

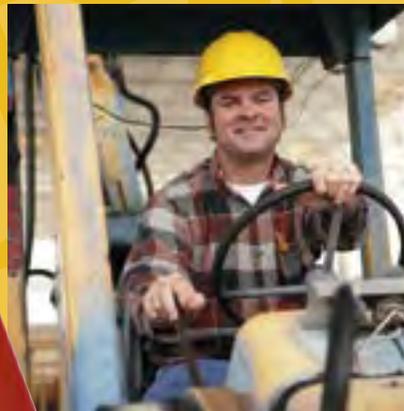


Literacy Works!

The Foundation
of a Healthy
Economy in
Northern Ontario

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- Benefits of a Workplace Literacy Program
- How to Organize a Workplace Education Program
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Literacy is...

... defined as “using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential”. This includes the knowledge and skills required/needed to:

- Understand and use information from company brochures, instruction manuals, newspaper articles
- Locate and use information contained in various formats i.e. job applications, transportation schedules, maps, tables and charts
- Effectively manage the mathematical demands of diverse situations i.e. working with numbers
- Effectively implement the process of problem solving (identify the problem, develop and/or apply the appropriate solutions).



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On November 16th, 2006, the Honourable Minister, Chris Bentley, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities announced two new initiatives: academic upgrading for adults and the launch of Celebrating Literacy, a community-based project that will champion adult literacy. In 2006-07, the McGuinty government will invest close to \$70 million in literacy programming. Celebrating Literacy promotes the benefits of adult literacy in the community by bringing together literacy program providers, employers, unions and learners to develop local campaigns raising awareness of the value of literacy in building healthy communities and a healthy economy.

In Northern Ontario, Celebrating Literacy is being spearheaded by two Local Training Boards, the Far Northeast Training Board and the North Superior Training Board in partnership with Literacy Network Northeast and Literacy Northwest. To ensure this important initiative is delivered across Northern Ontario, all Local Boards and Literacy Networks from the borders of Manitoba to Quebec are participating!

The Goal of Literacy - The Foundation of a Healthy Economy in Northern Ontario is to:

- Define and promote literacy and its impact on personal growth and economic well-being;
- Connect the local business community with local program and service providers;
- Identify opportunities that build on existing resources and services;
- Encourage local employers and stakeholders to commit to creating those opportunities.

The partners involved further expect that this initiative will increase the public's awareness about the importance of a well trained and highly skilled workforce for the development of a competitive and stable economy in Northern Ontario.

Did you
Know...

There is a correlation between literacy and wage levels. A Statistics Canada study indicates that each additional year of education a person receives is worth 8.3 per cent of their pay cheque. Using an annual base salary of \$30,000, this amounts to an additional \$2,490 per year.

(Literacy, Numeracy and Labour Market Outcomes in Canada, Statistics Canada, 2001).



People with higher literacy skills are more likely to:

- lead healthier lives
- be employed
- be involved in their children's education
- have the knowledge and the skills required to participate in society, whether it be at the personal, professional or community level.
- make informed choices about their lives

The demand for higher literacy skills is growing and has become necessary in a society that expects its citizens to deal with increasing amounts of information in a variety of forms.

A strong society results from citizens who are well informed and able to actively contribute and participate in the growth and development of a healthy economy and healthy communities.



As a society, we can take steps to address the issues that keep people from reaching their potential. We can promote literacy in all its forms, value lifelong learning and provide the resources to make it happen.

Higher literacy skills are key to...

Lifelong Learning:

- Literacy and essential skills are the foundation for lifelong learning
- At all stages: children, youth, adults
- In all life and learning settings: home, school, workplace, community

A More Inclusive Society:

- Immigrants
- Aboriginal Peoples
- Persons with Disabilities
- Those who face multiple barriers

Safe Communities:

- Investing in high school completion can cut crime by 4 times as much as investing in prisons
- Inmate education can cut recidivism by 10 percentage points

Social Capital:

- Higher voting participation
- Greater volunteerism
- Better work relationships
- More engaged citizenship

Health:

- Low literacy is linked to increased costs to health care system
- Higher literacy is related to higher life expectancy at birth

Productivity/Competitiveness:

- 1% increase in average literacy and numeracy skills would permanently raise GDP per capita by 1.5%

Labour Market:

- Higher earnings
- More employment opportunities
- Greater workplace mobility and adaptability
- Improved skills

Source: Human Resources Skills Development Canada

Workplace Literacy and Basic Skills generally refer to the skills needed by employees at work (i.e. reading, writing, math, and problem-solving).

These skills are also used with other important skills i.e. teamwork, leadership, self-direction and self-motivation).



