



LITERACY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Right to Read...and Read Well

September 2003

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Acknowledgements

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the support provided by Human Resources Development Canada and the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. We would also like to thank the staff at the Department of Education and in the disability and literacy organizations throughout the Halifax Regional Municipality for sharing their knowledge and providing invaluable insights into the issues associated with literacy and its impact on employability for persons with disabilities.

To those who participated in focus groups and interviews, thank you for your honest and open conversations and astute observations and suggestions. The advice and participation of the members of the Advisory Team was particularly helpful and for that we would like to extend a special thank you.

"Literacy remains part of the unfinished business of the 20th century. One of the success stories of the 21st century must be the extension of literacy to include all humankind."

United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette
Launch ceremony, Literacy Decade (2003-2012)
February 13, 2002, UN Headquarters, New York

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Background

The relationship between literacy and employment is well understood - the higher one's level of literacy, the greater the likelihood that stable employment is attainable. Only 45% of working age adults who functioned at the lowest literacy level were employed in Canada according to a study conducted in 1994 (Shalla and Schellenberg, 1998). The study also showed that 75% of working age adults functioning at the highest literacy levels were employed in the same period.¹

There is a reasonable body of knowledge which suggests that a higher percentage of persons with disabilities function at the lowest literacy levels than the population at large. We also know that a lower percentage of persons with disabilities is employed than the population at large. It is therefore, not surprising that TEAM Work Cooperative (TWC) and a number of its shareholders and other stakeholders have been concerned with literacy and its relationship with employment and employability for their client group for some time. TWC is a collaborative effort of 29 shareholder organizations, focused specifically on employment for persons with disabilities.

This study was focused on issues related to adult literacy for persons with disabilities in the Halifax Regional Municipality. The purpose of this study was to -

- ✚ Examine the accessibility and availability of literacy services in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) for persons with disabilities;
- ✚ Research the factors which contribute to the utilization of community based literacy programs by persons with disabilities;
- ✚ Identify barriers to learning and models which have had success with this diverse population;
- ✚ Recommend approaches and / or changes necessary to eliminate the barriers to successful literacy learning for adults with disabilities

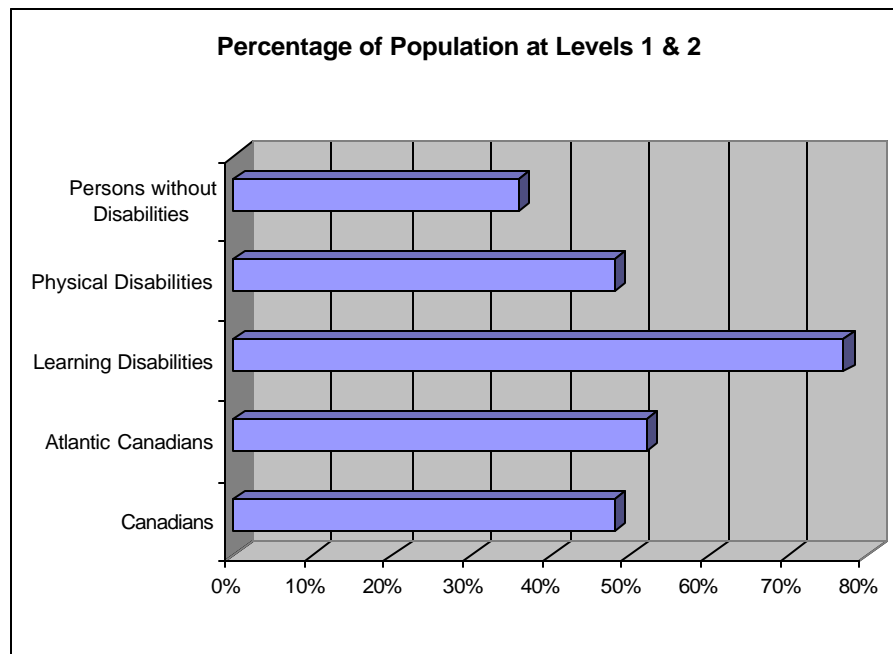
1.2 Literacy Profile

In June 2000, Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released the final report from the groundbreaking 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). The first international survey of its kind, IALS provides a comparison of literacy levels across nations, languages and cultures. Canada and 19 other countries participated in the survey. The study found that 48% of Canadians and 52% of Atlantic Canadians read at a grade 8 skill level or below.

The situation is somewhat more serious for persons with disabilities. A study entitled The Effects of Disability on Literacy Skills found that 77% of people with learning

¹ Joel Macht, Literacy and Disability, page 9

disabilities in Canada function below level 3 and 52% of those individuals function at level 1. The same study found that 48% of people with physical disabilities function below level 3 compared with 36% of people without disabilities.



The 1996 Census indicates that 5.1% or 12,490 individuals of the working age population in HRM (ages 15 to 64) have an activity limitation (AL) or long term disability (LTD) related to participation at school and / or work. The difference in education between persons with an AL or LTD versus those without is significant.

- ✚ 44% of persons with AL / LTD have not completed high school versus 24% of those who do not have an AL / LTD.
- ✚ On the other end of the spectrum, the data show that only 7% of those with AL / LTD have a university degree compared to 18% of those without AL / LTD.

In Nova Scotia, the unemployment rate for individuals with low levels of literacy is approximately 26% compared to 4% for individuals with high levels of literacy.² In HRM, the unemployment rate for persons with AL or LTD is 6% higher than for those without – 14% and 8%, respectively.

1.3 Adult Literacy Organizations in HRM

Adult literacy has moved a long way up the educational, social and employment agendas internationally, as well as in Canada and in Nova Scotia, with the release of the findings

² Literacy Nova Scotia, www.nald.ca/literacyns, Facts About Literacy 4

of the International Adult Literacy Survey. In recent years, significant effort, resources and funding have been allocated to the adult literacy agenda in Nova Scotia.

There is no shortage of literacy providers in the region. Fifty-four programs appear to be suitable for the target population in this study. The descriptions of these programs are found in the accompanying document, Adult Literacy Programs in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL)

NSSAL is a new multi-phase learning initiative announced by the Government of Nova Scotia in November 2000 and launched in September 2001. It is a key component of Skills Nova Scotia. NSSAL is a continuum of educational programs for adults ranging from basic literacy to high school completion delivered in a partnership arrangement with a number of education and community-based organizations.

In 2001 / 2002, 3700 students were enrolled in NSSAL, 2223 in levels 1 and 2 and 1477 in levels 3 and 4. The same year, 154 adults received high school diplomas.



Other Service Providers

There is a wide variety of other literacy service providers based on the information provided on the HRM Library website. Some of these organizations have a very specific focus either in providing literacy training to support employability or in the student population they serve. In some cases, they do both; such as Anchor Industries, which is a vocational centre for mentally challenged adults which provides basic literacy and work skills training and community employment opportunities.

1.4 Findings – Barriers and Issues

A recent study carried out by ABC Canada found that less than 10 per cent of Canadians who could benefit from literacy upgrading programs actually enrol. So while outreach has increased significantly in the past number of years, success has been minimal. The research indicates that barriers like job or money problems, lack of childcare and transportation are some of reasons preventing people from enrolling

The findings from this study generally support the study carried out by ABC Canada. Our findings fall into two primary categories – those which are specific to literacy students with disabilities and those which apply to literacy students in general. The project surveys showed that the two barriers which service providers indicated were most significant were those which literacy students in general would experience. These were:

-  Learner's lack of confidence; and
-  Personal financial barriers.

The third most significant barrier related specifically to students with disabilities:

-  Health / Medical issues

Issues and barriers described by TWC Survey respondents and identified through the focus groups, interviews and in other research materials have been grouped by those specific to adult students with disabilities and those which are generic to literacy students. They have also been organized into four categories to provide a framework for purposes of clarity. The four categories are defined as follows:

- ✚ Program Issues – relate to barriers and concerns with the literacy, disability and funding programs;
- ✚ Personal Issues – are those which the literacy students would experience;
- ✚ Social Issues – refer to those societal barriers which adult literacy students might experience;
- ✚ Support Issues – describe those barriers and issues which would provide personal support for literacy students.

However, it should be noted that some of the issues which are identified as being generic to literacy students may be more complex or significant for persons with disabilities. The most significant barriers are described below. Others are found in the body of the report.

Program Issues –

- ✚ Learning Models – Most literacy programs are generally designed for the generic adult student and not specifically to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Those students who have disabilities which are not visible, such as brain injuries, learning disabilities (LD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), mental health issues and others require modifications to the literacy programs for them to participate fully.
- ✚ Volunteer Resources / Tutors - Volunteers are the backbone of adult literacy programs in North America. In Nova Scotia, as elsewhere, these volunteers make a significant difference in their students' lives. Volunteer tutors are on the front line of the literacy program in Nova Scotia but there is no requirement for these individuals to have any experience or knowledge of working with persons with disabilities nor is there any training to assist them in this regard.
- ✚ Information and Data about Adult Students with Disabilities – There is no consistent manner in which literacy organizations gather information about their students' disabilities. The end result is twofold:
 - Instructors and tutors may have limited knowledge about their students and therefore, may not have key information about potential learning limitations; and
 - There is generally no reliable data about adult literacy students with disabilities in HRM programs.
- ✚ Financial – there is very little funding for adult literacy students unless they are on an employment path and are pursuing post secondary education. For students

functioning at the lowest two levels, neither employment nor post secondary education are likely to be near term goals which would potentially allow them access to funding sources. Funding is discussed in more detail later in this report.

- ✚ Literacy versus Employability – because funding programs often place value on literacy as it relates to employability and the pursuit of a job. The literacy community is concerned that there is insufficient appreciation of the value that enhanced literacy skills bring to individual's lives through increased self confidence and general quality of life. However, there is no doubt of the direct linkage between literacy and employability and an individual's ability to compete for and achieve sustainable employment.
- ✚ Program Eligibility – high school students graduating from high school who had participated in an Individual Program Plan (IPP), are not assessed in the same manner as other students. These students often 'graduate' from high school with a High School diploma, and very low literacy skills. Regardless of their literacy capability, they are not eligible for many of the literacy programs and are not eligible to apply for a another Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults or to write the GED tests.

Personal Issues

- ✚ Fear and Embarrassment - focus group participants spoke to their lack of confidence and their embarrassment about their reading capability, often preventing them from seeking clarification from an instructor or a tutor. Fear and embarrassment are the root of the confidence issue identified clearly as the number one barrier by respondents to our survey. The lack of confidence subsequently leads to learners avoiding any learning risk.
- ✚ Personal Motivation – students with learning difficulties, attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder, brain injuries, mental health or intellectual disabilities often learn slowly. The process is lengthy and requires a significant amount of perseverance. The pursuit of a high school diploma can be a long and tedious process or may not be attainable at all.
- ✚ Personal Priorities – for persons with disabilities, literacy may be low in their hierarchy of needs. Many adults find coping mechanisms which allow them to function adequately within their communities.
- ✚ Value of Literacy - Lack of understanding of the relationship between literacy skills and goal attainment, whether the goals are employment, social or personal, can be a demotivator. This is particularly true where there have been negative experiences with education in the past.

Social Issues

- ✚ Attitudes – There are systemic barriers generally for persons with low literacy skills, including social and employment barriers. The barriers are more complex for persons with disabilities, in part due to the attitudes held by our society about their capabilities and in part because many of the literacy programs do not have adequate resources to cater to their special needs.
- ✚ Social Stigmas – Being ‘illiterate’ has a social stigma associated with it. Many individuals with low literacy skills cover up for their poor reading skills, sometimes resulting in dire consequences.

Support Issues

- ✚ Formal Diagnosis - Lack of a formal diagnosis of LD or AD/HD means that the learner’s problem is often inadvertently interpreted to be lack of motivation. In fact, a significant percentage of students in adult education programs have undiagnosed LD or AD/HD, potentially as high as 30% to 50%. However, a formal diagnosis is only the first step in addressing literacy issues with this student population.

While these issues sometimes become apparent when adult students enrol in literacy upgrading, it begs the question about which government department should or could best address them – health, education or community services, or a combination of the three.

