

FROM SPARK TO SUSTAINED HEAT

**The First Year of A +B= \$
A Literacy and Economic Development Project
in Eastern Ontario**

Literacy Service Planning Group/ Ontario Local Training Board #1

From Spark to Sustained Heat

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From Spark...to Sustained Heat

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We dedicate
this book and the work it represents
to the memory of

Frances Lever

for many years Executive Director
of [Literacy Link Eastern Ontario](#)
who saw the potential,
fanned the spark
and forever continues
to inspire us.

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Summary

MEASURABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- 50 non literacy organizations mobilized on literacy issues
- 40+ newspaper articles, television and radio interviews
- 4 plain language workshops
- 125 page statistical profile of education levels
- Both County governments and all local Members of Parliament supporting literacy
- A Canadian model for community mobilization to improve the economy through increased literacy.

This report tells the story of how some literacy service providers in Eastern Ontario made the link between the education and literacy levels in the local population, and the economic prosperity in the region, then did something about it. It shows how you could start a similar project in your region.

The region where this happened had historically low literacy levels, so most people took that for granted and many considered it normal. After all, the area was pioneered by hard working people without much formal education, and until recently there were lots of jobs that didn't require literacy skills, or didn't require employees to learn and adapt.

The economy has changed: it is globally competitive and constantly evolving, but local attitudes to learning and local literacy levels haven't kept up. The literacy service providers realized that a wake up call was needed and they couldn't do it alone. If they continued to deal with the symptoms of the problem with their existing levels of resources, they could never solve the root problem.

Thanks to a government grant the literacy people were able to establish a project in which they joined forces with people from a variety of other backgrounds.

Together, they were able to get even more people and organizations to sit up and take notice that the education levels in the general population, and people's *attitudes* to life-long learning, have a direct effect on the overall socio-economic health of the community. Now the community is starting to act to change the situation.

This report describes how the collaborative project was organized, what it did, and what effect it had. But this is not a dry reporting of dates and facts. Rather, it tells the human story in simple language, and it describes the lessons learned.

On the whole the project has worked rather well. Therefore, the people who have been involved in it would encourage others to try it. This group didn't invent the wheel, they followed a model that had been well tested in another country. Similarly, this report is written as a handbook that can serve as a road map for you to use in your community.

Foreword

Ever since meeting people involved in the Georgia Certified Literate Community I have felt an undying enthusiasm for the model project and its possibilities. It would be a lie to say it was always easy to transmit that enthusiasm. Some felt it was too unCanadian, too political, too big, too vague...it even carried the dangerous possibility of being too successful! Like the Georgia model which involves a 10 year span, this project was also looking long term, a somewhat roguish stance in the world of annual discretionary funding.

Yet the project has become Canadian, tangible, successful and very much a part of the Eastern Ontario reality. It is becoming a part of the fabric of rural and bilingual community. Years ago anyone talking about literacy got vague courtesy nods; now I get fifteen minutes and consent to use office space for meetings. Where stalwart service clubs once stood alone to provide literacy efforts with support, now the occasional municipal government representative or economic development person stands with them. Organizations like the Eastern Ontario Training Board, the Eastern Ontario Health Unit and the SDG County Library have become unfailing allies of literacy work. A press clipping service reports a significant increase in the overall mention of literacy issues. There has been a shift from “what’s the problem” to “this is the makeup of our community” and “what can we do about literacy levels”. The work of the project has moved from “what do we tell” to “what tools can we offer”.

While we must await the detailed local data from the 2001 census to have an objective count of grade level changes from our 1996 baseline, some of these softer measures are most encouraging.

It is no small thing to look at the range of project team members and credits and realize that many, many people, representing many, many facets of our community were moved to participate in the Literacy Economic Development project that came to be known as A+B=\$. They continue to participate today. This alone represents a community movement.

When I first saw the suggested title to this book, I ventured into political correctness and thought “heat, maybe that’s too strong”. The more I thought about it the more I liked it. Sustained Heat suggests community momentum combined with pressure to change the status quo.

To those of you who warm your hands here, consider the book an invitation to spark your own efforts. Heat up your own community’s learning in the time-honoured human tradition of carrying an ember from one place to another.

Diane Coombs, March 29, 2000

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INTRODUCTION

“A+B=\$ first worked on raising awareness on “whether” literacy affected the community; once this became evident, it could move on to “how” it impacted on the community and “what” could be done about it.”

David Sherwood, A+B=\$ project coordinator

A) Purpose

The A+B=\$ project is a Literacy and Economic Development project that ended its first year of operation in June of 1999. This report was written in 2000 during its second year. The project is located in the Eastern Ontario counties of Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Prescott and Russell, including the city of Cornwall. This is quite a large area to cover, as you will see later on! In addition, A+B=\$ works in both official languages.

This handbook will hopefully serve more than one purpose. We wanted to look at what had happened during our first year of operation. This handbook is a way of documenting A+B=\$'s history and also of gathering and putting to use a variety of information and documentation that derived from our activities.

We think our experience was positive, and that other communities could follow a similar model to improve economic and social development through literacy. Therefore, A+B=\$ also wanted to create a resource that might be useful to people and groups who would be interested in leading a literacy initiative within their own communities. It seemed that our experience, if it could be of service to others, would fulfil its role as a pilot project and become a source of lessons and reminders for community leaders elsewhere. By no means is it intended to be a recipe for success. Such a project takes on a life of its own and a rhythm that cannot be entirely predicted in advance, but we believe our history can be beneficial if used as a stepping stone to make the ascension a little easier for others.

Finally, once a project starts, everybody gets busy. This does not always allow us, as workers, volunteers and community members, to ponder on where we came from, where we are going and how we can be even more effective. Therefore, this handbook also keeps an eye on the future. Since we were going to write a handbook, we also wanted the process to allow us to get information on what the future of the project could look like.

The handbook is in essence a “waltz in three tempos”, in that it presents the beginning, the present and the future of A+B=\$.

Good reading!

B) Overview

This handbook tells our story as it evolved over the first year. It begins with the initial spark that ignited its development and describes the blaze that heated its implementation phases. It is presented in three main parts.

Part I “An idea... a spark (before 1998)” recalls where and how the project was born. It describes the Georgia experience from which the concept was borrowed, and why it seemed a good idea to transfer it to Eastern Ontario. This section also presents a brief overview of our five counties and the French-speaking community’s history in terms of education.

Part II “The First Year: Kindling the idea... Creating a Bonfire” describes A+B=\$’s first year. It presents the start-up and following steps taken to implement the project. You will know more about the means A+B=\$ chose to better know its community, to raise awareness about literacy, to reach out to potential partners it and to sustain relationships and community response.

Part III “Around the Bonfire... Reflecting on How we Did” offers an assessment of the successes and limitations of the project. This assessment is conducted by looking at A+B=\$ through three different “lenses”: how we did in light of the Georgia criteria; our success in accomplishing the deliverables of the funding proposal; and finally, how we did according to the community’s perspective, relying on comments expressed during the consultation process.

In conclusion, we offer some elements of A+B=\$’s future and some ideas about the roads the project might choose to take.

In each section where it seemed appropriate, the consultants added their own “two-cents” in sidebars called “Consider...” that highlight the main aspects of a particular area of work and reminders that could prove useful. The “Lessons Learned” boxes focus on learnings that are closely associated with the A + B = \$ experience.

C) Who contributed

A+B=\$ wanted to document its first year of life but reviewing meeting minutes and activity reports is not necessarily the best way to grasp the most powerful features of a story. This document is the result of a consultation process that took place over several weeks. Consultants Carmen Paquette and Claire Mazuhelli were hired to help us out. They reviewed useful documentation and, with the help of A+B=\$ project staff and managers, set up a consultation process to hear people who have been involved with the project. Such a dynamic approach seeks to gather and then convey the “real stuff” that could otherwise “take a thousand words to say”.

The consultants interviewed community members, individually or in focus groups. When individuals could not attend the meetings and it was felt

their perspective was missing from the global picture, written questionnaires were sent which they returned by fax or e-mail. The list of participants in the consultation includes:

- P Project managers (2);
- P Staff (2);
- P Members of the steering committee (5);
- P Members of Literacy Service Planning (LSP) (11);
- P Members of le Réseau des services d'alphabétisation et de formation de base de langue française de l'est ontarien (called le Réseau) (5);
- P Community partners in Cornwall (5);
- P Community partners in Hawkesbury (1);
- P Community partners in Morewood (4); and
- P Funders (2).

From their diverse points of view and in their own words, these people were asked to talk about:

- P Their initial motivation or interest in the project
- P Their impressions of the project's first year; its accomplishments, challenges and learnings; the contribution of individuals and organizations to A+B=\$'s development;
- P The project's future, its second year and beyond.

A total of 36 persons had the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas about A+B=\$. We believe and hope that their voices will be heard throughout this handbook.

D) A quick glance at Eastern Ontario's Local Board 1

Local Board 1 consists of the five geographic counties of Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Prescott and Russell. This is a mostly rural area located between Ottawa and Montreal in Eastern Ontario. The population is 190,000. The only city is Cornwall at 50,000 people. This is one of the most bilingual parts of Ontario, with French being the first language of 40 % of the population.

