

Live & Learn: Profiling Successful Outcomes in Literacy

Compiled by
Joan Perry, M. Ed, ThB

Cover Design by
Jackson Yee

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is part of a project funded by the National Literacy Secretariat,
launched in Fredericton NB, on NB Literacy Day, April 16th. It
is dedicated to learners and workers in this province's literacy programs.*



Laubach Literacy New Brunswick
Joan Perry
2003

INTRODUCTION

This year, Laubach Literacy New Brunswick(LLNB) celebrates NB Literacy Day with a promotion of the success of literacy training programs. The high cost of low literacy skills to individuals and communities sparked a desire to create this educational tool, with the hope it would be useful, from fund-raising to student and/or volunteer recruitment.

LLNB is thankful to the National Literacy Secretariat for funding its project proposal and to Steering Committee members who volunteered time and advice for this effort. Our highest regard goes out to the men and women who revealed themselves, their goals, and struggles in life, in order to share valuable learning moments with others.

These remarkable learner stories are matched with literacy-related issues in a document aimed towards better education for all. Some were penned totally by the learners, while others were collected through face-to-face or phone interviews and compiled for print. They are more than essays or interviews on paper. They reflect *lived and learned* experiences, expressed in the students' own words. They are filled with overcoming victory in a battle against illiteracy, ignorance, and intolerance.

During the course of this project, I travelled throughout the province to talk with learners whom I'd never met before. I am thankful to LLNB for allowing me to participate in a great learning experience. With each interview, I left with a fresh understanding of the meaning of "*success*," as well as a new face to go along with the story. I am richer for such contacts and hope that even a small measure of the same richness touches readers, placing them in these moments of struggle and success.

I urge literacy workers to continue listening to learner accounts and students to keep on exercising their *voice*. I solicit the available resources of volunteers and sponsors, the services of facilitators and tutors, and the full supportive commitment of families and friends. The responsibility for literacy belongs to each and every one of us. It must become an *individual* concern, a *community* effort, and a *provincial* priority. Only then, can we advance.

Joan Perry, LLNB's "Live & Learn" Project Coordinator

Laubach Literacy New Brunswick (LLNB)



Vision & Core Values

Laubach Literacy New Brunswick is a volunteer nonprofit organization, dedicated to the development and support of our affiliated literacy councils. We provide a mutually supportive and positive working environment, promoting an atmosphere of trust and equality. Through the promotion of the Each One Teach One philosophy, we strive to meet changing literacy needs. The Each-One-Teach-One methodology, originated in 1930, is now used successfully in over 300 languages around the world.

Organizational History & Structure

LLNB was registered as a nonprofit, charitable organization in 1975, with a primary goal of tutoring adult non-readers one-to-one. We currently have 18 active councils with more than 450 trained tutors. Laubach volunteers contribute thousands of hours annually in literacy-related work, enriching the lives of individuals and families, and also benefitting communities, social service systems, and NB's economic vitality.

Presidents of each of the community-based Laubach councils comprise our Board of Directors. LLNB exists primarily to pool resources for services such as advocacy, tutor training, board development, public relations & program promotion, volunteer & student recruitment, fund-raising, student development workshops, and such.

Laubach Literacy Councils

Bathurst Literacy Council	Fundy Reading Council
Campbellton Literacy Council	Greater Moncton Literacy Council
Carleton Literacy Council	Keswick Valley Literacy
Dorchester/Westmorland Literacy Council	Minto Literacy Council
Laubach Literacy Fredericton	Miramichi Literacy Council
Laubach Literacy Oromocto	Laubach Literacy Petitcodiac
Port Elgin Literacy Council	READ Chipman
READ Saint John	Tantramar Literacy Council
READ Sussex	St. Stephen Literacy Council

Contact: Julie Kean Marks, Field Services Coordinator
Toll-Free number: 1-877-633-8899 Fax: (506) 756-1987
E-mail: bjkmarks@nbnet.nb.ca



FANB

The **Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick (FANB)** is a non-profit organization established in June, 1989. Its mandate consists of promoting literacy in French in New Brunswick, increasing public awareness, and ensuring a dialogue between the literacy practitioners in the province. The Federation consists of seventeen literacy councils, each representing literacy in French in their respective region.

Through projects and public awareness activities, FANB hopes to contribute to the reduction of the illiteracy rate, which is still very high in francophone New Brunswick. In concrete terms, FANB informs Acadians and francophones on illiteracy, coordinates projects, publishes information documents, puts to the disposal of practitioners a resource center of literacy documents, and acts as a spokesperson to government authorities. Moreover, FANB contributes to making the public and the decision-makers aware of the stakes in literacy in French in New Brunswick.

For more information :

President : Jocelyne Lavoie
Phone : 506-473-6821

Coordinator : Diane Ross
Phone : 506-473-4404

Fédération d'alphabétisation Nouveau-Brunswick
147B Court Street
Grand Falls (New Brunswick) E3Z 2R1
www.nald.ca/fed.htm
fanb@nbnet.nb.ca

NBCL

The **New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy (NBCL)** has been in existence since 1988 and is made up of representatives from grass-roots literacy organizations and other institutions which have an interest in literacy, such as the labour movement, federal and provincial government departments, and the private sector.

The New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy promotes literacy and provides support to the field, by providing professional development training to literacy practitioners, developing resources for the literacy community, and sponsoring conferences for learners and instructors. In 2003, the Coalition will be developing a literacy marketing, fund-raising, and volunteer management toolkit, sponsoring family literacy training, and is currently developing a province-wide Adult Learner Network. This network will be a means to support adults in their learning, to promote their successes, and to empower them to become role models and champions for others.

NBCL provides a toll-free telephone number for first-contact literacy information.



Honourary Patron - Canadian author Sheree Fitch

NBCL President - Cheryl Brown

Staff - Jan Greer Langley, Executive Director & Anne Leslie, Director of Programs

1-800-563-2211 (506) 457-1227 e-mail nbcl@nbnet.nb.ca

944 Prospect Street, Fredericton, N.B. E3B 9M6

www.nald.ca/nbclhom.htm

CASP

Community Academic Services Programs, or CASPs, initiated in NB in 1991, provide quality, community-based, academic learning opportunities to adults, at no cost to the learner. The local, provincial, and federal governments partner with business, industry, and community to provide resources necessary to address local literacy problems.

CASPs are available in both official languages and some operate for special needs learners or workplace training requirements. The programs provide small classes and flexible schedules to promote self-directed learning at one's own pace. CASP facilitators guide adult learners in their pursuit of personal excellence.

Literacy coordinators work from the Bathurst, Campbellton, Edmundston, Dieppe, Miramichi, Moncton, Saint John, St. Andrews, Acadian Peninsula, and Woodstock Community Colleges to promote and provide educational support to literacy programs in their regions.

Literacy

The 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) defined literacy as

“the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities at home, at work, and in the community, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential.”

A person with low literacy skills may not be able to read a book to a child, read warning labels and greeting cards, or even use a phone book. Tasks such as counting out money, reading medicine labels or bus schedules, writing a cheque or money order, filling out job forms, using a banking machine or debit card may be too difficult for some. One in four New Brunswickers cannot read, write, or do math well enough to meet daily needs.

One must see that many people, beyond those who cannot read or write at all, need literacy training. Higher levels of education are required in order to succeed in today's computerized world. More residents of New Brunswick are being socially isolated or left behind and more deeply lodged in the poverty-welfare cycle. Low literacy skills affect all of us and cost us more each year.

It's the goal of provincial literacy organizations to involve New Brunswickers in literacy initiatives so that no one needs to feel left out. With the help of volunteers, literacy practitioners, and sponsors, this province will continue to offer literacy training programs to meet individual needs for learners.

LITERACY IN NEW BRUNSWICK

Literacy is a basic need. Without an ability to read, write, or speak well, people suffer poverty, poor health, and unemployment.¹

Close to 60% of NB adults over the age of 16 have difficulty with reading printed text for daily requirements at home, at work, and in the community. It means that more than half of our adults lack sufficient skills to survive daily in a text-based society. Over 350,000 adults in this province need better literacy skills.²

There were 143 CASPs (62 anglophone, 77 francophone, & 4 bilingual) in operation in late 2002, with more than 1700 students enrolled.³

LLNB currently has 18 literacy councils. Their 2001 report indicated that they had 470 tutors registered, and tutored over 20,000 hours in the year, while working with 383 students.

“There needs to be a long-term commitment from the provincial government to literacy training in New Brunswick.”⁴

Some success indicators of literacy programs are: helping adults to become independent learners, meeting personal goals, improving family life, obtaining academic and non-academic skills (like life-skills, social and teamwork skills, improved attitudes and self-esteem).

This document contains 26 learner stories that represent the experiences and voices of people seldom heard, but who deserve to be. May these stories cause us to rethink our idea about literacy.

LITERACY AND HEALTH

Literacy plays a key role in health. Low literacy has a negative impact on life expectancy, diseases (like cancer, diabetes, heart disease), and accidents.

Low literacy increases health care costs as patients misunderstand health data, misuse medications, or require longer hospital stays.

Low-literate learners have problems reading and understanding health information unless it is clearly presented. They are more likely to work and live in unsafe or dangerous environments and to suffer the consequences.⁵

Yvonne grew up with an alcoholic father who thought education wasn't essential. Teachers made her feel she was wasting their time and didn't count as a person, so she quit school and married young. She knows she always lets others make choices for her, even the doctors, whose treatment information she couldn't grasp, when facing breast cancer at 37. Learning to read and write with a tutor from Laubach Literacy Fredericton has given her the courage to set goals and make informed decisions for herself. She won an Alpha Award and the 2000 Canada Post Literacy Award in recognition of her progress.

I grew up on the north side. I was pushed through school to grade seven. I couldn't write or read...just a bit, not enough to do everyday things. My father didn't feed us most of the time, wouldn't buy us books for school, and was very abusive. My mother didn't drink and was a wonderful woman. Growing up we always thought, "It's Mom's fault, like, what's up?" But it wasn't Mom's fault. It was Dad's drinking, but we didn't realize it then. I got married. It was like a scapegoat...out of one frying pan into another. My husband has a chemical imbalance, so I went through a lot with him. I didn't speak to anyone, never went anywhere, just worked all the time in the woods. I couldn't do banking. I had someone make out loans and contracts in my name and I would sign them.

Having kids, you need to know how to care for them mentally and physically. I never went near the school. The same teachers might have treated my children the same way, that "if your family's no good, then you're not." I couldn't read to them. I had a friend, Mrs. Cooper, a teacher. She helped my kids and would teach them to read at her house. I would buy books with cassette tapes at the grocery store. All of my kids are grown up, graduated, and went to university.

