



Literacy NL 2013 Regional Forum Series

Prepared for: Literacy Newfoundland & Labrador

Prepared by: Lauren Power, lpower@literacynl.com, Forum Coordinator

Acknowledgements

This forum series was supported with funding from the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador, and with print advertising contributed by TC MEDIA. Forum design and facilitation support was also received from the Office of Public Engagement, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Introduction

Overview

In the fall of 2013, Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador invited the general public and representatives from all fields (business, education, health, non-profit, and labour) to discuss the challenges and opportunities related to literacy and essential skills, and the workforce in our province. As these issues affect our entire province and its people, all were welcome to come, listen, speak, and share.

Theme

“Making the Connection” - between people and services, between each other, and between literacy and a strong workforce.

Rationale

Newfoundland and Labrador has a literacy challenge. One of every two adults in our province does not meet the desired proficiency level in either language or numeracy skills.¹

Low literacy levels and low rates of workplace skills development, especially among older workers who are already in the labour market, are significant concerns in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.²

- The 2003 International Adult Literacy Skills Survey (IALSS) deemed Level 3 as the level needed to function well in today’s society and economy.
- According to IALSS, more than 48,000 workers in NL function below Level 3. This indicates that a priority must be to develop the skills of our people, those in the workforce and those who are not.

It is estimated that by 2022, there will potentially be one new labour force entrant (15-24 years old) for every two retirees (55-64 years old).³ This new labour pool will demand increasingly higher levels of skill from its younger workers, while enticing many older workers to continue to contribute and develop their skills in the labour market.

¹ Literacy NL, Literacy in NL, <http://www.literacynl.com/literacy/>

² Newfoundland and Labrador Outlook 2020, <http://www.aes.gov.nl.ca/publications/LMOutlook2020.pdf>

³ Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, State of the field report
<http://www.literacy.ca/content/uploads/2012/12/State-of-the-Field-2012.pdf>

Strong literacy and essential skills have impacts which go beyond the labour market; they are integral to inclusive and sustainable communities. Literacy and essential skills can impact people's lives in many ways, including education, employment, justice, health, social connections, and civic engagement.

Building skill levels in our province requires the participation of many stakeholders. Literacy Newfoundland and Labrador's Regional Fall Forum Series "Making the Connection" offered individuals from a wide cross section of the province's literacy and essential skills field the opportunity to gather together, to share and to learn about the current literacy and essential skills landscape of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Information from these forums will be shared widely with community leaders, educators, and policy makers, in an effort to inform the development of policy and responsive programs for literacy and essential skills in our province.

Dates & Locations

Thursday, September 26 - St. John's, Holiday Inn

Thursday, October 3 - Gander, Hotel Gander

Thursday, October 10 - Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Hotel North 2

Tuesday, October 15 - Corner Brook, Glynmill Inn

Also, on October 10, the Branch Literacy Council hosted a regional forum using the forum series as a template. Their results are included in this report.

Methodology

The goal of the project was to engage the public in discussions around literacy, essential skills, and the workplace. Thus, public forums were chosen as the appropriate format. Though surveys and interviews could almost certainly collect more data, they do not provide the opportunity for participants to engage in discussion, to meet, or to exchange ideas.

Discussion was the focus of each regional event, with participants engaging in small group discussion around the following questions:

- What is happening in this area to build literacy and essential skills?
- What is required in this area to help you with literacy needs?
- What actions/next steps can happen in this area to advance literacy? What actions or next steps can Literacy NL take?

The Office of Public Engagement (OPE) facilitated the discussion. OPE is an office of the provincial government. It works with community partners to engage the public in dialogue that helps to inform policy and decision-making related to the future of rural Newfoundland. To facilitate the “deliberative dialogue” process, OPE contributed their ‘Turning Point’ instant voting software, as well as support personnel to collect and consolidate data from the round table conversations.

At each table, a facilitator recorded comments on one of a series of linked laptops. The comments were read by the OPE “theme team”. The team would group similar comments together and create a list of common themes. At the end of each discussion, the participants used their keypads to vote (anonymously), which resulted in the creation of a prioritized list.