This region has education and literacy levels significantly below the provincial average. As far as education is concerned, in the 1996 census:

- P over 45,000 adults (35%) do not have a high school diploma;
- P 28% aged 25 to 44 have no high school diploma;
- P about 15,000 are in their prime workforce years (19 to 44);
- P about 15,000 are aged 45 to 64 (of whom 7,000 have less than grade 9).

For literacy statistics we only have extrapolations from the International

Adult Literacy Survey of 1994, but those estimates also indicate that this region is several percentage points below the provincial average.

The following section offers an overview of the local demography, economy and employment. As we were to discover, each of the five geographic counties is a “distinct society” in some ways!

The United Counties of Prescott-Russell

Demography

- 18 municipalities were amalgamated into eight in 1998.
- Public transportation is restricted and makes it almost impossible for people to travel within the counties without a car.
- To the east, in Prescott County, is the largest centre, Hawkesbury, with 10,000 residents. The Hawkesbury-L’Orignal area is the administrative and industrial heart of the region.
- To the west, the County of Russell has known unprecedented demographic growth. Its economic boost comes from employment in nearby Ottawa. Rockland has for a long time been the largest centre in the region, Casselman, Russell and Embrun being the other important ones.
- In 1996, 53% of the population lived in rural areas while 47% were in urban areas.
- Prescott and Russell are the most francophone counties in Ontario: in 1996, francophones totalled 70% of the population. Many institutions and businesses offer bilingual services to the public but use French as their internal working language.

Economy and employment

- Agriculture plays a major role: it is estimated that one person in three works on a farm or in an agriculture-related sector.
- Dairy and beef industries are the main types of agricultural operations.
- Agri-food and recreational tourism are growing sectors in the counties; since the 1991 census, the service sector has boomed while the manufacturing sector has known a marked decrease.
- In the counties, 83% of the workforce is employed by businesses that have nine employees or less. Population growth in Russell County has favoured the burgeoning of numerous small enterprises.
- In 1991, 58% of the workforce worked outside of the counties, namely in Ottawa-Carleton; this has an enormous impact on the

local economy since people tend to purchase goods and services close to their workplace.

- The workforce in Prescott-Russell is divided into the following sectors:
 - 44.9% - service sectors (clerks, salespeople);
 - 33.3% - blue collar sectors (agriculture, construction, transportation); and
 - 21.7% - white collar sectors (administration, social and health services, teaching).
- In 1991, the average income of families in Prescott-Russell was 10% lower than the provincial average.

The United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry (SDG)

Demography

- The city of Cornwall is the industrial, commercial and administrative centre of SDG. It is in the geographic county of Stormont but is not part of the county government. It is the most populous centre with 50,000 people. In Glengarry County, Alexandria is the regional centre. Winchester and Chesterville are the largest towns in Dundas, the county closest to Ottawa.
- the 20 municipalities within the SDG county government structure were merged into six municipalities in 1998.
- Part of the Akwesasne Reserve (Mohawk) is located in SDG.
- Apart from the city of Cornwall, public transportation is restricted; it is aimed at travelling to and from Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal.
- In 1996, 45% of the population lived in rural areas while 55% were in urban areas.
- In 1996, francophones totalled 27,000 which represents 25% of the total population.

Economy and employment

- Job loss was considerable during the 1990-91 recession and new employment consisted of part-time, underpaid and precarious positions. People who are not highly educated are mainly employed in the service sector (there are 120 restaurants in Cornwall), tourism and hotel business.
- Cornwall has long been recognized for its textile and pulp and paper industries. Over the past years, chemical product, furniture and

electronic industries have surfaced. School boards are the main employers, followed by Domtar, the two hospitals, and the city of Cornwall. In 1995, 61 manufacturing industries employed 4,329 people in Cornwall.

- Around Alexandria, there are a few manufacturing industries; Moulure Alexandria Moulding is notable.
- In 1991, the average income of families in SDG was 20% lower than the provincial average.
- Outside of Cornwall, agriculture and businesses relating to agriculture are the main employer.

Below, the Eastern Ontario Health Unit's Base Map represents the five counties in which the project has been and continues to be active. The province of Quebec borders to the east and north, United States to the south. For the eastern end of the counties, the city of Montreal is an hour's drive.

Linguistic differences... a bit of history¹

Linguistic factors are important for any project that aims to work with the whole community. This is particularly true in a literacy project, because there was no publicly funded French language education beyond the Grade 10 level in Ontario prior to 1968. That situation negatively affected education levels in the Franco-Ontarian population who are aged in their late 40's or more today.

Until 1988 the French language school system was not funded on an equal basis. If a property was owned by mixed English-French owners (which includes most corporations), all of its taxes went to the English school system. The first post-1988 students are just starting to enter the job market.

In a project like A+B=\$, which takes the holistic view that the economic conditions for everyone improve when the workforce is more literate, it makes sense to understand any demographic group which is below the local average and to give attention to their needs.

1

In 1912, French was banned as a language of instruction in Ontario schools (Regulation 17). In 1927, Regulation 17 was dropped.

But in 1927 all French schools were also Separate schools (Roman Catholic). At that time provincial funding for Separate schools only extended to Grade 10. Therefore private tuition fees were necessary to acquire a secondary school diploma in French until 1968.

In 1968, the provincial government agreed to provide funding to the Grade 13 level for French language schools. But this only applied to Public school boards, not Separate until 1988.

In 1988, the province granted equal provincial funding to Grade 13 for all schools, Separate or Public, French or English. The property tax system was changed to pool corporate taxes and allow pro-rating from mixed ownerships, which had previously gone entirely to Public and/or English schools. With the 1988 reforms and parallel local reforms to implement linguistic school board arrangements in Prescott-Russell and Stormont-Dundas-Glengarry, nearly equal conditions existed in this region.

However, a systemic bias in tax collection continued: persons who did not declare support for French (or Separate) schools saw their taxes go automatically to English (or Public) schools. And in most other parts of Ontario school boards were still organized on the basis of religion not language.

Since January 1, 1998 all schools and all school boards in Ontario are treated equally. All funding comes from the provincial government and all school boards are organized along linguistic lines. The first students who will have been entirely educated under a fully equal French language system will begin entering the work force in about the year 2010.

PART I BEFORE MAY 1998

AN IDEA... A SPARK

*"I realize a lot of the A+B=\$ project is about process...
rather than the tangible results I am used to as a literacy service provider".*

Dina McGowan, Executive Director, Tri-County Literacy, Cornwall

A) The inspiration

As is often the case, great ideas come from a spark, an idea that twigs us and won't go away. We see a project elsewhere, talk to one person, witness one event and the moment remains with us for a long time. Slowly, the idea evolves and gets closer to becoming reality. This is exactly what happened for A+B=\$.

One of the co-chairs of Literacy Service Planning attended the Literacy and Technology Summer Institute, at Dawson College in Montreal, in 1993. As Diane Coombs recounts the story: "It was a classic event in the literacy field. Funds were scant. Literacy Link Eastern Ontario paid my registration, Laubach Literacy Ontario paid my mileage and the Prescott-Russell School Board gave me the time to go! While I was there, I met a participant from Georgia, USA, who talked about a literacy project that had an innovative way of dealing with this issue; it entailed a whole process by which local communities created literacy projects that eventually led to their recognition as "Certified Literate Communities". Recognition came from the Governor of the State of Georgia. Community leaders have to find their own funding and meet a strict regimen of commitments over a 10-year period to receive "final certification". Some of the initiatives were at their second and third year. A set of eight criteria were used to assess a community's readiness to be certified as a "participant" at the beginning of the process. The Georgia process is now almost ready to review its first decade. More than forty projects were born from this initiative.

"One of the exciting components of the Georgia concept was its way of involving non-traditional partners in literacy. It solicited people from diverse backgrounds, truly representing the situation as it is: literacy does impact on all aspects of life, from self-esteem, to job opportunities, to health issues. In Georgia, the economic impact of illiteracy was clearly emphasized and that was also a new way to look at an old problem. Although it is a well known fact that illiteracy has an adverse effect on all areas of a person's life, this project not only believed it but took it a step further in actively involving representatives from sectors such as business, churches, social clubs, industry, etc. Those were all players who were not previously involved in a hands-on way in literacy.

I thought this idea of partnerships amongst all sectors of a community could only prove beneficial for everyone involved. I asked for more

information and started to read and talk about the Georgia experience. I saw an opportunity to transfer the concept to Eastern Ontario.”

B) From inspiration to experimentation

Mapping the road from Georgia to Ontario

The Georgia concept was a great idea that would not go away! After obtaining information and learning more about this initiative, the question was if and how it could be adapted to Eastern Ontario while preserving its best features.

The first major difference is the way funding is provided to community groups. In the United States, the projects were personally supported by the Governor but communities had to seek their own funding mechanisms. This meant that a wider community project had to be fleshed out and defined in order to secure funding first. Only then could it start its work in raising interest in its goals and objectives. In Canada, the government funds literacy initiatives but political leaders generally do not provide high profile support.

In Georgia, most projects operate in one county. It was decided, largely because of the Literacy Service Planning’s catchment area and mandate, that the project would work within the five counties of Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Prescott and Russell, including the city of Cornwall.

