



ELEVATING WORKPLACE LITERACY & ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOCUS: HEALTH CARE

Presented by
ABC Life Literacy Canada



Dear colleague:

On behalf of ABC Life Literacy Canada, I am pleased to present the following report highlighting results and activity from our workplace literacy and essential skills project examining the health care sector in Canada.

ABC Life Literacy Canada would like to thank The Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, for funding this important initiative and for their valued support and leadership of this project.

The project provided an important opportunity to feature training amongst front line, entry-level employees within health care. Over the course of this report, you will learn from new sector research and insights from leading health care and literacy professionals. Our project proudly generated major national and regional media coverage and produced a new series of marketing and communications tools. These tools will significantly help ABC Life Literacy Canada raise awareness for literacy and essential skills within workplaces across Canada.

ABC Life Literacy Canada believes the workplace is a critical partner in tackling Canada's literacy and essential skills challenge. In the increasingly competitive global marketplace, our country's economic well-being will increasingly depend on a highly-skilled responsive workforce. Adequate adult literacy skills are key to a highly-trained workforce and the benefits for the economy and employers are clear. These benefits include increased productivity and bottom-line performance, improved work relationships and better health and safety records.

In connecting with levels of government, business and our community literacy partners, ABC Life Literacy Canada is committed to enhancing understanding and support of literacy in the workplace. Everyday workplace tasks such as writing an email, reading and understanding a new workplace manual, verbal communication with colleagues, managing inventory and learning new online software are only a few of the important yet taken for granted workplace tasks requiring literacy skills.

Special thanks to the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre, Alliance of Sector Councils, Glades Lodge Long-Term Care Centre, Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development, Literacy BC, The Learning Factor, Capilano University and the Hospital Employees' Union. I'd also like to thank our project committee, staff and everyone else who contributed to the project. All of your time, effort and expertise have contributed to our success.

Sincerely,



Margaret Eaton
President
ABC Life Literacy Canada



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Project Summary

The goal of this project was to stimulate action in increasing the Literacy and Essential Skills (L/ES) levels of workers at International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) Level 2, whose limited literacy skills pose significant challenges to their workplace performance and success. With the guidance of its workplace literacy advisory committee and data from the International Survey of Reading Skills, ABC Life Literacy Canada chose entry-level workers in the health care sector for its focus.

The project provides new information on the implications and impacts of low literacy among entry-level workers in the health care sector. This information in turn provides the impetus for strategies to mobilize the health care sector in terms of addressing the L/ES of the entry-level workforce.

This summary outlines how the project achieved its objectives. It also identifies some of the challenges we faced and how the project worked around these challenges.

Achievement of Project Objectives & Outcomes

This section outlines how each project objective was achieved and the activities undertaken to achieve the objectives.

Objective 1

Demonstrate the potential costs and economic benefits of increasing the L/ES levels of workers in occupations and industries which generally employ lower-skilled workers, using existing data provided by the 2003 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) and Statistics Canada's newly released in January 2008 International Survey of Reading Skills (ISRS).

Data provided by consultants Data Angel Inc. on the proportion of Levels 1 and 2 by industry helped narrow the sectors to focus on for this project. The data showed that health care through residential care and hospitals had 40-45% of employees at Levels

1 and 2. Furthermore, committee members indicated that the sector would be a good choice because it represented both the private and public sectors. In addition, there is a great need in the sector with an ageing population and little recent workplace literacy activity. The sector offered a great deal of scope across the country in a variety of different venues. Originally, the position of health care aide was targeted for focus because of a growing move towards accreditation across the country and its pivotal position in a career laddering system. However, as the project progressed, it became apparent that this was too narrow a focus and that our focus needed to be on entry-level workers in general.





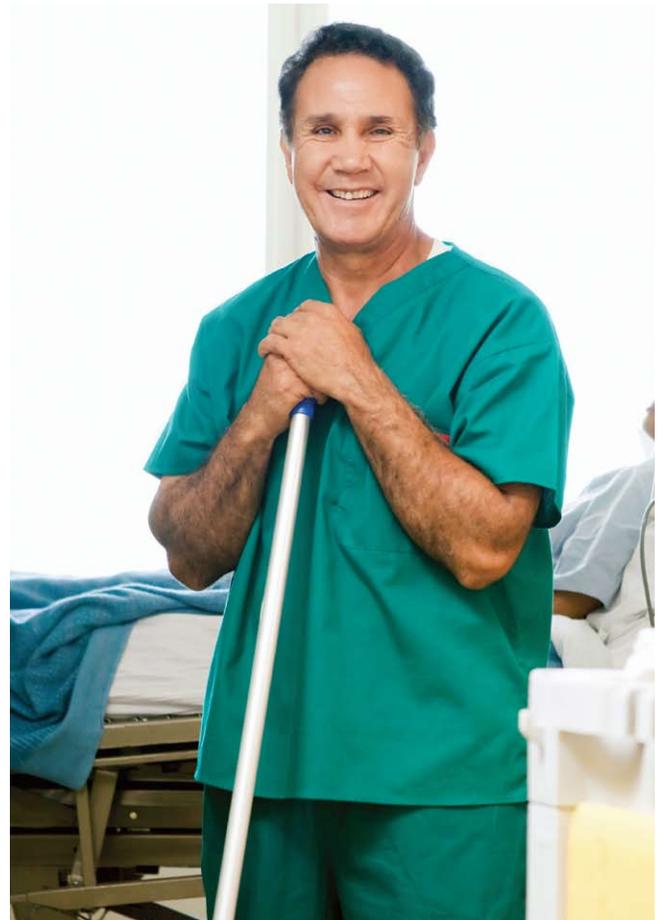
Following the identification of health care as a sector to focus on, an environmental scan was conducted to provide more qualitative data around L/ES issues in the sector. The scan showed that there is a dearth of material on the entry-level health care workforce in terms of training for literacy and essential skills. Furthermore, there are many changes happening that impact entry-level health care workers. Their jobs are becoming more complex with more issues around health and safety and more responsibilities around client care. The need to read and understand documents, write reports and use technology is an integral part of the changes for entry-level workers in the sector. However, training including L/ES is limited or nonexistent across the industrialized world in the sector. Contracting out in many cases has left these workers more vulnerable with less training and lower wages than ever before. Employers and workers see the benefits of training and L/ES. Employers believe that training and opportunities including literacy and language upgrading could reduce turnover, and address issues of quality of patient care, health and safety and advancement opportunities for these workers.