I had a back injury first, then breast cancer, then went back a third time when I ruptured my bowel and needed reconstruction. In the hospital for my back, I laid there and couldn't read the menu. They didn't bring me anything I wanted because I didn't fill it out. When I had cancer, I felt stupid. They pass you forms to sign and sheets to read. I thought everyone knew what was best for me, that everything was right to go with, but I had too much radiation and now my hands are all crooked. I wanted to know more, to be able to ask questions with the doctors.

They don't know you can't read if you don't speak out for yourself. It's no one's fault but your own... If you can't read, you have to help yourself before anyone can help you. You have to say, "I have a problem."

Yvonne...

When I first started to work in the motel, I was mixing chemicals together because I was told to. I didn't read the labels because I couldn't. It was a health and safety issue to do it this way or that. At work, I saw an ad on where to call if you need help to read. I took it off the wall and home with me to get in touch with a tutor. I kept it to myself because I wanted to see how it went before I said anything.

I had a fear that I wouldn't be able to do it and that it would be a waste of time. It was great because I worked one-on-one. Working full-time, I didn't have time to do a CASP class. I go to work and take my books with me and whenever I have spare time, I do math or science. I like to write about people, what I see in their eyes and on their faces. One of my writings, called *Glass Houses* was published in the student newspaper, The Learning Times. I've been working in literacy about ten years. I'm still working on Monday night with my tutor, towards my GED. It's slow progress remembering everything.

Literacy has opened my eyes to a lot of things. I'm more aware of my work hours now. Before I would punch in, but didn't know if I was getting paid the right pay. Now I know when I go to work. Doing an 8-hour day, I want to be equal and shouldn't get paid less than somebody else. I don't get all the dirty jobs. Before, I would take anything because I felt I have to have this job because I have no other choice. But I do have a choice. At work, some mention I've changed, that I don't take 'no' for an answer and that if I want something, I go after it.

There's more in life you put value on. The literacy council got me to do things to get more involved and that was a bonus. I did some public speaking workshops. It was a boost to my morale to learn more and to see what's out there. I have better social skills, buying skills, listening skills. I take opinions better. Five years ago, I never thought I would ever sit on the provincial executive board as student representative, or be Vice President of Laubach Literacy Fredericton.

When the table turns, you look back and think, "Man, life could've been so much easier. I could have had a better life if I'd had the education to do things."

Extracted from an interview with Yvonne Westall, Fredericton NB

A high school graduate with minimal reading ability, Dean knew that he needed to learn to read well to get a good job. In 2000, he started to work with a lady from his church, a tutor from the Keswick Valley Laubach Literacy Council. Learning to read his Bible has been the most difficult because of the hard names in it. He gets up and does a reading in his church now, which he could not do before.

My Road to Reading

My name is Dean Christie. I am 21 years old. I live in Central Hainesville, New Brunswick with my mom and dad. I was born with Spinal Meningitis and had a stroke while I was being born. I had to have several shunts and these required many operations.

Because I had a good memory, I would often memorize things that I wanted to “read” aloud.

When I was in Elementary school, someone from district office told my parents that I probably would be unable to learn to read and that I would just get frustrated if we continued to struggle in this area. I had teacher assistant help, but the school system just didn’t have the resources to give me instruction that I needed. We never gave up and I always worked hard to learn to read. When I was in high school I even attended after-school tutoring. Because I had a good memory, I would often memorize things that I wanted to “read” aloud. For example, I am very active in church and loved to read scripture so I would have someone read the section to me and I would repeat it phrase by phrase. My goal was to improve my reading so that I could read my bible.

I heard about Laubach Literacy’s adult reading program. I liked the fact that it was free – I had no idea at the time that I wouldn’t have to pay for tutoring. I also liked the fact that I didn’t have to travel outside my community.

I met with the Keswick Valley Laubach Literacy student/tutor coordinator and the tutor in October, 2000. We chose Wednesdays at my house to get together. We used the Voyager program, which I found easy and interesting. I have now completed 3 levels in Voyager and am in my 4th (there are 9 levels). I plan to continue until I have finished all the levels!

Improving my reading skills has done a lot for me. In August 2002, I was able to read scripture during my sister’s wedding ceremony. I now read scripture at home and at church in front of an audience. I also read novels. I am more confident, not just in reading, but in general. If I hadn’t started with the Laubach tutoring I would still be at a low reading level, instead of improving every day like I am now.

Written by Dean Christie Jr., Central Hainesville NB

LITERACY AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

“Learning disabilities are neurological disorders interfering with one’s ability to store, process, or produce information and create a gap between one’s ability and performance.”⁶

Some adults have learning disabilities that seem to slow down their rate of learning.

“The risks for those with learning disabilities may be limited educational opportunities and vocational options, isolation, and difficulty with independent living. They may feel inadequate, incapable, and isolated from others.

They may remember being teased, criticized, or even rejected by their peers. As a result they may have a poor self-image and lack the confidence to try new things. Adults with severe learning disabilities may have difficulty with tasks such as writing checks, filling out forms, taking phone messages, and following directions.”⁷

Sarah, in her thirties, attended programs at the Saint John Learning Exchange and READ Saint John. Struggling with a learning disability, she began work with a tutor in 1997. Since then, she has gotten married, started to work in a catering business as president of the board, and serves as the student advisor on the READ Saint John (a Laubach Literacy council) Board.

I didn't feel very good about myself before I began my upgrading. I had no confidence. I was very shy and I didn't talk to people. I kept to myself.

I went to the Learning Exchange first. I felt good. I was talking to other people who were in the same boat as I was. I went as far as I could with them but I wanted more. Then I heard about READ Saint John. I came in and did an evaluation and they found me a Tutor.

Sarah believes that, like hers, "All stories have a victory."

I knew I had a learning disability. I was tested for it before. I have a problem getting things down on paper. I know what I want to write but it doesn't look like it on paper. I miss words all the time. Working with a tutor one on one, I am slowly learning how to compensate. My mother has got a computer and we are working on that together. I find that it helps me a great deal.

Since I have been working on my upgrading, I have become less shy and more self confident. I volunteer and am President on a board for a catering organization, and have started public speaking to new tutors. I also sit on the board of READ Saint John as the Student Representative. Last year I won an award for achievement and that was a great surprise.

I feel pretty good about myself. I'm planning on getting another job. I work for the Catering organization now and the new job will probably be in the same field.

Written by Sarah Critchlow, Saint John NB

By the time Linda was almost 50, she was weary of asking others to spell words or do things for her. She had quit school in Grade 5, tired of being called names in a slow learners' class. Though able to write her name, she could never read stories to anyone. Working with a tutor from READ Saint John (a Laubach Literacy council) for almost three years, she owns a library card and two dictionaries which she uses often.

I was getting by with my reading but I couldn't read my mail or storybooks to my children. I was too embarrassed to ask other people for help.

I was a volunteer for the Salvation Army, and helped out in the kitchen. Darren, the Program Director, came into the kitchen one day and asked us if we wanted to learn to read or write. He approached each of us and I told him I would think about it. It didn't take me long to think about it. Three days later I went back on chapel service and told him I would do it. I went to READ Saint John and they evaluated me and found what level of reading I was at and where to start me.

I enjoy writing in my journal and can read scriptures for myself. I watch game shows to help me with my spelling. I would like to get a computer to help me ...

I was then matched with a tutor and have worked with her for the last three years. I started in (Laubach Way to Reading) Skill Book 3 and she has worked with me until I am now in Challenger 6.

Now I can read. I don't have to depend on anyone else. I can look things up and do things on my own now. My daughter says, "Mum, you should be proud of yourself, because you have come a long way." I learned more with my tutor than I learned when I went to school. I missed a lot of school when I was growing up because I needed a lot of medical care.

I also sit on the Board of Directors of READ Saint John as a Student Representative. I have much more confidence in myself and know I can accomplish anything I want. I feel good and I am proud of what I have accomplished.

Written by Linda Hebert, Saint John NB

LITERACY AND SELF-ESTEEM

Daily living for one with poor literacy skills may be filled with fear, isolation, frustration, shame, excuses, and hopelessness, bridging from low self-esteem.

When a person feels like a nobody, it often mirrors someone else's words or view. If you've been told you're stupid enough times, you'll start to believe it.

A person with low self-esteem needs courage to step forward to learn, but with his/her learning, may gain a new attitude and outlook on life.

Having a healthy self-respect is essential for personal growth and a quality of life.

A life without purpose can reflect a book of words without meaning.

Now 43, Lucille says that she was ashamed to enroll in literacy classes. When her sister-in-law was teaching at “Alpha Sans Frontiers”, she finally asked to attend. She wanted to know how to write better. She gained the confidence to become a store manager.

I have had to study hard during all my years in school. I passed the classes that required learning by heart. However, I failed the language classes because grammar, verbs, and dictations were my pet hate. I managed to get my high school diploma in 1979, but my writing skills were worthless. When my friend when to work far away, I would write to him. He would phone me that same night to find out what I had written. So, I stopped writing to him, because he couldn't understand how I had been allowed to graduate, without knowing how to write better.

In these classes, we are like a family. We learn to know each other, to find ourselves, to respect and listen to others, and to have confidence in ourselves.

I began taking care of children for many years. When the last of my own children started school, I realized that I couldn't help him. Since my neighbour and sister-in-law was teaching literacy classes, I finally asked her what I needed to do to attend the classes. She had often encouraged me to enroll, but I was too ashamed to do it. The night before I was to start, I couldn't sleep since I was so nervous. When I arrived in class, the learners were already there. The teacher introduced me to the group and everyone welcomed me without judging me. That was the first lesson I learned in class, not to judge anyone. Everyone was there for the same reason: to learn.

After attending classes during the fall and winter, I had enough confidence to go and give my name at the lobster plant. I worked all summer, and in the fall I returned to the literacy class. During a few years, I kept my job at the lobster plant, right up until my allergies forced me to stop. Thanks to the confidence I was gaining, I signed up for a program where I did security and supervision. It's there that I realized how much I liked working with the public. One day, someone mentioned to me that there was an opening in a store and I agreed to go work there. After two and a half years at that store, I was asked to become a manager in another store. It was the beginning of a big dream!

I would like to say that it's adult literacy that opened this door for me. In these classes, we are like a family. We learn to know each other, to find ourselves, to respect and listen to others, and to have confidence in ourselves. Now that the door is open, it's up to me to discover and realize my dreams.

Written by Lucille Cormier, Saint-Antoine, NB

Fact is, Diane lost her mother at the age of nine. She had little self-confidence and since going to class has improved her self-esteem. She has been helped greatly by starting to work in associations and has accepted different level executive posts. She's been treasurer for her literacy class(Formation St. François) committee for four years now and is also a member of the regional literacy council.

I enrolled in a literacy class in my village six years ago. I wanted to continue my education that I had to interrupt at the age of 15. I had to stay at the house and help my stepmother, who was not in good health, take care of my younger brothers and only sister. I had to quit school at the beginning of grade 7, and that caused me much sorrow since I really liked school. However, since I was the oldest, I had to make the sacrifice. I really liked to read. I would read everything I could get my hands on. I stayed at home until the age of 20.

