

Making a Case for Literacy

**The State of Adult Literacy and Adult
Basic Education in the NWT**

A Summary of Research

Research conducted by Lutra Associates Ltd.

On behalf of the

NWT Literacy Council

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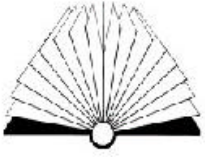
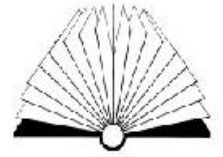


Table of Contents

A Summary of Research.....	1
What is Literacy?	4
Why Adults?.....	4
What is Adult Basic Education?	4
How is literacy measured?.....	5
What are the levels of English literacy among NWT adults?	6
What about literacy in NWT Aboriginal languages and French?	8
What is the relationship between low literacy and job opportunities?.....	10
What is the relationship between low literacy and poverty?	12
What is the relationship between low literacy and health?	14
What is the relationship between low literacy and children?	16
What is the relationship between low literacy and the justice system?.....	17
What is the relationship between low literacy and a person's ability to participate in their community?	18
Who is responsible for adult literacy and adult basic education?	20
What adult literacy and basic education programs are available?.....	22
Is it worth it to invest in adult literacy?	24
A Model for Tax Revenue and Social Program Savings with an Individual Investment in Adult Literacy.....	26
What are Our Conclusions about the State of Adult Literacy and Adult Basic Education in the NWT	27

A Summary of Research



The NWT Literacy Council wanted to find out about adult literacy and adult basic education in the NWT. Our research shows there are some real problems. There are solutions too.

This summary gives the main results of the research. The complete report is over 100 pages long. You can get a copy from the NWT Literacy Council.

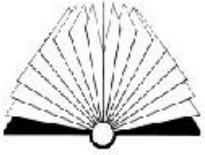
To do the research, we asked:

- What is literacy in today's world?
- How is literacy measured? What level of literacy do NWT adults have?
- Do NWT adults have problems with literacy?
- How does low literacy affect a person's ability to participate in life? How does low literacy affect a person's health, job opportunities, income, children, and education?
- How do NWT adults get help to improve their literacy?
- Who is responsible for adult literacy programs and adult basic education? What are they doing? How much do we spend on adult literacy? Is it enough? How can we make it better?
- How much should we invest in adult literacy in the NWT? What are the benefits?
- What can we do to influence the future of adult literacy and adult basic education in the NWT?

To do the research, we looked at many other reports. We also interviewed people.

A Dogrib Region Literacy Case Study was part of the research. The case study tells us about adult literacy in that region. It helps us understand one part of the bigger literacy picture.

This information is important to everyone. Get involved. Let's make sure that NWT adults have access to meaningful and well-supported literacy services.



What is Literacy?

Literacy is how people understand and use information. It is how they read, write, and use numbers and communication technology (computers, phone, fax, email, internet). People communicate and use information with every group of people they meet: at work, at home, and in their community.

Functional literacy is the skills people use to read, write, and use numbers for everyday things. People with functional literacy skills can understand and reply to letters. They can complete a form and apply for a job. They can read a drug prescription or a newspaper. They can follow written instructions.

Low literacy is when people don't have the literacy skills they need to do these daily tasks. They have trouble reading, writing, and using numbers.

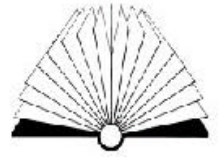
Why Adults?

- For this research, we defined adults as people who are 15 years or older.
- Adults are leaders, parents, and role models.
- Adults are responsible for the health and well being of their family. This includes elders and children. Adults usually have a job and make money to support their family.
- Adults make decisions for their family, their community, their region, and for the whole NWT. Good information helps people make good decisions. People with good literacy skills have better access to good information.

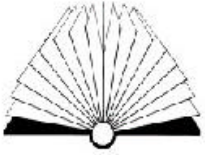
What is Adult Basic Education?

Adult basic education is any program that helps people get ready for post-secondary training or employment. Adult basic education is learning to read, write and use numbers and information technology. It is life skills, career planning, upgrading in specific subjects, or work training and experience.