- ✚ Transportation - Transportation is a significant barrier for those requiring use of a wheelchair and particularly where these individuals live in a rural area. Transportation subsidies from government require significant advocacy work to obtain. Access-A-Bus requires booking 14 days in advance.
- ✚ Assistive Technology - Only a very small percentage of respondents offer any type of assistive technology in their literacy programs, although most have access to computers and the internet. However, where assistive technology is available, it appears that it may be underutilized, perhaps because potential users are unaware of its existence.

1.5 Funding

Funding programs fall primarily into two categories – those which support literacy **programs** and those supporting literacy **projects**. Program funding is generally provided for core services and project funding is generally for short term initiatives resulting in specific outcomes or deliverables.

Primary program funding comes from the Department of Education. The other two sources of program funding are limited to those literacy organizations with a registered charitable status.

In 2002/3, NSSAL received \$5.9 in funding through the Department of Education. The regional school boards received \$0.8 million and the colleges and community-based learning organizations each received approximately \$2.5.

Project-based funding is available from the Federal / Provincial Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA). In the past two years, the LMDA funding priorities have included literacy, youth and information technology projects. In 2001/2 and 2002/3, literacy projects received about \$1.7 million or 30% and \$0.9 million or 24% respectively of the total number of projects funded.

There is little individualized funding available for adult literacy students unless they are on an employment path or are pursuing post secondary education.

1.6 Conclusions and Recommendations

The following is a summary of the recommendations. They are discussed in more detail in the body of the report in [Section 9](#).

Within the context of the following conclusions and recommendations, consideration must be given to involving adult students with disabilities in all or some of these initiatives. A creative way must be found to tap into the enthusiastic and committed student group about whom this study has been written. There were a number of individuals who participated in the focus group for learners who could be candidates for involvement in ongoing work.

1. Instructor and Tutor Training for Working with Persons with Disabilities

While many instructors and tutors are qualified teachers and knowledgeable about teaching literacy skills to their students, there is no requirement for them to be knowledgeable or trained to work effectively with persons with special needs and disabilities. A number of recommendations to assist in rectifying this issue are presented below:

- ✚ Updating and distributing a 10 year old tutor training guide, entitled Accessing Learning for Adults with Disabilities, which does not appear to be widely distributed.
- ✚ Increased dialogue between literacy and disability organizations could facilitate knowledge and skills training in working with adult students with disabilities.
- ✚ In the longer term, relevant program offerings through the Nova Scotia Community College or other educational institutions should be explored to provide a formal and consistent approach to training programs for literacy tutors and instructors working with adult students with disabilities.

2. Funding for Literacy Programs for Adult Students with Disabilities

Anecdotal evidence suggest that 30% to 50% of students in adult literacy programs have either learning disabilities or AD/HD. The funding approach and funding levels for adult literacy, particularly at Levels 1 and 2 are inadequate to allow literacy

programs to address the many issues related to literacy learning for persons with disabilities.

The Department of Education program funding supports the specific programs developed and taught by the Brain Injury Association and the Society for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to meet the needs of these students. Using these programs as models, an appropriate funding model is required to -

- ✚ Enhance existing programs ; or
- ✚ Develop literacy programs which meet the needs of other disability groups; and
- ✚ Deliver and sustain these literacy training programs on a long term basis; and
- ✚ Recruit qualified instructors and / or ensure appropriate training is made available.

3. Funding for Individual Adult Students with Disabilities

Current funding for adult literacy is an education-based program funding model. Little individual funding is available for adult students with or without disabilities as discussed in [Section 7](#) earlier in this report. Findings in [Section 6](#) of this report indicate that a variety of support needs are not being met for students with disabilities and that health and medical issues are a significant barrier to their learning.

An individualized funding approach is necessary to provide the supports for adult students with disabilities, including transportation, assistive technology and psycho-educational testing. These costs however, are, at best, only partially education related. Since disabilities are health related costs could be shared by the Departments of Health and Community Services.

4. Private /Public Sector Partnership – developing employment opportunities for literacy students with disabilities

More than 70% of new jobs in Nova Scotia require some form of post secondary education, yet 24% of adults in the population at large and 44% of persons with disabilities do not have a high school diploma. It is well understood that Nova Scotia is experiencing a severe skills shortage and this will continue well into the future unless addressed quickly.

A tri-partite partnership between business, government, and the not-for-profit sector (disability and literacy organizations) should be struck. The mandate of the partnership would be to explore and develop programs to assist literacy students with disabilities make the transition to a work environment and to address issues of workplace literacy. Linkages with other similar projects and programs could provide a jump start to this partnership.

Projects the partnership should initiate include -

- ✚ Identifying and implementing some ‘quick hits’ which would remove some of the systemic barriers to employment for literacy students with disabilities;
- ✚ Designing incentives for employers (including not-for-profit organizations) to provide work opportunities for literacy students with disabilities with a commitment to support continuation of the learning process;
- ✚ Creating a program to recognize organizations who provide leadership and champion the ‘Literacy for Employability’ agenda; and
- ✚ Designing recognition and incentives for literacy students who achieve their goals.

5. School to Work Transition – addressing the issues of high school graduates with low literacy skills

In [Section 7](#), under Findings, this report discusses the issue of students graduating from high school with literacy skills that are substantially below the grade 12 reading skill level.

Further understanding of this issue is required before definitive recommendations can be made. A project should be undertaken to examine these issues more closely and to explore the potential of building on existing school to work, high school to post secondary and school to apprenticeship transition programs that will address the specific needs of this student population.

6. Planning and Coordination of Literacy Needs for Persons with Disabilities

Responsibility for moving forward with the agenda for adult literacy for persons with disabilities must rest with an organizational entity. Organizations which should be considered include the Disabled Persons Commission, TEAM Work Cooperative, and the Department of Education.

An planning coordinator’s position could initially be funded on a project basis to develop an action plan to address the issues related to literacy for persons with disabilities. Longer term, this position should be permanently funded to implement the plan and to provide the coordination and perform the advocacy work that will be necessary to improve literacy and consequent employment levels for persons with disabilities in HRM.

2. Introduction

2.1. Project Background

The relationship between literacy and employment is well understood - the higher one's level of literacy, the greater the likelihood that stable employment is attainable. Only forty-five percent (45%) of working age adults who functioned at the lowest literacy level were employed in Canada according to a study conducted in 1994 (Shalla and Schellenberg, 1998). The study also showed that seventy five (75%) of working age adults functioning at the highest literacy levels were employed in the same period.³

There is a reasonable body of knowledge which suggests that a higher percentage of persons with disabilities function at the lowest literacy levels than the population at large. We also know that a lower percentage of persons with disabilities is employed than the population at large. It is therefore, not surprising that TEAM Work Cooperative (TWC) and a number of its shareholders and other stakeholders have been concerned with literacy and its relationship with employment and employability for their client group for some time. TWC, a collaborative organization of twenty-nine (29) shareholder organizations is focused specifically on employment for persons with disabilities.

Recognizing that literacy not only prevents people from being involved in employability programs but more importantly, hinders their individual growth and learning potential, the Literacy for Persons with Disabilities Committee was struck to develop the concept and proposal for funding for this study. Organizations involved in the Committee were the following:

- ✚ Affirmative Industry Association of Nova Scotia;
- ✚ Dartmouth Work Activity Society;
- ✚ Department of Community Services;
- ✚ Department of Education;
- ✚ Halifax Regional CAP Association;
- ✚ Halifax Regional School Board;
- ✚ Human Resources Development Canada;
- ✚ Independent Living Resource Centre;
- ✚ Nova Scotia Community College;
- ✚ Rehabilitation Centre of the Capital District Health Authority; and
- ✚ Teamwork Cooperative Limited.

³ Joel Macht, Literacy and Disability, page 9

2.2. Project Purpose and Objectives

The impetus for this study is found in the vision articulated in the 1998 document In Unison: A Canadian Approach to Disability Issues.

”Persons with disabilities participate as full citizens in all aspects of Canadian society. The full participation of persons with disabilities requires the commitment of all segments of society. The realization of the vision will allow persons with disabilities to maximize their independence and enhance their well-being through access to required supports and the elimination of barriers that prevent their full participation.”

The document goes on to define a new approach to disability issues as shown in the table in [Appendix 1](#).

With this premise in mind, the Literacy for Persons with Disabilities Committee described the purpose of this project in the proposal to HRDC as follows:

- ✚ Examine the accessibility and availability of literacy services in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) for persons with disabilities;
- ✚ Research the factors which contribute to the utilization of community based literacy programs by persons with disabilities;
- ✚ Identify barriers to learning and models which have had success with this diverse population;
- ✚ Recommend approaches and / or changes necessary to eliminate the barriers to successful literacy learning for adults with disabilities

The anticipated short term outcomes of this project are as follow:

- ✚ an increase in service providers’ (teachers, employment service providers, social workers, etc.) awareness of literacy programs/supports available to persons with disabilities within HRM;
- ✚ an increase in service providers’ abilities to respond effectively to the needs of persons with disabilities requiring literacy upgrading; and
- ✚ an increase in community (parents, family members, friends, youth with disabilities, etc.) awareness of the literacy programs and services available to persons with disabilities within HRM

The planned long term outcomes are:

- ✚ informed participation by persons with disabilities in local literacy programs ;
- ✚ full physical and attitudinal accessibility for persons with disabilities requiring literacy upgrading;
- ✚ full participation of persons with disabilities in their communities; and

- ✚ an increased rate of employment among persons with disabilities.

2.3. Project Methodology

The methodology for collecting and assembling the data for this project and identifying potential solutions involved a variety of standard research approaches. These included:

- ✚ Engaging an Advisory Team of 20 individuals representative of the various stakeholders in this project for consultation and to provide guidance and direction;
- ✚ Participating in two educational / information sessions; and
- ✚ Reviewing literature which included international level to local level surveys, reports / studies and websites;
- ✚ Completing an environmental scan of more than 100 literacy and disability organizations;
- ✚ Conducting one-on-one interviews with 16 service providers in both the literacy and disability communities, and individuals in government involved in program development and funding;
- ✚ Holding 3 focus groups with a total of 31 participants including service providers and learners with disabilities. The 18 representatives from the service provider community participated in two focus groups. They represented the following types of organizations:
 - 8 from literacy organizations,
 - 6 from disability organizations,
 - 2 from government,
 - 1 from the HRM Library, and
 - 1 from the Halifax Regional CAP Association

The 13 participants from the learner community who attended the third focus group were referred from their respective literacy or disability programs, as shown below:

- 6 from the Bedford / Sackville Literacy Network,
- 3 from the Halifax Regional Library,
- 2 from the Dartmouth Literacy Network,
- 1 from The Work Bridge, and
- 1 from the Next Step.

The learner participants represented a variety of disabilities. Some disclosed their disability to the group and others did not. Those who disclosed had learning disabilities, mental health and intellectual challenges.

- ✚ Developing two online surveys, one for literacy organizations and another for disability organizations. 95 organizations were invited to respond; 36 responses were received in total, a 38% response rate. 17 literacy and 16 disability organizations responded. Unfortunately, the size of the sampling is too small to draw definitive conclusions. Therefore, this report does not rely on the survey results except where they support findings from other sources.

The purpose of the surveys was to

- ✚ Understand the nature of the literacy services available in the Halifax Regional Municipality;
- ✚ Learn about the experiences of literacy organizations in servicing persons with special needs or disabilities; and
- ✚ Learn about the experience of disability organizations in servicing their clients with low literacy.

2.4. Project Scope

2.4.1. Geography

This project focused on issues within the boundaries of the Halifax Regional Municipality based on the geography covered by the five Metro Region Learning Networks in the Community Learning Initiative:

- ✚ Bedford – Sackville
- ✚ Dartmouth
- ✚ Eastern Shore and Musquodoboit Valley
- ✚ Halifax
- ✚ Western Region – Tantallon / Hubbards

2.4.2. Target Group

The target group for the study was adult learners with disabilities engaged in literacy training programs. The project considered issues related only to youth and adult learners with disabilities based on the HRDC definition of ‘youth’ from the ages of 15 to 30.

Disability categories included those identified in the Canadian Association for Independent Living Centre’s study and several added by the project stakeholders:

- Physical
- Blind / Visually impaired
- Deaf / Hearing loss
- Intellectual
- Learning
- Mental health considerations
- Brain Injured

- Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder
- Multiple including blind & deaf

2.4.3. Organizations

The focus was primarily on literacy organizations within the context of the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL). They include those organizations which are funded by the Nova Scotia Department of Education to provide literacy learning and the Adult High Schools in the Public School Program. However, the project was not limited to those organizations and our research involved others in the focus groups and survey work.