Literacy for Everyone!

Workplace literacy and basic skill requirements apply to all employees (entry-level, office and administration, highly-skilled trades, supervisors and managers).

The scope and variety of skills needed by employees vary from workplace to workplace and depend on factors such as the industry, the sector, employee job tasks and functions, the philosophy of management, workplace technology, changing of job requirements.

Without strong literacy skills, employees are unable to keep up with the ever changing demands of the workplace and society as a whole.

Literacy Matters!

The Canadian work force needs to be highly skilled and adaptable to compete in a global economy. Issues that point to a need to upgrade the basic skills of the work force are as follows:

- It is estimated that 16% of Canadian adults are unable to deal with the majority of written material encountered in everyday life; a further 22% do not have the sufficient skills to cope with unfamiliar, more complex reading;
- technological changes and quality initiatives require workers to learn new skills and take on new responsibilities;
- the shrinking labour market in many parts of the country means that employers will have to upgrade the skills of their existing work force to remain competitive;
- employment equity initiatives require employers to tap into segments of the labour market that have been underused in the past; these new entrants may require basic skills upgrading;
- the well-being of the trade union movement depends on having a highly literate membership which can have a voice in all aspects of union and workplace life;
- the move to a knowledge-based economy means that the work force will experience an increase in information requirements on the job which will require a higher level of basic skills.

Source : National Literacy Secretariat

What are the Benefits of a Workplace Literacy and Basic Skills Program?

For the Employer:

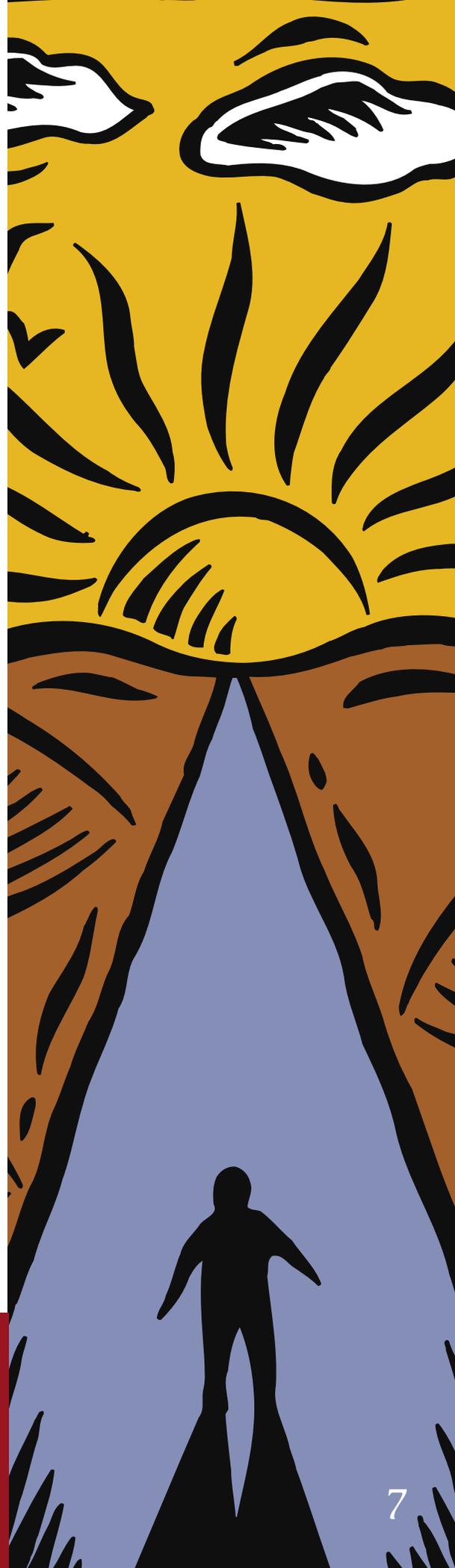
- a work force which is able to meet the challenges of new skill requirements and improved corporate image;
- a more adaptable work force in terms of cross-transfers and promotions;
- a safer work force;
- less supervisory time spent correcting mistakes;
- better communications among all levels of the work force.

For the Union:

- greater empowerment of workers to have a voice in workplace issues;
- greater ability of workers to achieve personal goals within their community;
- workers who can take a more active role within their locals and the labour movement;
- better understanding of the collective agreement on the part of union members;
- a larger pool of workers available for union-sponsored training programs.

For Employees:

- enhanced self-esteem and improved employee morale;
- greater chance for promotion and cross-transfers;
- enhanced opportunity to achieve goals in their personal lives and community;
- increased participation in all workplace activities;
- access to training they otherwise might not have had.



