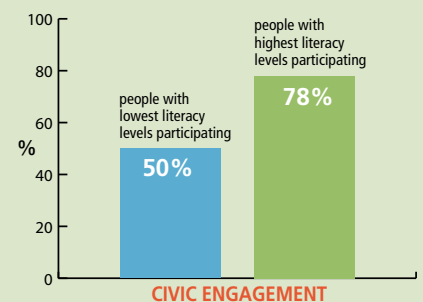
Lifelong learning is important for economic prosperity and personal growth. Raising the literacy levels of Canadians is one of the most important ways to encourage lifelong learning in our country.<sup>7</sup>

### 8 Literacy and HEALTH

Canadians with low literacy skills are more likely to suffer poorer health than Canadians with high levels of literacy and a person's level of literacy is a key determinant of overall health.<sup>8</sup>

### 9 Literacy and CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In Ontario, 50% of people with the lowest levels of literacy volunteer or participate in community groups, compared with 78% of people at the highest levels. As well, charitable giving increases with the level of education attained.<sup>9</sup>



### 10 Literacy and NEW CANADIANS

New Canadians make critical contributions to our society, culture, and economy. While many immigrants are represented at the highest levels of educational achievement, 60% of immigrants in our province have low levels of literacy in English or French.<sup>10</sup>

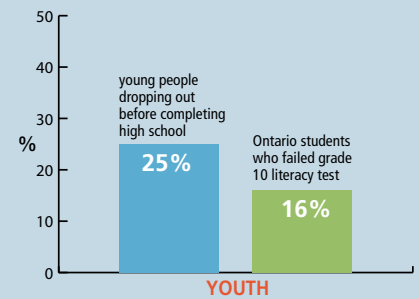


## 11 Literacy and FAMILIES

Parents play a vital role as their children's first teachers. The higher the level of a parent's education, and the more often literacy practices are embedded in daily family life, the higher the likelihood that the child will succeed in school.<sup>11</sup>

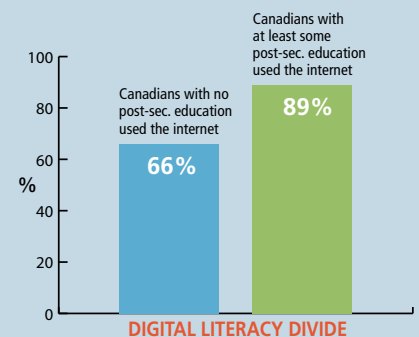
## 12 Literacy and YOUTH

The high school graduation rate in Ontario has increased from 68% in 2003–2004 to 82% in 2010–2011. However, this still means that 18% of young people dropped out before completing their high school education. In addition, 18% of Ontario students who wrote the grade 10 literacy test in the 2011–2012 school year were unsuccessful.<sup>12</sup>



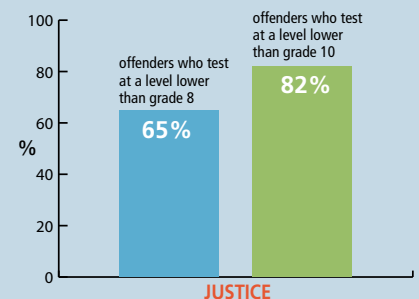
## 13 Literacy and SENIORS

In Ontario, more than 80% of seniors have low levels of literacy. This exposes them to increased health and safety risks which can result in higher health care costs and diminished quality of life. It can also reduce their ability to make informed choices about their health care, finances and other key decisions.<sup>13</sup>



## 14 Literacy and the DIGITAL DIVIDE

Canadians with lower literacy skills are significantly less likely to use computers. In 2009, 89% of Canadians with at least some post-secondary education used the Internet, compared to 66% of Canadians with no post-secondary education.<sup>14</sup>



## 15 Literacy and JUSTICE

Upon arrival at correctional institutions, approximately 65% of offenders test at a level lower than Grade 8, and 82% test lower than Grade 10.<sup>15</sup>

## 16 Literacy and the ECONOMY

Increased literacy skills are strongly linked to economic growth and prosperity. A 1% increase in literacy skills would lead to an increase of \$18.5 billion per year in Canada's GDP. Further, literacy is a key component to Canada's economic recovery and to the future prosperity of our country. Government investment in adult literacy yields substantial economic returns.<sup>16</sup>

## 17 Literacy and the ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

Lower skilled workers in Canada have been amongst the hardest hit by the economic downturn. Training and employment services should be increasingly targeted at hard-to-place job-seekers such as lower skilled workers.<sup>17</sup>

## 18 Literacy and the LABOUR MARKET OF THE FUTURE

Jobs of the future will require increasingly higher skills levels. It is estimated that by 2031, Ontario will need 77% of its workforce to have post-secondary credentials.<sup>18</sup>

## 19 Literacy and SKILL SHORTAGES

Due to our aging population and progressively lower birth rates, Ontario will experience a skill shortage in the near future. Improving literacy rates and increasing the participation rates of people currently under-represented in Ontario's labour force, such as people with low levels of literacy, will be critical to our province's future economic health.<sup>19</sup>

## 20 Literacy and WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Low literacy skills can represent a risk to workplace health and safety; however many employers are not aware that there are any literacy skills issues amongst their workforce.<sup>20</sup>



## An Overview of Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Program

**Literacy matters in Ontario!** Literacy skills are needed every day — at work, at home, at school, and in the community. However, 42% of Ontarians do not have the literacy skills they need for home, work and life.