In Georgia, multicultural participation in the projects is emphasized. In Eastern Ontario, the issue is one of language since the counties’ population is composed of large proportions of anglophones and francophones. The project leaders decided from the outset that this initiative would touch both the anglophone and francophone communities. A+B=\$ did just that and still does to this day. This situation, as explained further in other sections of this book, did generate particular challenges. Let’s just say that simultaneous community development work in both linguistic communities is a question that goes beyond language; it runs deep in the historical, cultural and social make-up of communities.

Finally, in Georgia there is a small state-wide coordinating office to provide initial advice, information, and evaluation leading to initial certification as a participant, and subsequent final certification as a “Certified Literate Community”.

Paving the road: developing funding proposals

Funding proposals were prepared in 1998 and presented jointly to the Ministry of Education and Training of Ontario and the National Literacy Secretariat under the federal department of Human Resources Development Canada. The Ontario Ministry is now called the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Both funders were to match sums awarded to the project. The monies would serve to hire a staff person who could coordinate and lead the day to day work. It was a one year funding request for a pilot project based on the Georgia model. The components of the funding proposal clearly established the goals of the project and the methods and means it would use to accomplish its work.

At the time, the project was called “Literacy and Economic Development Project” or “Certified Literate Community” in reference to the Georgia experience. The funding proposal was developed by LSP literacy deliverers. Among the most useful elements of the proposal was a month by month work plan to be achieved during the project’s first year. This proved to be a very handy tool to manage and monitor the evolution of the project. The proposal also had measurable outcomes.

The money was received in May of 1998. A+B=\$ was funded as a pilot project at \$60,000 and could commence its activities. The project evolved and followed the ebb and flow of community response and intangibles that often create surprises and unexpected challenges.

The project achieved a lot of early success and it was quickly realized that more resources were required for administrative and logistical support. This is partly due to the size of the territory and the fact that the approach had to be adapted to the characteristics of each county. There was also a need to devote resources to documenting the “pilot project” experience and sharing it provincially and to some extent nationally, and to evaluating the Georgia model.

Based on demonstrated progress on the measurable outcomes in the initial proposal, a supplemental \$15,000 was granted. The needs of each region or project are different but based on experience here and in Georgia such a project definitely requires the services of one full-time equivalent staff person.



LESSONS LEARNED

T When developing a funding concept, an extremely detailed work plan with measurable outcomes helps in guiding and evaluating the work through its evolution

C) What we set out to do

As its logo indicates, the project wanted to establish the link between literacy and economic development. A+B=\$ aimed to increase literacy levels and make life-long learning the new norm in the region. By raising awareness about literacy and by involving as many partners as possible in our activities, we recognized that the magnitude of the situation meant that no one agency could make a significant impact. Therefore, A+B=\$ chose to inform and seek out individuals and organizations who were not currently involved in literacy. In doing so, we took on a leadership role in ensuring that as many sectors as possible were made aware of illiteracy's impact on a person's life and ultimately on the whole region's socio-economic situation.

More concretely, we wanted more people to finish high school, more adults to take literacy courses, more workers to follow training courses and more people to train throughout their lives. A+B=\$'s ultimate aim is to foster a better economy and social well-being in the five counties it serves through life-long learning.

These statements are broad and may seem "high and mighty", but we found tangible ways of working towards these goals. Our work can best be described by using the following categories:

- P In order for ourselves and others to better know our community:** obtain and distribute relevant information about the community itself and literacy stakeholders, etc.
- P In order to raise awareness about literacy:** do social marketing, publicity and promotion; outreach and network with all relevant sectors, organizations and individuals as well as design and offer public presentations.
- P In order to foster community mobilization,** actively seek more formal community partnerships and host direct activities.

The work that fits into each of these categories is ongoing and often overlaps. One step leads to the other, while the other is still going on. This is the nature of the beast and often makes for exciting developments. We set out on our “expedition” with these guidelines in mind. As you will see, it was quite a journey!

PART II

THE FIRST YEAR

KINDLING A SPARK...

CREATING A BONFIRE

*“Literacy is an important determinant of health.
The A+B=\$ project is one of the most meaningful things
I have ever been involved with”*

*Janet Allingham, Public Health Nurse
at the Eastern Ontario Health Unit
and member of the project steering committee*

A) Getting Started

A+B=\$ within the existing networks

Even though we were innovative and had specific goals, we were very aware that we needed to fit into the existing network of literacy service providers and stakeholders. The following explains the nature of the various links we had with groups and organizations during our first year.

First, Literacy Service Planning acted as our sponsor. LSP is a group of literacy service providers and community leaders whose main mandate is “to promote and develop literacy in Stormont, Dundas, Glengarry, Prescott and Russell counties”. One function is to prepare an annual regional service plan for the Ministry showing how all literacy agencies work together. Another function is liaison with organizations that deal with a lot of potential literacy clients to improve promotion and referrals. A third function is to promote literacy generally and develop new services.

After discussing the options, LSP decided that one of its members would take on the role of trustee for the project. The Tri-County Literacy Council (TCLC), located in Cornwall, was selected as the financial and legal administrator for this responsibility. As Dina McGowan, TCLC’s executive director stated, “it was an opportunity for our small organization to participate in a larger project and to gain more recognition”. TCLC assumed the responsibility for the budget and the coordinator’s contract.

The project managers had always intended to work in both official languages by involving the francophone community. There was no exact counterpart for LSP within the French-speaking community, but it seemed essential to link up with French literacy service providers. Le Réseau des services d’alphabétisation et de formation de base de langue française de l’est ontarien (Le Réseau) has a mandate “to promote a francophone society in which all members develop and maintain lifelong basic abilities and a good understanding of the written word and mathematics, in order for them to flourish and participate fully in the social, cultural and economic development of their community”. Le Réseau’s difference with LSP is not only linguistic; it is solely composed of literacy service providers; it works in the five counties but also includes Ottawa-Carleton and Kingston. In order to get their support, the Réseau was contacted after A+B=\$’s coordinator was hired; this situation made francophones

feel as though they were included as an “afterthought” which did not necessarily set up an ideal scenario for collaboration. The coordinator put a lot of time and effort in continually ensuring the Réseau was well informed and that bilingualism was always included in the project’s orientation. A member of Le Réseau, Suzanne Benoît, was invited to join the project steering committee and become an informal third project manager.

The steering committee was created in order to anchor the project in the community and to get support and guidance for our work. It did not really have a management or supervisory role but rather acted as a sounding board and advisory group for our project. The majority of its members had never before been involved in literacy in any way.



LESSONS LEARNED

- T Information and accountability are two distinct concepts, carrying different responsibilities.
- T Clearly establish the accountability channels from the outset and have a backup plan for revising these if the need arises.

Hiring staff and setting up an office

Now that funds were secured, our work could begin to take shape. LSP members were ready to hire a project coordinator. Although it was first planned to have a full-time worker assigned to the project, the hiring committee decided on a consultant to run the project. The consultant was David Sherwood with a wealth of community planning experience as a major strength. The project managers designated by LSP were Diane Coombs and Dina McGowan. The scene was set.

CONSIDER...

Staffing your project in several ways and choosing the most suitable for your circumstances:

- < *using staff from existing organizations*
- < *one staff person with technical support*
- < *a team of several part-time employees with different functions or responsible for different parts of the community*
- < *ensuring that two or three persons maintain or alternate in representing the project, for shared visibility*

Clarifying staff roles in terms of:

- < *overall project objectives*
- < *decision-making*
- < *accountability*
- < *shared leadership.*

It is worth considering the climate of the times from the initial proposal to the actual operations. The words “restructuring” and “reform” became common as the Ontario government initiated unprecedented structural reforms to municipalities, school boards and provincial departments. Local governance structures became larger and the provincial civil service became smaller. Many LSP member organizations were affected. So was the Literacy and Basic Skills section of the Ministry. Hanging on to the project focus became an everyday challenge as the school board amalgamation removed one player from the LSP and at the same time doubled the responsibilities of one project manager.

The consultant went into a bilingual flurry of presenting reports, informing committees and individuals. As the project moved along and its potential success and early inroads were recognized, it became evident, as suggested in the proposal, that administrative support was necessary. Lynda Poyser was hired on a freelance basis, thanks to a supplemental funding application. Workload, geography and success further stretched the project

staff limits and two field agents, Ivory Lauzon and Diana Pethick, also freelance, extended the project’s reach. These additions had a great impact and served the community and project needs.

Forming a steering committee

For a community-based project such as A+B=\$ to develop ownership and involvement, it made sense to bring together a diverse group of people who could guide the initiative.

This group of people needed to represent the community-wide involvement we wanted to build: community organizations, health and social agencies, economic development people, literacy providers, libraries, municipal government, newspapers, etc. About 25 people were identified and 15 agreed to join. The steering committee had literacy providers or stakeholders plus a majority of non-literacy representatives. Although efforts were made, francophone representation remains minimal.

CONSIDER...

When starting your community project, which type of organization would be the best anchor in terms of:

- < *being visible?*
- < *being credible?*
- < *being seen as working on the issue in a new way?*

In your community, what would be best:

- < *working within an existing organization?*
- < *setting up a new group?*
- < *working with an existing network of groups?*
- < *setting up a new network of groups?*

Within the overall project, what will be the core group's:

- < *mandate?*
- < *its modes of communication?*
- < *its decision-making and advisory scope?*

What will this group need:

- < *to keep it informed?*
- < *to keep it involved?*
- < *to allow it to act individually or collectively?*

A core group of about six persons eventually maintained their ongoing involvement and the rest of the committee were kept informed through minutes of meetings. One result of the turbulence in the Ontario institutional environment was that many people told us "I don't have time for meetings anymore".