I got married and had a son the year after. In between, I started working in a restaurant as a cook's assistant. I liked it, but I had to work nights and weekends. Then, I had a second child. A girl. Since I liked working less on weekends and nights, I stopped.

When my oldest started school, I started taking care of children in my home. It's lucky that I had a grade 6 education and that I knew how to read. I was able to help my children in their schoolwork. My husband had his grade 12. Therefore, my children didn't suffer. However, I wasn't happy in all this. I knew that with more education, I could do better than look after children all day.

If I had to pay for my studies, I would not have been able to enroll in the classes. Back then, at my age, I would not have had the courage to do it.

To increase my self-worth, I agreed to take part in organizations as a volunteer. I was shy, and I wanted to be able to speak in public. That's why I accepted positions as secretary and treasurer of many different organizations. Today, I am still a member of certain organizations. By doing that, I think I was able to maintain a certain control over my Math and French skills.

I always kept taking care of children because I really liked them. That's why, in 1990, I established my own government-licensed daycare. I am very proud of this!

Diane...

In 1995, I heard of French and Math classes that were being given in my village. I enrolled in them. I took an evaluation test, and I started at level 101 in French and Math. What I like about literacy courses is that I can go whenever I want and can, and I can advance at my own speed. It's true that it's a long process and a slow one at two nights a week, but I am not discouraged and I continue to attend.

I really like working on my French. When I write, I am much more likely to watch out for spelling and grammar mistakes. My French has greatly improved, for which I can be proud.

I have a bit of difficulty in Math. I have to make a greater effort, but it's still going well. It has really helped me to pay attention, as much during association meetings as in the managing of the family budget. Before, I had difficulty in balancing my checkbook. Now, everything is fine.

I continue to attend classes. I have a teacher who explains really well, and she always gives us little pointers to help us. In six years, I have completed the 101-102-103 levels in French and Math. I started my level 200, and I want to finish it and then go on to earning my GED. I know that at two nights a week, I still have a long time to go, but that's fine. I will continue until I'm done. My husband and my children are very proud of me. As for me, you can imagine! I am even more proud!

I want to say to all who want to continue their studies to do it, and not to be afraid to go ahead because today, having an education is very important. I thank the government for implementing this program, in cooperation with the Community Colleges. I'm proud to have enrolled and to be where I am today. All this, I owe to my literacy class, where we make good friends.

Diane Cyr, St-François NB

Eighth in a family of nine children, here is Claudette's story. Her mother being widowed, she had to help her financially. This is why she had to quit school very early. She's an academic upgrading student in the "Alpha Campbellton Comite I" CASP class.

Literacy : The Beginning of a Life

I had to quit school very early. At that point, I had little knowledge of mathematics, reading, or writing. I drew circles on paper in order to count. In addition, when I would go into stores, I was full of anxieties at the thought of making mistakes, hence my need to be

accompanied by someone. Due to deficient schooling, I had low self-esteem, I thought I was stupid, good for nothing, that I would never make something of my life and that I would always be incapable of doing anything. I refused all social contact, and I would escape to my room when my brothers-in-law would come to the house. I thought that a girl without education could not follow a conversation and would therefore be of no interest to people who I thought were more educated. This is why every time I would interact with people, I would feel weak, foolish, silly, dim-witted, incapable and ignorant. I thought I would never bring myself out of this situation.

I can say that literacy changed my life and probably saved it... Literacy and the encouragement of my children are wonderful ingredients that contribute daily in helping me reassert my self-esteem.

The years passed and I got married. I had children, but I had no sense of self-worth. I would send my children to the neighbors to do their homework because I feared I would not be able to give them the correct information and wanted to prevent that. Embarrassed by my ignorance, I would tell them that I didn't have time to help them, and the neighbors would be able to. Just when I felt things were going from bad to worse and I would never get out of this, I heard about literacy. Good news! the classes were being held in the basement of my parish's church. I am in my element. I feel secure and enroll in the classes after a few weeks. I adored my experience. That victory succeeded in increasing my self-esteem, and I could now look for work. Sadly, after a few years, the courses were transferred to Campbellton, so it was impossible for me to attend. Inwardly, I was hopeful that one day I would be able to resume my studies. One day, my son gave me the good news; he knew where I could enroll in a CASP class. Once more, my negative thoughts were resurfacing: I was older, I wouldn't be able to learn more than what I already had. In addition, I was working, and I had lost the self-esteem I had managed to acquire during

Claudette...

those few years of studying. However, my son told me: “Mom, you’re the one who taught us to always forge ahead in life and to never stop believing in ourselves.” It’s then that I understood he was right, I had everything to learn. I couldn’t have shown them all their lives that we have to fight for what we believe...and then simply give up.

I’ve been participating in a literacy program for over five years now. Unfortunately, I can’t give my studies the time I would like because of my work. However, my free time is reserved for studying. That’s why weeks can go by before I see my sisters or my brother. Still, these are sacrifices that are rewarding and worthwhile. In addition, I can see the results in my French, reading, and Math work. It’s even thanks to literacy and to the progress I’ve made that I was able to survive the death of my mother and my youngest brother. Their deaths, occurring in a one-month interval, hurt me deeply. I joined a support group for grieving people in order to overcome more serenely this double loss. We had many articles to read, and thanks to the improvement in my reading skills, I was able to understand the texts and progress in my journey. Therefore, I can say that literacy changed my life and probably saved it. Furthermore, my family relationships have changed since I am now more social, I isolate myself less, I have more self-confidence, and I charge towards my goals. It’s even thanks to this inner-strength that I have made new friends, that I accept to take part in literacy meetings, that I am the Learner Representative on the FANB’s Board of Directors, and that I have learned to forge ahead. I help out members of my community, I am involved in parish committees, I read during church services, and I even participate in contests for learner achievement.

I can now understand when I read books, not short children’s stories that I would read before, but novels that I can savour. I can also discuss these books with my friends. This learning and knowledge, therefore, helps me to socialize since I can follow a conversation and participate.

Now 50 years of age, I am proud of myself. Even if literacy is a plus for me, my biggest success are my children. They often tell me that they owe everything to me since my courage gave them the power to keep learning. When they’d cry because their studies were trying for them and they didn’t understand anything, I was there to prove to them that life, without education, would be even more painful. To my great joy, they understood the importance of education.

Claudette...

In closing, I am able to assert that literacy is really the beginning of a life, **of my life**. Since my participation, I learned to write, so I can send cards or letters to my loved ones. Now, I am able to count without drawing small circles on paper. I can go to the store alone. I am also able to help senior citizens by running errands for them. Since I have more confidence in myself, I am able to ask for help. Therefore, I am a completely different person. I love life and I take part in it fully. I do this as the owner of a Special Care Home and also as an employee of the Red Cross. Recently, I even went to work as a janitor at the schools in my region. Before, it would have been impossible for me to write a resume and to send it since it required a certain training. I deprived myself of such an experience.

I am proud of the road I've traveled up until today. Result: better life, joys, love, respect, self-confidence. I don't regret anything of my efforts and of my perseverance because **I started to grow**.

Written by Claudette Audet, Campbellton NB

LITERACY AND GENDER

Globally, women are more seriously affected by illiteracy than men. In 2000, UNESCO estimated that 64% of all adult illiterates were women, an increase of 4% from 1997.⁸

An undereducated mother may not be able to read to her children or help them with their school work.

Women may be trying to manage alone in situations of poverty or depression. They may benefit from group support in literacy programs.

Women may come for a variety of reasons: to write better, to help their kids, or just to be with other people in the community. Literacy can help to bring someone out of poverty, ignorance, exclusion, or a life of disadvantage into a world of justice, voice, equality, and human dignity. Literacy empowers people to take charge of their lives by providing the tools.

Lynn, a single mother of two, was tired of seeing her parents worry on disability assistance, while raising her oldest son. Without grade 12, she ended up in a cycle of part time low-paying jobs and welfare. After taking months of upgrading at the Bathurst Adult Learning Center CASP, she had the confidence to study and pass the GED on her first try. She was surprised by doors of employment opened to her.

At 31, I've been on social assistance for approximately ten years. I had part-time jobs here and there. I never completed high school. I dropped out because of pregnancy and never went back . . . a typical teenage rebellion thing. Then I got into the welfare situation and it's addictive. You get used to your cheque coming in and you sitting there raising children . . . free money. I got a little too used to it, got lazy.

Because of my lack of education, I couldn't get anywhere. I didn't have the training, the skills. I didn't have anything. To go and apply for a position I wanted was just embarrassing and a waste of time, so I was taking cashier and waitress jobs. I was glad for the work, but it wasn't what I wanted to do.

When my children started going to school, I started thinking, "Okay, what will I do when they have to bring a parent?" When they get asked, "What does your mommy do for a living?" I did not want them to say, "My mommy sits home all day." That was a big thing for me.

I was 30 when I made the decision to enroll. My friends with careers going got me thinking, "Okay, that's enough! I need to start doing something with my life. There's nothing for a life to sit in front of the TV all day." I got hold of my worker and asked her to give me recommendations on the kinds of programs there were.

So, that is how I got Hollie . . . she was one of the first ones I contacted. It was CASP (for me) because of the funding and stuff . . . they didn't have to pay anything and I didn't have to pay anything. That was a big bonus 'cause where I was on assistance, the money was really not there. They helped with transportation. After school they helped with the daycare.

This helped me because of the hours. Your time was whatever you could put into it. That was good. I tried to schedule it the best I could, while my daughter was in school, so I would be home when she got home. I did a lot at home too.

You don't get second and third chances, especially older people like myself. We really need that. Adults give up easily if there is any kind of interference that we could not handle or feel like dealing with.

Lynn...

They were so proud, especially my daughter. She said, “Wow, mommy, you’re in school!” She was telling all of her little friends in school. I pick her up at school and sometimes they would say, “You’re in school?” So, it was really a rush feeling, to see my daughter so proud. My son too . . . he was a little shocked at first and didn’t understand it. But then I talked to him some more and explained what was going on and that I wanted a career. I wanted a life. I didn’t want to just sit there, you know. I wanted to give my children something. When I got the GED, knowing I was out of school for 12 or 13 years and then, I do this thing in such a short amount of time . . . he was very proud. This is good for me right now, because my son is having trouble at school. So, it’s like a big boost for me to say, “Kevin, I sat on my butt for so long and this is what happened. I’m 31 years old . . . because I didn’t go to school.”

The hardest thing for me to overcome was getting up in the morning. It was the motivation, “Can I do this? I started; can I finish?” I was scared I would get lazy, just not bother with it, or make excuses. Just failure, period! I was scared of taking tests and not passing them. The whole school scenario got me really nervous.

