

What Adult Literacy Learners Would Like YOU To Know



***The Learners
Advisory Network***



Movement for Canadian Literacy

Adult learners are people just like you in many ways.

They have hopes and dreams for themselves and their children but less opportunity to realize them because of their difficulty reading and writing.

Learners talk of poverty, family obligations, abuse, learning disabilities, and not getting the help they needed at school as some of the many reasons they missed out on their education as children.

The learners we spoke to want the opportunity to take control of and responsibility for their education now as adults.

"People confuse literacy with intelligence. We need to show that there are different kinds of smarts ('street' or 'people smarts', not just 'book smarts')."

"If you can't read you have to be fully engaged and aware all the time! People with literacy problems have had to find other ways to cope everyday; it's a type of genius."

Literacy is for Life

Learners want better literacy skills

to use at home: read to their children or help with homework; read labels; safely give or take medicine; read recipes; understand warranties; follow instructions and read manuals to perform other household tasks.

to use in the community: read bus or train schedules; talk comfortably with doctors; shop economically; do banking without help; attend local events and use the library effectively.

to use as involved citizens: read the newspaper; decide how to vote; take part on boards and committees; speak out on matters affecting their children and themselves; understand legal information and their rights as parents, tenants, citizens....

What learners see as needs

- ☑ free education to grade 12
- ☑ supports that enable them to return to and stay at school (childcare, training and book allowances, transportation)
- ☑ more relevant literacy and training programs, and better access to them
- ☑ effective job training that recognizes real job skills and that leads to long-term work
- ☑ access to jobs they can do regardless of literacy level (with oral or hands-on testing instead of written tests)
- ☑ basic computer skills, in order to keep up with the demands of today's society
- ☑ formal recognition that 'literacy is a right' and is essential to full participation in Canadian society

The public image of adult learners

Learners express concern about some of the ways they are portrayed in the media. They want images that are true to the way they see themselves.

Learners want the world to see them as:

- unique individuals with different goals and dreams, apart from their shared literacy needs
- life long learners - people with skills and strengths they are building on
- parents involved in their children's education
- workers who want to improve their skills
- activists on behalf of literacy and other issues in their communities
- voters and taxpayers
- active in pursuit of their goals
- competent to succeed in life

Learners constantly stress the importance of highlighting the gains they can make when supported in returning to school. If you are in the media or are responsible for portraying learners in any type of publication or promotion, their best advice to you is **'Emphasize the positive!'**.

Learners in ACTION

Across the country, many learners are active as board and committee members, peer tutors, researchers and literacy advocates. Here are a few examples:

Learner involvement on boards and committees

- Movement for Canadian Literacy's (MCL) Learners Advisory Network
- Laubach Literacy of Canada's National Student Caucus
- Alberta Association for Adult Literacy's (AAAL) Regional Teams
- Ontario Literacy Coalition's (OLC) Learners Council
- Provincial and Territorial Literacy Coalitions' boards of directors

Learner achievements/projects

- Canada Post Individual Achievement Awards
- Literacy BC's 'LEARN' Team's Action Research project
- Alberta's Write to Learn group's 'Fearless Writing' workshops
- Manitoba's Learner Speakers Bureau
- Focus-testing and/or consulting on health and consumer issues for the Canadian Public Health Association and the Consumers Association of Canada

The learners' voice

MCL's Learners Advisory Network can help you find learner speakers or focus groups in your region.

Valuing learners' work

Some learners volunteer their time to literacy programs and other local groups with limited funds, as a community service.

Please consider the following points when asking learners to do public speaking or focus-testing for your organization or professional group:

- Tell the learner speaker who the audience is and what you expect.
 - Ask if there are special needs, or supports that you can arrange.
 - When you introduce learner speakers, acknowledge their life experience.
 - Treat learners the same as others on a panel or group presentation.
 - Pay an honorarium if you have a speakers' budget or if other speakers are being paid.
 - Make sure learners are not out of pocket by prepaying any expenses; such as travel, meals, and childcare. (Most learners are on low or fixed incomes and cannot afford any extra expenses.)
 - if you are focus-testing in a literacy program, make a donation to the group.
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What YOU can do to support adult literacy

As an individual:

- Be a lifelong learner yourself.
- Encourage others to be lifelong learners.
- Read with your child.
- Help out a literacy program by donating money and/or your time.
- Attend literacy events / fundraisers.
- Vote in favour of sound government literacy policy.
- Speak and write plainly.

As an employer:

- Support workplace literacy and skills training.
- Use plain language to make all your printed material easy to understand.

As a literacy promoter or publicist:

- Be positive in your portrayal of learners; "personalize" literacy!
 - Emphasize the gains increased literacy is making in their lives.
 - Focus test your printed materials with learner groups.
 - Consult with the literacy community in your area.
 - Research your literacy facts (for example, see MCL's factsheets and website).
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Provincial and Territorial Literacy Coalitions

You will find a link to the literacy coalitions and their learner representatives on MCL's website (click on 'literacy coalitions').