During the first year, a total of eleven meetings were held and provided feedback and ideas to the A+B=\$ staff. Similarly to everyone we touched, in the beginning they wanted to know more about local literacy statistics and resources. The members' awareness about the impact of illiteracy on individuals' lives and on the socio-economics of Eastern Ontario grew as did their commitment to change what they could about this situation. Some examples were to bring their awareness of low literacy to their daily work: by helping people understand prescriptions, encouraging their colleagues to get plain language training or lobbying politicians about project funding, they symbolized the way in which a project such as A+B=\$ can make a real difference.

In wanting to know more about the local situation the steering committee was at the root of one of the most important things the project did. A request was made to Statistics Canada that would provide unprecedented data on the situation in their own community. We will

talk about the positive impact of this initiative later on.

The steering committee also prepared a strategic plan, which described its long term vision, mission and mandate, as well as the values, priorities and strategic objectives that would guide its work. The strategic plan is one of the perspectives by which the project was assessed by participants.

A steering committee can serve many functions. From an advisory body, to having direct involvement in the daily operations of a project, to assuming management responsibilities. Within A+B=\$ the steering committee, in its first year, served as a sounding board. All the members highlighted the “brainstorming” part of their meetings as being most stimulating. From being a “think tank” for the project’s staff and leaders, the steering committee’s role is slowly shifting towards more ownership of the project, indicated by the work they are now doing between meetings to further advance the project.

The core group, which is rather small, did manage to work diligently for the good of the project. Although open to more representatives being included, it is now working with a group of dedicated citizens, from diverse backgrounds.



LESSONS LEARNED

- T** Set up a credible group whose growing awareness sustains their participation and commitment to be active on the issue of literacy.
- T** A+B=\$ had difficulty in establishing initial links with francophone literacy providers but this was overcome- underline an approach to the community as a whole, working together.
- T** Expect resistance! Being a new entity can be a sensitive issue. Add extra care and diplomacy to the work list - support, do not replace existing structures.

B) Getting to know our community

Getting local statistics on education and literacy

When the project was underway, one reality became very clear: there was no definite picture of the literacy situation within the five counties. Statistics were provincial or regional and did not break down the under Grade 9 group. The steering committee wanted to develop plans that were anchored in reality and this called for facts rather than presumptions. It was decided that A+B=\$ would pay for a formal request to Statistics Canada, in order to obtain relevant figures for the five counties. The project also obtained literacy statistics for federal electoral districts from the International Adult Literacy Survey.

This move is most certainly one of our greatest accomplishments. The education statistics provided a realistic (and somewhat alarming) portrait of the situation municipality by municipality. The literacy statistics confirmed the situation. The figures were transferred to overheads and were later used for public presentations.

An overwhelming majority of people involved with the project insisted on the benefit of these statistics. Some clearly had no idea of the magnitude of the literacy problem in the five counties. Others had an inkling but still, the sheer numbers were, as they said, "quite an eye-opener". This is true of people who are involved in literacy as well as people from other community sectors.

The package of statistics was useful in more ways than one. It gave us credibility when talking about literacy. It provided us with the opportunity to disseminate these important facts. In doing so, the project met one of its main goals, which is to raise awareness about literacy.

Although the figures represent a real plus for anyone interested in literacy, a number of people noted that their use could also discourage people in the face of such a tremendous problem; employers and business people can also react negatively in that it paints a sorry picture of the region. Businesses might not be interested in investing in a population that faced such basic learning challenges. The fact that people could obtain their high school diploma and still have low literacy skills can create a negative reaction on the part of those who work in the education field and might feel threatened by this situation.

Knowing these concerns, we were cautious in not making our full set of statistics publicly available too soon, although we did share them with literacy service providers and other public bodies who could be trusted to use them as a tool to improve their service delivery.

A+B=\$ did and still are doing a lot of work to make sure that the problem is not hidden under the carpet but rather discussed openly and dealt with. Rather than blaming, we seek to show that we can act together to improve this situation.



LESSONS LEARNED

- T Getting up to date and credible literacy statistics gives early credibility.
- T When raising awareness about an issue such as literacy, it is important to prepare for negative reactions to statistics that paint a sombre portrait of the community. These can range from:
 - minimizing the problem
 - explaining away
 - blaming the individual or organizations
 - wanting to hide the statistics from present or potential employers.
- T This can be countered by emphasizing a positive, solution-oriented approach.

Getting to know the literacy stakeholders

In pursuing our goal to involve the community, we had to find out who we were dealing with in ways that we could “introduce” literacy to our community. Who are the literacy stakeholders? How many are there? Who do they serve and how? What were the proportions of French and English programs? We set out to “map ” the region in terms of literacy services and programs. Obviously, the results would help in identifying potential partners but they could also be used as information to anyone interested in such services and programs.

Some of the facts that came out of this endeavour were quite interesting. Approximately 1,000 learners were registered in literacy programs in the five counties, of which approximately 68% were English and 32% French-speaking.

The style of Ontario literacy instruction varies by organizational group and by language group. This is true of the seven government funded anglophone and francophone programs in the five eastern counties.

The anglophone community-based style is often one-to-one tutoring via trained volunteers such as is Tri-County Literacy Council, a Laubach Literacy Council operating in SDG.

All four francophone community-based programs offer small group classes with paid instruction staff like at *Moi j'apprends* in the Rockland area. One reason Francophone service providers can not rely on volunteers is that there are, relatively speaking, fewer educated potential volunteers to assist the much larger group of potential learners.

The Upper Canada District School Board, which operates anglophone programming in the five counties, has small group delivery with paid instruction staff in SDG and a hybrid model in Prescott-Russell with both paid instructors and Laubach Literacy of Canada trained volunteer tutors. The Cornwall campus also operates a literacy class for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students.

The St. Lawrence College offers large group classroom instruction with paid staff at the Cornwall campus. (The francophone parallel does this via *La Cité Collégiale* in Ottawa.)

There is also one all-volunteer group in Dundas County and one programme delivered by the Akwesasne Mohawk reserve. The project initiated contact with these but they did not participate (nor are they members of LSP).

C) Raising awareness about literacy

Raising and eventually expanding awareness about such a topic as literacy is no small feat! This is where the whole notion of social marketing emerges. Social marketing is in essence the selling of an idea or a prevailing issue within a community. It does not aim to provide a product but rather to convey a message; in our case that literacy is an important component of a community's well-being on all levels. This work entails simultaneous and sustained efforts on various fronts, to prompt community involvement on the issue and to maintain momentum.

Consider...

- The options of riding the wave of interest versus investing where the need is greatest.
- Meeting accountability and community demands can be conflicting.

In striving to attain our objectives, we worked on three different aspects. We used publicity and promotion; we produced press releases that promoted our activities or those of other literacy groups. We did outreach and established networking links with representatives of numerous community sectors and agencies. We also prepared and offered public presentations aimed at informing and triggering community support.

All of these aspects are of equal importance. The evolution of a project determines where the emphasis will be put; it is a dynamic process that calls for flexibility and readiness to deal with responses that result from the activities and events. Contacts are not made simply to make contacts, but to seek opportunities. Meetings or presentations result in diverse responses and we needed to deal with those while going about the rest of our business.

Publicity, Promotion and Media Relations

Publicity and promotion were a crucial part of the project's first year in that it was essential to promote its goals and put literacy on the map.

We work within a region that counts 11 local weekly newspapers and one daily. Most towns have cable TV. In this regard, we suspect that media coverage was easier to stimulate than in larger urban areas where the market is much more competitive, although we also recognize that newspapers have a vested interest in promoting literacy. We took full advantage of the free coverage provided by the local press. A+B=\$ prepared by reading guidebooks on how to write press releases.

Press releases containing general information were somewhat successful, but we banked on “special interest” communications that really triggered wide coverage. For example, press releases that were linked to:

- P announcing that a new group had been formed (“the flavour of the month” syndrome);
- P announcing International Literacy Day (an event with some profile);
- P publicizing a specific activity, such as a workshop that is open to the public (“of public interest”).

CONSIDER...

Finding out who has the appropriate fax and e-mail media lists:

- < local, regional, provincial, national organizations or networks

One of the secrets of our success in garnering media coverage is that we adapted press releases to the local media. This meant issuing eight slightly different versions of the press release according to county and language. For example, one paragraph was changed by including local statistics, by naming a local resident who sat on the project steering committee or by mentioning the activities of the local literacy centre on International Literacy Day.

Media coverage never faltered and it became a tool that was used most efficiently. Diane Coombs recalls, “For me one of the turning points of the project was the publication of an editorial in the *Cornwall Standard Freeholder*. The editorialist had not only picked up on A+B=\$’s information, but wrote an article that conveyed a real sense of understanding of the issue and its impact on the socio-economic reality of the community”. This is a concrete example of how the media was used to raise general awareness about literacy. This being a main goal of the project, media was instrumental on helping to spread the word throughout a community.