When I got here, it was totally different. There was a lot of one-on-one . . . not a lot of people around you. You don’t have to be shy. I didn’t have to get up and speak in front of the class. You don’t have to stand in line if you need help. I could just go into the corner if I wanted to and work on my own. I was one of the older ones. Then, in the last couple of months the younger people came. That was quite different, but I dealt with it because I was already comfortable in the class. The age difference didn’t matter. I don’t find that there is any negativity in this program.

I had to leave for a little while because of a family situation. I didn’t have to worry about being kicked out of classes or falling behind. My daughter was in the hospital for appendicitis. It was very scary; I almost lost her. It was such a relief not to have to worry because this program was very supportive. You don’t get that from high schools. So that really helped.

After I got the GED, I redid my resume. I passed out several and had three phone calls that afternoon. I was very shocked. Impressed. I wasn’t expecting replies back so fast. Not the best paying jobs, but still they were call-backs. It was what I needed: more reassurance, more confidence. I can go out there and do this. I plan on going to college in the fall to take an Administrative Assistant course. Good hours, not sure about the pay yet, but hopefully it will be enough.

-A passage from a chat with Patricia Lynn Curtis, Bathurst NB

Denise came from a family of eight children who moved a lot. She finished school in Moncton with a modified studies diploma. She is a lady who serves to give courage to others who wish to improve their situation. She tells us her path to her current cooking position at the George F. Dumont Hospital.

Our family did not have the chance to educate itself because my mother depended on social assistance for herself and her 8 children. We therefore moved often. I believe I attended 10 schools during the course of my studies. Sometimes a French school, sometimes an English school. At the end of the 6th grade, my teacher put me in the modified classes because I could no longer speak and write French correctly. I finished in Moncton with a modified studies diploma.

I entered the job market as a waitress, and later on as an employee of a senior citizen's home in Saint-Antoine. It's there that I became aware of the adult literacy class. It was located in the basement of the home. Since I had difficulty writing, I approached the teacher, who recommended that I attend classes in between my shifts.

The courses for cook and hairdresser interested me. However, with a family of two children, my husband and I could not afford such an expense. I was refused help from Employment Insurance at that moment.

During this time, I was making progress in my schooling at the literacy class, but also I was building my self-esteem. In 1997, the Community College invited me to write an admission's test. My determination allowed me to pass that test, and I returned to the EI Center who agreed to help me this time. I was determined to become a cook and go work in a hospital. My salary of \$6.15 per hour did not satisfy me any longer.

In the middle of my cook's course, I was already looking to the hospital for a position. In June 1999, they accepted me for a training period, and I've been there ever since. I make double the salary now and even more.

I would like to praise the literacy courses that gave me confidence in myself. I attended them until 1997. I passed my course with flying colors, and I even received many awards and certificates of merit during culinary competitions. I discovered that I too was able to accomplish many things.

The Math classes that I took helped me because I acquired the foundation that I had not grasped at school... I also encourage others to continue their academic work in the literacy classes. Follow your dreams to the end. I will always be ready to encourage you.

Denise...

Presently, I am working towards obtaining my cook's diploma. After that, I will be able to work anywhere. Nothing will stop me, now that I have gained confidence.

Written by Denise LeBlanc, Saint-Antoine NB

Nancy is a single mother with two children. She was a learner in the "Alpha Brantville" class where she completed her GED. Now, she is a college student in a computerized office management and call center class in Tracadie.

I share with you my experience as a single mother who was able to sacrifice and show determination by returning to my studies.

Many years after completing my secondary education, I decided to return to school in order to complete my GED (General Equivalency Diploma). Afterwards, I enrolled in the MultinHexa College to pursue training in office administration which would allow me to receive a college diploma. This will allow me to take up another challenge, that of finding a job in order to meet my needs and those of my children.

The progress I've made, up to the present, has increased my self-worth and has made me a person who's anxious to learn.

I always say, "Don't quit (literacy class). This is like money in the bank."

Written by Nancy Savoie, Brantville NB

LITERACY AND FAMILIES

Children from disadvantaged families are at risk for low literacy as well as for poor health, unemployment, and anti-social behaviour.

Low literacy makes it hard for parents to access parenting data or to help kids in school.

Inter-generational cycles of low literacy and poverty continue.⁵

Family environments of abuse (sexual, emotional, or physical) or drugs/ alcohol can be fearful for a child to grow up in.

A feeling of being put down can affect a child's learning development.

Being able to provide kids with a stable home environment with literacy development opportunities is important.

“Parents with higher literacy skills have greater economic security that contributes to healthy child development.”¹

The education of one's parents are a key influence in childhood learning.

Francine was trying to motivate her two children in their studies when she enrolled herself in an adult literacy class (Alpha Sans Frontières) in Saint-Antoine. She gained confidence. A little while ago, she was invited to speak to school dropouts on the subject of motivation.

At age 16, I was not interested in school and discouraged at not passing. The motivation wasn't there anymore. I took my things in the middle of the tenth grade and I quit. My choices in jobs were limited and, for many years, I worked as a waitress in a restaurant and as an employee in a fish plant.

My husband had a hairdressing salon and I helped him with the administration duties.

My two children were growing up, and I was trying to motivate them in their studies. I would always tell them that it takes a grade 12 education. However, I didn't have it and to show them the proper example, and practice what I was preaching, I enrolled myself in an adult literacy class in Saint-Antoine.

After four years in that class, I gained confidence. The desire to do something for myself took hold of my being. The more I would advance, the more I felt able.

Due to a job I got in Moncton as a cleaning person in a hotel, I had to end my studies and move.

A job at the Château Moncton opened doors for me. After a few months as a cleaning person, I became assistant supervisor. Then, the manager asked me to take on the full responsibility of supervising the service. I have my own office.

I am responsible for 15 employees. I do the inventory, take care of the laundry service, and oversee the management of the orders. When time permits, or a cleaning person is absent, I give a hand. I still enjoy working on the floors with the others.

A little while ago, I was invited to speak to school dropouts on the subject of motivation. I was just like them at 16 and I've made my way to where I am today.

I would like to conclude by praising the adult literacy service and my teacher for the encouragement and motivation I received in class. Something was telling me, "Francine, you can do it!"

The desire to do something for myself took hold of my being. The more I would advance, the more I felt able.

Written by Francine LeBlanc, Moncton NB

Denis St-Pierre, literacy learner for the past five years in the Maltempec class. Denis is the learners' representative at the Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick. He was the recipient of the Prix de la francophonie 2000 and the Alpha Award 2001 from the New Brunswick Department of Education.

I am pleased to be able to share with you my experience as a learner.

My motivation for attending an alpha class was undoubtedly my fragile health and also my desire to change some things that made me uncomfortable in life.

I started at the bottom, because I had communication, speech, and behavioural problems. I had low self-esteem; I was very shy and withdrawn. I felt worthless. I came from an environment that didn't encourage learning, and where family violence and alcohol were the order of the day. Even at the age of 35, I still could barely read and write, and people could not understand me when I spoke. What did I have to lose?

To explain to you how I managed to make my way through life, I have decided to tell you a story, my story. Here goes...

There once was an egg that was home to a little chick. As the little chick grew, his dwelling became smaller and smaller and he felt increasingly suffocated, a prisoner in his own house. So he decided to break free. He had to work very hard to make a small crack in his shell. He struggled very forcefully and using all the strength that he possessed, he finally broke the shell. He stuck his beak out and realized how good it was to breathe the pure air; then he stuck his head out and could see the sky, the sun, and all the beauty of his surroundings. He had managed to take a small step forward by exerting a huge effort for such a small chick. As time went on, he grew and felt sheltered and secure in his beautiful, soft nest.

With each passing day, he learned more about his nest. One fine day, he began to be bored and since he had big dreams, he wanted to leave his nest to explore the world beyond, because as he said: "When I was in the egg, I felt suffocated, and when I broke my shell that set me free. Since I feel like a prisoner, I think that if I leave my nest, I will be even freer." So one day, he gathered all his courage and challenged his fears by flying away. Some of his

I came from an environment that didn't encourage learning, and where family violence and alcohol were the order of the day... What did I have to lose?

Denis...

friends teased him and laughed at him. They said to him: “What do you think you are doing? Who do you think you are?” The little chick did not let them discourage him, his buddies may have been afraid of adventure, but he dared to go after it. There were days when the little chick stumbled and fell, and sometimes hurt himself, but he always managed to pick himself up again, holding his head high, and he was able to carry on.

Today, the little chick has grown up. He has become a beautiful bird with beautiful wings and he can fly higher. Now he can help his own little chicks. Sometimes he runs into obstacles, such as mountains, thunderstorms, snowstorms, wind, and cold. Exhausted by his efforts, he is sometimes forced to stop to catch his breath and to get some rest. He must find ways around such obstacles and confront new ones, in order to continue his flight and travel higher and farther, to feel freer, and enjoy the beautiful vistas that life offers him free of charge. In this way, his wings will become stronger, more flexible, and the beautiful bird will be able to discover the essence of his life.

I have succeeded in developing my potential through my various activities and commitments as a volunteer: as a member of my community, as a catechism leader, in literacy work, and in the diocesan movement. I have also made progress on a personal level, by trying to learn more about myself, and to better understand myself. But without education, it would have been impossible for me to make all these dreams come true. That is why I am proud to have returned to school. I support all men and women who want to continue learning, because it's an ongoing process, regardless of our age or our social status. I would never have been able to do it all on my own, I learned with the help of other people.

In closing, a thought came to me when I was writing my text and I would like to share it with you: “The road to our dreams is a difficult one, but one day, I will arrive at the top of my mountain of Life.”

Written by Denis St-Pierre , Maltempec NB

Elsie was sad when she quit in grade seven, because she liked school. She thinks that attending a literacy class (Alpha sans Frontières) in Saint-Antoine is good for her, for learning proper French.

When I was younger, my dream was to become a secretary. I attended school until the seventh grade.

I really enjoy the activities and the places we visit.

Around the age of 13 and 14, I left school to go help one of my aunts, who had become ill and had three children. It was my mother who sent me there. Nevertheless, I liked school, and it really saddened me when I quit.

Around the age of 21, I got married and moved with my husband to the United States.

Attending a literacy class is really good for me. It gives me the courage to continue learning proper French.

At times, I have lacked the motivation to attend, but since I believed that it was good for me, I kept going.

Here in class, I have met many friends who are interesting to speak with and I enjoy working with them. What also interests me is to see the disabled people who are in our class. The teacher helps them, just like the others. We respect them a lot and I enjoy seeing them laugh and be happy.

I really enjoy the activities and the places we visit. The disabled people come with us too, and we take good care of them.

Written by Elsie LeBlanc, Saint-Antoine NB

LITERACY AND EMPLOYMENT

“People with lower literacy skills are twice as likely to be unemployed as other adults. If they do have jobs, they’re likely to be the lowest-paid, most insecure and least attractive jobs.