Guest Speakers

At each event:

- A Literacy NL Board Member welcomed participants and spoke on the need for strong literacy and essential skills in each region; and
- Guest speakers shared their views about how essential skills issues are being addressed locally, provincially, and federally.

In St. John's:

- Literacy NL was represented by LNL Board Member, Dr. Linda Coles.
- Guest Speakers:

Marsha Rowe represented Random North Development Association's *Bridging the Gap* program;

Brian Hicks represented College of the North Atlantic's federal *Essential Skills* Project and provincial *Sector Skills* Program; and

Darlene Scott represented the Community Sector Council's Vibrant Communities/Literacy NL Opportunities Program: *Supporting Youth Seeking Success*.

In Gander:

- Literacy NL was represented by LNL Board Member, Carol Sturge.
- Guest Speakers:

Marsha Rowe represented Random North Development Association's *Bridging the Gap* program;

Donna Saunders represented Advanced Education and Skills' provincial *Sector Skills* program; and

Nicole Parsons represented the Dover and Area Family Resource Centre Literacy NL Opportunities program: *Grief Kits* and *Family Learning Kits*.

In Happy Valley-Goose Bay:

- Literacy NL was represented by LNL Board Member, Alison Keats.
- Guest Speakers:
 - Shelley Broomfield represented Advanced Education and Skills' provincial *Sector Skills* program;
 - Lauren Power represented Literacy NL's Youth Learning Project: *Re-engaging Disengaged Youth*;
 - Caroline Vaughan represented Literacy NL's *Northern Men's Research Project*.

In Corner Brook:

- Literacy NL was represented by LNL Board Member, Judy O'Quinn.
- Guest Speakers:
 - Marsha Rowe represented Random North Development Association's *Bridging the Gap* program;
 - Judy O'Quinn represented Advanced Education and Skills' provincial *Sector Skills* program.



St. John's, NL

September 26, 2013

Participants

On September 28, 2013, 52 participants gathered at the Holiday Inn in St. John's for the Avalon Regional Forum. Of the participants, 18% were students, 31% were representatives from non-governmental organizations, 16% were from academic institutions, 16% were from government, 4% were from the business and the private sector, and 16% were identified as "other".

Results

What is happening on the Avalon to build literacy and essential skills?

The first question participants discussed at roundtables centered on the ongoing work in the region related to building literacy and essential skills. Some of the key points that were shared included the following:

- Lots of strong, community-based programming
- For many groups, the focus is on connecting individuals (to services; between services)
- Language programs for new Canadians
- Sector Skills (provincial program) helping individuals make workforce attachments

What is required to meet literacy and essential skills needs in the Avalon Region?

Comments in the room pointed to a concern that the provincial climate for literacy and essential skills is not a positive one. The Avalon group was vocal in their concern regarding recent funding cuts, the recent change in the delivery model of Adult Basic Education in the province (from public to private colleges), and the ensuing loss of student supports. Participants noted that there are feelings of no progress or of moving backwards.

During the discussion on the gaps and needs related to literacy and essential skills, participants identified what they felt were important elements for progress. After the discussion, the OPE facilitators presented the common themes of the collected ideas. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which two needs they felt should be addressed first in order to advance literacy and essential skills. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Increase funding for programs and delivery
2. Raise awareness of programs and services
3. Provide essential skills training at a younger age
4. Promote networking and partnership opportunities between business, private, and public
5. Provide alternative learning for individuals, including persons with disabilities
6. Provide advocacy for those experiencing barriers
7. Provide early intervention
8. Use technology more in learning (social media, educational apps, etc.)

What actions can happen locally in the Avalon Region to advance literacy and essential skills?

For the third topic, participants focused on new ways to enhance current work around literacy and essential skills. After the discussion, the OPE facilitators presented the common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which actions would have the most impact. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Lobby government for a Strategic Literacy Plan
2. Develop supports for learners and ensure they are in place, including childcare, addictions, and others
3. Provide increased education and awareness
4. Build partnerships and networking opportunities
5. Continue the consultation process
6. Share success stories and best practices



Gander, NL

October 3, 2013

Participants

On October 3, 2013, 12 participants gathered at Hotel Gander in Gander for the Central Regional Forum. Of the participants, 50% were representatives of non-governmental organizations, 21% were from academic institutions, 21% were from government, and 7% were identified as “other”.