LESSONS LEARNED

Ensure your press releases:

- < are no longer than an 8½ by 11 page
- < quote a person
- < always include statistics or a fact
- < try to have some “newsworthy” twist or angle
- < use catchy titles

Have a list of facts ready for the people named in the press



In general, it was more difficult for us to get television, radio and daily newspaper coverage. However, the press release on the 1998 International Literacy Day, September 8th, which corresponded with the founding of A+B=\$, led to an interview on an English regional television and an interview with a French provincial radio program.

We established a fax list to distribute the material, including all the media and the MP's and MPP's offices. The content was also posted in the provincial literacy electronic bulletin board (AlphaCom). ABC Canada, a national organization, was a source of draft lists, as was the local Health Unit, although we did make corrections and additions. Creating a list is an investment in more ways than one. One of the ways we got "brownie points" was by sharing our list with literacy service providers and other community organizations. We shared our lists with a variety of organizations as they shared their information with us. Although often advised to contact journalists personally, there was no follow up on this idea.

There was undoubtedly more media coverage than was documented. The monitoring system was incomplete at the beginning of the project. The steering committee, project leaders and staff kept an eye on local newspapers and media in general. Later on, we found out that a local business offered media monitoring. They forwarded copies of media clippings for a small fee.

There was no monitoring system for public service announcements on local radio stations. There is no local television station and although press releases were sent to Ottawa media because they are distributed in Eastern Ontario, they rarely responded.

Local Cable TV posted our notices of coming events in their electronic bulletin boards. We probably could have made better use of Cable through pre-taped advertising or appearing on community programs.



LESSONS LEARNED

- T It is very useful to break down regional information to local issues or facts for local media in order to trigger interest and media follow up.
- T It is useful, at the beginning of a project, to set up a monitoring system that would include print, radio and television media coverage as well as community response; set up funding for this from the outset.

Outreach and Networking

Phone, talk, fax, meet, talk, e-mail and meet again! A+B=\$, when it first started, needed to make contact with literacy stakeholders as well as non literacy community leaders. A lot of work was put into reaching out and establishing personal contacts, to talk about the project and to make sure its goals were well understood. We were the new kid on the block and as such, needed to reassure the existing programs and services so that our presence would not generate turf wars. A+B=\$ succeeded in this. As Leanne Clendering, member of the steering committee, puts it “within A+B=\$ there is no struggle about territory... everyone works together towards the same goal”.

CONSIDER...

When reaching out to a community:

- < ensure you are documented on the issue you want to promote
- < remember outreach is time consuming

Draw up a plan in which you target the contacts that are:

- < essential to your work
- < important to your project
- < would be nice to have

Attend other like-minded organization's events and activities.

Ensure that you deal with follow-up responses from outreach and networking efforts:

- < in a timely fashion BUT...
- < in accordance with your priorities and long term objectives.
- < follow-up, follow-up, follow-up!

We think what success we enjoyed in networking was at least in part due to the fact that we had taken the time to document the situation. When we made contacts, we were well prepared to talk about literacy in Eastern Ontario and this probably allowed for easier entry into organizations and agencies. During its first year, A+B=\$ participated in a number of community activities, such as:

- P** International Literacy Celebration, Centre à la P.A.G.E, Alexandria
- P** Major presentation on five counties Agricultural Study, Casselman
- P** Briefing session for Ministry of Education and Training field staff
- P** Official opening of the Referral Centre for Adult Training (CAFA), Hawkesbury

In addition A+B=\$ established direct contact with numerous individuals and organizations, for instance:

- P** The Eastern Ontario Training Board
- P** Provincial MPPs and federal MPs
- P** Literacy providers in both official languages
- P** The Eastern Ontario Health Unit
- P** Municipal government representatives

Outreach and networking is ongoing. It is continuous work that allowed A+B=\$ to gain community renown and sustained interest.

One of the keys to successful outreach, networking and public presentations is follow-up. Whenever one of our community contacts “sparked” someone’s interest, we made sure to provide “kindling” and tried to “fan the flames”. This might be giving them the brochure of the nearest literacy centre, providing a copy of our statistics, promising to call back with an answer to their question or to connect them to a resource, etc. This takes time but paid off in many small ways. As noted elsewhere in this report, when we failed to do good follow-up it was noticed in the community.

Public presentations

CONSIDER...

What information you convey and how you use information:

- < to say what you did (activity reports)
- < to share what others have done (clearinghouse function)
- < to provide tips for action (action planning)

Using a basic adult education method for community work, considering:

- < knowledge: what information people need
- < skills: what can people do now or learn to do about the issue
- < attitude: what seems to be the prevailing attitude: enthusiasm, disbelief, empowerment to act

Keeping in mind that:

- < knowledge alone does not usually lead to action or to changing attitudes
- < people need to know what/how they can do something about the situation

In order to establish ourselves within the communities we serve, we had to become known so that partners would share our objectives. We prepared public presentations that described the project and its goals, as well as the prevailing situation with regards to literacy and its impact on the socio-economic situation in the region.

It was important to develop key messages and to repeat them wherever the project was asked to speak. Such presentations were successful in that they yielded diversified community response. A majority of people got involved in partnership meetings either through the media or via public presentations they attended. We were never content to state the facts. We always issued an invitation to act in small, concrete personal ways as well as in larger, strategic, organizational ways.

In the first year, we made presentations to a variety of organizations and groups such as:

- P** North Glengarry Community Economic Development group
- P** Dundas County Women’s Institute
- P** Seaway Valley United Church Presbytery
- P** Eastern Ontario Health Unit family home visitors
- P** United Counties Council

Outcomes from these presentations were:

- P** media coverage

- P volunteers coming forward to contribute to the project (for example, as members of the steering committee)
- P community support to the project
- P mutual learning experiences (especially with family visitors who deal with “high risk families”)
- P direct contacts with local, provincial and national elected officials
- P rooms being made available for project meetings and events
- P requests for information and presentations
- P resources offered by Eastern Ontario Training Board

One of the most interesting and unexpected results of these efforts certainly was the immediate involvement of local people. Our expectation was that this would occur later, but following an A+B=\$ activity, two local women from Dundas County decided to organize a plain language workshop in their own community. By using our resources and gaining the collaboration of the local church and groups, the workshop took place and was very successful. Several participants signed up to become volunteer tutors.

It is also after this activity that A+B=\$ decided to hire a local field worker for Dundas County. She used our documents to make public presentations on behalf of the project. Finally, another local woman joined the field agent and they both worked on presentations; one of these women was the director of the food bank and she was particularly interested in learning how to help her clients with literacy. “People need to feel secure and know that they don’t have to be ashamed.” As the other field worker added, limited “Literacy is sad not bad”.

Community work is best accomplished by people who are from and know the community they are working in. The Dundas field workers did a lot towards anchoring the project in Dundas.



LESSONS LEARNED

- T Our presentations were somewhat open-ended, in that we invited people to talk about how low literacy affected their organization or community. We learned a lot about how we could be helpful from these discussions
- T Be willing to listen and learn
- T Be positive in your approach. Choose language/wording that convey positive messages. Stick to them in all documentation and presentations, and train project staff in them.
- T When generating interest and motivation within the community, appropriate follow up is important so that good ideas and positive energies are not dissipated after the first event.
- T Follow up takes time but is an essential way to involve community leaders more directly and ensure that they eventually take ownership of the project.

D) Towards mobilizing the Community

Community mobilization is a long term goal and one that fuelled each and every activity A+B=\$ undertook during its first year. It goes hand in hand with informing, reaching out and networking in that it flows from these efforts. In working towards mobilization around the issue of literacy, we oriented our efforts to establishing more formal partnerships, where the work would lead to action. We thought another good way of stimulating involvement was for us to lead activities in the region; we initiated plain language workshops and organized a reading activity targeted to children in a library.

Creating more formal partnerships

CONSIDER...

Avoiding adding too much information about the issue as a catalyst to local action: a few concrete steps and support during implementation go a long way!

Preparing to work at and taking pride in the fact that you have helped people feel confident they can act on their own on an issue such as literacy.

Ensuring that all avenues for partners' involvement and empowerment are considered, even if it means modifying your work plan.

Parallel to informal networking, we wanted to stimulate more formal partnerships amongst representatives of various sectors. The concept of partnerships meant that people received information, could comment on the project's objectives and were offered the opportunity to get involved in some way. The key was to trigger their interest and to see how these organizations could contribute to the project, either by providing human or financial resources or any other form of concrete support.

We did a lot of work around the preparation of partnership meetings. Invitations were sent to all the people that had attended public presentations, those we had been networking with and representatives of all the sectors we wanted to touch. We asked them to identify other people we should invite. Two meetings were held in strategic locations.

Partnership meetings were held in:

- P** Cornwall: 24 organizations were represented
- P** Hawkesbury: 11 organizations were represented.

These meetings touched a wide array of community agencies and leaders. The conversations and discussions injected a powerful impetus for the social marketing campaign that was ongoing but on which A+B=\$ intended to put more emphasis in the coming months. It was the first time such a project existed, that bridged francophone and anglophone literacy stakeholders and aimed to establish partnerships with non literacy community leaders.

As a participant stated “These meetings were a great opportunity for us, as community workers, to network among each other and also to share our hopes and dreams... it is always good to know that you are not alone in dealing with a difficult issue”.