The better paying, secure jobs that used to exist for undereducated people are rapidly disappearing.”⁹

Today, the jobs on the rise require the highest literacy skills. Workplace literacy is critical to keep up with changing trends in the labour market. Good literacy skills are needed to access the training that can lead to jobs.

Literacy programs provide learners with everyday work skills. Once trained, these learner-workers may recognize their right to speak up about safety or work conditions. As adults improve their literacy skills, there is lower work-related costs and improvements in quality, time, and employee morale.¹⁰

Grace, out of work at the age of 47, had no confidence to look for a job. Feelings of insecurity and failure followed her from a small two-room schoolhouse in a tiny, Newfoundland community. With her children raised, she started at the Salisbury Adult Learning Centre CASP, where she passed her GED. It fuelled a desire for other courses, allowing her to discover a talent for painting.

I grew up with eleven brothers and sisters in Newfoundland, in a tiny community, where the teacher would be the Salvation Army Officer. Kindergarten to grade six, and grades seven to twelve, would be in the two classrooms. I didn't do well in school. It was always a struggle. All tests were on the blackboard. I couldn't see the writing on it. I really needed glasses, but we couldn't afford any. Education wasn't thought to be important. Learning to do housework, to cook and bake so you could get a husband, was important.

It was in the back of my mind that when God closes the door, He always opens a window. This was my opportunity because I saw the ad in the paper about the learning place. The good Lord above kept me going...a lot of prayers!

Three years ago, with my children raised, I started the CASP program full-time, five days a week. I had been working part-time and was out of work. It was years since I quit school at fifteen in grade seven. I always wanted to finish. I did try about ten years ago, one night a week, and I could not do it. I couldn't get the basics. Tests and exams, I was too terrified to write. My mind went blank. I felt like a failure, always insecure. I had no confidence, even to look for a lot of work.

I didn't have anything (in Math) like integers, negatives, and positives. I had to learn all that and it was quite difficult. When I felt I could not do it, Margaret was there to encourage me. She didn't let us fool around or anything. She said, "You're there to learn. It's up to you what you get out of it." She always found books or something that was easier for me to follow. You weren't looked down at, or told that you were stupid. I never thought I could do anything. I thought I was stupid. Because I never finished school, I felt so insecure, so ashamed going into groups.

Grace...

I was the worst speller. The first test, I got only 3 right out of 25. I have improved a lot. I got up to getting only 3 to 5 wrong at the end. That was an encouragement and I think it gave me confidence. What worked best was that I could work at my own pace. The atmosphere was relaxed, no pressure. I wasn't rushed into anything. Give me small goals and I seem to achieve them. I started in September and passed my GED in June. It was amazing in itself to be able to go in and write that, because I do suffer from severe panic and anxiety, ever since the birth of my first child. It helped me to get a job working in the kitchen of a nursing home, where there was a lot of reading, spelling, and concentration.

I have heard both of my girls say that they've seen a difference in me. I see a big difference in myself. I've gone out and learned how to paint. I would not have been able to do that before. I had photographs of the houses my husband and I grew up in and just painted them. It's been two years since I've started. I kept going back and taking painting classes and I've taken a computer course. There is a lot of things I would not have done. It's given me a boost of confidence to know I'm okay, that I'm not stupid anymore.

Taken from a chat with Grace LeRiche, Salisbury NB

Annabelle could never get the work she wanted because she lacked the education. After eighteen years at K-Mart, she became unemployed when it closed its doors in 1998. Needing to work to supplement her husband's disability income, she tried to find suitable work or training. At 53, she enrolled in the Minto CASP, to try to get her GED, so she might pursue her aptitude for clerical work. Succeeding, she now loves her work as a casual filing clerk for NB Power.

Like a lot of young people, I was in a hurry to get nice clothes that were in fashion. I quit in grade nine. I worked most of my life, since I was 15, in restaurants, laundries, and factories. I got a job at the Post Office in Ontario and worked there almost a year before deciding to come back home. Here, I went back to factories. I worked at the cotton mill. It was hard.

At the K-Mart, I was only the floor walker. I didn't have the education to go to work as a clerk because they wanted high school graduates. After 5 years of being the walker, I was getting discouraged with the high shelves, in trying not to lose sight of the person I was watching. When they brought in the layaway program, I asked to be put on it and the manager said, "It's your baby." They brought in people from Montreal to train (me). I stayed on that for the rest of the time I worked at K-Mart. Then came the word that K-Mart was sold and I thought life was over. Most of us cried. We didn't know what was going to happen to us.

During the last month I worked, I took a homemaker course on working with seniors, using all my sick days and time I had coming to me, in order to take it. I knew it was something that I could do. I thought that it's a backup anyway. That's what it's turned out to be. I started working for *Services to Seniors* right away.

I thought life was over...
At the start I said, "What am I going to do?" I'm 53, almost 54...a lot of people retire at 55. Here I was, just starting out! Everyone was thinking, "What's the point of doing this at your age?" What was the alternative? What was I going to do? They were putting people to work in the 50 & Over Program, pulling bushes in ditches... I didn't want to be out there with the flies...I would stay up nights to study. My husband would kinda get fed up with me, but I stuck with it.

Annabelle...

After a career orientation course, I was told about CASP and started in the fall of '98. It was handy to home. I didn't have to pay for it. That "*Spotlight on Computer Literacy*" book was a big plus for me. It was all so convenient. I realized a dream; I can still graduate! It was always something that bothered me, that I didn't have a high school diploma. I think I was the oldest one there, for a while. I was trying to prove to all the people who said it was a waste of time, that it wasn't. Sometimes, I'd be tired at night (studying) and would think, "Maybe they're right. What am I doing?" When I wrote my GED and passed in February/99, I was so proud of myself. I was in the first graduation ceremony that was in Fredericton, at the Chamber of Commerce. If I can do it, other people can.

There are (rural) places that don't have an industry to finance (a CASP). We were very fortunate that NB Coal funded us... There will always be people who don't finish school or need a little help.

I stayed in CASP until April. I didn't feel that I'd really graduated until I finished the program. I wanted to take the physics & biology I'd never taken before. It was a challenge. If I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it right. I took a six-week *Introduction to Computers* course at ABC. The day I finished, I got an interview call, from an application that I completed while in CASP. Writing that resumé was part of my practice with computers. I would've liked to have taken a typing course, as I have no speed. It would probably help me where I am, taking care of microfilm cards. I was hired on as a community program and I'm the only one that is still there.

From an interview with Annabelle Barton, Minto NB

Gaétan Haché lives in Maltempec. In May 1999, he loses his job due to the closing of the textile plant where he had been working for 10 years. As work is rare in the Acadian Peninsula region, he questions himself a lot. Where to find a job with a grade nine education? At 45 years of age, it's not easy to start over. Since being a student in the "Partenariat Maltempec II" class, he has simply transformed himself. He has a career that he likes and a happy family life, because, one day, he challenged his fears and dared to take the risk of going back to his studies.

Encouraged by his wife and his children, he decides to go back to school. This first step was not taken without effort and it was not easy.

"I had a huge lack of confidence which produced rage because I was very scared of failing and of being judged. I was feeling trapped and knew that if I wanted a decent job, I had no other choices but to go back to school. It's finally in January 2000 that I decide to register for a CASP class. I felt really welcomed and that gave me confidence from the start. For me, the greeting into a class is very important. The encouragement from the other learners really helped me to trust myself, and I realized that I was capable. The teacher, who was my wife, did not have an easy task of it, since she had to be the teacher in the classroom and wife at home.

From the beginning, I noticed that I was reading but that I didn't know how to read. I didn't understand what I was reading since my vocabulary was very poor. (And now, I realize how that lack of vocabulary was also harmful in my relationships with others. It's one thing to speak French, but we still have to understand it.) I worked really hard. I registered for the GED testing, something I dreaded a lot. In April 2000, I took the tests, and in May, I received my diploma. Then, I undertook the steps to go to college in order to take the Health Care Worker course. In September, I started my course with more confidence.

I was bringing with me my childhood fears and especially those that haunted me the most, my school-related fears: fear of the teacher, fear of failing, etc...I still can't believe where I've gotten. With the senior citizens that I care for, I revisit my childhood fears. They didn't have the chance to get rid of their fears, so I listen to them and I understand them because I know what it's like to be scared. By being close to them, I'm getting quite a lesson in life: *we end our life the way we lived it.*

Gaétan...

As there were students my own age, it reassured me and I told myself that I was as capable as the others. I completed my course with a 94% average, I who told myself that I was no good. In February 2001, I received my diploma on a Friday, and that Sunday, I was starting work in a senior citizens' home: La Villa Beauséjour de Caraquet.

Today, I have a sense of pride and accomplishment. Before, I was always negative, I felt judged, I was searching for happiness, I didn't know what it meant to be happy. In my ignorance, I was hurting myself and others. Today, I have more power over my life. I know myself better, so I am better able to understand others. We all have a right to make mistakes; it's only human and there's always room for starting over, for being reborn. I have a career that I like and where I have a chance to make remarkable progress. I am learning to be more tolerant and more patient, two qualities that I had but were not developed.

Also, with my wife, I take part in the diocese movement "La Flambée" in which I began my personal growth four years ago. Inside that movement of mutual aid, I feel valued and I can speak in front of people who really listen to me.

Education isn't only knowing how to read, write, and count, but also understanding what we read, write, and say. The message I would like to pass on is to know yourself first, in order to know who you really are. It's then that we see that we're just as important as anyone else. We are all important, no matter our job, our social standing, or anything else. We all belong to the same family, and if one member is missing, nothing goes as well. French is my mother tongue, and I now know, that it's not enough to speak or read French, I also have to understand it."

Gaétan has become a more calm and more confident person, therefore a more tolerant one. He has improved his communication skills which makes his life easier and makes him more positive. He knows how to accept constructive criticism and no longer sees it as a judgment. For him, learning means opening yourself to others and to life, in order to improve your quality of life, as well as the quality of life of those close to you. It also means taking the potential that resides in all of us and letting it surface in order to benefit others. This is how he found the joy he was searching for: **INSIDE OF HIMSELF.**

Written by Linda Haché, for Gaétan Haché, Maltempec NB

CITIZENSHIP AND LITERACY

For new Canadians, it is difficult for those who aren't literate in their first language to become literate in a second language. Often, the language assistance available isn't enough for newcomers.⁵

People with low literacy skills may find it hard to get information on their citizen rights and duties. Literacy allows them to vote and participate in civic life.

The proportion of immigrants at the lowest level of literacy is larger than the proportion of those born in Canada who are at this level.¹¹

New Canadians who may not be able to read or write in English may be highly literate in the language they learned in childhood.

In 1990, at 62, “Mama Alice” came to Canada. She believes that God wanted to relieve her from her struggles in South Africa. Raised as one of nine children in a poor family, education was costly and distanced from where she shepherded her father’s flock. She started school late at 12, sharing a slate to write her lessons on, with a cousin. Having a lesser standard of learning than white South Africans because of apartheid, she always felt inferior because of her lack of education. She couldn’t believe her good fortune in joining Fredericton CASPs free of charge.

