

UPGRADING NEEDS ASSESSMENT
for Yarmouth County

by

The South West Shore
Development Authority

in partnership with

The National Literacy Secretariat

and

The Nova Scotia Department of Education

Overview

The South West Shore Development Authority conducted this upgrading needs assessment throughout Yarmouth County to determine adult learning interests and requirements. It was funded by the National Literacy Secretariat, a division of Human Resources Development Canada. Also involved was the Nova Scotia Department of Education which provided valuable expertise.

The study took place from November, 1996 through September, 1997. It included adults, defined as people 16 years and over, from all over Yarmouth County. There were 772 people surveyed out of a possible 27,310. The survey was conducted by a combination of telephone interviews, interviews with people on the street or in coffee shops, and questionnaires distributed by helping agencies, training institutions, government offices, and businesses. A researcher or counselor was always available to help participants with low level skills fill out the questionnaire. A variety of topics were included in order to determine training needs including specific areas of interest, current levels of literacy, reasons for needing to upgrade, the distance people are willing to travel, the times of the year which are most convenient for learning, and the current barriers to upgrading.

The survey was designed with some consideration to the methods being used for studies in other areas particularly Shelburne County so that an easier comparison of data could be made. The survey form, for example, was largely the same and was agreed to by both parties in advance. Therefore some regional as well as countywide conclusions can be drawn by using the two studies together.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found at the back of this report. Most of the questions required that the participants simply check the appropriate response. It was written this way for ease of completion and clarity. However, there was room for comments. Typical remarks have been included in shaded text boxes throughout this document.

Findings of Needs Assessment Survey

Communities surveyed

Most communities in Yarmouth County were represented in this survey. In total there were 51 listed. In order to maintain a good distribution of input across the county, an effort was made to have response rates proportionate to the population of each of the municipal units. Although this goal was not totally achieved (the Town of Yarmouth has a slightly larger relative percentage than the Municipality of Yarmouth), there is an acceptable balance.

Age Groups Surveyed

The survey included people from all ages over 15. The rate of participation by age group is described in the following table.

Age Groups Surveyed

Age Group	Percentage Surveyed
Age 15 to 24	19% (148 of 772)
Age 25 to 34	35% (269 of 772)
Age 35 to 44	33% (254 of 772)
Age 45 to 54	11% (82 of 772)
Age 54 to 64	2% (16 of 772)
65 and older	0.3% (3 of 772)

The majority of respondents (68 percent) were between the ages of 25 and 44. Nineteen percent were young people aged 15 to 24. Only 13 percent were between 45 and 64. Response by seniors was almost nil.

This lack of representation of seniors was partially due to a sense on their part that the study was not relevant to their needs, a greater suspicion of anyone interviewing them and, clearly, a lack of interest in upgrading.

"I wish there was something good for young people who want to upgrade in Yarmouth County."

Interest In Upgrading for Each Age Group

All respondents were asked if they would like to upgrade their skills. The following table shows the answers by age group:

Interest by Age Group

Age Group	Yes	Uncertain	No
15 to 24	79% (117 of 148)	11% (17 of 148)	9% (14 of 148)
25 to 34	67% (191 of 269)	18% (48 of 269)	11% (30 of 269)
35 to 44	68% (169 of 253)	18% (46 of 253)	15% (38 of 253)
45 to 54	80% (66 of 82)	10% (8 of 82)	10% (8 of 82)
54 to 64	75% (12 of 16)	25% (4 of 16)	0% (0 of 16)
65 and older	0% (0 of 4)	0% (0 of 4)	100% (4 of 4)

Young people aged 15 to 24 and those between 45 and 54 were the most interested in upgrading. They responded affirmatively at the level of 79 and 80 percent respectively. Seventy-five percent of the age bracket 55 to 64 wanted to upgrade.

Those aged 25 to 34 and 35 to 45 were also very interested in upgrading. The percentage of interested respondents was 67 and 68 percent. Only the seniors were uninterested.

"Everyone could be helped by more education. Even if you can't see it at the time it helps you think about new things."