Those employers who have offered L/ES programming indicate that the results are: 1) improved patient care; 2) improved employee retention; 3) better ability to fill labour shortages; 4) improved job performance and; 5) increased health and safety. Union representatives and their members see opportunities

for upgrading related to literacy and language skills as part of a strategy to get credentials, move into better paying jobs and improve health and safety issues.

Following the completion of the scan, ABC Life Literacy Canada conducted a detailed search across the country to find workplaces in the health care sector that would agree to be a promotional case study for the project. Organizations in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were approached. Two situations were selected for cases.

The first was Glades Lodge, a long-term care centre in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The second was an employer, union, training and education partnership led by Literacy BC embarking on an embedding L/ES project in the health care sector in British Columbia.



To build awareness of L/ES with health care sector stakeholders, the project completed the following:

- ▶ Two videotaped cases in the sector with respect to L/ES; these cases will form the basis of website promotion at ABC and with its partners, and further print promotion
- ▶ An issue of *Training Matters* published in *Canadian Business* magazine with a focus on L/ES in the health care sector
- ▶ Featured articles on L/ES and health care in the *Globe and Mail* and *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald*
- ▶ Two articles on L/ES and health care in *The Canadian Learning Journal*, the member magazine of the Canadian Society for Training and Development
- ▶ A new workplace L/ES web section at www.workplaceeducation.ca
- ▶ New business-to-business workplace literacy awareness campaign featuring a health care workplace

Objective 2

Target key stakeholders, employers, labour, sectoral councils, trade associations, decision-makers and practitioners, in one particular industry which has low recognition of, and/or a lack of strategy around, its workplace L/ES challenges.

ABC Life Literacy Canada spent a great deal of time searching out key officials in the sector through its Workplace Literacy Advisory Committee, staff and workplace literacy consultant. Throughout the project, there was communication with approximately 200 officials from provincial and national health care associations, employers, unions, government officials, communications and media personnel, academics, L/ES providers and other related organizations. Contact was made with officials in Canada, the UK, New Zealand, Australia and the USA. Communication with these key contacts focused on publicizing the project, understanding L/ES needs and activities of the stakeholders, providing key information on L/ES and looking for ways that the project might connect or work with these key contacts. Many of these contacts provided key information for the environmental scan, other colleagues to connect with and possible workplaces or projects for our promotional cases.



Objective 3

Assist the targeted industry to better understand its workplace L/ES challenges, to mobilize itself to create strategies for action, and to help it develop approaches for addressing labour needs.

The project focused on building awareness and promotional tools to assist the health care sector in understanding the need to address L/ES challenges and suggest strategies for action. While outcomes such as the health care studies identify effective practices and approaches for addressing these needs, it was premature within the time frame of the project to mobilize the sector for action. As the result of the outcomes and products developed as part of this project, there is now a readiness to mobilize the sector for action.

Objective 4

Broadly disseminate research findings and project results to key stakeholders to influence their decision to become strategically engaged on the issue.

ABC Life Literacy Canada will be sharing the sector report, new marketing and communications tools and overall project learnings to engage various stakeholders on the importance of workplace literacy and essential skills. The proactive outreach will include engagement with project partners, unions, human resources and public relations professionals in health care, and literacy partners across the country. The sector report results and activities will also support ABC Life Literacy Canada's strategic mandate of increasing workplace literacy advocacy efforts with government, business and unions.



Glades Lodge

Glades Lodge is a 124-bed long-term care facility located in Halifax, Nova Scotia. It has 140 employees and is owned by GEM Health Care Group. In partnership with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 1259 and the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development, Glades Lodge has offered workplace education programs since 2005.

These programs have included academic up-grading, document use, basic computer training and communications courses.

Roundtable Sessions at Glades Lodge

ABC Life Literacy Canada conducted roundtable sessions with senior managers, CUPE representatives, the project team, program participants and other program stakeholders for a total of 24 people. Our main goal was to find out from stakeholders what the organizational and individual impacts of workplace literacy programming were.

Organizational and Individual Results

Management perspectives

Senior managers at Glades Lodge indicate that the results of literacy and essential skills programming include improved resident care along with more independence, adaptability and accountability. Improved independence saves time and makes for a more efficient workplace. Employees are also taking on more

leadership at work and feel empowered as a result of having opportunities to learn new skills. Comments from these managers indicate that the whole facility benefits when people are better at communication with residents and resident documentation.

Union perspectives

CUPE representatives said that the workplace education program has provided education opportunities that their members never would have had. There is a thirst for learning especially from the older workforce. Some people had never operated a computer before and were really afraid. Other people wanted to get their Grade 12 equivalency. There are many visible results from participation in the program that go well beyond the walls of the workplace. One father was able to read to his grandson for the first time. Other people take more of a leadership role in the union. Participants tell the union they feel grateful, confident, and that they learned a lot.