Results

What is happening in Central to build literacy and essential skills?

The first question participants discussed at roundtables focused on the ongoing work in the region related to building literacy and essential skills. Some of the key stakeholder organizations identified included the following:

- Provincial Government: Adult Education & Skills - Sector Skills
- Private College Programming (ABE, Barton Reading)
- Targeted Initiative for Older Workers
- Bridging the Gap
- Community Access Program (CAP) Sites
- Family Resource Centres
- Women Interested in Successful Employment (discontinued)
- Laubach Literacy Councils
- Status of Women Referrals

What is required to meet literacy and essential skills needs in the Central Region?

In conversation, participants noted that the areas of greatest need were the municipalities located away from the Trans-Canada Highway (smaller, more remote communities). Participants felt that resources available in communities like Gander were comparable to those available in the capital city of St. John's.

During the discussion on the gaps and needs related to literacy and essential skills, participants identified what they felt were important elements for progress. After the discussion, the OPE facilitators presented the common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which two needs they felt should be addressed first in order to advance literacy and essential skills. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Increase awareness and education; stronger communications (public & participants)
2. Change the stigma associated with literacy programming
3. Increase funding for program delivery
4. Increase the focus and provide more engaging activities in the school system and pre-kindergarten
5. Develop literacy networks

6. Increase access to hands-on education (online workshops)
7. Provide alternative learning
8. Use technology

What actions can happen locally in the Central Region to advance literacy and essential skills?

For the third topic, participants focused on new ways to enhance current work around literacy and essential skills. After the discussion, the OPE facilitators presented the common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which actions would have the most impact at the local level, with the participants taking the lead. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Improve communications among general public, community, and provincial stakeholders
2. Provide more professional development for practitioners regarding essential skills
3. Promote stronger linkages between local organizations and provincial/national networks like Literacy NL
4. Lobby provincial government to revisit the kindergarten to grade 12 school system to include curriculum for the essential skills
5. Provide full-time literacy specialists
6. Host community consultations concerning literacy and essential skills
7. Partner with Association of New Canadians
8. Increase student/teacher contact time

Prioritizing next steps for Literacy NL at the provincial level

After the discussion, the OPE facilitators again presented the common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which actions would have the most impact at the provincial level, with Literacy NL taking the lead. The results were as follows:

1. Develop a communications strategy
2. Engage Department of Education in discussions
3. Increase scope, awareness, focus outside of the Avalon
4. Be a stronger voice (i.e. literacy cutbacks in libraries, ABE, WISE)

5. Target service groups for memberships and get them involved
6. Identify literacy champions
7. Evaluate existing programs



Happy Valley-Goose Bay, NL

October 10, 2013

Participants

On October 10, 2013, 20 participants gathered at Hotel North II in Happy Valley-Goose Bay for the Labrador Regional Forum. Of the participants, 27% were students, 27% represented non-governmental organizations, and 19% represented government. 27% identified as “other”.

Results

What is happening in the Northern region to build literacy and essential skills?

The first question participants discussed at roundtables centered on the ongoing work in the Northern region related to building literacy and essential skills. Some of the key stakeholder organizations identified included the following:

- Creative Arts Festival (November)
- Sapujavik (North West River) Community Association's Programming — not explicitly "literacy", but engaging
- Early Childhood Education - programs with literacy focus
- Academy Canada and Friendship Centre (ABE, Level I)
- Friendship Centre - offers tutoring, seniors' reading group, and other programs
- Local libraries - offer programming
- CAP Site - with intern
- Advanced Education and Skills

It was noted by several participants that there was a time when there were more literacy-based programming and workplace training; however, the current status of many of those programs has changed.

What is required to meet literacy and essential skills needs in the Northern region?

Happy Valley-Goose Bay is notable for its sense of community and interconnectedness. The community's acceptance and utilization of social media (i.e. Facebook) has strengthened the lines of communication.