How is literacy measured?

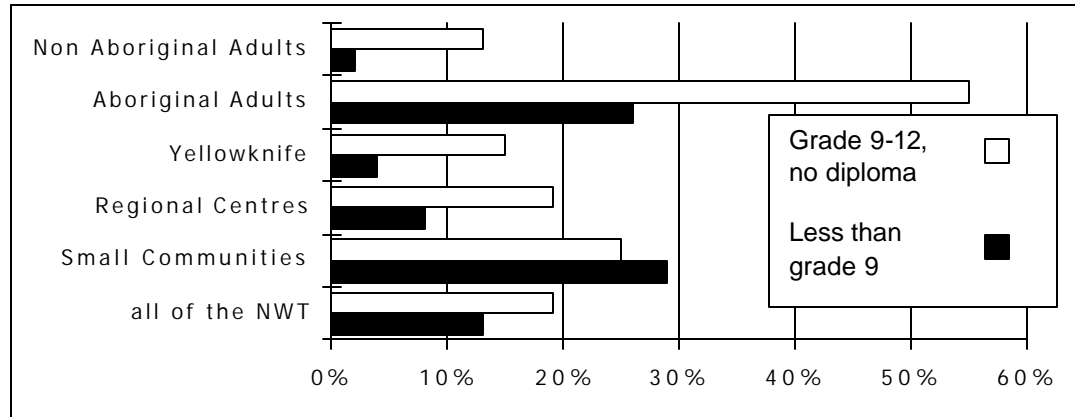


- One way to measure literacy is grade level. People with grade 9 to 12 probably have at least functional literacy. Research shows, however, that they don't necessarily read or write well. People with less than grade 9 probably have low literacy skills.
- Grade level isn't the best way to measure literacy in today's world. In the NWT, grade level is the only information we have right now.
- The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) measures literacy from Level 1 to Level 5, using tests. People at Level 1 have no skills or few skills. People at Level 2 can read, but not well. People at Level 3 can read well, but have problems with more complex tasks. Experts say Level 3 is the minimum to function well in society. People at Levels 4 and 5 have strong literacy skills. The NWT, Nuna vut, and the Yukon were not included in the International Adult Literacy Survey.



What are the levels of English literacy among NWT adults?

The only way to measure literacy in the NWT right now, using information about NWT adults, is to use grade level. This chart shows the percent of different groups of adults with less than grade 9 and from grade 9 to grade 12.



Source: NWT Labour Force Survey, 1999

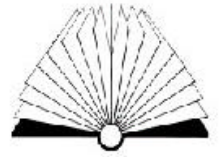
The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) does not include the NWT, Nunavut or the Yukon. For this research, we were able to estimate literacy levels in the NWT using IALS data.

Using International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) data, our research tells us that:

- 50% of NWT adults do not have Level 3, the literacy skills we need for daily living.
- 66% of Aboriginal adults and 31% of non-Aboriginal adults do not have the literacy skills needed for daily living.
- Aboriginal adults in the NWT have lower literacy levels than Aboriginal adults in southern Canada.
- Non-Aboriginal adults in the NWT have higher literacy levels than adults in southern Canada.

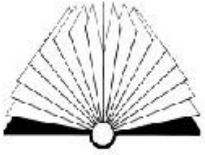
The Dogrib Region Case Study tell us that:

- 70% of adults in the region have less than grade 12 education.
- 50% of adults need help to read and use numbers for daily tasks.



What Should We Do About This?

- Aboriginal groups and literacy organizations and programs need to work together to meet the literacy needs of Aboriginal adults.
- The NWT should be part of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) so we have good information about adult literacy levels. Knowing the problem helps to solve the problem.



What about literacy in NWT Aboriginal languages and French?

Aboriginal languages are oral languages, with no history of reading and writing. Aboriginal language use is declining. Few written materials are available.