Participant perspectives

Participants say that they now have increased confidence, comfort and sense of pride and accomplishment. Their motivation for learning is not just for work but also to help their children. They have learned additional skills including computer skills, communication techniques and resident documentation. Some of the learning relates to tasks that they did not have to do in the past. These new skills help them at work but also at home with their families and their children. Some participants talked about being a role model for their children.



Parvathi Tummalagunta, a physiotherapy assistant at Glades Lodge, shares her experiences in the workplace education program.



Visit www.workplaceeducation.ca for the video case study

Embedding Literacy & Essential Skills in the Workplace

Case Study: Vancouver, BC

Literacy BC, in partnership with the Ministry of Education, received three-year funding from the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) for a project: Embedding Literacy and Essential Skills (ELES) in the Workplace (2009-2012). The project is looking at ways to embed L/ES approaches in three different sectors including health care. Entry-level workers, especially those in housekeeping and food services, have been contracted out to large multinationals. Infection control is more of an issue as is the need for more health and safety training.

The work in health care builds on previous joint labour management workplace literacy programming funded by the Health Care Labour Adjustment Agency that took place over approximately eight years in 14 health care facilities from 1995-2003. At that time, stand-alone workplace education programs were offered jointly by management and unions. The project partners believe that an embedding approach is important because it is a way to reach more workers and develop a learning culture especially when funding is not available for stand-alone programs. This approach looks at opportunities in the everyday work life and training of an organization to embed literacy and essential skills. The first two years of the project are developmental involving research and training of work groups for each sector. The third year will involve trying out approaches and involves assessment tools for learners.

Roundtable Sessions at Literacy BC

ABC Life Literacy Canada conducted roundtable sessions with Hospital Employees' Union representatives and staff, and representatives from Literacy BC, Capilano University and the Learning Factor for a total of six people. Our main goal was to find out what the impacts of the previous workplace programs had been and the expected results for an embedding approach.

Results of Early Workplace Programs

In the mid-1990s a lot of health care workers were in transition and losing their jobs. There was a re-

quirement for re-training to move into new jobs. The joint union-management initiative or BEST (Basic Education and Skills Training) program used a hybrid model involving instructors and peer tutors. Some participants were able to get their Grade 12 equivalency. Some participants became tutors and coordinators for the programs. Other participants moved on to other jobs or to college programs. Management noticed that employees were more engaged in staff meetings and in sharing ideas for efficiencies in the workplace. The teamwork in the programs rippled out to the workplace and broke down silos. They became more involved in in-services and more proactive around health and safety issues. Participants began to hold themselves differently—they became more confident. They also understood their rights at work better. There was a ripple effect to their families and communities. One woman gained the respect of her teenage son when she was able to help him with his math.

Expected Results of the Embedding Approach to Literacy

The project partners expect and hope that the same kinds of outcomes and ripple effects will result from their embedding approach to literacy and essential skills in the workplace.



Visit www.workplaceeducation.ca for the video case study

Nova Scotia

Best Practices and Success Factors

One of the critical success factors illustrated through Glades Lodge is having the program at no cost at work with an employer contribution of paid time.

The funding contribution and support of the skills coordinators from the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development is also critical. Many employees could not take advantage of education opportunities outside of work because of cost and time. In addition, everyone invests and collaborates in the program—management, the union, participants, the project team and the skills coordinator. This partnership model makes it successful.



Maureen Lovell talks about the benefits of the workplace education program at Glades Lodge.

Effective practices include:

- ▶ using the project team to plan and guide the program—ownership held by everyone and results for everyone
- ▶ using a learner-centred approach that focuses on all aspects of a person
- ▶ conducting an organizational needs assessment
- ▶ creating a safe and comfortable environment for program participants
- ▶ confidentiality of results and discussions within programs
- ▶ being flexible around program delivery tailored to workplace realities
- ▶ creating a culture of learning at the workplace, not just a one-off program
- ▶ customizing program content to each workplace



British Columbia

Best Practices and Success Factors

Similar to Nova Scotia, the stand alone programs offered in the past were at the workplace. Critical to success was this accessibility, paid time and government funding for similar reasons to those expressed in Nova Scotia.