Disability Organizations included in this project were essentially those who from the TEAM Work Cooperative. Several other organizations responded to the survey and participated in the focus groups.

2.4.4. Programs

Programs reviewed included primarily those programs offered through NSSAL, although we learned about other programs available in the community and some of those are referenced in this document.

2.4.5. Out of Scope

This project was as much defined by those areas within scope as those outside the specific research approach. The following describes those areas which were out of scope for the project:

- ✚ There was no effort to explicitly include programs outside the HRM catchment area except where they offered potential models or alternatives to the programs available locally.
- ✚ While the project researchers learned much about the P to 12 education system, there was no attempt made to review the system or its impact on current literacy issues among youth and adults.
- ✚ Access to and use of technology is a recurring theme throughout this paper but the project did not specifically address the issue of computer literacy. That is, no deliberate research was carried out to determine issues related to training learners basic computer skills. (Interestingly, all participants in the learner focus group were computer users. Some accessed the Internet for research purposes, many used e-mail, some used desktop software programs and all used it to play games.)

3. Definitions of Disability and Literacy

3.1 Definition of Disability

The Government of Canada published a report called Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in December 2002. It suggests that our perspective about what constitutes a disability has evolved significantly over the past century. The report comments that defining disability is “not an easy task”. It goes on to say that the four broad categories under which we consider people to be disabled are

- ✚ Physical;
- ✚ Sensory;
- ✚ Mental health; and
- ✚ Intellectual.

It also makes the point that “people are considered to be disabled if their condition restricts their ability to perform common tasks such as working, going to school, traveling, walking, communicating or performing daily tasks at home.” ⁴

3.2 Definition of Literacy

Historically, persons who were ‘illiterate’ lacked the skills to read and write versus those who were ‘literate’ who possessed reading and writing skills. There was no recognition of degree of capability.

Definitions of literacy today are many and varied and tend to discuss literacy on a continuum of capability. The Centre for Literacy of Quebec provides the following perspective around ‘Literacy for the 21st Century’ -

Literacy involves a complex set of abilities to understand and use the dominant symbol systems of a culture for personal and community development. The need and demand for these abilities vary in different societies.

In a technological society, the concept is expanding to include the media and electronic text in addition to alphabets and numbers. Individuals must be given life-long learning opportunities to move along a continuum that includes reading, writing, and the critical understanding and decision-making abilities they need in their communities.⁵

⁴ Advancing the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, Government of Canada Report, December 2002 – page 10

⁵ <http://www.nald.ca/litcent.htm>

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) carried out in 1994, defined literacy as -

The ability of adults to use written information to function in society, to achieve their goals, and to develop their knowledge and potential.

These and other definitions consider literacy in the context of the need to communicate and function in one's personal, social, community and work environment. They suggest that the attainment of literacy skills is dependent on one's personal goals, aspirations and potential and therefore, differs from individual to individual. Other definitions are found in Appendix 3.

4. Literacy Profile

4.1 Canada and the International Adult Literacy Survey

- ✚ In June 2000, Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released the final report from the groundbreaking 1994 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). The first international survey of its kind, IALS provides a comparison of literacy levels across nations, languages and cultures. Canada and 19 other countries participated in the survey.
- ✚ IALS identified and measured three types of literacy:
 - **Prose Literacy** - the ability to understand and use information from texts such as news stories or fiction;
 - **Document Literacy** - the ability to find and use information from documents such as maps or tables; and
 - **Quantitative Literacy** - the ability to make calculations with numbers imbedded in text, as in balancing a chequebook.

Canadians' Literacy Levels

IALS measured proficiency at five different levels within each literacy type. Here is how Canadians, ages 16 and older, measured up in prose literacy:

- ✚ 22% of Canadians were at level 1. These people have difficulty reading and have few basic skills or strategies for decoding and working with text. Generally, they are aware that they have a literacy problem.
- ✚ 26% of Canadians were at level 2. These are people with limited skills who read but do not read well. Canadians at this level can deal only with material that is simple and clearly laid out. People at this level often do not recognize their limitations.

- ✚ 33% of Canadians were at level 3, which means that they can read well but may have problems with more complex tasks. This level is considered by many countries to be the minimum skill level for successful participation in society.
- ✚ 20% of Canadians were at levels 4 or 5. These people have strong literacy skills, including a wide range of reading skills and many strategies for dealing with complex materials. These Canadians can meet most reading demands and can handle new reading challenges.
- ✚ Approximately twenty-five percent (25%) of Atlantic Canadians function at literacy Level 1. Another twenty seven percent (27%) function at literacy Level 2, an approximate equivalent to a grade 8 skill level.⁶

The Department of Education in Nova Scotia provides the following approximate equivalents to the four literacy levels described by IALS.⁷

Table 1 – Literacy Level / Grade Skill Equivalencies

| LEVEL | GRADE SKILL |
|-------------|-------------|
| I (a and b) | 0 to 6 |
| II | 7 to 8 |
| III | 9 to 10 |
| IV | 11 to 12 |

4.2 Literacy among Persons with Disabilities

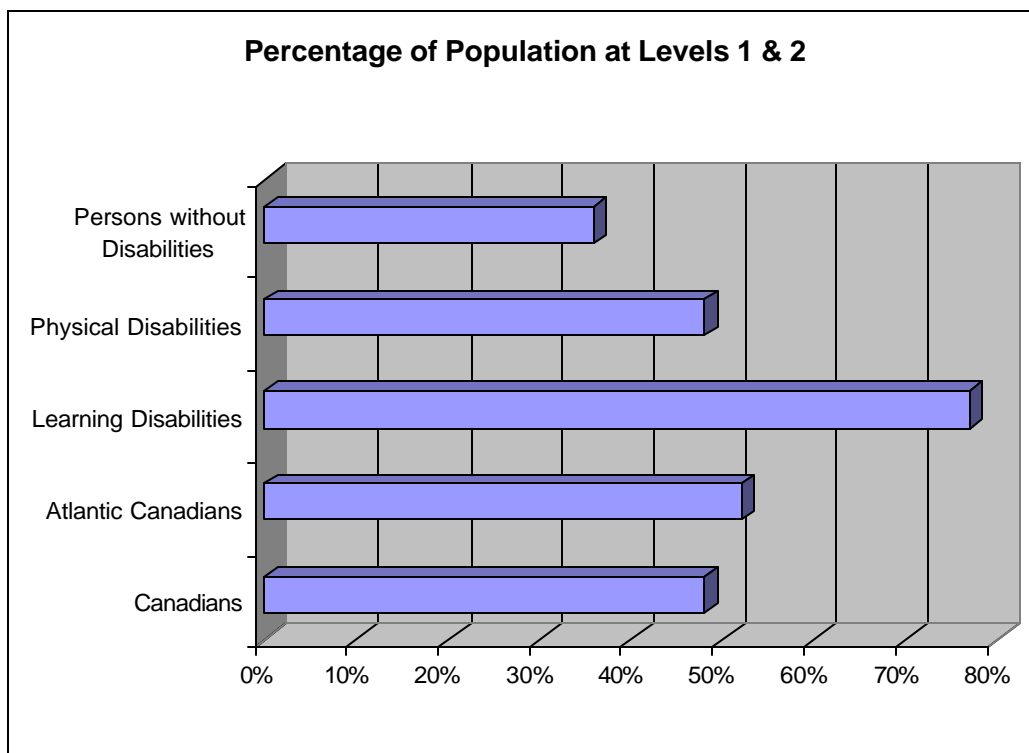
The situation is somewhat more serious for persons with disabilities. Joel Macht, in his Literacy and Disability study of December 2000, found that between 50% and 77% of people with disabilities function at the lowest two literacy levels (Kapsalis, 1999). In fact, Macht, quotes a study entitled The Effects of Disability on Literacy Skills which found that 77% of people with learning disabilities in Canada function below level 3 and 52% of those individuals function at level 1. The same study found that 48% of people with physical disabilities function below level 3 compared with 36% of people without disabilities.

The following chart provides a comparative view of the Canadian population functioning at levels 1 and 2:

⁶ National Adult Literacy Database website - <http://www.nald.ca/nls/nlsild/fact3.htm>

⁷ Nova Scotia Department of Education, Community Learning Initiative Learner Profile: 1999-2000, page 1

Table 2 – Percentage of Population at Levels 1 & 2



Macht goes on to say that “no statistically significant relationship could be isolated between physical disabilities and low literacy levels. However...people with physical disabilities (and for that matter learning disabilities [author’s note: and many other types of disabilities]) experience less involvement in the labour force. Therefore, while schooling may be equivalent, people with disabilities do not have much of an opportunity to practice their literacy skills because they are less likely to have a job. Literacy is a well-documented ‘use it or loose it’ phenomenon.”⁸

4.3 Halifax Regional Municipality Experience

The 1996 Census indicates that 5.1% or 12,490 individuals of the working age population in HRM (ages 15 to 64) have an activity limitation (AL) or long term disability (LTD) related to participation at school and / or work. The difference in education between persons with an AL or LTD versus those without is significant.

- 44% of persons with AL / LTD have not completed high school versus 24% of those who do not have an AL / LTD.

⁸ Joel Macht, Literacy and Disability, page 11 and 12

- ✚ On the other end of the spectrum, the data show that only 7% of those with AL / LTD have a university degree compared to 18% of those without AL / LTD.
- ✚ The table below illustrates the data for the population aged 15 years and older.⁹

Table 3 – Education Level Comparisons

| LEVEL OF EDUCATION | PERSONS WITH AL / LTD | PERSONS WITHOUT AL / LTD |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Less than Grade 9 Completion | 18% | 4% |
| Some High School | 26% | 20% |
| Total | 44% | 24% |
| High School Certificate / Graduate | 15% | 18% |
| University Degree | 7% | 18% |

4.4 Literacy and Employment

Increasingly, employers are demanding a high school diploma. By 2004, more than 70% of new jobs in Nova Scotia will require some form of a post secondary education. Only 6% of new jobs will be held by those with less than a high school education.¹⁰

There is a correlation between literacy and wage levels in Canada. Over 80 per cent of Canadians at the lowest literacy level and over 60 per cent in the second lowest literacy level have no income, or incomes of less than \$27,000. A recent study indicates that each additional year of education a person receives is worth 8.3 per cent on their paycheque. Using an annual base salary of \$30,000, this amounts to an additional \$2,490 per year. (*Literacy, Numeracy and Labour Market Outcomes in Canada*, Statistics Canada, 2001).¹¹

It is therefore, not surprising that persons with disabilities experience a significantly higher level of unemployment than the population at large. In Nova Scotia, the unemployment rate for individuals with low levels of literacy is approximately 26% compared to 4% for individuals with high levels of literacy.¹² In HRM, the unemployment rate for persons with AL or LTD is 6% higher than for those without – 14% and 8%, respectively. A more detailed breakdown of these statistics is found in [Appendix 4](#).

⁹ Halifax Metro Labour Market Information Unit, Persons with Disabilities – A Comparison of HRCC Halifax, HRC Dartmouth, HRC Bedford & HRC Halifax, August 2002

¹⁰ Skills Nova Scotia Framework and 2002-2003 Action Plan, page 5

¹¹ ABC Canada, <http://www.abc-canada.org/research>

¹² Literacy Nova Scotia, www.nald.ca/literacyns, Facts About Literacy 4

5. Adult Literacy Organizations in HRM

5.1. Overview

Adult literacy has moved a long way up the educational, social and employment agendas internationally, as well as in Canada and in Nova Scotia with the release of the findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey. This survey and work by a variety of organizations including the Roeher Institute, ABC Canada and others, provides definitive data to support the concerns that the literacy community has had for many years but which had not received serious attention from governments or the private sector. In recent years, significant effort, resources and funding have been allocated to the adult literacy agenda in Nova Scotia.

There is no shortage of literacy providers in the region. The Halifax Regional Library website has the most comprehensive list of programs. It provides detailed information about 83 programs in total including public, private and ESL programs. Of those, 54 programs appear to be suitable for the target population in this study. The descriptions of these programs are found in the accompanying document, Directory of Adult Literacy Programs in the Halifax Regional Municipality.