Literacy skills are like muscles – they are maintained and strengthened through regular use.

Canadians use their literacy skills more in the workplace than at home.

The higher an individual's literacy level, the more likely he/she will be employed and have a higher income.

To find out more about services in your community, visit:

www.ontario.ca/employmentontario



Organize a Workplace Education Program!

- Encourage involvement from all aspects of the workplace (management, employees, unions, etc.) in the process.
- Survey employees' needs, fears and concerns before programs are designed and implemented. Workplace education programs should focus on building on what people can do already so they can experience success in learning new skills.
- Programs should be based on needs identified by all stakeholders. Generally workplace education programs combine job-specific, job-related and other needs as identified by program participants, employers and other stakeholders.
- It is important for any organization considering a program to invite several individuals to make presentations on their programs and services. Some of the characteristics to look for are:
 - experience in working with adults in a learning situation;
 - understanding of workplace issues including management/labour relations;
 - ability to relate to and gain the confidence of management, unions and employees;
 - capacity to design tailor-made programs based on identified needs;
 - ability to be flexible in terms of program design, time schedules for programs and where they are delivered, i.e. on site.
- There are several types of service providers available to organizations and companies interested in implementing workplace education programs and related activities in their workplaces (i.e. community literacy organizations, community colleges, school boards, private training consultants, etc.)

Ways for employers to promote literacy in the workplace...

- share information about learning opportunities with employees
- partner with a literacy program or training provider to sponsor or support a literacy program in your community
- be a life-long learner and encourage others to do the same
- make literacy an issue and priority at your staff meetings
- build links with local literacy partners in the community

When setting up a workplace education program...

Avoid singling employees out in terms of their need to upgrade basic skills.

Avoid using language like “literacy” or “basic skills” in your oral or written descriptions of programs. Similarly, avoid terminology which is pejorative and suggests deficiency such as “illiterate”. Terms such as “Communication Skills Upgrading”, or “Skills Enhancement”, etc. will be more suitable.

Don’t promise promotions or job security on the basis of individual results from a program.

Don’t judge the success of programs on productivity gains and accident decreases; these depend on many other variables than just upgrading the literacy skills of the work force.

Don’t assume that programs alone will meet all your basic skills needs.

Source: National Literacy Secretariat

SUCCESS STORY

Honors Graduate :2 year Social Service Worker Program at Northern College 2006

I was in the Academic Upgrading program at Northern from October 2003 until May 2004.

I made the decision that I wanted a career that I could be proud of. I wanted to be a productive self supporting individual. I needed upgrading as I had only a grade eight.

The teachers in the upgrading program helped me to realize that I could accomplish my goal even at my age. They were very supportive. Upgrading gave me communication and computer skills and I became a tutor and worked in the college library to help subsidize my income while I was a student.

Upgrading changed me. It helped build my self esteem and self confidence and it made my life fulfilling and rewarding. Having a proper education is important and upgrading allowed me to enter into a post secondary program. I completed the 2 year Social Service Worker in 2006 with honors and I am now employed in a job I love. I was dedicated and wanted to succeed and the upgrading teachers, professors and other staff at Northern went the extra mile to help me.

Karren Montague



SUCCESS STORY

Keith Allen is an adult learner with the North Bay Literacy Council. Keith decided to improve his reading, writing, spelling and math skills and work toward getting his GED. Over the course of his learning, Keith has worked with three one-on-one tutors. Keith works for the City of North Bay. He is the winner of the 2005 Canada Post Literacy award for the province of Ontario, the first recipient of CUPE's National Literacy Award and in 2005 he also won the North Bay Health and Safety Award and the Ontario Federation of Labour's Occupational Disease Response Team Award. Keith is an advocate for learning at all ages and speaks freely about his learning issues to the new tutors trained by the North Bay Literacy Council. The following was written by Keith for the North Bay Literacy Council newsletter.

Two Time Literacy Award Winner

There is light at the end of the tunnel. The light is getting brighter as the time goes by. On Aug, I received a letter from Canada Post to say that I won the Canada Post 2005 Individual Achievement Literacy Award. On September 26 2005, I received a call from the National President of CUPE to tell me that I won the CUPE first Literacy Award.

Tutors, there is light at the end of the tunnel, just kept up the good work. Students, yes try to do your homework on time, this is my problem.

I would like to say thanks to my three tutors for all their hard work and time. Yes, I cannot forget Jane, Nancy, the board members, volunteers and the students, along with all the sponsors who help support the North Bay Literacy Council. Without everyone's help, I would not be able to write this letter five years ago and receive two Literacy Awards. THANK YOU for supporting Literacy in this community.

Literacy is a community issue. Each one of us can learn from each other no matter how much education we have.