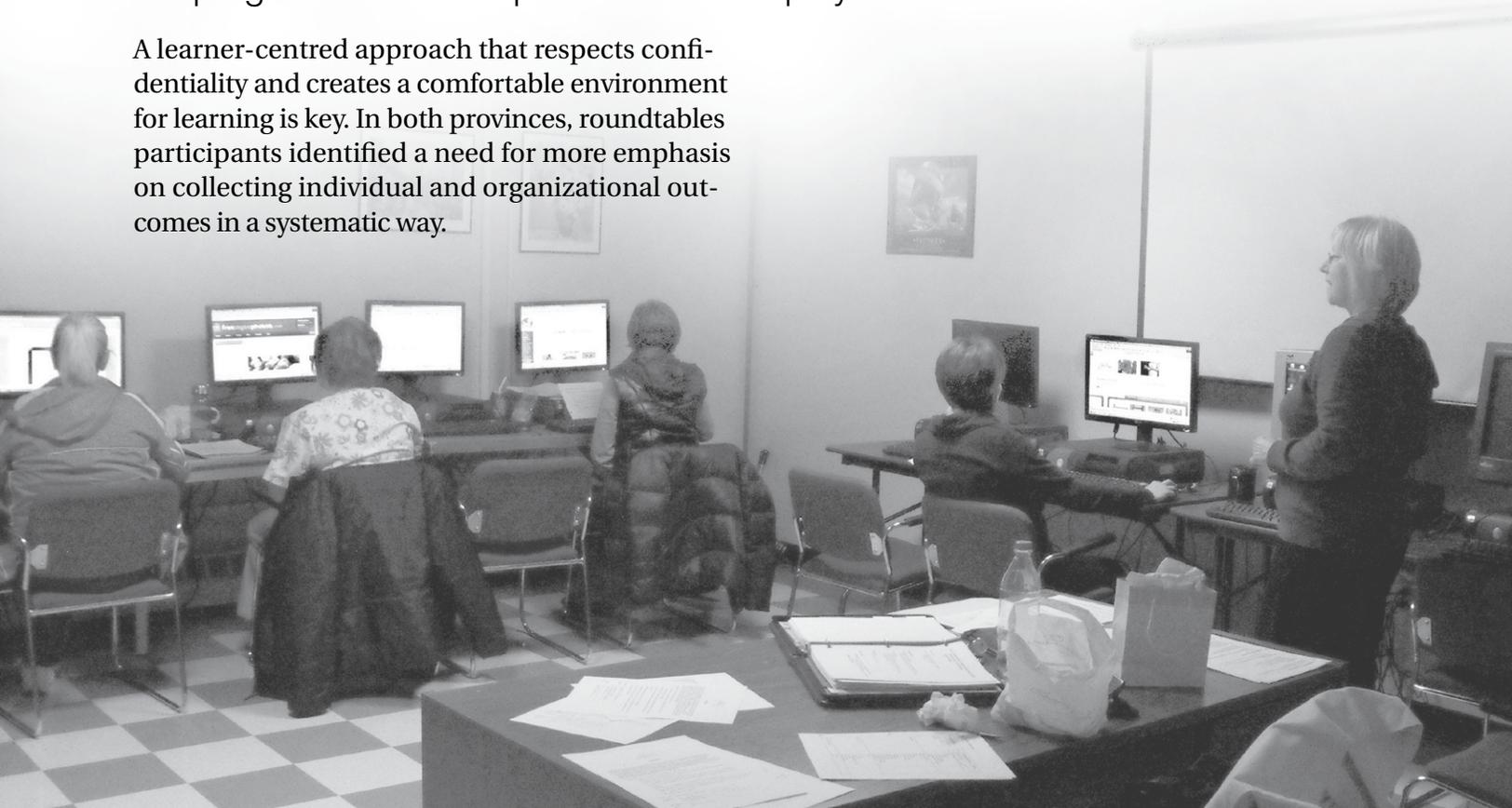
Effective practices include:

- ▶ using a partnership model with a joint committee of management and labour to plan and implement a program
- ▶ having a program coordinator and a champion
- ▶ being flexible in program delivery
- ▶ addressing the stigma of school-based learning and fear of learning
- ▶ using a learner-centred approach with participants as whole people
- ▶ ensuring confidentiality of participation and results
- ▶ using an approach where post-secondary instructors work with peer tutors

Common Success Factors

The two approaches show a number of common success factors, most notably the need for government funding and infrastructure support. Also essential is the involvement of workers in the design and delivery of programs, and having the program at the workplace with an employer contribution of time.

A learner-centred approach that respects confidentiality and creates a comfortable environment for learning is key. In both provinces, roundtables participants identified a need for more emphasis on collecting individual and organizational outcomes in a systematic way.



Training Matters Published in Canadian Business Magazine

The sector project provided opportunity for ABC Life Literacy Canada to produce *Training Matters 2009*. *Training Matters* was published in *Canadian Business* magazine and showcased leadership in workplace literacy and essential skills training across the country. It featured case studies of successful workplace literacy programs, the value of investment in workplace literacy, and served as an excellent resource for organizations looking to start their own workplace literacy and essential skills program.

Feature editorial included telling facts and statistics to demonstrate the potential costs and economic benefits of increasing literacy and essential skills levels in the workplace. The cover story makes a compelling case for the economic impact of literacy and featured a one-on-one interview with Craig Alexander, VP and Deputy Chief Economist for TD Bank Financial Group. “Working Towards a Cure,” an editorial on the case for improving skills in health care was also featured, and highlighted insights from leading health care, government and labour professionals.

Training Matters was distributed to a comprehensive list of officials in the health care sector. Over 150 issues were targeted directly to unions, human resources and public relations professionals in the health care industry. These key audiences are important to create improved understanding of workplace literacy and essential skills challenges.



▶ **Training Matters 2009** is available for download at www.abclifeliteracy.ca

THE CASE FOR IMPROVING SKILLS IN HEALTH CARE

WORKING TOWARDS A CURE

When the public thinks of a skills shortage in the health care sector, people tend to think of a shortage of doctors or nurses. The reality is that there is a growing demand in all positions, including support staff.

Between 2001 and 2006, the health care and social-assistance sector in Canada added 199,900 jobs, growing at 2.9%, well above the national average amongst all sectors. Traditionally, most of the new positions, such as housekeeping, have required few skills. But that is changing, with increasing requirements not just for more skills but also certification. Where will these workers come from?

Many of them are already working in hospitals, clinics, long-term care and other facilities. But they urgently need skills upgrades. Says Kandy Lindsay, executive director of Nova Scotia's FutureWork Society: "There's an explosion of new beds and new facilities. Health care in Nova Scotia is open to essential skills training. They see the need in a most visceral way."

FutureWork connects with employers facing staffing shortages to find properly trained employees. Lindsay and other training experts will tell you that it's far more cost-efficient to retrain existing workers than to recruit new ones, but retraining often requires upgrades to basic types of skills.

Eilene Gan, a nursing unit clerk at the British Columbia Women's Hospital and Health Centre in Vancouver, and a local literacy advocate for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), has experienced the need for basic skills in a constantly evolving health care workplace. "Health care restructures its workforce all the time," she says. "Every time they restructure, they change everyone's job." With change comes uncertainty: new scheduling programs to learn and new software to master. "Some of our licensed practical nurses [LPNs] now have to have email access to read memos and meeting notices," Gan says. "But they have no skills in email. A lot of these people are in their late 40s and 50s, so it's difficult."