5.2. Skills Nova Scotia

Skills Nova Scotia is the province's new labour market framework. Six key elements are critical to the success of the skills framework. One of the 6 elements is





“Inclusion of every Nova Scotian by ensuring access to opportunities allowing them to become actively involved in the labour market”.¹³

A full description of the key elements is found in [Appendix 5](#).

5.3. Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL)

The NSSAL is a new multi-phase learning initiative announced by the Government of Nova Scotia in November 2000 and launched in September 2001 and is a key component of Skills Nova Scotia. Funding is provided by the Departments of Education and Community Services, and by HRDC. The coordinating body is within the Department of Education.







NSSAL is a continuum of educational programs for adults ranging from basic literacy to high school completion delivered in a partnership arrangement with a number of organizations including:

-  The Nova Scotia Community College;
-  College de l'Acadie;
-  Regional School Boards / Adult High Schools; and
-  Community based literacy organizations.

¹³ Skills Nova Scotia, Framework and 2002-2003 Action Plan, pages 12-14

The table below provides an overview of the organizations and programs offerings and the enrollment in 2001 / 2002 in Nova Scotia.



Table 4 – NSSAL Overview

| LEVEL | GRADE SKILL | DELIVERY ORGANIZATIONS | ENROLLMENT 2001 / 2002 |
|-------------|-------------|---|------------------------|
| I (a and b) | 0 to 6 |  Community based Learning Organizations  College de l'Acadie | 2223 |
| II | 7 to 8 | | |
| III | 9 to 10 |  Community based Learning Organizations  College de l'Acadie  Nova Scotia Community College  Adult High Schools – Regional School Boards | 1477* |
| IV | 11 to 12 | | |

* 149 students were enrolled in community-based organizations and 1328 in college programs

5.4. Certification

In 2001 – 2002, one hundred and fifty-four adults (154) received adult high school diplomas. Students enrolled in the NSSAL programs have the option of attaining one of two credentials. They can work toward and receive –



-  The Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults – recognition of prior learning including attainment of level 4 or grade 12
-  A Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma – through the Adult High School program offered by the Regional School Board

In addition, an adult student can also attain a Nova Scotia High School Equivalency Certificate of Grade 12 by passing the 5 General Education Development (GED) tests. The GED is funded and administered separately from NSSAL.

For a more detailed description of the available certifications, please see [Appendix 6](#).

5.5. Eligibility

To be eligible to apply for the Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults or to write the GED tests, candidates must meet the following criteria. They must -

-  Be 19 years of age or older;
-  Have been out of public school for one full year or more and;

- ✚ Not already have a Department of Education recognized high school graduation diploma.

5.6. Community Learning Initiative

The Department of Education provides funding, practitioner training and other supports for the Community Learning Initiative (CLI) consisting of 27 Learning Networks throughout the province including 5 specialized networks serving diverse communities. CLI networks are delivery vehicles for literacy learning and are a component of NSSAL.

The table below provides an overview of the HRM-based and specialized networks.

Table 5 – CLI Networks

| HRM REGIONAL NETWORKS | SPECIALIZED NETWORKS |
|--|--|
| Bedford / Sackville Literacy Network | Metro Deaf Literacy Network |
| Halifax Community Learning Network | Provincial Black Literacy Network |
| Western HRM Community Learning Network | Nova Scotia ESL (English as a Second Language) Network |
| Eastern Shore and Musquodoboit Valley Literacy Network | Mi'kmaq Literacy Network |
| Dartmouth and Area Literacy Association | Acadian Literacy Network |

CLI funding provides for two (2) distinct program models. The first is a one-on-one tutor based model and the other is a classroom based model. Tutors are primarily volunteer resources and while classroom instructors are salaried resources, they are assisted by volunteers in the classroom.

Based on the learner profiles submitted to the Department of Education, about 400 learners participated in the 5 metro regional networks and the deaf network in 1999 - 2000. The following table provides an overview of the 2 program models. Information about the Deaf Literacy Network was not included in the data.

Table 6 – Program Models

| | TUTOR MODEL | CLASSROOM MODEL |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Number offered in HRM | 16 | 6 |
| Description | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Employs a tutor coordinator who matches volunteer tutors with learners ✚ Targets a minimum of 15 to 30 matches ✚ Tutor Coordinator supports, liaises and carries out ongoing assessments of matched pairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Employs an instructor ✚ Instructs regular group / classroom sessions ✚ Groups have 10 – 15 participants |
| Offered by | All 5 of the regionally based networks | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Bedford/Sackville ✚ Dartmouth and Area ✚ Halifax |

The province has been collecting data about the CLI networks for 5 years. The data shown below is from the most current available data in the Community Learning Initiative Learner Profile 1999 – 2000.

Data from this source suggests the following on a provincial wide basis:

- ✚ Extra Support Needs – transportation is by far the greatest need identified, followed by child care support. Wheelchair access and health supports constitute the smallest percentage. It is not known how many of the total number of learners identified the need for extra supports.
- ✚ Age distribution – approximately two thirds of the learners range in age between 18 and 39. Only 10 percent are 50 years of age and older.
- ✚ Last Grade Completed – 57% of the learners completed grade 9 or less. Only 11% of the learners indicated that they had completed grade 12 or ‘other’, presumably an equivalent.
- ✚ Sources of Income – 57% of the learners receive their income from social assistance, Employment Insurance (EI) or disability pension; 20 % report income either from full or part time employment; 9% report no income

This data is found in chart format in [Appendix 7](#).

5.7. Other Service Providers

There are a great variety of other literacy service providers based on the information provided on the HRM Library website. Some of these organizations have a very specific focus either in providing literacy training to support employability or in the student population they service. In some cases, they do both such as Anchor Industries which is a vocational centre for adults with intellectual disabilities. It provides basic literacy and work skills training and community employment opportunities.

Those with an employment or employability focus generally also offer life and work skills or pre-employment training in addition to literacy training. They include the following:

- ✚ Dartmouth Work Activity Society
- ✚ Options Work Activity Program
- ✚ Pheonix Learning and Employment Centre
- ✚ The Shining Light Learning Academy for Adults

Some of those servicing a specific student population are:

- ✚ Metro Immigrant Settlement Association (MISA)
- ✚ Kjiptuk Aboriginal College
- ✚ Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia
- ✚ Black Educators Association of Nova Scotia
- ✚ Centre for Diverse Visible Cultures
- ✚ College de l'Acadie
- ✚ Society for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

6. Findings - Barriers and Issues

The findings in this section of the study are drawn from the surveys carried out with the literacy and disability organizations for this project, focus groups and interviews. Other data included in this report can be found in the survey conducted by the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition (now Literacy Nova Scotia) and other research materials.

6.1 Findings from Project Surveys

The findings fall into two primary categories – those which are specific to literacy students with disabilities and those which apply to literacy students in general. The project surveys showed that the 2 barriers which the service providers indicated were most significant were those which literacy students in general would experience. They were as follow:

- ✚ Learner's lack of confidence – by far the most significant barrier with more than 90% of the respondents indicating that this is at least sometimes a barrier. However, 64% of the disability organizations while only 37% of the literacy organizations felt that this is frequently a barrier.
- ✚ Personal financial barriers – nearly 50% of respondents indicated that this is frequently a barrier; and

The third most significant barrier related specifically to students with disabilities:

- ✚ Health / Medical issues – nearly 40% of respondents indicated that this is frequently a barrier.

The program-related barrier which received the highest ranking by both types of organizations was that of instructors and tutors being unable to respond to the special needs of students with disabilities. It is not surprising then that the need for training specific to working with students with disabilities for instructors and tutors was also ranked as the most important opportunity for service improvement.

While the surveys were in general inconclusive because of the small sampling, it is clear that the two types of organizations obviously have differing views of barriers affecting learners with disabilities. For example, the disability organizations expressed a far greater concern with barriers related to the literacy programs than the literacy organizations. The disability organizations also indicated a reasonably high level of concern with the lack of assistive technology as a barrier while the literacy organizations ranked this as quite low.

Based on the research carried out for this study, the most apparent reasons for their differing views is because:

- ✚ Disability organizations are in the business of working with persons with disabilities as their primary client while literacy organizations work with a multitude of different students. Furthermore, they are often not aware if a student has a disability if the student has not self disclosed.
- ✚ Disability organizations are knowledgeable about disability issues while literacy organizations indicated throughout this study that they require education and support in learning to work with students with disabilities.
- ✚ Lastly, unless students self identify and request various supports, literacy service providers may not intuitively identify a need. Only 47% of the literacy organizations indicated that they have a process for self identification. Disability organizations however, would be in a position to identify and offer supports in the absence of a client's request.

6.2 Other Findings

A recent study carried out by ABC Canada found that less than 10 per cent of Canadians who could benefit from literacy upgrading programs actually enrol. So while outreach has increased significantly in the past number of years, success has been minimal. The research indicates that barriers like job or money problems, lack of childcare and

transportation are some of reasons preventing people from enrolling. When asked what concerns they had about upgrading, participants in the research indicated the following:

- ✚ The two most highly ranked concerns are about money and conflict with paid employment, followed by distance of programs offered;
- ✚ The next most highly ranked set of concerns are program related, including program length, level of difficulty, not being able to work at one's own pace, and relevance of program content; and
- ✚ The highest cognitive/emotive factor is a general nervousness about taking a program.¹⁴

Issues and barriers described by TWC Survey respondents and identified through the focus groups and interviews for this study generally support the findings from the ABC Canada research. Findings for this study have been grouped by those specific to adult students with disabilities and those which are generic to literacy students. They have also been organized into four categories to provide a framework for purposes of clarity. The four categories are defined as follows:

- ✚ Program Issues – relate to barriers and concerns with the literacy, disability and funding programs;
- ✚ Personal Issues – are those which the literacy students would experience;
- ✚ Social Issues – refer to those societal barriers which adult literacy students might experience;
- ✚ Support Issues – describe those barriers and issues which would provide personal support for literacy students.


However, it should be noted that some of the issues which are identified as being generic to literacy students may be more complex or significant for persons with disabilities.

¹⁴ ABC Canada, Why Aren't They Calling?, http://www.abc-canada.org/research/watc_summary.asp

Table 7 – Barriers by Category

| TYPES OF ISSUES | ISSUES SPECIFIC TO ADULT LITERACY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES | ISSUES GENERIC TO ADULT LITERACY STUDENTS |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Program Issues | Learning Models | Financial |
| | Volunteer Resources | Literacy versus Employability |
| | Data about Adult Students with Disabilities | Space |
| | Confidentiality | Languages |
| | Alternate Print Materials | Program Eligibility |
| | Eligibility for Work Ready Servicing | |
| Personal Issues | | Fear and Embarrassment |
| | | Personal Motivation |
| | | Personal Priorities |
| | | Value of Literacy |
| Social Issues | | Attitudes |
| | | Social Stigma |
| Support Issues | Formal Diagnosis of LD, AD/HD, etc | |
| | Transportation | |
| | Assistive Technology | |

6.1.1. Program Issues

 **Learning Models** – Most literacy programs are generally designed for the generic adult student and not to specifically meet the needs of students with disabilities. Those students who have disabilities which are not visible such as brain injuries, learning disabilities (LD), attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD), mental health issues and others require modifications to the literacy programs for them to participate fully. Only three organizations in HRM have designed programs to address the special needs of persons with disabilities –

- Anchor Industries
- Brain Injury Association of Nova Scotia
- Society for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

The learning model, incorporated in the Inroads Program developed by the Brain Injury Association addresses issues such as retention of learning due to poor memory and difficulty sustaining attention. They incorporate practices and techniques to assist the student such as regular breaks, frequent repetition and written back up to oral instructions. Interestingly, these same techniques are required to assist students with learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder and may be helpful in assisting learners with physical disabilities, especially those who have little formal education and have been out of a learning environment for a long time.

Face-to-face time - 55% (141 / 258 organizations) of respondents to the survey carried out by the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition provide 10 or fewer hours of active teaching time per week¹⁵. This suggests that the learner must be self motivated to complete homework assignments or continue the learning process throughout the remaining period.