Proud to be a Canadian

Where I grew up, it cost to go to school: to buy a uniform, to buy books, and to pay school fees. Because the school was very far, I would go to school one week and stay home the next, sharing the ‘looking after the flock’ with a cousin I shared a school slate with. I quit school because I had already grown up. When you were a teenager, you had to work on the farm before college or work in Johannesburg.

The farm, that my parents worked, belonged to a German owner. He just gave my parents a piece of land, to grow crops on, to bring up their children. It was like a family. Every family had a house, but we were entirely contracted on that farm.

When your time comes to be called to the farm contract, you go back and work there. I was in a school institution, doing a 3-year domestic science course, after grade seven. While there, I had to come back to work at the farm for one year, at 15 cents a day. After the year, if you’d done a good job, they gave you money. If not, they cut it off.

I was looking forward to marriage. At 24, I married, moved to Johannesburg, and had five children very quickly. The marriage lasted 12 years with my baby only 8 months old. I struggled and prayed to God to help me because I didn’t have an education. Without one, my work was making dresses because I had trained as a dress maker.

In Le Sotho, a lady teacher from Fredericton was interested in me and the orphan children I raised. I used to go to school to volunteer and she was surprised. On visiting me, she found me in a really unbelievable state

Being part of Canadians, that was my interest, to see myself being accepted. In South Africa I felt rejected. Why I am accepted (here) but not in my country? I said, “Oh Canada, oh Canada,” just like the anthem. I praised it and I loved it. I said, “Why didn’t I come to Canada earlier?”

Alice...

compared to Canada, and she said, “How do you bring these children up in this?” When her contract ended, she wrote and sent me five dollars to fix up a passport and said, when it was ready, she would send us a ticket to come.

I came here as a visitor, asked for ‘landed immigrant’ status, and was accepted. I volunteered in a special care home, for food and a place to stay, for two years. I used to alter pants and make bridesmaids’ dresses. I applied for citizenship.

At the Fredericton Food Bank CASP, what was special for me was to meet people... just working together, helping each other, talking and sharing backgrounds and past experiences. CASP increased my belief in God. We were suffering without education. God is helping us, giving us people like teachers. It is not everyone who can teach you. Barb was a very good teacher. She made us feel comfortable and took us out for a conversation, tea-time, or lunch once in a while, to make us feel that we are one community. Unfortunately, it closed down.

Barb introduced us to other classes to continue. I chose the Neil Squire Foundation’s (Educational Options) CASP and they accepted me, even though I thought they wouldn’t because I was older. I had osteoporosis and arthritis and used a cane, so I *had* physical disabilities. I had to travel there by bus, which was a problem when I missed it. They gave me a schedule and helped me to read it. My teacher would remind me, “Now you should go, otherwise you will miss the bus.”

I could read, but not fluently. I liked the stories in Challenger (reading) series. I must write my GED. I need that certificate, to see it displayed at the Foundation’s CASP, lined up on the wall. My self-esteem has already improved. At 76, that’s why I am at St. Thomas University part-time, taking two courses on a scholarship. I always wanted one in my family to have a BA.

-Spoken words of Alice ‘Mathabo Mokoena, Fredericton NB

LITERACY AND YOUTH

Children who struggle to read
feel bad about themselves.
Feeling bad about oneself
in the flow of learning seriously decreases
the capacity for learning.

Studies indicate that 35% of children with reading
disabilities drop out of school,
a rate twice that of their classmates.

Surveys of young adults with criminal records show that
about half have reading difficulties.

Similarly, about half of youths with a history
of substance abuse have reading problems.

The problems,
psychological and educational,
continue to affect these kids
for the rest of their lives.¹²

During her youth, Tammy had family difficulties. Since she was moving and changing schools every year, she found it difficult. She's been attending classes at Alpha Sans Frontières in Saint-Antoine for six years and she understands now, how education is very important.

I didn't have the necessary explanations I needed in order to succeed. I didn't understand the academic subjects well, and my grades were so low that I lost courage. When I started grade 9, and the others were still making fun of me, as they

had been doing since grade 5, I had had enough. I wasn't doing well in class, I still had difficulties at home, I had very few friends, so I started consuming alcohol and drugs. I quit school to go on the job market in the fish plants. Since I was no longer living at home, I moved in with my boyfriend.

Going back to school has given me the opportunity to face a very promising future filled with many dreams. I will reach my goals!

After one year spent working in the fish plant, I began to realize that I didn't want to do this type of work for the rest of my days. Therefore, I decided to enroll in a literacy class in my village. Literacy classes allow us to have a second chance in obtaining our high school diplomas.

In the class, I advance at my own speed. I receive the necessary explanations, and I put in a lot of effort in order to understand. My grades are a lot higher, something that encourages me to keep going.

Attending literacy classes has allowed me to meet other people and make new friends. We have many activities and conferences that give us important information on self-esteem which helps us to increase our confidence. I've quit taking alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. I've started doing volunteer work, and that has increased my self-esteem. I am very proud of my progress.

Tammy Caissie, 22 years old, Saint-Antoine NB

After three failed attempts in two years at ninth grade, Kerri-Lee's psychiatrist told her about the Moncton Youth Residences Inc. CASP program. Working at her own pace, and one-on-one instruction, has led her to believe she can write her GED by the end of next year. She wants to put her life back on track and actually have a career, hoping to be a hairdresser, or a convenience store owner.

I had a lot of trouble in high school. I had a lot of people I got into fights with. I didn't like them. I was suspended all the time. Everything was just too hard and I wasn't interested in it. I never did work. I skipped school. You know the stuff that people usually do. I just threw myself away and got into drugs and didn't care. From the age of fourteen to sixteen, I took twenty-nine overdoses.

I was seeing my psychiatrist for two years by then. I have a really good relationship with her, a good foundation. For her to tell me,

"I encourage you to quit school, but not leave school, just finish it (there) and go somewhere else," was like she was guiding me. Realizing what was going on at the atmosphere of high school opened my eyes. Drugs were a big part of it. My greatest pressure was from people. She encouraged me to leave the high school and made me interested in this program, so that I would want to come. It wasn't a difficult decision at all.

So, I came about a month after I quit school. When I started, I found that I was lower in some things than I should have been. I was really nervous. I didn't know what the instructor or anyone would be like. Was it going to be something like high school? When I got here, everyone was great, really nice. Six persons compared to twenty (in a class) is a lot different. It's very quiet.

My family was so supportive, because I'd quit school. To come back to school and do something like this, was something that was good. My friends would put me down... that I was nothing but a high school dropout, but that didn't matter. Some people criticize me because it's only a GED, but they don't know. I chose to lose a lot of people I used to hang around. I wanted to focus more. I don't want to be around drugs or people who jig school. It wasn't hard. I knew that it would be better for me.

In high school, I was slow and I didn't have time to learn. Working at my own pace, I can go very slowly if I want to and go over it 100 times to understand it as much as I can.

When I came to CASP this year, the big thing was my being interested in my work.

Kerri-Lee...

This is my second full year. What works for me is the one-on-one I get when I have trouble. I developed a really good relationship with my teacher. I spent some time (nine months) at the youth jail in the Miramichi. It was my teacher that helped me turn around. I got a progress report back. She said, “Kerri has had a good semester, that I’ve been learning really well, and my attitude has changed.”

I have good marks in everything. It was quite a surprise to see. You’re always moving on. I enjoy Power English. English has always been my strong subject. I started in Book Six. I’m finishing Book Eight and moving on to nine. Right now, we are reading a book as a class, called “The Pen Dragon.” By the end of this year, I would like to be in the pre-GED book. That’s my goal. I hope, by the middle or end of next year, to take the ten-week GED course at the Community College.

We have projects. The last, we had to research a historical person. I chose Albert Einstein. I knew he invented something, but it was really hard to figure what he did invent. But I did that and got a 92% and I was very pleased. I really put my heart in the project.

Now, we have to pick a disease to do research on. Just before Christmas my father had three silent heart attacks. The main artery to his heart was 85% blocked. It was angina, so I know pretty well everything there is to know about it. Just to learn more different things about it interests me very much.

I feel prouder, more mature. This has changed me. I think more of myself because I’m doing something. Now, I’m stronger and if I’m going to do anything, I’m going to do it now. I really think it has to do with this (program) and I want to do it, so I can do this or that. I feel this program (for those 16 to 19) is a good step for people coming out of high school who can’t function there.

-A selection from an interview with Kerri-Lee Després, Lakeville NB

Here, Rose Boucher talks about the path that brought her to the “Alpha Sans Frontières” literacy class in Saint-Antoine two years ago. She also participated in a contest for amateur writers at the Northrup Frye Literary Festival. She won second prize for her text of her own life course.

My Success Story

I’ve always had one goal in life: to complete my grade 12 and attend university. Being a very hardworking and resourceful person, I am certain that I can achieve my dream.

In high school, I had to quit in grade 10 because many people were making fun of me. I was fed up with being subjected to the teasing, and had I not quit school, I would not be here today. The most hurtful thing that a person can do is to make fun of others. Those that do it may like it, but they don’t realize the severity of their actions. For me, it started in grade one and continued until I quit.

I’ve always been able to read and write, but coming back to school has simply improved my skills. I’ve never stopped reading and writing because I didn’t want to forget how to communicate in writing. I’m very happy to be able to do it. I don’t think I’d be comfortable not knowing how to write. My life wouldn’t be the same.

I’ve spoken with many people about the literacy classes, and I’ve suggested that they try it, but they all have the same idea in the beginning: “We’re too old to go.” I’ve explained to them that there is no specific age for participating in these classes. Finally, a few weeks ago, I convinced my mother to come try it out. She really liked it, and she wouldn’t quit under any circumstances. She thought she was too old herself, but she felt in her place from the first day. She is 42 years old, so age doesn’t mean anything. I think she’s very courageous. I also know of a learner who is 92 and lives in a home. There’s the proof, that age doesn’t stop anyone from resuming their studies.

Those who don’t master their reading and writing skills have difficulty traveling and often find themselves in distress. Today, it’s essential for a person. Parents also feel more comfortable helping their children with their homework if they know their subject matter.

Rose...

Since coming to class, I've helped out in my community. I have enrolled in the Christmas Parade in order to represent the class. Before, I was too shy to do it. Coming to the literacy classes has changed my personality, and I'm happy about it. I have the chance to meet people, and I am comfortable doing so. I have more respect for my family as well.

Since I have more confidence in myself, I do more volunteer work for our classes. Every Friday, we organize a draw to help our class. We've also sold calendars, and I helped with this fundraiser. I am not paid for this volunteer work, and I wouldn't want to be either. I feel proud of myself to be of service to others who need help.