Health care faces the challenge of retaining veteran employees or losing them at a time of growing need. Gan herself has benefited

from a medical technology course and a typing course. She went from being an aide in the maternity ward to a higher-skilled technical clerk. Thanks to programs agreed upon by the hospital and the union, many workers have not only upgraded their skills but also gained promotions. "We had a couple of people," says Gan, "who had been housekeepers and became registered nurses."

Bonnie Kay-Griffin, administrator at Halifax's Glades Lodge, a long-term care facility, also extols the need for upgrading existing workers' skills. "Lifelong learning is one of our values," she says. "We're always looking at ways and means to educate our people, and there's not a lot of money in our budget." Glades forged a relationship with the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development, forming funding partnerships. "We provide time off for workers [to take training] and they don't lose wages," Kay-Graham says. The process is employee driven, with Glades' management teaming up with CUPE, the Nova Scotia nurses' union, and the department of labour.

She catalogues but a few of the courses Glades has offered. "We provide physical-assessment skills for LPNs, and nurses today are expected to provide leadership, so we've customized courses to include some leadership skills." And there are cultural-sensitivity courses to help staff work harmoniously with their growing ranks of immigrant nurses, and computer skills such as emailing and documentation. Other courses include team-building classes to break down the us-and-them barriers in the workplace, and courses on how to resolve conflict and how to communicate effectively.



Thanks to a skills training program, Eilene Gan has been promoted to a technical clerk at a B.C. hospital.

A more literate workforce boosts productivity. The C. D. Howe Institute reports that a 1% rise in a country's literacy level, relative to the international average, is associated with an eventual 2.5% rise in labour productivity and a 1.5% rise in the per-capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

This 1% in Public Investment 2005 and Canada

According to the Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, on average, a one-dollar investment in training returns a benefit to the employer of \$1.38

Kay-Graham and Gan both point to the growing need for skills certification in the health care workplace, even for some lower-echelon jobs. For example, continuing-care assistants often have been in the workforce so long that they got their jobs before certain skills and certification became mandatory. For others, new certification rules put them into situations where they cannot be rehired if they leave their positions or if positions change. When a B.C. long-term care facility closed, workers needed mandatory provincial certification to get the same jobs at other facilities. With CUPE's help they got the trainings they needed so they could be rehired elsewhere.

Another important facet to skills upgrading in health care involves making better use of new Canadians, many of whom fill the lowest-skilled jobs. They benefit from language training to improve their English or French. Gan recalls two women of East Indian origin who worked as food-services workers in Surrey, B.C. They upgraded their English and later took their high-school equivalency. They eventually went to college and now have good jobs in central processing, a department that sterilizes hospital equipment.

Such programs benefit everyone. "It's certainly a retention tool," Kay-Graham says, "and we have a lot of long-term employees." That's important in a growing health care sector and, fortunately, employers are getting the message. "In the past," says Brown, "employers would have said, 'if you don't like the job, I have five other people who want it. Why would I invest in training?' But now, we're more of a knowledge-based society, so we need those levels of training."

To better understand the needs of on-the-job training, ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation has undertaken a study of literacy and essential skills (L/ES) among entry-level health care workers. Workers with low literacy skills face significant challenges in their workplace performance. This project will help the sector to mobilize and create strategies to address skills needs.

With ballooning demand for more and more skilled workers in health care, the need is becoming urgent. The key questions now are: will employers recognize the need for essential-skills training and can they take the action needed to retain their most valuable assets—their existing employees? That recognition is now imperative.



FutureWork in Nova Scotia helps companies retrain workers when there is a staffing shortage. To date, FutureWork has trained more than 750 workers with an approximate 90% graduation rate.

IPSOS-REID STUDY: LITERACY AND SKILLS UPGRADING A HIGH PRIORITY

Recent research shows that the majority of working Canadians believe that there is a literacy problem, and some admit that they do not have the necessary literacy skills to change jobs. In addition, most managers said they would be unable to help their employees out with their literacy challenges if asked.

The study, conducted by North American market research firm Ipsos Reid and commissioned by ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation, polled over 1,000 working Canadians and over 300 managers and executives working in the private sector. The study found other insightful perceptions on literacy related to the current recession and the workplace.

FINDINGS:

- 72% of working Canadians believe that the current level of adult literacy—that is reading, writing and mathematics skills among adults for whom English or French is their first language—is a 'problem'.
- 21% of working Canadians do not 'strongly agree' that 'if they were to lose their job today, they possess the necessary literacy skills to secure a new job'.
- Four in 10 (40%) managers 'disagree' that 'if one of their employees told them they had challenges with reading, writing or math skills, their company could quickly get them the help they need'.
- Workers in Atlantic Canada (81%) are most inclined to believe that the levels of literacy in Canada are a problem, followed by those living in Quebec (75%), Alberta (75%), Ontario (72%), British Columbia (68%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (63%).
- Atlantic Canadians (86%) and Quebecers (85%) are most likely to 'strongly agree' that they possess the necessary literacy skills to secure a new job if they had to, while lesser proportions in Ontario (77%), Saskatchewan and Manitoba (77%), Alberta (77%) and British Columbia (75%) strongly agree.



Visit the Workplace Literacy section at www.abc-canada.org to check out the webcast of the Ipsos Reid announcement.