During the focus group conducted with learners, several participants indicated that more reading / contact time with their tutor would be beneficial. In particular, students seemed to value the one-on-one time with a tutor. They also indicated that their embarrassment is alleviated as they get to know their instructor or tutor, allowing them to feel more comfortable about asking questions.

Distance Education - There are few distance literacy education programs offered in HRM. Of 265 respondents to the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition Survey, province-wide survey, 22 indicated that they offer distance education. Lack of opportunity for clients to pursue their literacy goals from their own homes through the use of computers and online learning is a particularly important issue for those with transportation restrictions or barriers. However, where a learner might be motivated to access such a program, a significant amount of advocacy work is often required to secure a computer through government funding sources.

It should be noted that distance education is an inappropriate model for levels 1 and 2, where students tend to have a high dependency on instructors and tutors.

✚ **Volunteer Resources / Tutors** – Volunteers are the backbone of adult literacy programs in North America. Many literacy programs have a significant dependency on volunteer resources. A survey recently conducted by Literacy Volunteers of America found that almost 122,000 volunteers dedicated 8.4 million hours to working with 218,000 adult students.¹⁶

In Nova Scotia as elsewhere, these volunteers make a significant difference in their students' lives. One focus group participant spoke about his life just four years ago as being one of depression and having a sense of hopelessness. He and others in the group described their tutors as patient, knowledgeable, resourceful and sensitive to their needs. His involvement with one of the literacy networks is described below in a speech he gave earlier this year at a literacy think-tank session:

¹⁵ <http://www.ns.literacy.ca/results/>

¹⁶ 2001-02 ProLiteracy America Annual Statistical Report, <http://www.proliteracy.org/resources.asp>

“My life has completely turned around 360 degrees as a result of one phone call four years ago. You will not find a more staunch supporter of literacy networks and the much needed assistance they provide, while at the same time, making a difference in our lives. They sure made a difference in mine!”

Volunteer tutors are on the front line of the literacy program in Nova Scotia but there is no requirement for these individuals to have any experience or knowledge of working with persons with disabilities nor is there any training to assist them in this regard. Yet we believe that many adult students have learning disabilities, AD/HA or other special needs. Volunteer turnover is significant and unpredictable. On average, tutors volunteer for 1.5 to 2 years.

The Department of Education offers a 30 hour tutor training program. Literacy programs are encouraged to have tutors participate in the training however, it is not mandatory. Training costs \$50 / participant and the costs are assumed by the literacy network / program. There is no specific funding allocation for tutor training; therefore, the literacy organizations must find the funding in their overall allocation.

Tutors volunteer their time with specific literacy organizations. There is no central resource organization which organizes or allocates tutors. Disability organizations seeking tutors for their clients must either encourage their clients to enroll in a literacy program or seek out a literacy tutor from another source.

✚ **Information and Data about Adult Students with Disabilities** – There is no consistent manner in which literacy organizations gather information about their students’ disabilities. Some have a self identification process but more than 50% of the literacy organizations responding to our survey do not have a process whereby a learner can identify his/her special needs or disability. Some agencies collect information in other ways, mostly during the intake process. And some organizations do not collect any information. The end result is twofold:

- Instructors and tutors may have limited knowledge about their students and therefore, may not have key information about potential learning limitations; and
- There is generally no reliable data about adult literacy students with disabilities in HRM programs.

✚ **Confidentiality** - Due to sensitivity around confidentiality, key information about a learner such as behavioral issues is often not passed on either by a referring agency or from one literacy program to the next.

✚ **Alternate Print Materials** - The majority of respondents to the survey do not offer print materials in alternate format such as large print or Braille. In fact, there is no adult literacy program for the blind in Nova Scotia.

- ✚ **Eligibility for Work Ready Servicing** - Not all disability organizations offering employment support will service a learner as work ready if s/he is attending literacy training.
- ✚ **Financial** – there is very little funding for adult literacy students unless they are on an employment path and are pursuing post secondary education. For students functioning at the lowest two levels, both employment and post secondary education are often a long term goal for which funding may not be available until the student has progressed to level 3 or 4 where the goal is more tangible. Funding is discussed in more detail later in this report.
- ✚ **Literacy versus Employability** – because funding programs often place value on literacy as it relates to employability and the pursuit of a job, the literacy community is concerned that there is insufficient appreciation of the value that enhanced literacy skills bring to individual's lives through increased self confidence and general quality of life.

However, there is no doubt of the direct linkage between literacy and employability. As discussed previously in this report, as an individual moves up the literacy ladder their ability to compete for and achieve sustainable employment is significantly enhanced.

- ✚ **Space** - Many of the community literacy programs are conducted in a public space such as a library. They are therefore quite limited in their ability to offer accommodations. Learners find it difficult to concentrate in space where other activities are ongoing concurrently with the learning time. Additionally, the CLI programs do not have permanent space assignment and therefore, are required to secure space on an annual basis.
- ✚ **Languages** - Very few literacy organizations in HRM offer programs in languages other than English. Of the 20 respondents to our survey, only one offered French language literacy training. Respondents to the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition Survey indicated that 35 of 267 programs offered French language training and none offered training in an Aboriginal language.
- ✚ **Program Eligibility** – Those high school students graduating from high school, who have participated in an Individual Program Plan (IPP), are not assessed in the same manner as other students. The Department of Education website states the following:

“Students on Individual Program Plans (IPP) do not write provincial exams, since their program plans do not include the full range of outcomes on which the examinations are based. It would not be fair for these students to write.”

These students often graduate with a high school diploma, and yet their literacy skills are much lower than those expected of high school graduates. Regardless of their literacy capability, they are not eligible for many adult literacy programs and are not eligible to apply for another Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults or to write the GED tests.

6.1.2. Personal Issues

- ✚ **Fear and Embarrassment** - focus group participants spoke to their lack of confidence and their embarrassment about their reading capability, often preventing them from seeking clarification from an instructor or a tutor. One individual indicated that she was 'scared people would think she is stupid' so rather than ask for help, she saved her questions for her family. Another indicated that her new tutor is 'good at knowing when she does not understand' and gives her the necessary assistance without the learner having to ask for it.

Fear and embarrassment are the root of the confidence issue identified clearly as the number one barrier by respondents to our survey. The lack of confidence subsequently leads to learners avoiding any learning risk.

- ✚ **Personal Motivation** – students with learning difficulties, attention deficit disorder, brain injuries, mental health or intellectual challenges often learn slowly. The process is lengthy and requires a significant amount of perseverance. The pursuit of a high school diploma can be a long and tedious process or may not be attainable at all. These students must be extremely self motivated to achieve their goals. Sixty percent of respondents to our surveys believed that adult students with disabilities generally do not achieve their goals.
- ✚ **Personal Priorities** – for persons with disabilities, literacy may be low in their hierarchy of needs. Many adults find coping mechanisms which allow them to function adequately within their communities. Particularly if previous education experiences have been negative, they will not pursue literacy training as a priority in their lives.
- ✚ **Value of Literacy** - Lack of understanding of the relationship between literacy skills and goal attainment whether the goals are employment, social or personal can certainly be a demotivator. This is particularly true where there have been negative experiences with education in the past.

6.1.3. Social Issues

- ✚ **Attitudes** – There are systemic barriers generally for persons with low literacy skills, including social and employment barriers. The barriers are more complex for persons with disabilities, in part due to the attitudes held by our society about their capabilities and in part because many of the literacy programs do not have adequate resources to cater to their special needs. The issue of attitude appears to be systemic in both the minds of able bodied persons and persons with disabilities. One person interviewed captured the attitudinal problem like this – “We should be asking what a person with a disability would like to accomplish rather than dictating what is available to him/her”.

Attitudinal barriers include both those on the part of learners with a disability because they believe they have no right to pursue literacy; and on the part of the family who are fearful of the change it will bring to the learner.

- ✚ **Social Stigmas** – Being ‘illiterate’ has a social stigma associated with it. Many individuals with low literacy skills cover up for their poor reading skills, sometimes resulting in dire consequences. Furthermore, adult students do not want to be seen to be associated with programs which teach basic reading and writing skills, which has led to different labeling of these programs such as skills training and upgrading.

Several focus group participants related personal experiences about losing their jobs when it was discovered that they could not read well. One participant told the story about his last job, where grade 12 was a requirement of employment and he was terminated because he had lied about having the required qualification. Participants spoke of feeling shame when they were found out.

A number of literacy programs have experience with learners who have criminal records which presents yet another barrier to their learning. These individuals often deal with an additional social stigma.

6.1.4. Support Issues

- ✚ **Formal Diagnosis** - Lack of a formal diagnosis of LD or AD/HD means that the learner’s problem is often inadvertently interpreted to be lack of motivation. In fact, a significant percentage of students in adult education programs have undiagnosed LD or AD/HD, potentially as high as 30% to 50%, although as previously indicated, there is no reliable data available.

While psycho-educational assessments are carried out routinely in many public schools today, for students who were either never assessed or where the results of the assessment have been discarded (they are normally retained for three years only), a diagnosis is important information in their literacy learning. The cost of such an assessment is normally not covered by most of the funding programs but at the same time, funding for accommodations is contingent on an assessment. Typically, the cost of an assessment is in the range of \$1500 to \$2500.

The Learning Disability Association of Nova Scotia carries out assessments at no cost, as part of the Destination Employment program. Persons who believe they are at risk of having LD and are unemployed are eligible for the program. If the assessment confirms an LD diagnosis, the program provides the students with greater awareness of their disability and assists them in developing job-related goals and tools for seeking and retaining employment.

However, a formal diagnosis is only the first step in addressing literacy issues with this student population. Treatment and individual funding for treatment are necessary for these students to succeed. In the case of AD/HD, waiting times for treatment are long, skilled and knowledgeable medical personnel are scarce, medication is expensive and family support is often lacking.

While these issues sometimes become apparent when adult students enrol in literacy upgrading, it begs the question about which government department should or could best address them – health, education or community services, or a combination of the three.

✚ **Transportation** - Transportation is a significant barrier for those requiring use of a wheelchair and particularly where these individuals live in a rural area. Transportation subsidies from government require significant advocacy work to obtain. Access-A-Bus requires booking 14 days in advance. Literacy programs in the more rural areas of HRM report that transportation is the single most significant barrier for students who are either unable to drive due to a disability or who do not have the financial resources to own a car.

✚ **Assistive Technology** - Only a very small percentage of respondents offer any type of assistive technology in their literacy programs, although most have access to computers and the internet. However, where assistive technology is available, it appears that it may be underutilized, perhaps because potential users are unaware of its existence. For example, the North Branch Library in Halifax has a computer equipped and configured with a variety of different assistive technologies but it is not used extensively although it is advertised along with all other library services.

Assistive technology is a significant issue for public access computer / Internet sites, particularly as CAP sites are meant to provide 'access for everyone'. In response to this issue, the Halifax Regional CAP Association (HRC@P) has created a page on their website dedicated to information about assistive technology products and links to related sites.¹⁷

32% of respondents to the needs assessment carried out by the Metro Deaf Literacy Network indicated that they required computers to accommodate their learning needs. During the focus group with learners, 100% of the participants volunteered that they use or have used a computer. Some use it to do their homework, others for e-mail and still others to supplement their learning. At a very minimum, they were all familiar with using a computer to play games.

7. Funding

7.1. Program and Project Funding

Funding programs fall primarily into two categories – those which support literacy **programs** and those supporting literacy **projects**. Program funding is generally provided for core services and project funding is generally for short term initiatives resulting in specific outcomes or deliverables.

Primary program funding comes from the Department of Education. The other two sources of program funding are limited to those literacy organizations with a registered

¹⁷ <http://hrca.ns.ca/>

charitable status. One is the Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf Tournament (PGI) for very specifically defined expenses and others come from private sector donations. All other funding sources provide support on a project basis only.

The following table provides an overview of the key funding sources and the literacy categories they support.