For Aboriginal language literacy, our research tells us that:

- All Aboriginal languages have low levels of literacy. Most Aboriginal people of all ages have no literacy in their Aboriginal language.
- Improving Aboriginal language literacy skills may be one way to keep and develop Aboriginal languages in today's world.
- Women and people with higher levels of education are more likely to have good literacy skills in their Aboriginal language than males and people with lower levels of education.

"... for most, if not all of the Canadian Aboriginal languages, this is their homeland. If the languages are lost here, they are lost forever to the world. The enormity of this loss is still not fully understood or acknowledged."

Languages of the Land - A Resource Manual for Aboriginal Language Activists, Crosscurrent Associates, 1999. Prepared for the NWT Literacy Council.

"The Dogrib language is not used as much in our communities as it has been in the past. It is not used for every communication as it once was, and in some contexts its use has diminished significantly"

Dogrib Communities Languages Plan, May 1999, Dogrib Community Services Board.

"For every 100 people who learned Cree as a first language, only 17 now use it regularly as their home language ... At this rate, use of the language in the region could easily disappear within a generation or two."

Cree Language Plan, May 1999, South Slave Metis Tribal Council.

The Dogrib Region Case Study tells us that:

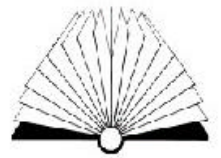
- 33 people have some training and experience in Dogrib literacy.
- Dogrib political and social organizations have a goal. They want Dogrib to be the main language of business and daily life in the region.

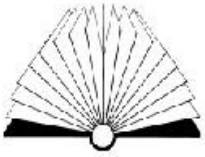
For NWT French literacy, our research tells us that:

- There is little information about French language literacy in the NWT. 6% of NWT people say French is their mother tongue. French fluency and literacy have remained stable over the past decade.

What should we do about this?

- Actively promote Aboriginal language fluency and literacy.
- Write, publish and distribute more materials in Aboriginal languages
- Train instructors for Aboriginal language literacy.
- Design and deliver Aboriginal language literacy programs.
- Determine what are the literacy needs of French speaking people.

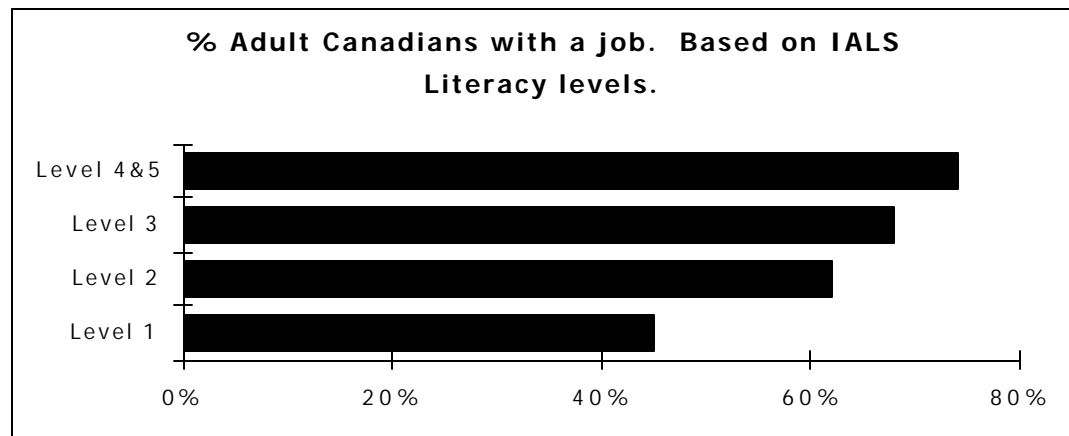




What is the relationship between low literacy and job opportunities?

Our research tells us that:

- Low literacy skills can limit job opportunities. People with low literacy skills are twice as likely to not have a job. They may have trouble getting and keeping a job.