In response, the Ontario government, through Employment Ontario, funds the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program. The program serves adults who want to improve their literacy and numeracy skills to achieve their goals of post-secondary education and training, employment, apprenticeship, secondary school credit or independence. The LBS program is part of Employment Ontario. In 2011-2012, over 60,000 adults received LBS services in over 300 program sites all across this province.

Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs are also funded in part by the Federal Government under the Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement (LMA). Federal LMA funds are used to provide increased opportunities for vulnerable groups in the labour market; in particular to serve unemployed individuals who are not EI clients, or employed individuals who have low levels of literacy. In 2012-13, roughly 22 per cent of the funding for LBS programming will come to Ontario through the federal LMA agreement. The LMA is a vital source of funding to support the literacy skills for those Ontarians most in need and continued LMA funding from the Federal Government is crucial.

The LBS program is delivered by three sectors: community-based agencies, school boards, and colleges. It supports literacy upgrading for adult learners in four streams: English language, Francophone, Native, and Deaf. Each of these sectors and streams brings their unique strengths and together we effectively serve the diverse needs of adult literacy learners in Ontario.

### Sources

1. Statistics Canada, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003 and HRSDC educational attainment calculations based on Statistics Canada data, 2012.
2. Statistics Canada, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003.
3. Statistics Canada, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003.
4. Statistics Canada, "The Value of Words: Literacy and Economic Security in Canada," 1998.
5. Statistics Canada, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003.
6. Statistics Canada, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003.
7. Council of Ministers of Education, Canada's "Learn Canada 2020 Report", 2008.
8. Canadian Public Health Association, "A Vision for a Health Literate Canada: Report of the Expert Panel on Health Literacy", 2008.
9. Statistics Canada, Canadian Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2009 and Statistics Canada, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003.
10. Statistics Canada, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003.
11. Statistics Canada, "Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey", 2005.
12. Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012 and the Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2012.
13. Statistics Canada, International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, 2003.
14. Statistics Canada, Canadian Internet Use Survey, 2009.
15. Correctional Services of Canada's website, "Overview of Education and Employment Programs", 2010.
16. Statistics Canada, "Literacy Scores, Human Capital and Growth Across 14 OECD Countries", 2004 and the Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 97<sup>th</sup> CMEC Meeting, March 2010.
17. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD Employment Outlook 2010.
18. "People Without Jobs; Jobs Without People: Ontario's Labour Market Future", Miner Management Consultants, 2010.
19. "People Without Jobs; Jobs Without People: Ontario's Labour Market Future", Miner Management Consultants, 2010.
20. Conference Board of Canada's Report "Literacy's Impact on Workplace Health and Safety", 2010.

Literacy instruction is free and is provided through a variety of methods including classroom, small group, one-to-one tutoring, and online learning. LBS programming is delivered under the new Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework or OALCF.

In order to help adult learners meet their goals, Ontario's literacy agencies work closely with diverse community stakeholders (such as social and employment service providers, Ontario Works, other education providers, employers and service clubs).

Community Literacy of Ontario is pleased to paint a picture of literacy: lifelong learning, health, poverty, employment, the economy, civic engagement, seniors, families ... these are issues the people of Ontario care deeply about and issues which also impact our province in profound ways.

"Literacy: Why it Matters" is freely available online at:  
[www.nald.ca/clo/resource/literacy\\_why\\_it\\_matters.pdf](http://www.nald.ca/clo/resource/literacy_why_it_matters.pdf)

For more information visit:

- Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' "Literacy in Ontario: The Rewards are for Life": [www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/literacy/ontliteracy/ont\\_lit.html](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/training/literacy/ontliteracy/ont_lit.html)
- To find your local LBS agency, search the Employment Ontario website for "Literacy and Basic Skills": [www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/search.asp](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/search.asp)
- Community Literacy of Ontario's website: [www.nald.ca/clo](http://www.nald.ca/clo)
- ABC Life Literacy Canada's "Literacy Facts and Myths": <http://abclifeliteracy.ca/literacy-facts-statistics-and-myths>
- For links to Ontario's literacy networks and support organizations see: [www.essentialskillsontario.ca/essential-skills/skills-delivery](http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/essential-skills/skills-delivery)

*"The literacy program has helped me to start my education again giving me the confidence to start over."*

— Quote from an adult learner in a community-based LBS program