LESSONS LEARNED

- T Regular partnership meetings and/or community forums can sustain or rekindle interest.
- T It is more conducive to mobilization that the discussions include mutual assistance and actions that benefit both the project and your partners.

Project Activities

In trying to implement a community project such as ours, we felt it was important to sponsor and/or organize some tangible activities that would help raise our visibility, possibly ignite community mobilization around literacy, answer a need, and show we were willing to act as well as talk.

With this in mind, we undertook two activities. At the steering committee’s initiation, we organized an activity around Christmas time, where “Santa Claus” read to children at the Hawkesbury Public Library as a demonstration “that we are a community that reads”. Also we set up plain language workshops. These were not in the original work plan but as it turns out, were greatly appreciated in the community and met a

community expressed desire for tools with which to meet the area's literacy difficulties head on.

Plain language workshops

For many partners and community activists, the highlight of our efforts was the plain language workshops. Workshops were held in:

- P** Cornwall, in French (7 participants)
- P** Cornwall, in English (13 participants)
- P** Hawkesbury, in French (7 participants)
- P** Morewood United Church, in English (18 participants)

A \$20 registration fee was charged. We hired plain language trainers to give the workshops. We have been advised by people "in the business" that if the workshop is repeated yearly we could gradually increase the fee and/or attract more people so that it becomes self-funding.

In total, the four plain language workshops allowed 45 persons to be taught or "re-taught" how to write simply. All participants were greatly stimulated by the contents and appropriateness of the workshops. As one community leader put it "I would really like to see more plain language workshops happening; I would certainly send my staff who deal with a large number of clients who are on social benefits. It could also be done in the workplace to allow for even more participation".

Plain language workshops really brought home the idea of ensuring that written words are used in a way that is accessible to everyone.

Participants benefited personally and also brought their new awareness back to their jobs. One participant stated that "after the plain language workshop, I looked at the material produced in my workplace. I asked if they were aware of the difficulties some documents represented for our clients. Some of them cannot even read the instructions for medicine they are taking. That is not only a literacy issue, it's a health and safety issue"

We think that such "ripple effects" symbolize the positive impact of activities on the issue of literacy. Concrete examples, related to "real life", can become powerful instruments to promote community awareness, involvement and mobilization. The workshops allowed participants to examine the daily written tools they used and to consider their real value, in terms of communication. It is not enough to give out information, the key remains for the information to be understood.

It also allows the workshop participant to look at the world from the point of view of a person with low literacy skills -- that often generates understanding. Grandiose gestures don't always yield the most grandiose results: each step individuals took after the workshop in their own workplace or in other areas of their daily lives makes a real difference. It only takes a small stone to create a lot of ripples. This message was clearly understood by participants at our plain language workshops.



LESSONS LEARNED

- T The project greatly benefited from concrete activities and events which stimulated the involvement of local persons who could reach out to their own communities.
- T It is empowering for individuals and groups to use a project's tools and expertise to organize their own events. It then starts to be a community-owned project.

The “Santa Claus reads to children” event

The activity was organized in collaboration with the Hawkesbury Library, the Hawkesbury Family Centre, the Health Unit and the Referral Centre for Adult Training. It was advertized as a respite program where parents could leave their children for an hour, while doing their shopping and their kids would be read stories. We had a member of the local literacy centre there to see if any parents were interested in literacy training and we gave out brochures. Twenty-five children attended the reading. It was a tangible demonstration of a community interested in reading. It was a terrific marketing image and got a lot of publicity.

This activity had very positive outcomes. There was extensive media coverage and the librarian joined our project's steering committee. It was also a team building exercise. Members of the steering committee originated the idea and helped organize it.

Sample ticket to the reading event:

Sustaining linkages and community response

We sustained many types of linkages throughout our first year of existence. The linkages were maintained by:

- P holding meetings
- P hosting events and activities
- P attending other groups' events
- P using telephone, fax and e-mail
- P maintaining regular individual contacts with key decisions makers and community leaders.

Those linkages, depending on their nature were maintained for different purposes, such as to:

- P distribute relevant information around literacy (statistics, promoting activities, etc)
- P distribute information about our efforts and activities
- P gather information about literacy needs in the community
- P action planning (for example, steering committee, project managers)
- P getting feedback and brainstorming about ways to accomplish our work (partnership meetings)
- P gain support and active contribution from community leaders and groups (networking, public presentations)
- P promote literacy in general and our efforts in particular (publicity, promotion, media relations, etc)

Our efforts resulted in:

- P Sharing of lists with the Health Unit, which has a function of community information and clearinghouse
- P Funds granted by the Eastern Ontario Training Board for radio ads in the context of our social marketing campaign.
- P A Certificate of Merit, 1999 Award of Rural Excellence, from Rural Living/Pioneer Hi-Breed Limited, for Innovation in Community Economic Development.
- P Increased media coverage, including articles on literacy that were not generated by A+B=\$

PART III
AROUND THE BONFIRE...

REFLECTING ON HOW WE DID

A) Assessing our success in light of Georgia criteria...and assessing the Georgia model

In Georgia, a set of eight criteria is used to evaluate a community's success in achieving its goals. Although the project borrowed the concept, we obviously adapted our efforts to our community's reality. Let's examine the progress A+B=\$ made during its first year in light of the eight Georgia criteria.

1. Be sponsored by a community group with written plans and objectives to accomplish this mission.

CONSIDER...	
When starting a literacy project:	
<	which of the Georgia criteria are in place in your community
<	which criteria could easily be put in place
<	which criteria need to be adapted to your reality
<	which criteria could be discarded.
Ensure you are not bound or hindered by the Georgia criteria.	

- Literacy Service Planning spearheaded and sponsored the project. Its long term objectives are similar to the project goals. Its funding proposal contained a detailed work plan.

2. Ensure all major sectors of the community are actively involved, including multicultural representation and adult students.

- We actively sought to involve all sectors of the community. We made contacts with representatives from the following sectors: literacy services and programs, education, health, social, religious groups, community organizations, politicians from all levels and unions, employers and business.
- Generally, the project did well in bridging the anglophone and francophone literacy providers, which had never been done before in the region. However, direct involvement and contributions were much more substantial in the anglophone community. The French-speaking population did not respond in the same way. This is an area where we still have work to do.
- Regarding the different sectors, we made our mark almost everywhere. Whether they are members of the steering committee or partners, people who are involved with the project do represent a good cross-section of the community.

- More work needs to be done to involve the economic, business and industry sectors. Considering the clear link we make between socio-economic well-being and literacy, it is essential that these sectors are represented and/or touched in a more direct way.
- As far as our position within the existing literacy networks, it can be said that the project has earned an enviable place within the regional groups and organizations. A+B=\$, as a project, still needs to work on linking up with provincial and national literacy bodies, although some individuals within A+B=\$ do maintain those links.
- The Web site was to be developed in Year 1 was not ready until Year 2.
- We had an adult ex-student on our steering committee but were not successful in replacing her when she left.

3. Define its geographic boundaries.

- The geographic area was clearly determined from the onset and remains the same. Local Boards in Ontario are pre-set into 26 areas. We worked in Local Board 1.

4. Use census data and other sources to estimate how many adults need services, and to formulate a recruitment plan.

- This was achieved by the formal request made to Statistics Canada. We also used published data from the International Adult Literacy Survey.
- Although the statistics were very useful, these figures can become even more significant by being disseminated in many more ways and we plan to make full use of such important facts. Census data leads us to smaller and smaller units - leading us in turn to the ultimate reality of literacy as a micro-community issue.

5. Plan to achieve the goals over a 10-year period.

- A+B = \$'s goals are long term ones.
- The 10-year period in Georgia related to the attainment of objectives that would allow for certification of communities. Early on in the project, A+B=\$ decided that this was non-essential for success as well as difficult to implement (i.e. there is no certifying body to undertake the responsibility of certification and A+B=\$ did not want to play such a role). Certification carries a labelling connotation that we were not comfortable with.

6. Define a method for measuring and evaluating progress.

- A+B=\$'s initial monthly work plan, part of the funding proposal, was a useful tool in monitoring the work being done. A strategic plan and periodic work plans were developed.
- Most of our short term measurable outcomes are process related (eg. contact all municipalities).
- A lot of the work we accomplished relates to long term achievements; raising awareness is not easy to measure, but our press clippings are one indicator.
- It will take time to impact higher enrollments in literacy services and programs, but Ministry statistics will provide monitoring.
- As the Georgia model suggests, 10 years to impact education and literacy levels in the general population is a reasonable timeframe. In the eastern Ontario context, the LSP provides, we estimate, a three year jump into the model. The project added a year of intense activity. Thus we hope to have some impact detectible in the 2001 census of education levels as compared to our 1996 baseline.

7. Ensure that the concept and goals are endorsed in writing by all governing bodies.

- This is ongoing work; we gained support from federal and provincial politicians. Through meetings and contacts, A+B=\$ also got the written endorsement of some local governments. The implications of written endorsements are, in some cases, as concrete as a willingness to insert A+B=\$ flyers in municipal mailings or putting up billboards along county roads; in others the support is more in principle and included in resolutions (as such a literacy component is introduced to the organization's mandate).

8. Develop a budget plan for 3 years. Secure funds and resources to carry the plan through the 1st year, including a staff person.