I see myself, in the future, as a good woman, a woman who works hard in order to lead a nice life. I've always wanted to move to Hollywood and work in judicial sciences. Being determined, I won't stop until I reach my goal. I want to help out my parents financially or otherwise. I love them very much, I appreciate their support, and I'm eternally grateful to them for their love and collaboration. We're told that if we help someone, the same will come back to us. If I can only get to that point, my dream will have come true.

In the past, someone told me that if I wanted something, I simply had to work in order to get it. I really trust that message, and I share it with everyone. You are all able if you truly want it. Come join our classes, and I assure you that you will like the experience.

Written by Rose Boucher, Saint-Antoine, NB

LITERACY AND AGE

40% of Canadians over the age of 65 never finished primary school, compared to 4% of Canadians aged 26 to 35.

The largest proportion of New Brunswickers at **Level 1** (people who have difficulty with printed materials and identify themselves as unable to read) were in the older age groups. The likelihood of being at Level 1 increases with age.¹³

The age range of population using literacy services is:
40% between 35-44 years of age,
30% between the ages of 25-34,
and 20% between 45-54 years of age.

More youth, particularly those with learning disabilities, are coming to programs.⁴

Mathurin is 62 years of age and he does volunteer work at the hospital. He is active in the Alcoholics Anonymous movement in his area. When he started in the literacy class, he did not know how to read or write. As a child, he started school in English since there weren't many schools at that time. Now, he's perfecting his writing skills with the help of some computer software programs. He also likes to write love notes to his wife.

When I started in the literacy class, I didn't know how to read or write. I didn't even know the letters of the alphabet. I had to start at the bottom of the ladder. Today, I'm in my seventh season, as our classes are open 20 weeks per year. I attend classes 15 hours per week and I learned how to read, write, and to do math. I even know how to do my homework on the computer. My teacher, Marie, has had a program saved to a disk, especially for us. On it, we have a French program with all the grammar rules, for example adjectives, plural, gender, homophone, etc., as well as mathematics. When we make a mistake, the program makes a special ringing sound, and Marie hears it, so there's no way we can cheat.

My teacher is patient with me because I'm 62 years old and I write very slowly. However, I rarely make mistakes, and she tells me often that she's proud of me. I often go visit patients at the hospital, and I help them fill out their menus. I can write nice, sweet notes to my wife and I choose lovely birthday cards for her. I read in front of my friends as I oversee an Alcoholics Anonymous group. I read to them the thought of the day, the Serenity Prayer, etc.

I don't know if it's because I'm the oldest of the group, but they spoil me a lot. It motivates me to continue, and I think I learn twice as fast.

I tell them that it's thanks to the literacy classes if I'm able to read like that. People around me are proud of me because they know the difficulty I've had in the past due to my lack of education. I've had to overcome many obstacles and I've often felt humiliated. I had a big lack of self-esteem and self-confidence too. I often speak with my friends about the change that has occurred in my life. For me, it's a new way of life and I encourage many people to enroll in literacy. To me, it's like a new family. I feel at ease, and I think that the hardest thing was to take that first step and learn the basics. Today, I am taking French 201 and Math 101-fourth exercise book.

Mathurin...

My goal was to learn to read for my personal use, and I succeeded. Each day, I continue because I like it. My teacher tells me that I am a ray of sunshine for my class and the result of her work because I have reached my goal. With so many compliments, I will definitely not quit. I will continue in order to make sure that I don't forget everything that I've learned. Today, I encourage younger people not to quit because education is important. Thanks to all who work for this cause as volunteers or in any other capacity. Many dreams are being realized thanks to you all. We appreciate your actions.

Testimony written by Mathurin St-Coeur, Brantville NB

As a child, Germaine had an unpleasant period in school. She is a student in the “Alpha sans frontiers” class, since she realized the need for education in order to be able to help her grandchildren. Now, she feels more a part of the community of Saint-Antoine.

I started school at the age of 6. In the beginning, the other students were good to me, and I really liked it. However, later on, around grade 3 or 4, they started making fun of me. It was a very unpleasant period in my studies.

At age 14 and still in grade 6, I had to stay at home. My mother was often ill during that time. I went on with my life, and I became a mother to six children. When they grew up, they gave me the joy of becoming a grandmother. I realized the need for education in order to be able to help my grandchildren.

It’s then that I decided to attend literacy classes in order to improve my French and Math skills. I’ve been attending for seven years, and I love the experience. Even at 60 years of age, I want to continue to complete my grade 12.

In 1998, my husband fell victim to paralysis and spent 12 weeks in the hospital. I found it difficult to visit him everyday and, at the same time, attend my classes. However, I didn’t give up hope.

Literacy has allowed me to do more volunteer work. I really enjoy helping others.

My family understands why I resumed my studies, and my daughter, especially, encourages me to continue. Literacy has allowed me to do more volunteer work. I really enjoy helping others, and since coming to class, I help my teacher to prepare literacy activities. I find that I’m being of service and that I’m more a part of the community.

I encouraged one of my friends to come to class. It’s at our recognition ceremony that she attended a literacy activity for the first time. The following year, she enrolled in the class.

One day, I hope to receive my diploma, thanks to all my efforts. My studies have helped me to believe in myself and in my future. I encourage others to come see us and visit our beautiful class.

Written by Germaine Mallet, Saint-Antoine NB

Before, Philippe felt very isolated, but now he is heading towards a new career and feels more sure of himself. He has wanted a better job and a better life. What he likes most about the CASP program, “Éducation des adultes” in St-Léonard, is that there aren’t many learners, so the teacher has more time to help them and give explanations. He feels smart like everyone else and has more confidence in himself.

I had been going to the English school because the teachers at the French high school were giving me a hard time. I believed I would have better luck with those at the English school. I was suspended from school due to my numerous absences. I had a lot of difficulty waking up, especially on Monday mornings because I would stay out late all weekend and was too tired to get up. I contracted mono. It didn’t bother me to miss school; it was like a vacation. I was a “tough” guy, and for “tough people”, just getting by with a passing grade is good enough.

I find a job which is, for me, more important than school since it gives me spending money. After a month, I lose my job and tell myself that it’s too late to start school. Here I am looking for another job. However, every time I find something interesting, they ask me if I have my high school diploma. So, I find odd jobs of two months at a stretch.

At home, things were not going well with my parents. I was aggressive and rebellious. I left home to try my luck in Montreal. I can say that I lived through some horrible experiences. At the end of six months, I had barely worked three weeks and had to live in a youth shelter. I decided to come back to my home town.

In my parents’ opinion, going back to live with them was out of the question. I was 19 years old and I had to fend for myself. Hoping to find a job, I go on welfare and rent a room. I barely have enough money to eat, often going to the food bank that offers me a way out. I found myself on the street, reduced to sleeping in a tent that my parents had given me.

I spend the summer in a campground where I would work to pay off my rent. In the fall, after the campground closed, I lived in an old camp belonging to my grandfather for a few months. When it started getting too cold, I came back to Grand Falls. After a few nights spent outside in the cold, I met someone who agreed to share an apartment with me. Just then, my welfare benefits are reduced to \$50 a month. However, this doesn’t last long, and I am once again in the street.

At this point, I am very aggressive, and one morning following a night spent in the bitter cold, I am taken to the hospital in an ambulance. Without my knowledge, I am admitted to the psychiatric ward. I stay there two months. Upon leaving the hospital, I am placed in a home in Saint-Léonard. I feel so relieved to finally be in a stable place where I can relax and regain my strength. One fine

Philippe...

day, the owner asks me if I would like to resume my studies and informs me of the nearby CASP class. I agree to go. Because of the medication I was on and everything I had been through, my memory had taken a beating. When my French and Math skills were evaluated, I was told that I would need to review the subject matter of the intermediary level before taking up my grade 10 studies. At first, I was discouraged, but I decided to charge ahead. Everyday, I understood more and more. I would increasingly remember things I had learned before and this encouraged me. Slowly, I regained confidence in myself and in my abilities.

Contrary to what I was before, I am now a model of attendance.
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One day, I met a girl. She too had dropped-out of school and was unemployed. She was lonely and felt time drag on during the time that I was in class. Once, while talking about my experience, I tried to convince her to resume her studies. She agreed to, since she understood that it would help her and since she would be with me more often.

During the summer of 2001, I got involved in a local event, entitled “Festival du Draveur Acadien”, as a volunteer. I helped out as much as I could and even got to see Édith Butler up close. During that time, I also began practicing Kung Fu. I really enjoyed the personal discipline that that sport teaches, but I had to stop when I began working part-time nights and on the weekends. With my full-time studies, it was too much.

Today, I am proud of myself and my stunning successes, even in French which was my worst subject in school. My parents and my family are very happy that I have gone back to school and are very proud of my success. However, the most important thing is that I am proud and happy. With determination, I will complete my studies once and for all.

My teacher, who’s very proud of me, is now helping me prepare for the GED exams (General Equivalency Diploma). I’ve even started thinking about post-secondary studies, something that I never even considered in the past. However, my grades are good enough that I could attend those classes without worrying.

In closing, I would like to add that with the help of the CASP class “Éducation des adultes de Saint-Léonard”, I have become someone I never thought to be. The future seems much more interesting now that I have a goal to reach. It’s what motivates me and gets me to class every morning. I would like to give this advice to the other learners : “Live close to the literacy class (to be able to walk there).”

Written by Philippe Morin, St-Léonard, NB

LITERACY AND JUSTICE

Low literacy can play a role in criminal behaviour, as those with lower skills often have fewer chances to play positive roles in their communities.⁵

Prison educational programs provide opportunities to change such.

On average, offenders have lower literacy skills than the general population.

They experience literacy problems at three times the rate of the general population.

36% of offenders have not completed grade nine.

According to the Correctional Service of Canada, the average education level of newly admitted offenders, serving 2 years or more, is grade seven.¹⁴

Offenders who improve their literacy skills are less likely to re-offend.

An investment in literacy for them is an effective crime prevention strategy.

Family problems spurred Peter to quit school at eleven. Married with two kids, he did all kinds of casual jobs in between welfare bouts. Barely able to read, he'd kept a copy of Dr. Seuss's The Cat in the Hat, with a hope that someday he might read it. Westmorland Institute, a minimum security prison, offered him a chance to get schooling. Today, he is one of several inmates involved in the "Turning a New Page" literacy program and is reading The Cat in the Hat for a books-on-tape lending project for District 2 schools.

I was the oldest in my family and went to grade three or four. I didn't like school that much. I knew some words, like *cat* or *dog*. When I met my wife, she asked my why I didn't go to school. I said, "money problems... stuff like that." My wife is alone (now) and is going to have a hard time, but is happy that I'm going to school.

My parole officer got me transferred here, (Westmorland Institute), last spring. When I got here, I started school at 38. Before I was at Springhill. They asked me what I wanted to do: work or go back to school. I come at 8, go back home at 11:30, and come back from 1 until 4 o'clock.