Source: *International Adult Literacy Survey, 1996*

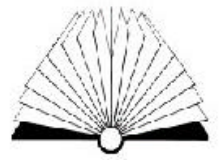
- The jobs that people with low literacy skills can get are probably insecure, part-time, seasonal, unskilled, and have low pay.
- Low literacy skills can limit access to safety information or directions. People with low literacy skills may put themselves and other workers at risk. They may not know they lack information. They may not tell anyone if they do know, for fear of losing their job or being embarrassed.
- For employers, low literacy skills means higher costs to recruit, train, and keep workers. Turnover rates are higher. There may be more health and safety problems.
- BHP says many northern workers can't write a job application or pass a trades exam. 40% of BHP's jobs are unskilled and semi-skilled, and 67% of BHP's Aboriginal employees have these jobs. BHP says 24% of their workers can't read basic signs and 34% rely on oral instruction.

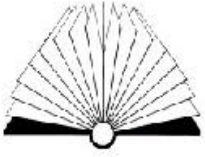
The Dogrib Region Case Study tells us that:

- In 1994, 37% of the people who wanted a job had less than grade 9. 2% had grade 12.
- Young men may have few role models. They see men with little formal education get high paying jobs at diamond mines.
- Women are going to high school, university and other post-secondary institutions. This may contribute to social, gender-based tensions.

What we should do about this?

- Recognize the relationship between literacy and job opportunities.
- Develop and deliver a workplace literacy strategy and programs.

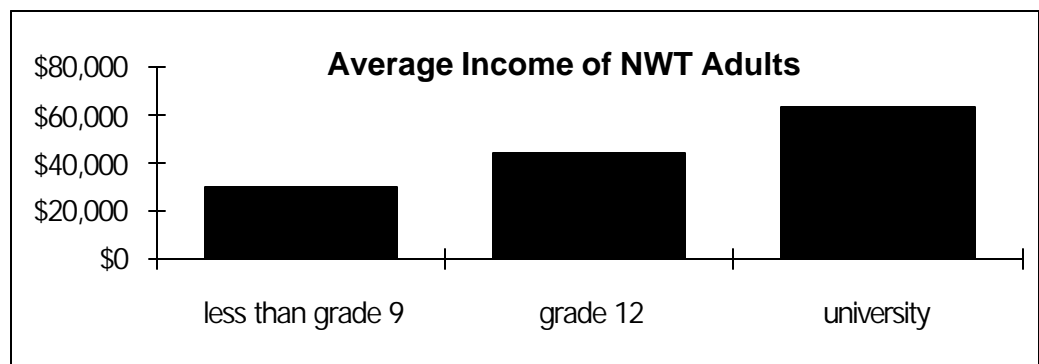




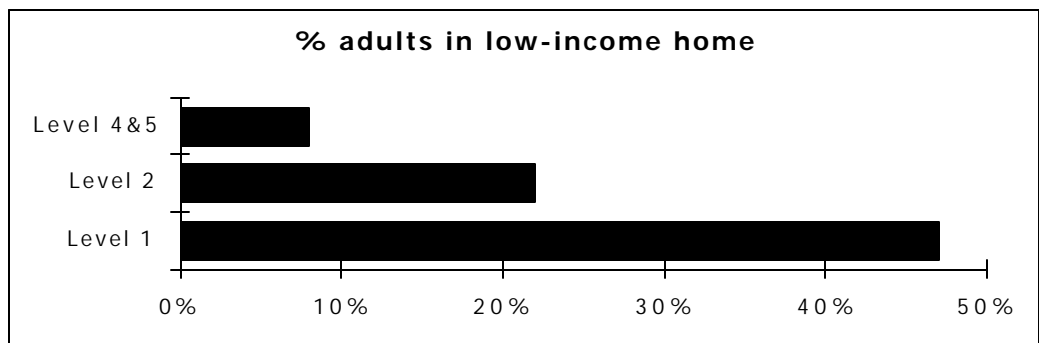
What is the relationship between low literacy and poverty?

Our research tells us that:

- People with low literacy skills probably earn only 2/3 of what people with good literacy skills earn.
- The annual income of people without literacy skills is 46% less than the income of high school graduates.
- People with low literacy skills are more likely to use income support for basic needs.
- NWT Aboriginal males make 50% less than non-Aboriginal males. Aboriginal females in the NWT make 60% less than non-Aboriginal females.