Excerpt from "The case for improving skills in health care: Working towards a cure," Training Matters 2009

Eilene Gan, a nursing unit clerk at the British Columbia Women's Hospital and Health Centre in Vancouver, and a local literacy advocate for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), has experienced the need for basic skills in a constantly evolving health care workplace. "Health care restructures its workforce all the time," she says. "Every time they restructure, they change everyone's job." With change comes uncertainty: new scheduling programs to learn and new software to master. "Some of our licensed practical nurses [LPNs] now have to have email access to

read memos and meeting notices," Gan says. "But they have no skills in email. A lot of these people are in their late 40s and 50s, so it's difficult."

Health care faces the challenge of retraining veteran employees or losing them at a time of growing need. Gan herself has benefited from a medical technology course and a typing course. She went from being an aide in the maternity ward to a higher-skilled technical clerk. Thanks to programs agreed upon by the hospital and the union, many workers have not only upgraded their skills but also gained promotions. "We had a couple of people," says Gan, "who had been housekeepers and became registered nurses."

ABC Featured at CME Conference

On March 30, 2010 ABC Life Literacy Canada participated as an exhibitor at the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters (CME) Human Capital Management 2010 conference.

The conference focused on 'Revving Up for the New Economy' and attracted human resource professionals and business executives. ABC Life Literacy Canada networked with various stakeholders to promote the sector project and other workplace literacy initiatives. As an exhibitor, ABC Life Literacy Canada managed an event booth that showcased workplace literacy and essential skills information.



Sector Project Garners Major Media Attention

ABC Life Literacy Canada conducted targeted media outreach to build awareness of workplace literacy and essential skills. *The Halifax Chronicle-Herald* ran a feature story on January 9, 2010 on the workplace education program at Glades Lodge Long-Term Care Centre, one of the organizations that participated in ABC Life Literacy Canada's roundtable.

The article featured details of the workplace education program and testimonials from employees. Additionally, ABC Life Literacy Canada secured a feature article on the front page of the Careers section in the Saturday, March 6, 2010 edition of the *Globe and Mail*. The article talked about the new knowledge economy and the importance of improving literacy levels among workers in order to stay competitive. The *Globe and Mail* article also featured the Glades Lodge Long-Term Care Centre as a model workplace education program.

On-the-job training

Literacy program adds to workplace skills

By BILL SPURR
Features Writer

When the Halifax long-term care facility Glades Lodge moves to a new building this year, among the changes will be the amount of computer knowledge required by front-line workers.

That could be daunting to a workforce that doesn't possess a high level of formal education, but the Lodge's workplace education program has won awards from the province and been acknowledged by the **ABC Life Literacy** Foundation for its ability to give workers the skills they need.

"When I came to the home, I was really humbled by the way the staff is able to organize and run their workplace education program here," said Anna Ordineilli, administrator at Glades Lodge. "The program is a collaborative relationship between the employer, employees and the Department of Labour's workforce development program."

Most of the residents of Glades Lodge have extensive nursing needs, with many suffering from dementia. All employees, from housekeepers to nurses, even members of the management

...es, with the employer allowing workers to go to class on work time and the cost of instructors covered by the Labour and Workforce Development Department.

All courses are customized, and a 12-week literacy course that's being offered now through **ABC Life Literacy** is aimed at staff without a professional designation.

The literacy program is really meant to address some basic skills such as communication, improved reading, writing, numeracy, but a lot of it is to do with communication," explained Ordineilli, who said the payoff for management is creating a workforce that's more skilled.

"If they don't have the skills to do their job, they're not doing their job as well as they could. What it means is they're able to create a memo, or take leadership on the unit... rather than waiting for the manager to do that. Communication is better, efficiency is improved, people's needs get addressed on a more timely basis and it filters the responsibility to all the employees, instead of 'I'm going to tell my manager so my manager can put a note in the chart.'"

Donalda Fougere, a continuing care assistant at Glades Lodge since 1981, has taken almost every course that has been offered since the workplace education program was ramped up in 2001. She has won awards from the province and her union for her diligence and leadership, and said the reason she is so keen is simple.

"It's free education. The courses that we put on here would cost hundreds of dollars out in the community. Our computer course, for instance, was a basic computer

See LITERACY / F2

Excerpt from “Literacy gets a new job emphasis,” *Globe and Mail*, March 6, 2010.

Canada’s economy may be picking up, but experts say there’s still one challenge that could stand in the way of the country’s long-term economic success: workplace literacy.

“Technology has pushed the need for different skill sets,” says Margaret Eaton, president of ABC Life Literacy Canada in Toronto. It’s knowledge-

based jobs that will carry Canada in the future. And those jobs require higher-level literacy skills. It’s no longer just about reading and writing. Today, the definition of literacy includes such things as numeracy, comprehension, communication, problem-solving and technology know-how – essential skills that employees need to do their jobs, she adds.

SATURDAY, MARCH 6, 2010

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WEEKEND WORKOUT » EDUCATION

Literacy gets a new job emphasis

As Canada increasingly shifts to a knowledge-based economy, workers’ reading and writing skills are sometimes not up to par and hurting productivity. The challenge is to find ways to help them solve difficulties that may be a personal embarrassment

BY JENNIFER MYERS

Canada’s economy may be picking up, but experts say there’s still one challenge that could stand in the way of the country’s long-term economic success: workplace literacy.

“Technology has pushed the need for different skill sets,” says Margaret Eaton, president of ABC Life Literacy Canada in Toronto. It’s knowledge-based jobs that will carry Canada in the future. And those jobs require higher-level literacy skills. It’s no longer just about reading and writing. Today, the definition of literacy includes such things as numeracy, comprehension, communication, problem solving and technology know-how – essential skills that employees need to do their jobs, she adds.

And the challenge isn’t confined to traditionally low-literacy jobs in manufacturing or industry. An ever-increasing reliance on computers, e-mail and social media means all workers are communicating more through written language and even staff in mid-level jobs may struggle. “Employees have to have more understanding, they have to have the ability to decode messages, to find the meaning and inferences in them,” Ms. Eaton says.