Difficult words, I don't understand and I can't pronounce. They teach me how to pronounce words with long *a*'s and short *a*'s. The *e*'s and the *i*'s come out the same and were harder. I got a little frustrated a few times, but I got used to it. I worked through four levels with my tutor. The program helped me with my math, reading, and spelling... mostly in writing it. I write it down on paper and keep saying it until I get it.

Mike is my tutor. He looks at my work and checks it. I read books from the library. I have so many pages to do for a week and so many books for the end of the month. The teacher marks down a percent. The Cat in the Hat is a funny book. It helps kids and helps myself in reading too. There are a few words I gotta learn how to read. When I make the tape, I will feel good.

It's changed my life, going back to school, catching up on my reading and writing. When I am ready to leave, if I need a little more schooling I will get that out there. After, I will see if I can go to training school. I can't go home until August. My wife will work 'til I get out. In the future, I hope to have a better job to take care of my family. I dreamed about having a house, family, and a good job.

I wanted to get my grade 12, then get a mechanic course. I know how to work on old cars...but the new cars today are all computerized. I don't know nothing about them... Studying hard is a way to get something better with my life when I get out.

Told by inmate, Peter O'Blenis, at Westmorland Institute, Dorchester NB

LITERACY AND LOW INCOME/POVERTY

Literacy is a close cousin to poverty. People from poor families have higher rates of illiteracy. They have fewer choices in jobs, education, housing, and other things needed to have full lives. “Poverty is not just about not having enough money. It’s about lack of dignity, respect, choice, and opportunity.”⁹

“Even in the year 2000, one in five children in Canada still lived in poverty, an increase of 39% since 1989. They are often not well served by the school system where they are likely to be labelled and placed in classes where less is expected of them and less may be offered. Many poor children either drop out of high school or graduate without being fully literate.”⁹

When a person doesn’t have enough to eat, a place to sleep, money to buy books or to pay for transportation to class it is hard to learn.

People who live in poverty may feel that they don’t fit in.

Having low reading and writing skills increases the risk for social assistance.¹⁵

Sherry ran away from home at 15, married at 16, and had two babies by the time she was 18. An attack of Guillain-Barre Syndrome on her nerve and immune systems and an aneurism left her in leg braces to her knees, with the use of her left side. At 41, she entered the Educational Options CASP at the Neil Squire Foundation. Now, at 47, she believes for an open door in ministry and volunteers with “Bridges of Canada,” a program of Monty Lewis Ministries.

Nothing in my life happened just normal. I was one of fourteen children, the sickly child, growing up in a hard, difficult life. There was nothing special if you were a girl. I got up in the morning and got on the school bus, not smelling the best. You got a bath on Saturday night. We didn't get clothing from a store. We got whatever was dropped off at our gateway. We were unkempt. Ten girls and one comb in the house, and it was pretty hard to find it. My parents didn't manicure our hair. We weren't allowed to cut it for religious beliefs. (I'm pleased with my hair today. I take good care of it. I enjoy my bath.)

As babies, we were given tea in a bottle. I think my mother thought we would enjoy it because she did and it was warm. I hardly slept during my childhood. I still can't handle caffeine. We never went hungry but we didn't have nutritional food. Many of us have serious health effects from not enough calcium or nutrients in our body.

We were very poor and cramped in a tiny two-bedroom home. You went out, tasting the snow and freezing to death, just to escape. Mactaquac bought our tiny home because of a mistake digging our door-yard to pieces, so we had to move to the city and bought a big, old, cold house. My dad had to leave many times to get work and my mother continued to try to raise us.

School and my childhood were a blur. Kids made fun and hollered, “Miller, killer, eat dirt and die.” I had low self-esteem. I care not to look back. It's painful. Marriage was a way out. He took excellent care of me and he still does. I am separated after 26 years because I was so unhappy. He was diagnosed with autism. He would be my best friend.

When I came to God myself, in 1981, my life changed. It's like the song, “He didn't pick you up, to push you down. He didn't teach you to swim, to watch you drown...” I made good friends in the

I wasn't illiterate, because I went to grade 10. I was illiterate socially. I didn't know how to function in the outside world because we were not socially acceptable. You were pushed aside, squished into that little humming nest of confusion...I needed to get out in the outside world...build self-worth through literacy, church, organizations, school programs.....

Sherry...

church.

I started wanting to get my education. Without my diploma, I knew that I had missed something. I looked up “learn” in the yellow pages and started with a tutor from Laubach Literacy of Fredericton. I went through the books very quickly and went through an excellent CASP program with a fair amount of difficulty in math. I drove myself a twenty-mile distance . My tutor still came twice weekly to work with me during CASP. She’s offered to take me through university if I want to go. I took five years to do my upgrading. When I got my GED, I cried and cried.

A lot of medical conditions can be helped with you identifying them and working with it too.

At the Neil Squire CASP, it was the only group I was accepted in. I’ve never labelled myself as handicapped. I didn’t want to walk (in public) because someone might look at me. I learned to accept some disabilities. Others had the same hopes, dreams, and desires though they might not be able to communicate with you. The big highlight would be the people I met. When they sent me to Ottawa, I picked up a male friend, which really boosted me. People tell me that I am not the same person. I hold my head up now, which I didn’t do before. I don’t want them to remind me of what I was, because I don’t remember. I think, “What was I like? Was I that bad?” It’s my self-image, the mask I put on, of what I am.

I go to an Overcomers’ group on Monday night to work on my food program and my over-talking. From my brain surgery, a physiotherapist told me, “When they touch the human brain, it makes you over-talkative.” It bothered the other students; I know it did.

I was a recreation coordinator for Opal 3 for four summers while working on my GED. I’ve done some counselling at the Canadian Paraplegic Association. I am on the board of Laubach Literacy Fredericton and on the provincial board with the New Brunswick Coalition for Literacy. I can do basic office work and I did take two computer courses. I’d like to go to St. Thomas University in September, maybe, to study gerontology, about older people. My long-term goal is to have full-time employment, to look after myself financially. I may have to go through baby steps, by volunteering where I am. I am going to minister the gospel; that is my heart’s desire, but I need training and polishing. There’s going to be a lot of barriers up against me. I hope it’s not all physical!

-Taken from a taped interview of Sherry McMillan, Fredericton NB

LITERACY AND EDUCATION

There is a strong connection between educational attainment and literacy skill levels. 74% of high school graduates have strong skills.¹¹ The rest can handle only simple reading or writing tasks.

Generally, any who leave school without graduating have lower literacy skills.⁶

19.4% of New Brunswickers aged 25 and over have less than a Grade 9 education.⁸

Many adult learners have bad memories of learning as a child in school.

An old Chinese proverb says, “The nail that stands out gets pounded down.”⁸

Negative childhood experiences were often a factor in causing them to quit school.

When they return to classes, they may not know what to expect.

Adult literacy programs that provide flexibility in planning, methods, hours, and resources can be instrumental to the learner’s success.

As a housewife, Dorothy's one ambition was not to be heard and not to stand out in a crowd. Now a grandmother and author of three books, she enjoys her role as public speaker at literacy conferences across Canada. When a Laubach tutor from the Fredericton Literacy Council recognized Dorothy's learning disability as dyslexia, it started a long, hard road in learning. Forming a support group called 'Second Chance Learners,' she believes that "it is never too late to learn."

After being away from school five or six years, at the age of twenty, I went back to that one-room school, to get an education. I had always wanted to be a missionary. I didn't think of all the training that I'd have to do. A lady in our community said, "You need to be able to write letters and write them well, so that people back home will know what you're doing on the mission field, so that you can raise support." That, I guess, was one of the things that always has stuck in my mind, that I needed to be able to write letters. That's why I wanted to go back.

At that time, I got a teacher who must have taken a dislike to me, or the fact that she had one more person to teach when she already had thirty students. I went until April and realized that with my math, I could never get anywhere. I never made more than 10 out of 100 all the time I went to school. The teacher would get me up to the board and get these little kids to go up and put down the answer. I knew it but I couldn't put it down right. I'd reverse them. It amazes me no teacher ever realized that I was just reversing. Numbers don't click at all in my brain. (Don't ever quote me on dates and ages.) Without math, I knew I could not get into high school. I decided to drop out at fifteen and go to work. My father wasn't able to claim me on his income tax, so I was really a bill of expense to him.

I was married and had my four children before I had an opportunity again. It was because of my husband's health. They were going to operate on him and take out his voice box. He was unable to use the written word.

We lived in Burton when our kids were just little. It seemed they always wanted a note for something. I would have to go from Burton to Fredericton

I personally experienced the changes literacy brings to lives. What I wanted most was an education, realizing I couldn't do anything without one. Discovering my dyslexia was a defining moment in my life. The self doubts, the frustration, and all the times I felt stupid and embarrassed were erased. Gone. At age 50, I had this feeling in the core of my being that I could move forward. I could learn. I could read. I could do math...well, maybe not math..but I could do a lot of other things.

Dorothy...

where my sister lived. She would write me a note. I saw many cold days, putting those little kids in the car to get a note for school. That always seemed to be one of the things that was hardest for me and I did not have the ability to write it. Because my sister was a director of nursing, I did not want to say things that my grammar would give away that I did not have an education. I was always trying to hide that fact.

Our daughter went to the unemployment office and saw the pamphlet about how to learn to read and write in the privacy of your own home. That very night I was able to sign up and Thelma Kolding, the coordinator, set me up with my tutor, a retired schoolteacher. My husband and I, we went together. My tutor, Margaret McGibbon, said she never had a student in all her teaching that was so eager to learn as I was. I was just like a sponge. If she and I could not meet, we would do our lessons on the phone. I learned to read because we took it slowly. I continued until I graduated.

At the storefront youth program, the teachers thought they were gonna teach me math. They did everything they could one day. When I left, the whole three of us were crying, because they tried so hard. I took them flowers and said, "Math is NOT my thing!"

I like to talk to people who can make a difference, like doctors and health professionals who have no idea. You know they've never cleaned their teeth with haemorrhoid cream or Brylcreem. I have done those things when I wasn't able to read. Even to this day, I stay clear of yellow labels. If anybody ever needs to know what to do with consomme soup, ask me. I have bought that so many times for tomato soup because it looks like it. I've worked with groups out of Ottawa on packaging and labelling. I'd go as a learner and when they'd show me something and describe it, I would say, "No, I wouldn't have any idea what that was." I feel that I have made a difference in so many people's lives. To me, the more I speak, it's just more of a challenge. My career was telling people of the need of literacy (training). Thelma Kolding always says, "You have been our missionary."

There is a saying I came across that says something about the course of my life. It goes like this, "***Education is what you get from reading the fine print. Experience is what you get from not reading it.***" Another I like says, "***Don't be afraid to attempt something new. Remember, it was amateurs who built the ark. It was professionals who built the Titanic.***"

An excerpt from an interview with Dorothy Silver, Fredericton NB

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