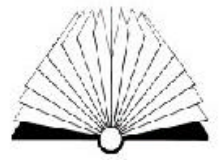
Source: NWT Labour Force Survey, 1999



Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, 1999

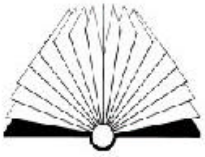
The Dogrib Region Case Study tells us that:

- The average income in 1996 was \$17,076. Average income for the whole NWT was \$33,808. The Canadian "poverty line" is \$20,000.
- 45% of adults rely on income support. 92% of these people have grade 10 or less.



What should we do about this?

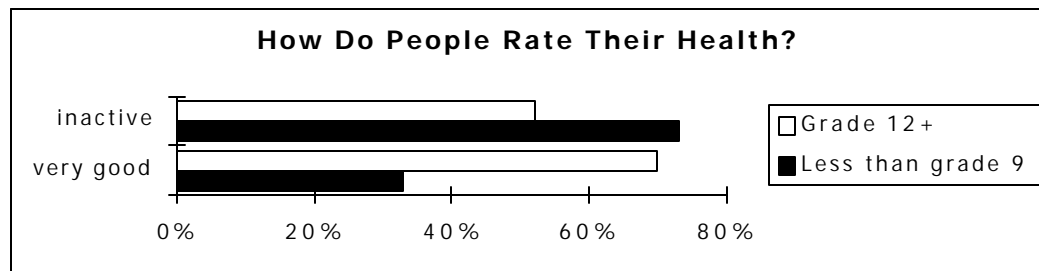
- Recognize the relationship between poverty and literacy. Poverty means it is hard to meet basic needs. Poverty hurts a person's health and well-being.
- People on Income Support need access to literacy and adult basic education programs. They also need access to social supports, such as day care and counselling.



What is the relationship between low literacy and health?

Our research tells us that:

- People with low literacy skills may not be able to read and understand information about the medicine they take.
- People with low literacy may not be able to read and understand information about machinery, tools, firearms, or chemicals they use at home or at work.
- People with low literacy skills may not be able to read and understand information about alcohol, drugs, nutrition and hygiene.

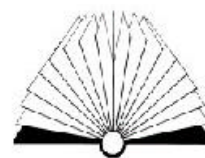


Source: National Population Health Survey, 1996

- People with low literacy skills are twice as likely to have high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and obesity. They are more likely to smoke cigarettes, use medical services, die prematurely and experience poor emotional and mental health. They may lack independence, a sense of well-being, and the ability to make choices and have control over decisions about their life.

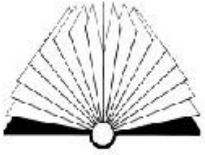
The Dogrib Region Case Study tells us that:

- Education and employment may create different classes of people. Families without jobs and education may be at high risk to have addiction problems, and other socio-economic problems that directly affect their children.
- The Dogrib Community Services Board is developing programs to help stop substance abuse and other social problems. These personal supports help students succeed.



What Should We Do About This?

- Recognize the relationship between health and literacy. Healthy people cost less and they feel better.
- Include literacy as part of all health promotion.
- Use plain language for health promotion, medication, and other information for the public.



What is the relationship between low literacy and children?

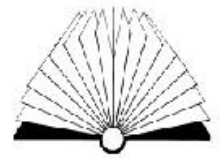
Our research tells us that:

- People with low literacy skills are more likely to live in poverty. In the NWT, 20% of children live in poverty. Poverty means children may have low birth weight, poor health and nutrition, and developmental delays.
- People with low literacy skills may not be able to read with their children. Reading with children helps them be more interested in reading, and more successful at school.
- Early childhood programs and family literacy programs increase literacy levels of both parents and children.

What should we do about this?

- Recognize the cycle of literacy. Improve the literacy skills of today's adults for positive effects on the health and well being of all northerners.
- Support family and early childhood literacy programs. Use the Healthy Children Initiative and other programs to do this.