Table 8 – Funding Sources

| SOURCE OF FUNDING | PROGRAM | PROJECT |
|---|---------|------------------|
| Provincial Government – Department of Education / NSSAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Funding Application | ✓ | |
| Provincial Government - Department of Community Services / NSSAL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Proposal Basis | | ✓ |
| Canada-Nova Scotia Skills and Learning Framework (formerly Labour Market Development Agreement – LMDA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Proposal Basis | | ✓ |
| National Literacy Secretariat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project Proposal Basis | | ✓ |
| Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf for Literacy Tournament (PGI) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Grant Application to a maximum of \$3000 See Note below | ✓ | |
| Foundations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant Application | | ✓ (primarily) |
| Private Sector Donations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fundraising United Way | ✓ | ✓ |

Note: The Department of Education contributed \$40,000 to the annual PGI Golf for Literacy Tournament. This contribution was designated by the Department of Education to be used to support community-based literacy organizations. Grants totaling \$39,969

were issued to 30 literacy organizations through the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition.¹⁸

7.1.1. Literacy Program Funding Sources

80% of respondents to the project surveys receive their primary funding from the provincial government. Similarly, 86% of respondents to the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition survey indicated their funding is received from provincial government sources. Other funding sources include:

- ✚ Federal government programs
- ✚ Provincial / federal program
- ✚ Local government
- ✚ Grants
- ✚ Fundraising including corporate sponsorships and charitable donations
- ✚ Student fees

7.1.2. Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning Funding Summary

Adult literacy in Nova Scotia is funded through the NSSAL. In 2002/3, the Department of Education provided the following grant allocations:

Table 9 – NSSAL Funding Summary

| ORGANIZATIONS | GRANT ALLOCATION (Numbers Are Rounded) |
|---|---|
| Regional School Boards (5) | \$822,000 |
| Colleges – ✚ Nova Scotia Community College ✚ Universite Sainte Anne – College de l’Acadie | \$2,500,000 |
| Nova Scotia Community-based Learning Organizations | \$2,530,000 |
| Total | \$5,852,000 |
| Metro Community-based Learning Organizations | \$900,000 |
| Range of Grants | \$17,000 to \$250,000 |

7.1.3. Community Learning Initiative Funding

Funding is based on an annual grant application process and covers instructional, administrative/coordination and educational resource costs. The grants cover program costs to a maximum of 40 weeks from September to June. There is no maximum amount for which an applicant can apply. The amount of the application is dependent on anticipated student enrolment as that determines the number of volunteer tutors and classroom instructors, and therefore, the number of coordinators. Educational resource

¹⁸ A New Face for Literacy, Annual Report, Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition 2001-2002 / Promotion of Literacy by Informing Government and the Public About Literacy Issues / <http://www.nald.ca/literacyns/report02.htm>

funding is allocated on the number of programs managed by any one organization. Suggested resource allocation is \$250 per program for Level 1 and 2 programs and \$1200 for Level 3 programs. The larger funding amount for Level 3 is in recognition of the need for ‘enhanced resources’¹⁹ such as access to computers and science labs.

Because funding is allocated through an annual application process, the literacy organizations cannot retain permanent employees. Furthermore, the funding is for 40 weeks only. The salary range is \$15.00 to \$20.00 per hour plus benefits for tutor coordinators and instructors. Instructors must have a university degree, preferably in education, or equivalent experience and training with at least two years relevant experience working with adults in an educational setting. There is no requirement for a teaching certificate.

Not-for-profit community based organizations accounted for 65% of the student population in adult literacy programs (see [section 4.2, Table 2](#)) but receive only 43% of the program funding (see [Section 7.1.2, Table 9](#)).

The following is an excerpt from the Literacy Nova Scotia – Election 2003 Toolkit which summarizes the funding issues challenging the community-based literacy organizations.

“These organizations have responded to the downloading of government responsibility by offering programming at the community level at a fraction of the cost required by the public schools or the community colleges. Most of the not-for-profit organizations are hampered in their work by insufficient funding, competition for scarce resources, difficulty in retaining staff and volunteers, and finally, anxieties caused by funding uncertainties and constraints in the use of funds.”²⁰

7.1.4. Federal Provincial Labour Market Development Agreement (LMDA)

In the past two years, Federal Provincial LMDA funding priorities included literacy, youth and information technology projects. The strategic directions for these priorities include:

Literacy -

- Provide Building Blocks for Transitions into Learning and the World of Work
- Develop a Skilled, Competitive Workforce
- Promote Learning Communities in Nova Scotia

Youth –

- Supporting Initiatives to Enhance the Employability of Youth at Risk
- Providing Access to Information Technology for Youth
- Furthering the Development of Entrepreneurship Skills in Youth

¹⁹ Community Learning Initiative Grant Application Guidelines: 2002-2003, pages 2 - 5

²⁰ Literacy Nova Scotia website – www.nald.ca/province/ns/literacyns/elect03/whatdone

Information Technology -

- Develop a Skilled, Competitive Workforce
- Ensure Effective Access to Existing Public IT Infrastructure and Labour Market Information for All Participants
- Develop Innovative Ways to Introduce and/or Adapt Technology in Local Economic and Social Sectors
- Conduct Research to Support Achieving Strategic Directions 1-3

Fourteen literacy-related projects received funding out of a total of 57 projects in HRM. Literacy projects received 25% of the total allocated funding, a proportionately appropriate amount. Total amounts allocated to literacy projects were \$1,694,942 versus other projects which received \$5,726,234.

Literacy Nova Scotia notes in its Election 2003 Toolkit, that increasingly, the not-for-profit community-based organizations have come to rely on LMDA funding to support non-teaching activities and projects. However, as shown in the table below, only 25% of the LMDA funded projects were literacy related.

Table 10 – LMDA Funding Allocation

| | 2001 - 2002 ²¹ | 2002 - 2003 ²² |
|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| # Total Projects | 57 | 59 |
| # Literacy Projects | 14 | 15 |
| Literacy % of Total | 25% | 25% |
| Total Investment | \$5,726,000 | \$3,736,000 |
| Literacy Investment | \$1,695,000 | \$894,000 |
| Literacy % of Total | 30% | 24% |

7.2. Student Funding

There is little funding available for adult students with disabilities participating in literacy programs. The research has identified only two sources, one specific to persons with disabilities pursuing an employment path and the other available to any adult student who does not have a grade 12 diploma.

7.2.1 Opportunity Fund

The Opportunity Fund for Persons with Disabilities provides financial assistance to unemployed persons with disabilities to help them prepare for, obtain and sustain employment or self-employment. The Opportunity Fund is able to support all disability groups with four major interventions:

²¹ Data based on aggregate of individual LMDA project approvals

²² <http://www.hrdis.ca/lmda/>

- ✚ Skill Enhancements;
- ✚ Special Accommodations;
- ✚ Entrepreneurship; and
- ✚ Targeted Wage / Job Placements.

While the Opportunity Fund is not specifically designed to support literacy education, criteria under the Skill Enhancement provides support for training and education, including upgrading and literacy programs. The Special Accommodations criteria provide support for transportation, technical aids and job coaching.

In 2002/3, 248 individuals received support through this fund.

7.2.3 Literacy Nova Scotia Bursary

Literacy Nova Scotia offers a bursary of \$500 to assist with tuition, travel costs and books. In 2003/2004, three bursaries will be awarded. Literacy Nova Scotia started the bursary fund in 1995 using money raised through the Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf Tournament. To be eligible, an adult may not have completed Grade 12 in the public school system, must have been out of school for five years or more, and at the time of application must be attending or has been accepted into a program leading to an adult high school diploma in Nova Scotia.

8. Service Improvements

Respondents to the project surveys were invited to indicate the importance of a number of suggested improvements to literacy services for persons with disabilities. The following table provides an overview of the aggregated responses in order of priority.

Table 11 – Service Improvements in Order of Priority

| RANKING | SERVICE IMPROVEMENT DESCRIPTION |
|----------------|--|
| 1. | Training for instructors and tutors specific to working with persons with disabilities |
| 2. | Program funding to support literacy learning specific for learners with disabilities |
| 3. | Literacy organizations need more or clearer knowledge about a student's disability |
| 4. | Closer relationships and improved communications between literacy and disability organizations |
| 5. | Resource sharing between literacy and disability organizations (e.g. instructors, tutors, volunteers, training, etc) |
| 6. | Improved access to assistive technologies and devices |
| 7. | New / different program delivery models |
| 8. | Improved knowledge of assistive technologies and devices |

The respondents provided a number of additional comments. Most of the comments reinforce either the improvements described in the table above or other observations made elsewhere in this study. The following are verbatim comments:

- ✚ **Funding:** “Free access or funding for psycho-educational assessments”
- ✚ **Instructor / tutor training and knowledge of disability:** “If we don't know what the learning disability is, how can we help them? If we do know, we don't have the training [to work with people with disabilities]to help. The big problem with literacy students is dyslexia. How can we help someone with this problem? The provincial government doesn't give us extra money for adaptive technology or testing. We can't apply for PGI funds because we are not a registered charity.”
- ✚ **Reinforcement between Classes:** “A problem with individuals who have intellectual or cognitive disabilities is that they have very little ability to motivate themselves outside of their class time. They come to class, do their work and very few really take these skills into their lives personally or professionally. Having more contact with people who run the group homes and reinforcement between classes would be valuable.”
- ✚ **Teaching Approaches:** “We need a blend of teaching approaches so that some learners are provided with more generic services and others with services based on their specific disabilities or languages.”
- ✚ **Disability Organization involvement with Literacy Services:** “Involve the disability organizations in the process of trying to improve literacy services for

persons with disabilities. Look at the special needs of all types of disabilities and how these disabilities are unique and therefore, may need specialized programs. When looking at improving literacy program access for persons with disabilities, do so for all persons in the province in both rural and urban settings”

- ✚ **Employment Relationship with Adult Literacy:** “DO NOT attach any of the improvements in access to literacy programs to obtaining employment as a required end result.”
- ✚ **Literacy Program Organization:** “Different levels of literacy are not clearly connected meaning clients have to relocate and establish new support networks.”
- ✚ **Systemic Barriers:** “Working to remove systemic barriers such as funding limitations, rules that are black and white and don’t accommodate specific needs e.g. client being required to fit into system or policy requirement and because of diverse needs is unable to meet the requirement and therefore loses the opportunity.”

9. Conclusions and Recommendations

Within the context of the following conclusions and recommendations, consideration must be given to involving adult students with disabilities in all or some of these initiatives. A creative way must be found to tap into the enthusiastic and committed student group about whom this study has been written. There were a number of individuals who participated in the focus group for learners who could be candidates for involvement in ongoing work.

1. Instructor and Tutor Training for Working with Persons with Disabilities

While many instructors and tutors are qualified teachers and knowledgeable about teaching literacy skills to their students, there is not a requirement for them to be knowledgeable or trained to work effectively with persons with special needs and disabilities. This presents a significant barrier for these students and is a source of frustration for instructors and tutors. In part, the turnover in staff is due to their inability to working effectively with their disabled students due to lack of training and knowledge. A number of recommendations to assist in rectifying this issue are presented below:

- ✚ Nearly ten years ago, through funding from the Department of Education in Nova Scotia, the National Literacy Secretariat and HRDC, a number of literacy initiatives targeted to persons with disabilities were initiated. This included development of a guide for literacy tutors and instructors about working with persons with disabilities. The guide, entitled Accessing Learning for Adults with Disabilities, is still available but does not appear to be widely distributed nor do the learning networks appear to know of its existence. This tool could be an immediate start to an education program for tutors and instructors to assist them in their daily work.

- ✚ Increased dialogue between literacy and disability organizations could facilitate knowledge and skills training in working with adult students with disabilities. Disability organizations have a wealth of information and knowledge which could be organized into 'lunch and learn' sessions, conference or customized workshops, a tips and techniques newsletter, or added onto the TEAM Work or other website. This might best be initiated by a joint sub-committee of TEAM Work Cooperative shareholders and the HRM Literacy Association.
- ✚ In the longer term, instructors and tutors working with students with disabilities should have appropriate training and qualifications to meet the challenge of working effectively with this student group.

St. Clair College in Windsor, Ontario has included a literacy component in the Developmental Services Worker program to assist graduates in supporting learners with developmental disabilities. The College also intends to consider the feasibility of offering a general orientation to literacy training courses through their continuing education program.²³

Similarly, relevant program offerings through the Nova Scotia Community College or other educational institutions should be explored to provide a formal and consistent approach to training programs for literacy tutors and instructors working with adult students with disabilities.