*Keith Allen
Adult learner*

What is the difference between English/French as a Second Language (ESL/FSL) Programs at the workplace and workplace basic skills programs?

Employees whose mother tongue is not English or French may be literate in their own language but have a need to improve their communication and reading and writing skills in English/French. Some employees may not be able to read or write in their own language and, therefore, would have different needs.

While there is little or no stigma attached to learning English or French as another language, first language speakers of English or French who want/need to upgrade their basic skills may be reluctant to disclose their needs. Doing so may be seen as an admission of failure in a society that expects people to be able to read or write in their own language. People may also fear negative consequences for disclosure such as losing their jobs or being ridiculed by co-workers.

In culturally diverse workplaces, other strategies will need to be implemented at the same time as basic skills and ESL/FSL programs to improve communications at the workplace. Supervisors and managers may need skills to communicate more effectively with a changing work force and workplace policies and procedures may need to be adapted to address the needs of the work force.

9 million working-age adults don't have the skills needed to thrive in today's world.

The 9 million Canadian adults who have low literacy are about twice as likely to be unemployed.

4 out of 10 Ontarians don't have the literacy skills needed to meet the demands of today's knowledge society.

Empower Employees...

Employees will be more likely to get involved in upgrading their basic skills if you have created a safe, supportive environment. This kind of environment is created when you ask for employee input and allow employees to be involved in the planning process. Programs should be voluntary and never single people out. In addition, workplace education programs should be promoted on a wide basis to reach every possible participant and to build support from co-workers, supervisors and managers. Employees will want assurance that their dignity and job security will not be threatened as a result of their attending a workplace education program.



SUCCESS STORY

Barb Singleton is an adult learner with the Dryden Literacy Association (DLA). Barb decided to upgrade her skills and work towards obtaining a G.E.D. She also completed DLA's "Building Essential Skills Training" Program (BEST). Barb was successful in her exams and has since received her G.E.D. She is currently studying bookkeeping and computer skills. Barb volunteers regularly at the local hospital and recently has become a volunteer director for the DLA Board of Directors, representing adult learners. In December of 2006, she was the recipient of the Regional Adult Literacy Award for Individual Achievement that was sponsored by the Northwest Training and Adjustment Board.

"When I first started going to the Dryden Literacy Association my reading, writing, spelling, grammar and math were terrible. I could not multiply let alone do fractions. I used to be very insecure but the staff was so helpful and supportive. I also took the B.E.S.T. program which gave me a lot of confidence and I learned that I have a lot of good qualities. The staff made arrangements for me to take my G.E.D. and I passed! I am now studying bookkeeping and computers. I was also able to attend the Enhancing Learner Success Conference in Thunder Bay where I received an award for all my accomplishments.

Thanks to everyone at the Dryden Literacy Association and to all those that support literacy programs!"

*Barb Singleton,
Adult learner*

SUCCESS STORY

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Employment Testimonial from Valley Adult Learning Association, Fort Frances, Ontario

Two year's ago, John registered in the Literacy and Basic Skills program that was delivered by the Valley Adult Learning Association (VALA). John was 39 years old, had completed his grade 12 but was an Ontario Works client with no work history. John's goal was to upgrade his skills to become more employable.

This goal made John an excellent candidate for a new Workplace program that VALA was able to deliver through an Ontario Trillium Foundation grant. VALA secured a 10-week work placement for John at Northland Basics and monitored his progress throughout. VALA also worked closely with John and the employer to focus on improving the essential workforce skills that John was lacking.

The following is an initial evaluation from his manager at Northland Basics: John's mannerisms are abrasive and intimidating to both customers and co-workers. His customer service skills are inappropriate and he needs much improvement in this area. John needs to stay focused on the task at hand and work on both his personal hygiene and manners. John is available, on time and has very good computer skills.

After his 10-week placement at Northlands Basics, John remained with VALA to continue to improve upon and learn new essential skills. During this period, John prepared a resume, secured reference letters and some experience in other workplace settings. John was also referred to Anger Management Therapy, as his anger problems were affecting both his personal life and employment.

After nearly two years, John secured employment at Pizza Hut as a cook and a delivery driver. He is happy with this new position, and is also managing his personal life issues. John did not require help in applying for this position.

The following is an excerpt from an interview with Rena Louro, Pizza Hut Manager:

John is a great worker. He is outgoing, follows my directions and works well with others in a team setting. His personal hygiene has been excellent. Keeps his uniforms clean. His customer service skills are very good, never argues with the customers. Best employee I've had in a long time. Only complaint is he shows up too early for work! I will call the Valley Adult Learning Association again for Workplace learners in the future.