What is the relationship between low literacy and the justice system?

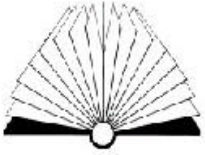


Our research tells us that:

- Low literacy skills can limit access to the justice system.
- It is possible that crimes are not reported and charges are not laid because of low literacy.
- People with low literacy skills may not be able to read and understand legal information.
- Low literacy skills can limit involvement with community justice programs.
- Victims of crime with low literacy probably can't write their own victim impact statement.
- A written record is needed for everything in jail. People with low literacy skills may need help to: use the phone, get a temporary absence, have input to a pre-sentencing report or case management plan, prepare for a parole board hearing, and complete an early release form. Low literacy skills can limit access to rehabilitation programs. These are often required to get an early release.
- Inmates at Yellowknife Correctional Centre have these characteristics. Their average level of school is 6.7 years. They are likely to re-offend if they have a low level of education. Ninety percent (90%) say their occupation is labourer. Ninety percent (90%) are Aboriginal.

What should we do about this?

- Do literacy testing and have literacy programs in the correction system.
- Use plain language to help people complete victim impact statements, and be more involved with community justice programs and all aspects of the justice system.
- Support inmates to attend literacy and adult basic education programs when they are released.



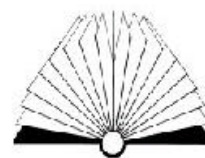
What is the relationship between low literacy and a person's ability to participate in their community?

Our research tells us that:

- Low literacy skills can limit access to information. Information helps people know what is happening. It helps them make good decisions and participate in their community.
- Land claims, self-government agreements, and impact benefits agreements are part of northern politics and the economy. People with low literacy skills may have limited understanding of these agreements.
- Low literacy skills can limit involvement with community, nonprofit groups.
- People with low literacy skills may avoid government and other institutions (banks, insurance, medical services).
- Government or community workers with low literacy skills may have trouble doing their job properly.
- People with low literacy skills may have trouble getting services from government or their community.

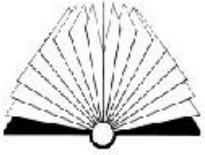
The Dogrib Region Case Study tells us that:

- The Dogrib people are preparing for self-government and land claims implementation.
- Dogrib organizations and institutions are taking on a range of human service, governance, and land and resource management responsibilities, previously delivered by the GNWT or the Federal Government.
- The Dogrib region is directly affected by the booming mining industry. They negotiate, sign and implement Impact Benefit Agreements.
- People with low literacy skills rely on people with good literacy skills when they need to understand and respond to written things from government and other institutions (banks, insurance, medical services).



What should we do about this?

- Use plain language so people with low literacy can read, understand and use information.
- Provide plain language training for government and community workers.
- Provide workplace literacy programs for government and community workers.



Who is responsible for adult literacy and adult basic education?

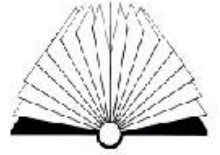
Our research tells us that:

- The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has the main responsibility for adult literacy and adult basic education. Other GNWT departments are involved, especially Health and Social Services, Justice, and Municipal and Community Affairs.
- The Federal Government is involved through French and Aboriginal language agreements. They support literacy through the [National Literacy Secretariat](#).
- The NWT Literacy Council, Aurora College, community groups, Aboriginal organizations, labour, industry and others have accepted some responsibility. Many look to government to take care of basic education.
- There is no legislation or widely understood policy for adult literacy and adult basic education.
- **Current strategies say:** adult literacy is part of a "community learning network"; use a case management approach; and community groups and partnerships should drive programs.
- **The reality is:** a network doesn't exist in many communities; the case management approach has not been adopted; few communities have the capacity to develop and deliver programs; and there is a lack of supports to enable successful partnerships.