During the discussion on the gaps and needs related to literacy and essential skills, participants identified what they felt were important elements for progress. After the discussion, the OPE facilitators presented the common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which two needs they felt should be addressed first in order to advance literacy and essential skills. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Improve kindergarten to grade 12 school system (better student/teacher ratios, higher standards for graduation, tutors)
2. Provide coordinated effort and funding for literacy programming
3. Motivate the target audience to self-identify and to participate, and provide the required programming

4. Promote understanding/learning of cultural differences and languages
5. Provide training for adults
6. Encourage more parent participation and involvement
7. Improve the library system (in more communities, longer hours, updated books and resources)
8. Promote improved communication and awareness of programming
9. Prevent technology from having a negative impact – use it to improve literacy outcomes

What actions can happen locally in the Northern region to advance literacy and essential skills?

For the third topic, participants focused on new ways to enhance current work around literacy and essential skills. From this discussion, participants put forward the following suggestions:

Support volunteers (tutoring in school and community)

Promote more engagement activities in the community (volunteers, daycares, book clubs)

Provide more programs for youth and adults, reading recovery, study groups

Promote communication and awareness of programs and services (e.g. social media)

Educate students on the connection between literacy, essential skills, and success

Prioritizing next steps for Literacy NL at the provincial level

After the discussion, the OPE facilitators again presented the common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which actions would have the most impact. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Create regional Literacy NL committees
2. Host networking opportunities for those involved and/or impacted by literacy issues
3. Advocate for funding for programs
4. Research factors related to literacy issues (local and provincial)
5. Promote education and awareness of services provided by Literacy NL



Corner Brook, NL

October 15, 2013

Participants

On October 15, 2013, 20 participants gathered at Glynmill Inn in Corner Brook for the Western Regional Forum. Of the participants, 40% represented non-governmental organizations, 20% represented government, and 40% identified as “other”. Most of those choosing “other” were affiliated with a not-for-profit organization.

Results

What is required to meet literacy and essential skills needs in the Western Region?

Participants discussed how distance between communities in the Western Region creates additional challenges, particularly around access to resources. This issue is felt acutely in more remote areas of the region, where one would have to travel to a major centre to access basic literacy training.

During the discussion of the gaps and needs related to literacy and essential skills, participants identified the following as important elements for progress:

- Gain dedicated government funding
- Receive greater government input, awareness, and involvement in literacy
- Promote the existence of programs and services
- Raise awareness of literacy as a public concern
- Review the kindergarten to grade 12 school system, including the role of inclusion and social promotion
- Help young children by smoothing transition between ECE and kindergarten
- Provide a more comfortable atmosphere in the schools for skill building
- Promote a greater use of peer tutoring and volunteer support
- Develop a Strategic Adult Literacy Plan for the province

What actions can happen locally in the Western Region to advance literacy and essential skills?

For the next topic, participants focused on new ways to enhance current work around literacy and essential skills at the local level. After the discussion, the OPE facilitators presented the common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which two needs they felt should be addressed first in order to advance literacy and essential skills at the local level. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Promote more partnering and communication for better use of resources
2. Make resources available in all communities, not just major centres
3. Improve support for Family Resource Centres for young adults
4. Provide more pre-school programs

5. Share success stories and identify champions
6. Provide improved access to education for seniors
7. Provide centralized location (physical and online) for literacy supports
8. Compile a regional directory of volunteers

Prioritizing next steps for Literacy NL at the provincial level

After the discussion, the OPE facilitators again presented the common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which actions would have the most impact. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Advocate for change in kindergarten to grade 12 school system
2. Advocate for sustained government funding
3. Improve marketing and promotion
4. Provide for better engagement (urban, rural and remote communities, and students)
5. Develop a Strategic Literacy Plan
6. Develop a provincial awareness campaign
7. Conduct further consultations and forums with stakeholders
8. Promote the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills



Branch, NL

October 10, 2013

Participants

The Branch Literacy-Arts Committee held the first annual Branch Literacy-Arts Festival from Thursday, October 10 to Saturday, October 12, 2013 at the Branch Community Centre. Literacy NL was a supporter of this festival.