Even workers agree there are problems. A 2009 survey by Ipsos found that 72 per cent of working Canadians believe that the current level of adult literacy is a problem among those for whom English or French is their first language and 21 per cent say they don’t possess the necessary literacy skills to secure a new job.

“Literacy rates haven’t improved much in the past decade, but the trouble is the workplace is more complex, more competitive, and there’s more mobility,” says Alan Middleton, executive director of the Schulich Executive Education Centre at York University in Toronto.

And many firms aren’t stepping up to the challenge of

TEAMWORK FOR TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS



Donalda Fougere, left, and Barbara Painting help each other in the computer lab at a Glades facility in Halifax. SANDOR FIZEL FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

THE COMPANY:

Glades Lodge Inc., long-term care facility, Halifax

PROGRAMS:

In 2008, Glades set up a 10-station in-house computer lab to offer customized computer courses for employees, ranging from support and administration staff to social workers and nurses. Other courses offered include team building, communication and leadership skills as well as cultural sensitivity sessions. This year, Glades will introduce an English in the Workplace course.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES INVOLVED:

More than 40 of Glades 140 employees successfully completed essential skills programs in 2009.

HOW IT WORKS:

Participation is voluntary. Each program takes about 40 hours to complete. Staff generally attends classes three hours a week; 50 per cent of their time is paid for and 50 per cent is contributed by the employee.

THE PAYOFF:

Anna Ordinelli, an administrator at Glades, says that while the company hasn’t analyzed their training programs in terms of retention or absenteeism, many of the staff who have been involved in its workplace education programs are long-standing employees and are happy to keep it that way. Plus, she says, they’re more confident and enjoy greater control over their jobs and they’re happier. It improves the quality of their work

life, which enables them to provide better care to residents. “We see this as an investment in life-long learning. But the programs are employee driven. They would fail without [staff] commitment,” Ms. Ordinelli says. “There’s an almost voracious appetite to learn here.”

PROBLEM SIGNS

Five indications that your workers may be struggling with literacy and essential skills:

1. Employees avoid training sessions or fall external training programs.
2. Excellent employees continually turn down promotion opportunities.
3. Change initiatives often fail or are slow to be implemented.
4. Staff make excuses. For example, “I’ll read it later,” or “I forgot my glasses,” when put in situations where reading or writing is required.
5. Employee absenteeism and turnover are high.

Source: Margaret Eaton, president ABC Life Literacy Canada

Knowledge numbers

72

Percentage of working Canadians who believe the current level of adult literacy skills is a problem among adults for whom English or French is their first language.

21

Percentage of working Canadians who strongly agree they do not possess the literacy skills they need to secure a new job.

4 in 10

The number of managers that say that if an employee had challenges with reading, writing or math skills, they would not know how to help.

50

Percentage of U.S. college students nearing graduation that lack the literacy skills to handle complex tasks such as analyzing arguments in newspapers or

Learn@Work Week to be Celebrated

The sector project provided opportunity for ABC Life Literacy Canada to participate in Learn@Work Week 2010, hosted by the Canadian Society for Training and Development (CSTD). Learn@Work Week is a week-long celebration that promotes the importance of workplace learning and performance.

ABC Life Literacy Canada composed a feature editorial for the Learn@Work Week 2010 member Toolkit, and will be meeting with CSTD officials to develop additional activities during the week. The partnership with CSTD has also seen two stories on workplace literacy published in the Spring 2010 and Fall 2009 issues of CSTD's member magazine, *The Canadian Learning Journal*.

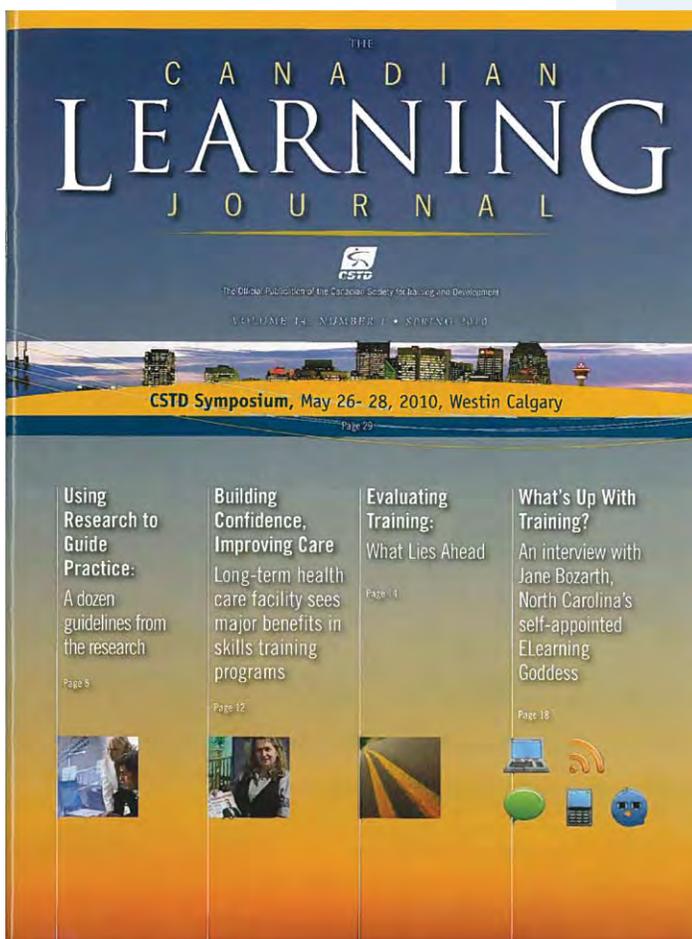
Excerpt from “Building Confidence, Improving Care,” *The Canadian Learning Journal*, The Official Publication of the Canadian Society of Training and Development, Spring 2010:

Managers, union representatives and program participants attest to the enormous impact of the Workplace Education Program. They all comment on the confidence that program participants have gained. This increased confidence is the foundation for all other learning.