The Dogrib Region Case Study tells us that:

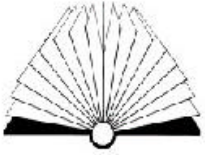
- More people see the benefits of education. Early childhood programs, grade extensions and job opportunities help people to support education, stay in school, and return to school.
- Dogrib Treaty 11 Council, the Dogrib Community Services Board and other community organizations support literacy, education and training with a variety of funding and program initiatives.
- The Dogrib Rae Band established NSR Employment Solutions. This service provides employment referral, training and outreach services.
- Dogrib organizations and businesses have partnerships with Aurora College and industry to provide job-readiness and skills training programs.

- A long-term plan is for Chief Jimmy Bruneau School to be a regional high school and adult education/training centre.



What should we do about this?

- Develop and implement a policy for literacy and adult basic education. NWT adults need access to long-term, stable and appropriate programs. Government, Aboriginal and community groups, industry, education agencies, and labour need to be part of this, and work together.
- Form a multi-sector Literacy Steering Committee to develop, oversee and maintain a strategy, and to communicate. No one group can do this alone.
- Recognize the right of all adults in the NWT to basic education. Include adult literacy in the Education Act or create an Adult Literacy and Basic Education Act.

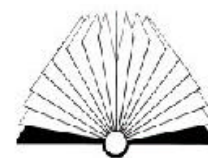


What adult literacy and basic education programs are available?

Type of Program	Comments
Community Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Primarily for young adults, 15 to 20 years old. Some adults 21+ years old (eg. Rae and Kakisa).
ABE; College academic studies; Community Learning Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High and low level literacy skills. Some full-time, mostly part-time adults. 92% Aboriginal.
Community & Family literacy; Aboriginal languages.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low level literacy skills. Run mostly by community groups. Create awareness of importance of literacy.
Access program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High level literacy skills. Leads to entry to a specific, post-secondary program.
Workplace Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High and low literacy levels. Specific to the needs of the workplace.
Job Skills Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High and low literacy levels. Skills for a specific job. May not have literacy as part of the program.

Our research tells us that:

- People need adult basic education and community literacy programs. These programs help people prepare for higher level literacy and post-secondary programs, and for jobs and skills-based training.
- Fewer programs are available to help people with low literacy skills. Emphasis on higher level literacy programs and skills-based training is increasing.



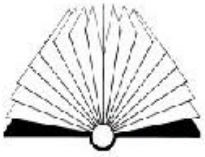
- There aren't enough adult literacy programs to meet the need. There are waiting lists for literacy and adult basic education programs in many NWT communities. The same programs aren't available from year to year, or from community to community.
- Instructors are hired and let go. Instructors may not have the training and support they need. They don't have enough books and other resource materials.
- There is no consistent evaluation for programs or students.

The Dogrib Region Case Study tells us that:

- There are short-term literacy programs, academic upgrading and skills-based training for jobs. Since 1998, no ABE programs have happened in Rae-Edzo. Programs in other communities have insecure, short-term funding. There are no literacy programs for adults with less than grade 5.
- In the past, skills-based training programs were usually 8 months long. They had 15 male participants and a literacy section. More recently, these programs are shorter. They train people for specific jobs in construction and/or mining, and have no literacy training.
- Adults with grade 5 or more can go to the high school. These students are mostly dedicated, conscientious, and motivated women. They have no other adult basic education options.

What should we do about this?

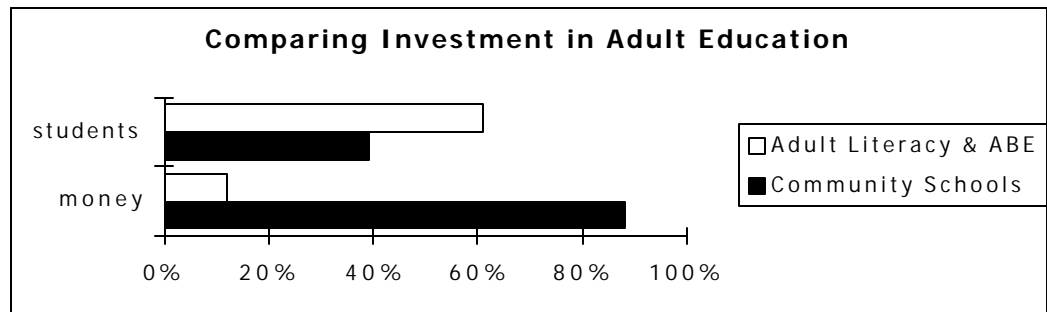
- Develop and implement an effective, efficient way to evaluate best practices, student success and public accountability
- Develop and implement accessible, sustainable programs in all communities, so people can increase their literacy skills throughout their life. This includes family literacy, school-based literacy, adult literacy and upgrading, and workplace literacy.
- Support instructors with training and appropriate resource materials.