On the first day of the festival, the Committee hosted their own forum on literacy and essential skills, using the Literacy NL forum series as a template. Twelve individuals were in attendance.

Literacy NL was asked to be the 'holder of record' for information coming out of the Branch Forum. The results of this forum are included here.

Results

What is happening in the Branch region to build literacy and essential skills?

The first question participants discussed at roundtables centered on the ongoing work in the region related to building literacy and essential skills. Some of the key points that were shared included the following:

- Literacy Festival
- Stepping Stones Family Resource Centre
- Funding from government
- Sending information home with children to families
- Support from public/private organizations for support of Literacy Festival
- Town advocates for high-speed Internet
- Homework program for children at community center
- Community Book Club (potential)
- Community Singing Kitchen Meals which shows history/heritage of the community (support from all in the community, including youth)
- Seven published artists from Branch

What is required to meet literacy and essential skills needs in Branch?

During the discussion on the gaps and needs related to literacy and essential skills, participants identified the following as important elements for progress:

- Computer literacy training
- High-speed internet
- Library within the community
- More human resources and funding to improve the ability of the education system to support individuals with learning disabilities
- Improved access to a community college
- Daily access to a newspaper

After the discussion, the OPE facilitators presented common themes to the group. The participants were provided with electronic voter keypads to indicate which two needs they felt should be addressed first in order to advance literacy and essential skills. The results were ranked as follows:

1. Access High-speed Internet
2. Participate in more human resources and funding to improve the ability of the education system to support individuals with learning disabilities
3. Avail of computer literacy training
4. Have a library within the community
5. Improve access to a community college
6. Partake in access to a daily newspaper

What actions can happen locally in Branch to advance literacy and essential skills?

For the next topic, participants focused on new ways to enhance current work around literacy and essential skills, with a local focus. From this discussion, participants put forward the following suggestions:

- Have follow up to this forum
- Provide outreach to more community members
- Provide community seminars on literacy and essential skill issues
- Promote literacy committees and activities
- Draw upon resources in the community
- Provide/ Promote a book trading library
- Promote Book Clubs

What actions can happen on a provincial scale to advance literacy and essential skills?

For the final topic, participants focused on new ways to enhance current work around literacy and essential skills, with a provincial focus. From this discussion, participants put forward the following suggestions:

- Promote literacy/essential skills activities directly in small communities
- Provide/Support funding for communities for book clubs, educational materials, and mentoring programs
- Provide/Promote adult continuing education - not just literacy
- Involve all communities in literacy and essential skills workshops

Literacy NL
2013 Regional Forum Series
Conclusion & Recommendations

Despite the regional differences, common threads can be seen through the five regional sites:

- Despite significant effort to attract interest from the workplace sector, and the workplace focus of the forums, there was very limited representation from the private sector.
- Though programs and services are often available in major centres, this availability often does not extend to remote areas of the province.
- The lack of a strategic plan for adult literacy, as well as a lack of a comprehensive strategic literacy plan covering all ages, is seen as an area of immediate need.
- The kindergarten to grade 12 school system remains the centre of our education system, and literacy and essential skills must take root there. However, though the school system is seen by many as an area of great need, it is also seen as an area that is difficult to, and/or resistant to change. Concerns expressed included the policy of social promotion, as well as the diminishing levels of essential skills among new graduates.
- All sites included calls for building awareness of services, removing barriers to accessibility, increasing availability of programs, and advocating for more funding.
- All sites expressed a need to identify the local community needs within their regions.

The following activities were commonly raised as possible priorities for Literacy NL:

- Remote areas can be served best by local action. The formation of regional committees would build the capacity of Literacy NL, and would help identify and address the needs of many remote areas. The Branch Forum, with its emphasis on local community needs, was able to identify specific local priorities (e.g., high speed internet; computer literacy training).
- Raising awareness, and increasing knowledge of existing programming and resources, is particularly important among organizations that serve the public.
- Advocacy efforts and policy discussions should be focused on the following areas: a review of the kindergarten to grade 12 school system, the successful implementation of a strategic plan for literacy, and sustained funding for literacy and essential skills programming.