2. Funding for Literacy Programs for Adult Students with Disabilities

Anecdotal evidence suggests that 30% to 50% of students in adult literacy programs have either learning disabilities or AD/HD. In Section 4 of this report, we indicate that 77% of persons with learning disabilities function at the lowest two literacy levels, suggesting that literacy programs may well have a high percentage of students with learning disabilities.

The funding approach and funding levels for adult literacy, particularly at Levels 1 and 2 are inadequate to allow literacy programs to address the many issues related to literacy learning for persons with disabilities. As previously indicated, these organizations work with 65% of the adult literacy student population and receive only 43% of the applicable funding.

The Department of Education program funding supports the specific programs developed and taught by the Brain Injury Association and the Society for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing to meet the needs of these students. Using these programs as models, an appropriate funding model is required to -

- ✚ Either enhance existing programs or develop literacy programs which meet the needs of other disability groups;

²³ Networking with Organizations Serving Persons with Special Needs – A Literacy Link South Central Community Development Project, Amy Tooke Lacey, July 2002 – page 15

- ✚ Deliver and sustain these literacy training programs on a long term basis; and
- ✚ Recruit qualified instructors and / or ensure appropriate training is made available.

3. Funding for Individual Adult Students with Disabilities

Current funding for adult literacy is based on a program funding model. Little individual funding is available for adult students with or without disabilities as discussed in [Section 7](#) earlier in this report. Findings in Section 6 of this report indicate that a variety of support needs are not being met for students with disabilities and that health and medical issues are a significant barrier to their learning.

In British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, the case has been made for a move from program funding to individual funding primarily for social service programs. A recent report about individualized funding in British Columbia describes the issues with program-based funding in the following manner –

“Service delivery generally falls under a block funded or managed care style, wherein the state fund-holder funds the service provider agencies, and they then deliver services or programs to the individual. Block funded services are set up for a predetermined general need and not to meet the needs of a specific individual...it is the service provider, rather than the individual or family, who defines what those needs are.”²⁴

Where the current program-based funding for adult literacy provides students generally with an opportunity to upgrade their literacy skills, a person with special needs is unsupported in this model. Furthermore, the special needs are not education-related for this student population but rather health-related. And the special needs tend to be quite individualized.

An individualized funding approach is necessary to provide the supports for adult students with disabilities, including transportation, assistive technology and psycho-educational testing. These costs however, are at best only partially education related. Since the cause is health related, costs could be shared by the Departments of Health and Community Services.

Moving from a program-based funding model to an individualized model is a big leap but one which warrants consideration and examination to allow this student group to progress in upgrading its literacy skills. This is an initiative which should be championed by a partnership of literacy and disability organizations, perhaps with TEAM Work and the HRM Literacy Association at the helm.

²⁴ ‘Changing the Rules of the Game’ Individualized Funding in B.C.: Implications for Families and Social Workers; Suzanne Salter, August 2002 – page 11

4. Private /Public Sector Partnership – developing employment opportunities for literacy students with disabilities

More than 70% of new jobs in Nova Scotia require some form of post secondary education yet 24% of adults in the population at large and 44% of persons with disabilities do not have a high school diploma. It is well understood that Nova Scotia is experiencing a severe skills shortage and this will continue well into the future unless addressed quickly.

An example of a private / public sector partnership developed to address the skills shortage in the construction industry resulted in the creation of the Dexter Institute, a partnership between the Nova Scotia Community College and Dexter Construction. This two-year program is designed to develop students for the construction industry as heavy equipment operators.

A tri-partite partnership between business, government, and the not-for-profit sector (disability and literacy organizations) should be struck. The mandate of the partnership would be to explore and develop programs to assist literacy students with disabilities make the transition to a work environment and to address issues of workplace literacy.

Linkages with other similar projects and programs could provide a jump start to this partnership.

- ✚ TEAM Work is currently engaged in developing a Business Leadership Network to encourage business leaders to employ persons with disabilities. Participants in the partnership could be drawn from the Business Leadership Network.
- ✚ The HRM Literacy Association is a grassroots organization dedicated to increasing public awareness of literacy issues. It is committed to bringing the private sector to its table to address issues of literacy in the workplace.
- ✚ NovaKnowledge, a not-for-profit organization whose membership consists of representatives from industry, education and government is focused on developing a flourishing, sustainable knowledge economy in Nova Scotia. The Call to Action, a large scale province-wide project currently underway is addressing the issue of Lifelong Learning in the Workplace as one of its priorities.

Projects the partnership should initiate include -

- ✚ Identifying and implementing some ‘quick hits’ which would remove some of the systemic barriers to employment for literacy students with disabilities;
- ✚ Designing incentives for employers (including not-for-profit organizations) to provide work opportunities for literacy students with disabilities with a commitment to support continuation of the learning process;

- ✚ Creating a program to recognize organizations who provide leadership and champion the 'Literacy for Employability' agenda; and
- ✚ Designing recognition and incentives for literacy students who achieve their goals.

5. School to Work Transition – addressing the issues of high school graduates with low literacy skills

In Section 7 under Findings, this report discusses the issue of students graduating from high school with a diploma but their literacy skills are substantially below the grade 12 reading skill level. One can assume that the employability potential for these students is poor and, because they have a diploma, they are not eligible to participate in most literacy programs. One can also make the assumption that many of these students have disabilities.

Further understanding of this issue is required before definitive recommendations can be made. A project should be struck which examines these issues more closely and explores the potential of building on existing school to work, high school to post secondary and school to apprenticeship transition programs to address the specific needs of this student population.

6. Planning and Coordination of Literacy Needs for Persons with Disabilities

An organization must be responsible for moving forward with the agenda for adult literacy for persons with disabilities. Organizations which should be considered include the Disabled Persons Commission, TEAM Work Cooperative, and the Department of Education.

At one time, the Department of Education had created a position to coordinate literacy needs for persons with disabilities. This position was intended to provide advocacy, coordination and organization for the needs of this group. The position existed for only a short time and appears to have been eliminated several years ago. Someone who has 'the pulse' of this community and the authority to influence program change would be an asset to moving the issues forward.

A planning and coordinator's position should initially be funded on a project basis to develop an action plan to address the issues related to literacy for persons with disabilities. Issues which an action plan should address include both strategic and tactical issues, most of which have been described above.

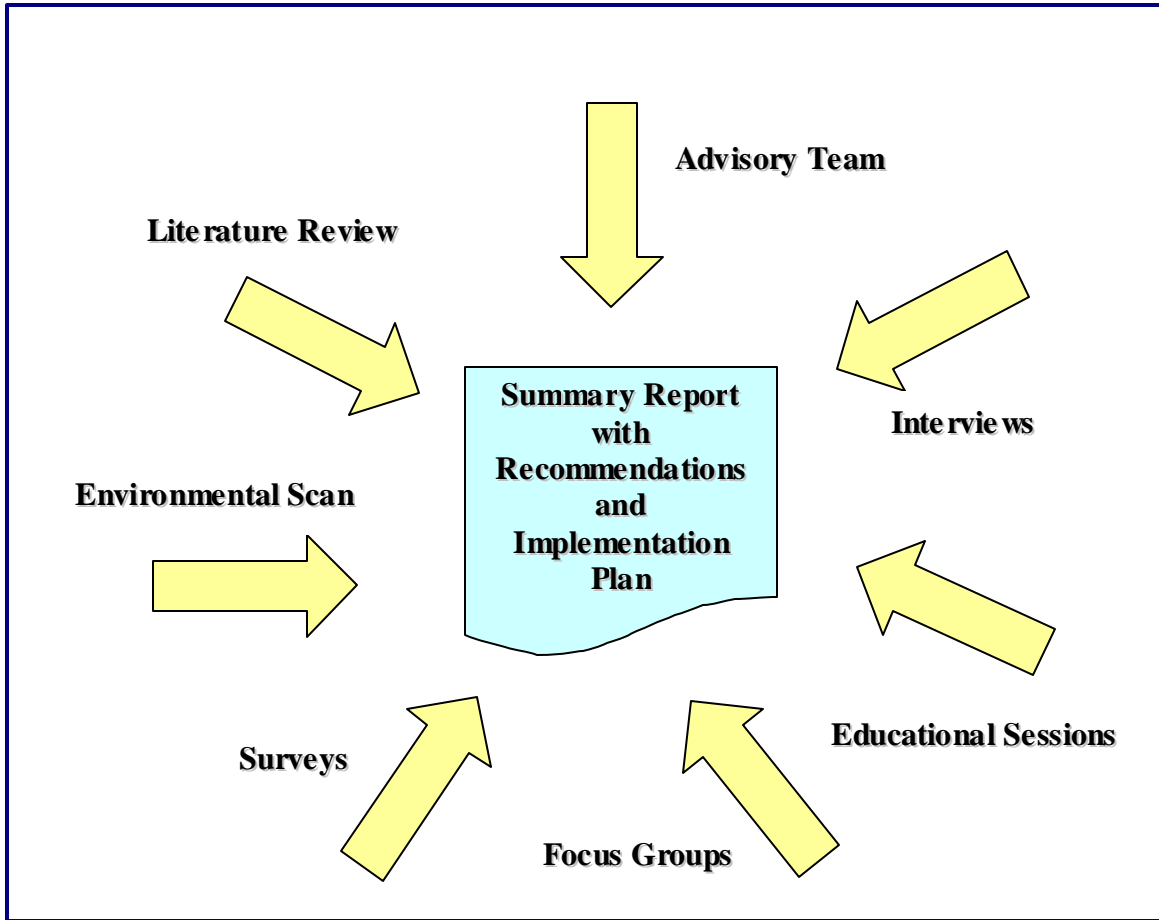
Longer term, this position should be permanently funded to implement the plan and to provide the coordination and perform the advocacy work that will be necessary to improve literacy and consequent employment levels for persons with disabilities in HRM.

10. Appendices

10.1. In Unison / A New Approach to Disability Issues Table



10.2. Project Methodology



10.3. Definitions of Literacy

The Literacy Preparation Project for Adults with Developmental Disabilities: Training Manual

- The ability to read and write, commensurate with capability, as well as personal and social needs

Literacy Strategic Plan for the Northwest Territories

- Literacy is an individual's ability to listen, speak, read, write, view, represent, compute and solve problems in one or more of the NWT official languages at levels of proficiency necessary to function in the family, the community and on the job

The Roeher Institute's "Literacy, Disability and Communication

- To be literate is to have status, respect and accommodation from others; to have skills in communication (verbal, written, sign, gestures, or other language); and to have access to the information and technologies that make possible self-determined participation in the communication processes of one's communities and broader society

10.4. HRM Labour Force Activity Limitations

Population aged 15 years and older

| LABOUR FORCE ACTIVITY | GENERAL POPULATION | PERSONS WITH AL OR LTD | PERSONS WITHOUT AL OR LTD |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| Total | 278,825 | 36,920 | 241,910 |
| Labour Force | 187,715 | 10,560 | 177,155 |
| ✚ Employed | 171,380 | 9,110 | 162,280 |
| ✚ Unemployed | 16,330 | 1,450 | 14,880 |
| Not in the Labour Force | 91,105 | 26,365 | 64,745 |
| | | | |
| Participation Rate | 67% | 29% | 73% |
| Employment / Population Ratio | 61% | 25% | 67% |
| Unemployment Rate | 9% | 14% | 8% |

10.5. Six Key Elements Critical to the Success of Skills Nova Scotia

- ✚ Full Partnership – among government, business, labour, educational institutions, communities, community-based organizations and individuals to optimize strategic investments in labour market development.
- ✚ Strategic Coordination – of key departments and agencies to create a collaborative decision-making forum.
- ✚ Capacity Building – in existing education and training systems requires a more flexible and responsive approach to skill development and the delivery mechanisms.
- ✚ Information – must be timely and accurate to allow for knowledge sharing and relevant and responsive labour market policies, programs and services.
- ✚ Accountability – through the assignment of clear objectives and expected levels of performance.
- ✚ Inclusion – of every Nova Scotian by ensuring access to opportunities allowing them to become actively involved in the labour market.

10.6. Certification Options

Flexible Learning and Education Centres (FLECs)

FLECs is a program offered through the Halifax Regional School Board. It offers a variety of day, evening and distance education high school credits as well as PreGED and GED preparation courses. Courses taken through the FLECs program can be applied to any of the 3 credentials.

Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults

With the creation of NSSAL, the province provides adult learners the opportunity to acquire a new credential, the Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma for Adults which recognizes learning from both public school and adult learning programs, as well as that obtained through prior learning.

General Education Development (GED)

The province continues to administer the GED test. The GED is an international high school equivalency testing program for adults. It consists of a series of five tests in the following areas:

- Language Arts Reading
- Language Arts Writing
- Mathematics
- Social Studies
- Science

The GED tests are designed to measure the skills that correspond to those of recent high school graduates. They involve the ability to understand and apply information; to evaluate, analyze, and draw conclusions; and to express ideas and opinions in writing. Adults who pass the five tests receive a Nova Scotia High School Equivalency Certificate.

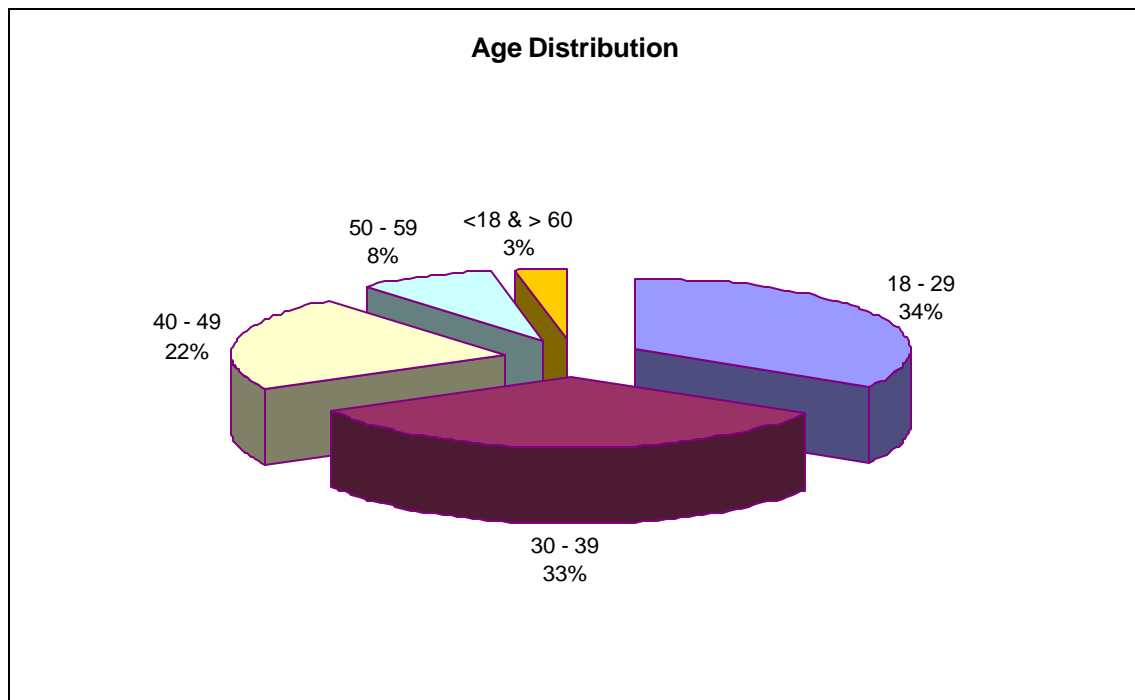
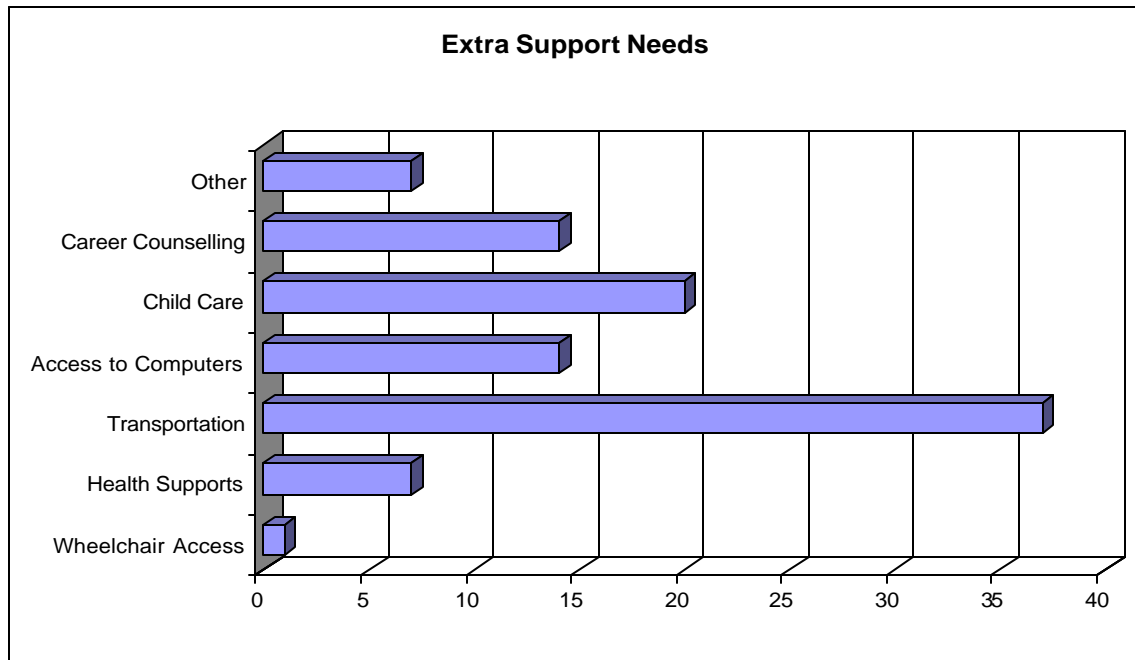
Many adults who did not graduate from high school have acquired skills through work, community, family and study experiences, at or above a secondary school level. The GED allows these adults to demonstrate academic abilities that are **equivalent** to those of high school graduates. The content of the test items measures skills relevant to adult experiences.

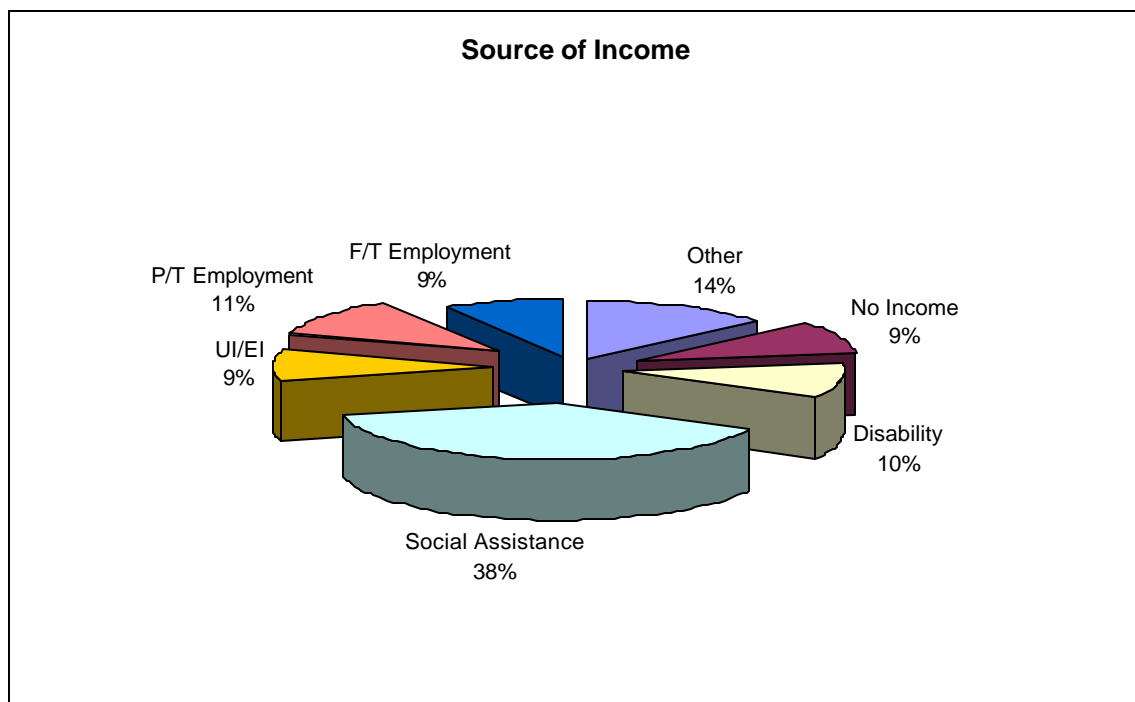
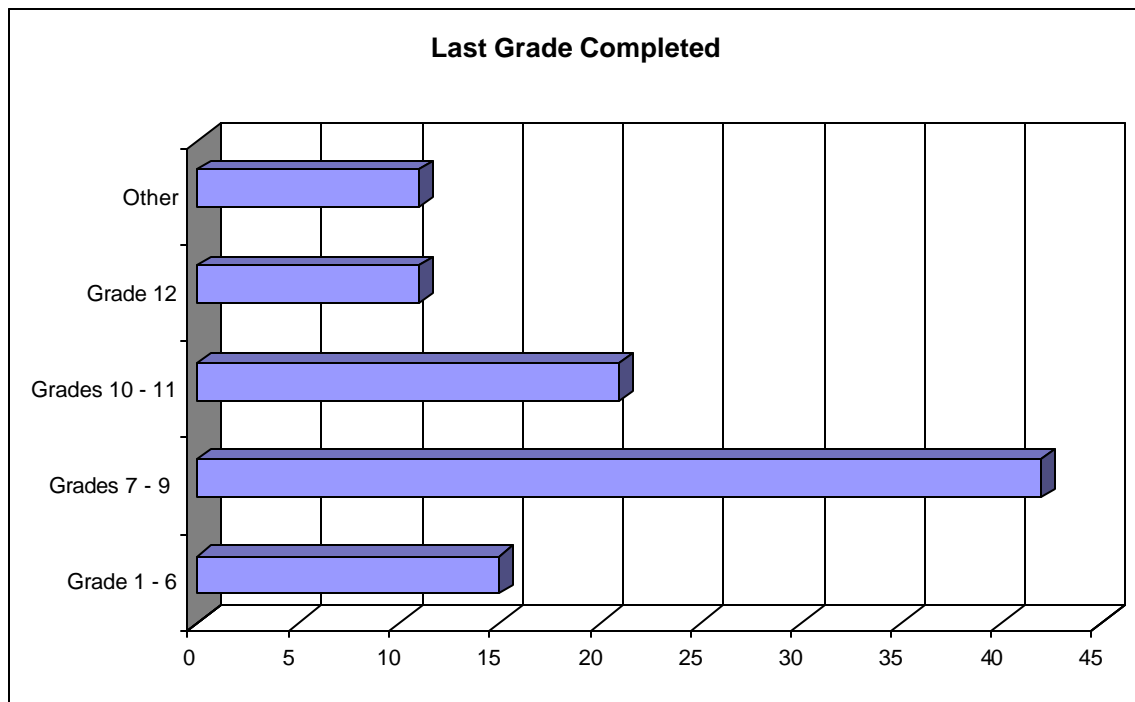
Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma

The Nova Scotia High School Graduation Diploma is the same diploma granted to those who graduate from any Nova Scotia high school. It requires successful completion of 18 credits and can be taken either through the high school daytime program on a full time basis or on a part time basis through night school credits.

10.7. CLI Data Charts

Note: All charts are described in percentages





10.8 List of Acronyms

| ACRONYM | COMPLETE TERM |
|---------|--|
| AD/HD | Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder |
| AL | Activity Limitations |
| CAP | Community Access Program |
| CLI | Community Learning Initiative |
| EI | Employment Insurance |
| GED | General Education Development |
| HRC@P | Halifax Regional Community Access Program |
| HRDC | Human Resources Development Canada |
| HRM | Halifax Regional Municipality |
| IALS | International Adult Literacy Survey |
| IPP | Individual Program Plan |
| IT | Information Technology |
| LD | Learning Disability |
| LMDA | Labour Market Development Agreement |
| LTD | Long Term Disability |
| NALD | National Adult Literacy Database |
| NSSAL | Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development |
| PGI | Peter Gzowski Invitational Golf Tournament |
| TWC | TEAM Work Cooperative |