Is it worth it to invest in adult literacy?

Our research tells us that:

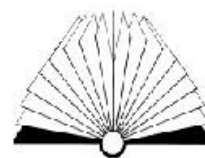
- Community schools are a priority for funding over adult basic education and adult literacy.
- Adult programs need funding too. There is not enough funding to meet the need.



- Funding for literacy programs is generally unstable and fragmented. Uncertain funding means programs struggle to keep partnerships, develop options, monitor performance, keep staff, and deliver consistent and accessible services.
- Adults often can't get money and other supports to attend education and literacy programs.
- Adults can't get money from the NWT Student Financial Assistance Program to attend literacy and basic education programs. They often don't have good access to other, social resources, such as day care, counselling, and housing.

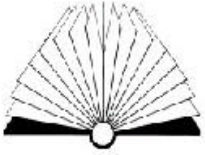
The Dogrib Region Case Study tells us that:

- The Dogrib Treaty 11 Council has funding to assist students who attend post-secondary education. This is added to funding from the NWT Financial Assistance program.
- The Dogrib Community Services Board administers the Healthy Children Initiative in the region. Projects with a family literacy component exist in each Dogrib community.



What should we do about this?

- Keep track of how money is spent.
- Increase public funding for adult basic education and community literacy programs.
- Establish a long-term, partnership fund. Communities need to be able to plan continuous programs.
- Replace project funding with multi-year funding. Programs need more stability.
- Provide Student Financial Assistance to adults who go to basic education and literacy programs.
- Develop and implement a cooperative model to make funding decisions. This can help prevent competition for scarce resources.



A Model for Tax Revenue and Social Program Savings with an Individual Investment in Adult Literacy

Government investment in literacy can pay for itself in less than 2 years. This model assumes that it costs about \$10,273 a year per person for an adult basic education program, and that in 3 years they can graduate.

- Individual Literacy Investment (\$10,273 per year for 3 years) \$30819
- Annual Income Opportunity \$43000
(With good literacy skills, they can probably get a good job)

With a good job, every year they will pay:

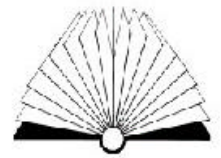
- Average Federal Tax \$4817
- Average NWT Tax \$2168
- NWT Payroll Tax \$430
- Income Support Savings \$3068
- Public Housing Rent Recovery \$6000

Total of Tax Revenue & Savings every year: \$16,483

The savings last a person's lifetime. There are many other savings too:

- People can support themselves and their family. Their health and well-being, and that of their family, is stronger.
- People have more freedom to move to a different community if they want. They have more choices for a job and other things.
- People can understand and respond to change better. They can participate more fully. A lot is happening in public and Aboriginal governments, the economy, the workplace, and communities. People can read and understand information, take responsibility, and help make good decisions.

What are Our Conclusions about the State of Adult Literacy and Adult Basic Education in the NWT



We need to improve the state of adult literacy and adult basic education in the NWT.

We need to make an economic, social, and political commitment to:

- Get involved, take responsibility, work together, and do something. Talk about the need for better adult literacy with your MLA, Band Council, Local Education Authority, Health Board, Community Justice Committee, other community organizations and public and Aboriginal governments.
- Invest in adult literacy. Legislation would provide some guarantee of investment. Money spent on adult literacy and adult basic education is worth it. The direct pay back happens quickly. There are many long term benefits for individuals, families, communities, and future generations.