- A three-year budget was not developed because contributions awarded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the National Literacy Secretariat are for the first year of operation only.
- A 2 year plan might be sufficient to kick-start a project in the Ontario context. There is wisdom in the Georgia model in this regard. The investment needed to start a project from scratch means it is unrealistic to expect lasting impact in the

- first year.
- Knowing that many grant programs in Canada are for one year at a time, we suggest you work hard on your partnerships. The community partners may support your applications for funding in subsequent years, or suggest non-literacy funding agencies you may not be familiar with, or assist in discovering private or public funding within the community.
 - Our project did have contracted staff support.

Assessing the Georgia model

The Georgia model is used in over 40 counties in that state. Our experience confirms the Georgia “Certified Literate Community Program” model is a sound one. We would expect that any community which follows its basic structures and adapts them to their local experience would meet with satisfactory degrees of success. In the appendices you will find more detailed information on the way they build their process through their eight evaluation criteria and the structure of their boards of directors.

There are some general distinctions between the American and the Canadian experience which affect the way the model evolved here. In the state of Georgia there is a Certified Literate Community Program coordinating office and, for the first several years, the governor and his wife provided constant high-profile leadership influence. In the Eastern Ontario and Canadian reality this type of ongoing influence can only be exerted through more grass roots adoption of the literacy philosophy. We discovered that very practical tools must be offered to community organizations and individuals so that they can easily adopt them and put them to work. The Plain Language Workshops were a case in point. Participants took away useable knowledge that could help them do their job better. It also affected their world view of literacy and contributed to a more grass roots style of community influence.

In terms of infrastructure in the Ontario context, the Literacy Service Planning system that is organized along Local Training Board lines, provides an effective stepping stone into the Georgia model. Since the LSP groups bring together the provincially funded literacy programs and are mandated to work cooperatively to promote and deliver literacy training, the provincial system is well on the way in the Georgia sense. In terms of time, we would estimate the LSP process to represent about a

two year jump, or equal to the preparation time to meet the Georgia criteria.

Another important link has been the close work with the similarly mandated Eastern Ontario Training Board. While its mandate is broader than literacy, its purposes and goals are closely matched; thus the LSP augmented by the Training Board structure and support link again mimics or satisfies Georgia criteria of involving the community stakeholders and providing a long term influence both in financial support and awareness raising.

While the five-county local board geography presented challenges (remember Georgia works by the single county), particularly as we came to understand the micro-community nature of literacy practices, we also came to strong partnerships with similarly mandated bodies such as the Eastern Ontario Health Unit and the county library systems. This mutually supporting inter-linking grew stronger as the project progressed.

Time frame needs study and adaptation to individual situations. The Georgia model suggests a 10 year implementation period. The decade is in addition to the substantial preparation a community must invest to simply meet the initial criteria- an estimate of two years' preparation. This brings the total time to 12 years. The Eastern Ontario and Local Board context allows us a head start on the criteria, we estimate the equivalent of the two years' preparatory work. It is hard to imagine the work needed to exert influence throughout a geographically larger and bilingual community as taking less time than the Georgia model. But, given our four year census spans, we estimate a broad range of this type of project to mimic completion of the Georgia evaluation scale to be between two and three census taking periods or eight to 12 years depending on the "state of readiness" of the community.

Given our relatively short time frame and the burgeoning effects we are witnessing to date, we confidently recommend the basic "Georgia" approach in the Ontario Local Board version, and hope that this handbook will assist you in adapting to your community's needs.

B) Assessing our success in light of funding proposal deliverables

One of the things we liked about the Georgia model is that it brings a

certain rigour to the process and it challenges communities to establish measurable outcomes and benchmarks. The following were the objectives the LSP listed in the original funding proposal. [In brackets are the indicators by which to measure progress.]

1) Secure the commitment of all leading public and private community organizations to support literacy efforts

[measurement: support letters, meeting minutes, new policy development, participation]

In retrospect, the word “all” was a bit ambitious for a one year funding horizon! Otherwise, the project has done well on this objective. Over the first two years, over 50 non-literacy organizations have participated in project activities in various ways. This would never have happened without the A+B=\$ catalyst. The next challenge will be to encourage them to make a long term commitment to literacy. It has been suggested this might be done by linking them somehow to the LSP which is a permanent structure. The majority of steering committee members are not from literacy backgrounds and have developed a long term commitment to the project. [The project has letters of support, meeting minutes and notes on participation.]

2) Create and sustain public demand for a literate community

[measurement: publicity record, media reports, endorsements, action plans]

As noted elsewhere in this report, the project generated a lot of media coverage, especially in weekly newspapers. In the first year, 5 press releases were issued by A+B=\$. Over 40 newspaper and newsletter articles resulted. One TV and two radio interviews resulted. In the second year, fewer press releases were issued but there were more articles about literacy written by journalists, more press releases issued by literacy service providers, and more mention of literacy and life long learning in local newspapers. We have succeeded in making the literacy and economic development linkage more visible. [A record of press clippings is available and has been provided to the funders. We also have municipal government endorsements.]

3) Achieve new enrollment in the first year and subsequently affect enrollment annually to achieve the target increase in literacy levels [measurement: literacy program annual enrollment statistics compiled by the provincial Ministry; Statistics Canada 2001 census data on education available in 2002]

Literacy Service Planning Business Plans indicated an increased overall

enrollment over the three school years coincident with the project. We are unable to determine direct causation. We are hoping to see an improvement in education levels in the 2001 census, and in literacy in the next [International Adult Literacy Survey](#).

Given that literacy centre enrollments are the ultimate indicators of success, A+B=\$ will continue to monitor this. As per the Georgia model the project set a long term target, which in our case is to double annual enrollment figures within 10 years (and see upward movement in overall 5-9 Grade Levels in the 2001 census).

4) Assess and document progress [measurement: project records, LSP evaluation of project, [NLS](#) final report]

The project submitted regular progress reports to LSP and Le Réseau. The project managers submitted periodic reports to the funders, including a final report at fiscal year end. The LSP evaluated the project positively and wishes to see it continue.

The project kept records, for example on the media reports and community support noted above. Here is another one: in the first year there were 22 presentations and meetings of various types, reaching 282 people directly, plus provincial, regional and local media coverage. In the second year there were fewer activities, but more people reached at each activity on average.

A grant from NLS for Year 2 allowed us to prepare and translate the greatly enhanced documentation and assessment of our pilot project experience that you are now reading.

5) Publicly recognize the socio-economic benefits of literacy skills increase [measurement: Internet web site usage, media coverage, publicity materials and distribution scheme]

The Web site was not a factor in the first year. We tried to have one set up by students, but that effort failed. It was completed in Year 2 thanks to the help of a steering committee member. The next step would be to register it with search engines and ask other literacy sites to establish reciprocal links. The media coverage and strategy were very successful and are described elsewhere in this report. We developed a graphic logo, a brochure and an information kit, all widely distributed, including through press conference and public forum.

6) Demonstrate the economic effectiveness of a concerted

literacy and community effort [measurement: 6-12 jobs acquired by literacy students as a results of the model development, Statistics Canada census data]

The proposal concept was that employers would come to acknowledge that recent literacy training is an acceptable pre-requisite to employment, and create some openings for employment without secondary school diploma. While we know of students whose literacy training has helped gain them employment, the limited time frame of the project did not allow us to adequately penetrate the workplaces of Local Board 1. It is a useful long term goal but we would not recommend it as a measurable outcome.

- 7) **Develop a model for the province's LSP structures to initiate and sustain a literacy campaign capable of meeting increased literacy targets** [measurement: outcomes-based; if successful the project documentation will be written into a guidelines format including a) How to Start, b) Criteria for Success and c) Evaluation]

This report constitutes that “deliverable” (see also Appendices/Keys to Action page 79).

There were other ongoing evaluation measures used by the LSP project managers:

- a) **Quality, commitment and growth of steering committee representation**

The quality of the commitment and the work that was accomplished by steering committee members grew over time. The committee did not grow in numbers, rather participation dwindled to a core group of committed participants. 11 meetings were held the first year and the committee continued to meet about once a month in the second year.

- b) **The project's use of its statistical data**

This report has noted the positive effect statistics have had on the community and the level of awareness about literacy in our midst. We think this was one of the most important things that was done and feel that we have accomplished a lot with these figures including presentation packages distributed throughout the five counties.

- c) **Private business / industry support**

Work still needs to be done in this area. Business and industry do have a

stake in literacy in terms of their own productivity. A better equipped workforce can only mean good things for them. On the other hand, small business especially has to focus on the short term bottom line and may not have time for a long term project like ours initially. This message needs to be repeated and efforts need to be made to actively seek the support and contribution of employers and the private sector. Perhaps the statistics are not the best way to link up with this sector. Maybe it would be better to try an approach by which the clear financial advantages are laid out for them. In fact, this could be done for all sectors of the economy, as literacy does touch on all levels of the marketplace and workforce.

d) Municipal government buy-in

A + B = \$ got the support of the two county governments and most local governments in the second year. We could have systematically pursued such buy-ins earlier, however we wanted to make sure they would buy into action plans, not just offer symbolic support. We visited and received the support of all local MP's and MPP's in the first year.

Model resolution for adoption by community and government agencies

A model resolution was written up and is being used. It is included in the appendices to this report.