Senior managers claim that a more skilled workforce leads to improved care for residents, a thirst for learning, more independence and more adaptability. Greater independence saves time and creates a more efficient workplace. Employees are also taking on greater leadership roles at work.

Anna Ordinelli, administrator for Glades Lodge, explains that employees are taking much more initiative and ownership in their work. She states, “There is a feeling they can do just about anything.”

Kathleen Doane, Director of Social Work, echoes these impacts. She notes that staff members have improved their skills, that they feel empowered, and that the overall quality of their work has improved. She emphasizes that the bar for the whole facility is raised when people are better at communicating with residents and at documenting resident care.



New Workplace Education Website

In an effort to provide more detailed information for employers who are considering workplace education programs, ABC Life Literacy Canada enhanced its workplace literacy web section as part of the business-to-business workplace education advertising campaign.

The website aims to provide important resources for HR and C-suite executives wanting to get started on a program. The revised web pages feature a needs assessment framework; successful case studies and employee testimonials; listings of regional workplace literacy providers/practitioners; a Business toolkit—a customizable PowerPoint presentation that will help enrich and influence decision makers; and an interactive component to help connect employers with literacy partners.

In addition to the web pages, ABC Life Literacy Canada developed colourful web banners to complement the workplace literacy section of the website. These web banners are quick links to successful case studies and listings of regional workplace literacy providers/practitioners.

▶ Visit ABC Life Literacy Canada's new workplace literacy section at www.workplaceeducation.ca

Online Promotion

ABC Life Literacy Canada promoted the sector project as part of its strategic online editorial content plan. This included a feature article in *Literacy at Work*, ABC Life Literacy Canada's national e-newsletter distributed bi-monthly to 2,000 stakeholders in government, business and the literacy field.

In addition, ABC Life Literacy Canada showcased its attendance at the Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters conference in the March 2010 e-newsletter, as well as on abclifeliteracy.ca. Throughout the sector project, ABC Life Literacy Canada featured articles on its homepage, including updates on the roundtables in Halifax and Vancouver.



New Awareness Campaign

ABC Life Literacy Canada created a new business-to-business focused advertising campaign to communicate the importance of workplace education and raise awareness in the business community. The new campaign promotes literacy training as a key business solution and features the successful case study of Glades Lodge Long-Term Care Centre (in Halifax, NS) where workplace education is seen as a vital part of the organizational culture.

“We feel incredibly proud of our workplace education program at Glades. It’s helped our staff feel better about their work, and improved the way that we do business,” says Anna Ordinelli, Administrator, Glades Lodge Long-Term Care Centre. “By upgrading skills, employees feel ready for new challenges and are always willing to learn. Plus we’ve seen increased productivity and efficiencies in health and safety practices. It’s a win-win situation.”

A series of advertisements form the campaign and are rolling out over the course of 2010 in targeted

media outlets. The campaign includes both full-page, full-colour print ads as well as animated web banners with embedded video that showcase workplace education successes and staff testimonials. Advertisements were placed in issues of *HR Professional* and *Canadian HR Reporter*, as well as on the publications’ websites. A video case study of Glades Lodge Long-Term Care Centre that offers testimonials that speak to the power of workplace education was also featured.

The image displays three overlapping screenshots from a business website. The top screenshot is from HR Reporter, showing a search bar and a headline: "Managers rarely discuss workers' careers: Survey". The middle screenshot is from Workopolis, featuring a search bar and a banner for "Your workforce could benefit from literacy and essential skills training." The right screenshot is a paid advertisement for ABC Life Literacy Canada, with the headline: "Do they have the reading, writing and math skills for the new economy?".

▶ Are your employees prepared?

- ▶ In a workplace literacy study, 90% of employers indicated that employees who took basic skills programs had an increased ability to work independently.
- ▶ Enhanced literacy skills prepare employees for managerial and technological changes in the workplace, and position the company for greater competitiveness.
- ▶ When literacy skills are enhanced, employees are better suited to meet the demands of the job and better prepared to assume greater responsibilities and seek promotion.



future

literacy

54

skills

2

ability 38

95

competitive

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9 10

“ We feel incredibly proud of our workplace education program at Glades. It has helped our staff feel better about their work, and improved the way that we do business. By upgrading skills, employees feel ready for new challenges and are always willing to learn. Plus we've seen increased productivity, efficiencies in health and safety practices and a major return on our investment. It's a win-win situation. ”

– Anna Ordinelli,

Administrator, Glades Lodge Long Term Care Centre, Halifax NS

ABC
LifeLiteracyCanada

Connect with resources to help you empower your employees, increase your competitive advantage and create a more vibrant and engaged workforce.

Contact ABC Life Literacy Canada at abclifeliteracy.ca for more information.



ELEVATING WORKPLACE LITERACY & ESSENTIAL SKILLS FOCUS: HEALTH CARE

Presented by ABC Life Literacy Canada

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Learning Knowledge Centre • Wendy Tanner, Labour Education Centre



ABC Life Literacy Canada is a non-profit organization that inspires Canadians to increase their literacy skills. We connect and mobilize business, unions, government, communities and individuals to support lifelong learning and achieve our goals through leadership in programs, communications and partnerships. ABC Life Literacy Canada envisions a Canada where everyone has the skills they need to live a fully engaged life.

For the latest news and information
on adult literacy please visit
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