C) Assessing our success in light of the community's perspective

This section summarizes data gathered during the consultation process held by the consultants. It gives an overview of the opinions expressed by the 36 persons who participated in the process and took the time to comment about the A+B=\$ project. Since the consultation consisted of informal conversations, comments were not quantified. Thus, terms such as "most", "majority" and "few" are used in order to convey the emphasis of certain aspects highlighted by participants.

"Projects often have a very narrow scope while A+B=\$ has a large one. It provides a conceptual framework to think about literacy and economic development for many years to come: it lays a foundation for meaningful work in the next years."

Participants' initial interest or motivation for A+B=\$

- % A majority of participants were initially motivated by their own involvement in literacy services or programs or because they work with "high risk" populations.
- % A few participants stated personal experience or observation as a trigger (for example, they knew or know people who face literacy challenges), while others heard about the project from colleagues or the media.

A+B=\$'s first year

Greatest accomplishments:

- % An overwhelming majority mentioned the local statistics as the greatest accomplishment of the project.
- % A great number of participants had heard of or participated in a plain language workshop; this is an activity that seems to have stimulated great interest and that probably should be repeated in the future.
- % A lot of participants talked about A+B=\$ presentations as being very impressive; the content was clearly appreciated as was the coordinator's skills during these events.
- % Many participants talked about the ability of the project to deal equally well with the French-speaking and English-speaking communities.
- % Many participants talked about the discussions that were held around social marketing as very useful; the identification of a message, the way to transmit it to people who face literacy problems, etc.

Limitations:

- % Many participants stated that there was a lack of concrete product delivered; for example, some participants obtained the agreement of municipal governments to mail out information, but at that point the project wasn't equipped to provide it.
- % A number of participants wished the project had undertaken more concrete activities and encouraged more direct action; for example, simple ways of approaching a person with low literacy skills or

- repeating the “Santa Claus” experience elsewhere.
- % Some participants expressed concern about the scope of the project and the difficulty inherent in “trying to be all things to everyone”. They thought energies were dissipated in carrying out such a large mandate. They suggested better focus and targeting.

A+B=\$’s future

Suggestions related to activities

Continue

- % Most participants agreed that A+B=\$ has a clear and consistent message that is repeated to everybody.
- % Most participants saw A+B=\$ as an integral part of the community and wished it to continue its leadership role.
- % Most participants wished the project would continue to raise awareness and to provide a link between francophone and anglophone literacy providers.

Suggested improvements

- % Always have something in hand, when doing public representation, that can be given to people; whether it be a handout, a flyer or a button.
- % Hold plain language sessions in the workplace.
- % Have employers use a sticker in their stores or shops, stating that they support A+B=\$ (ISO-like concept).
- % Involve more diverse sectors by highlighting the impact of illiteracy on their particular field (agriculture, forestry, etc).
- % Target by sector, geography or linguistic factors and move on one target at a time.
- % Access more formal networks: municipal governments, literacy groups, private sector. Try to get on their agenda and make sure literacy is there.
- % Create more financial partnerships that would help secure funding for the project.

Suggestions related to structure

- % A substantial majority of participants didn’t support A+B=\$ becoming a separate entity; some said the community could not

support another structure, some stated funding restraints and how they are all competing for the same money.

- % Many participants saw A+B=\$ as remaining a part of LSP.
- % Some participants saw A+B=\$ as community-directed and saw a shift in the steering committee role as becoming more of a management body.
- % At the LSP table, A+B=\$ was seen as complementary to the Training Board and supportive of the broader efforts of LLEO (Literacy Link Eastern Ontario).

CONCLUSION

"In the end, I see children maintaining their desire to learn, parents supporting their kids and community members benefiting fully from every opportunity to fully grow and evolve."

A+B=\$ Steering Committee Member

A) Our vision for the future

Where the project is now: its second year

In its second year, which actually started in September of 1999, the project basically continued the work it had started in implementing its strategic plan, using publicity and promotion to raise awareness, stimulating community mobilization and sustaining linkages.

For year two, the federal government, through its National Literacy Secretariat, contributed towards a second year of operation to take the model building to completion. The project also managed to carry out a number of other activities.

More partnership meetings were held and interest in the model and literacy seemed to gel around the social marketing campaign. Partners are actively participating in the development and organization of this campaign and it will no doubt benefit all of Eastern Ontario.

The project is now at a turning point... its future lies in the foundation it managed to establish, the willingness of the community to sustain it and the political will to support the ongoing work of such a multi-sectorial project.

Funding or not, the art of not losing ground

It is important for projects such as ours to seek funding in various ways, once we have created community momentum, to avoid depending more on funding than community involvement. This could be done by seeking more financial partners and securing funding for specific projects and activities around our objectives. Funding remains part of the solution but it can not be the only path. There are ways of making sure the project's work and documentation leaves a lasting legacy.

We do believe the essential elements are in place for continuation. In one form or another, the work accomplished by A+B=\$ will be furthered. We have already made a difference and the project managers, staff and steering committee have already started to examine ways of ensuring the project's efforts are continued. We want to see A+B=\$ transferring its

knowledge and expertise to the community, that will in turn choose to act or take on one or more aspects of its work.

The consultation process provided us with opinions and suggestions that will be considered and used in planning for the future. That process in itself and this handbook can be viewed as a way for A+B=\$ to give back some of what it received from the community it serves.

We face important questions, to which there is no single, simple answer. Is it better to focus on areas where the energies exist, or to continue reaching out to communities that are less responsive? Do we follow the guidance that statistics provide on where the needs are, or do we react to community requests and support in places which are statistically less in need? Is it better to target only one linguistic community or one county, or do we continue working in both official languages within the same geographic area? If new funding is not secured, how will A+B=\$ ensure that the work is not lost and that the community and community leaders do continue the work that was started by the project?

Those questions and the future of A+B=\$ lie with its leaders' ability to examine the project's evolution and draw on the learnings and trends it suggests. We believe we can do this in an efficient and creative way.

B) Concluding remarks

It is fair to say that A+B=\$ has made a mark in Eastern Ontario's literacy world. It is a project that has "big dreams and little resources", but as one participant put it "A+B=\$ made a bang in a very short time".

The scope and magnitude of the project created a series of challenges and called for ongoing adjustments.

We can say that A+B=\$ successfully analyzed the community's socio-economic makeup. It was excellent in raising awareness about literacy in Eastern Ontario. A lot of effort was put into promotional work, public presentations and these yielded good results.

The project was efficient in networking but had moderate success in reaching out to municipalities, the private sector and employers.

A+B=\$, during its first year, was not as successful as its proposal concept at fostering genuine community mobilization. However, with the clarity of hindsight, this takes more time as suggested in the Georgia model.

When all is said and done, it is safe to say that the first year of A+B=\$ was a success. It was successful enough that it continued into a second year and continues still at the time of publication of this document.* As a participant stated "I want to help make my community become more literate because in doing so, I will contribute in solving multiple problems".

*In fact, just preceding publication of the "Spark" Report, the project was invited to be represented at the first Canadian National Summit on Literacy and Productivity October 27-28, 2000; a nomination of the Movement for Canadian Literacy.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & APPENDICES

- ' Original proposal/ work plan/ job descriptions . . p.63
- ' Critical keys to action . p. 68
- ' Community forum samples p. 72
- ' Plain language workshop samples p. 75
- ' Press release sample . p. 80
- ' Social marketing basics p. 81
- ' Sample strategic plan . p. 91
- ' Sample resolution . . . p. 98
- ' Categories purchased from Statistics Canada p. 99
- ' Literacy action targets p. 100
- ' Web site information samples p. 101

N.B.: Pages 63-110 of appendices are available in book format only.

' CONTACTS

If you think you might like to light a fire under your region by doing a similar project, you should consult the following technical appendices pages 63 through 106. The materials in it will help you understand what we did in more detail, and in some cases may save you reinventing the wheel.

You may also contact A+B=\$, or obtain additional copies of this report in English or French, in PDF format (without appendices/ at October 15, 2000 the PDF versions were in draft only) at:

www.hawk.igs.net/~aplusb

and in the National Adult Literacy Database/ Full Text Document Library at:

www.nald.ca

To contact the LSP (Literacy Service Planning, Local Board 1):

c/o St. Lawrence
College
(Arlene Cronin)
Cornwall, ON
K6H 4Z1
Tel: (613) 933-6080 ext.
2213

c/o Tri-County Literacy
Council, (Dina
McGowan)
101 Second Street West
Cornwall, ON
K6J 1G4
Tel: (613) 932-7161

c/o Upper Canada
District School Board
(Diane Coombs)
T.R. Leger LBS
3525 Main Street South
Alexandria, ON
K0C 1A0
Tel: (613) 525-1700
[coombsd@mail2.glen-
net.ca](mailto:coombsd@mail2.glen-net.ca)

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL SOURCES

Considering a literacy awareness/community mobilization project like this?

' Search titles: community development, healthy communities, community economic development, or sustainable development round tables.

' Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education, 1800 Century Place, Suite 400, Atlanta, Georgia USA 30345-4304

' Eastern Ontario Training Board at www.eotb-cfeo.on.ca

' Ontario's Alphaplus network at www.alphaplus.ca

' Laubach Literacy Ontario at www.trainingpost.org

' Laubach Literacy Of Canada at www.laubach.org
...these sites will in turn link you to additional literacy
related information sources.