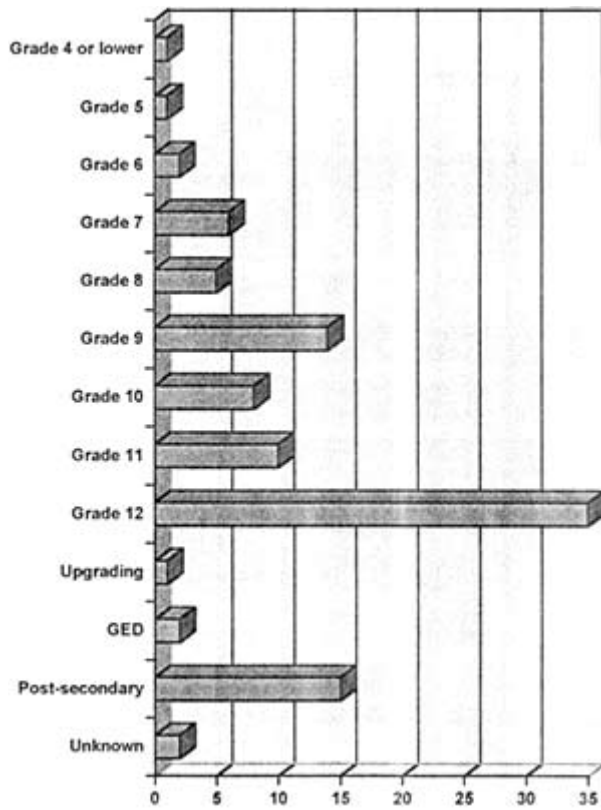
Level of Education of Those Surveyed

Forty-five percent (348 of 772) of the people surveyed had not graduated from high school. One percent (8 of 772) upgraded; two percent (8 of 772) got their GED; and fifteen percent (117 of 772) had post-secondary education.

"The more education a person gets the better chances of getting a job."

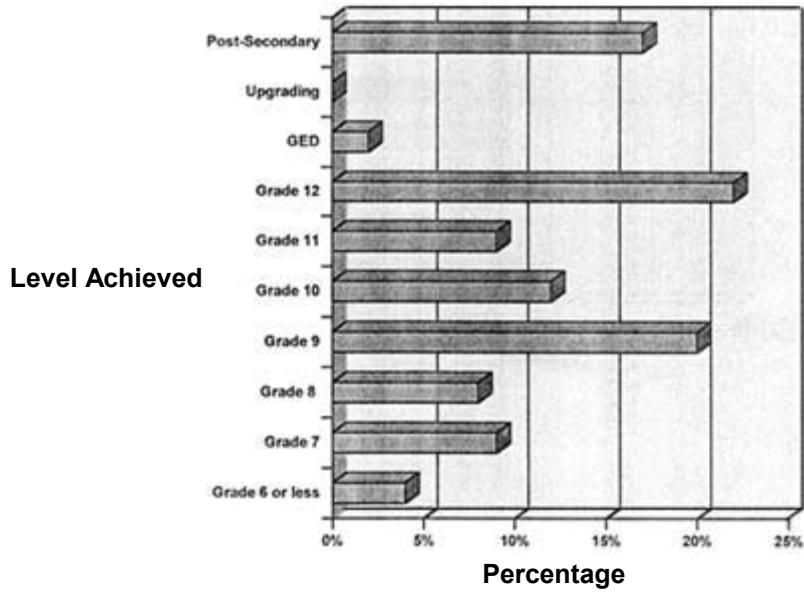
The graph on the **following page** shows the breakdown of overall educational levels in more detail:

Overall Education Levels

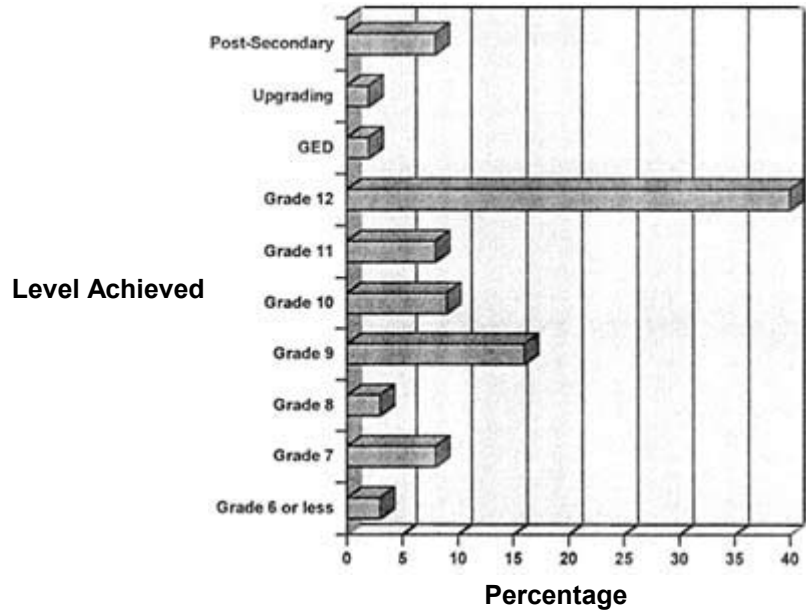


Educational levels of those surveyed by age group are charted on the following bar graphs:

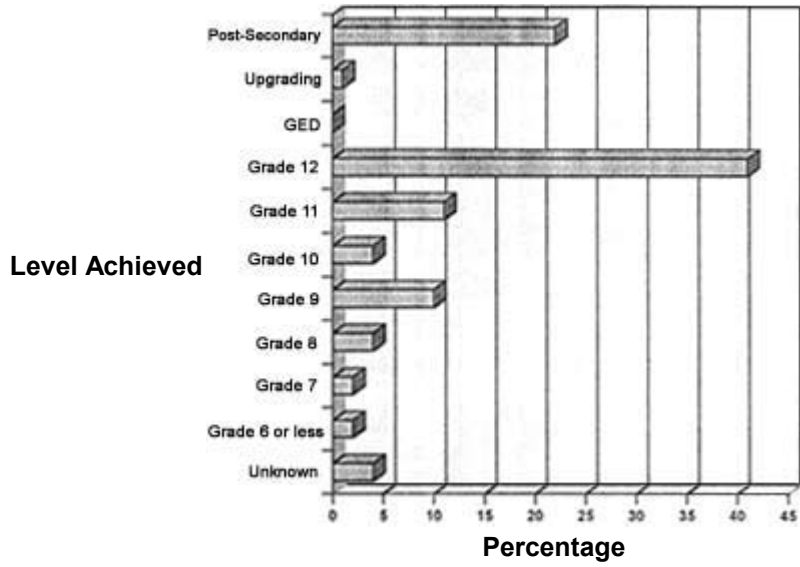
Age 15 to 24 – 137 Surveyed



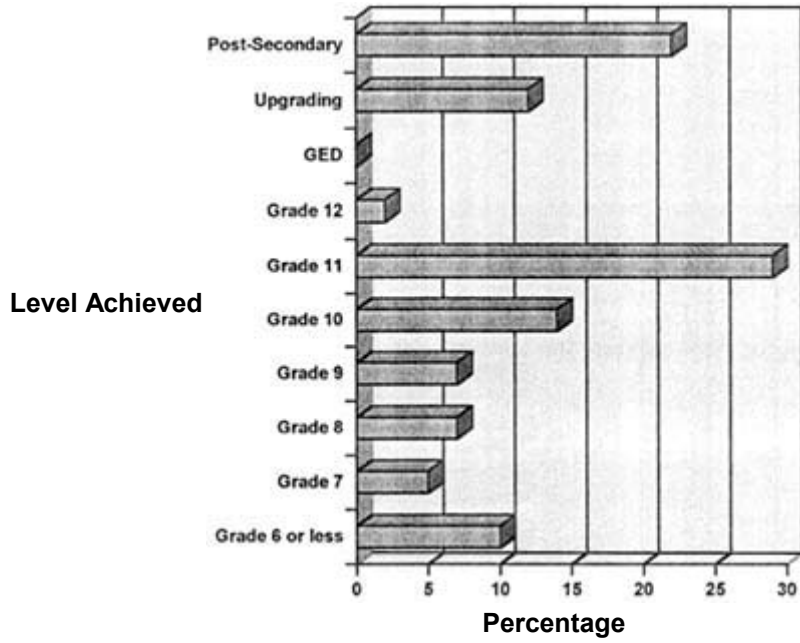
Age 25 to 34 – 263 Surveyed



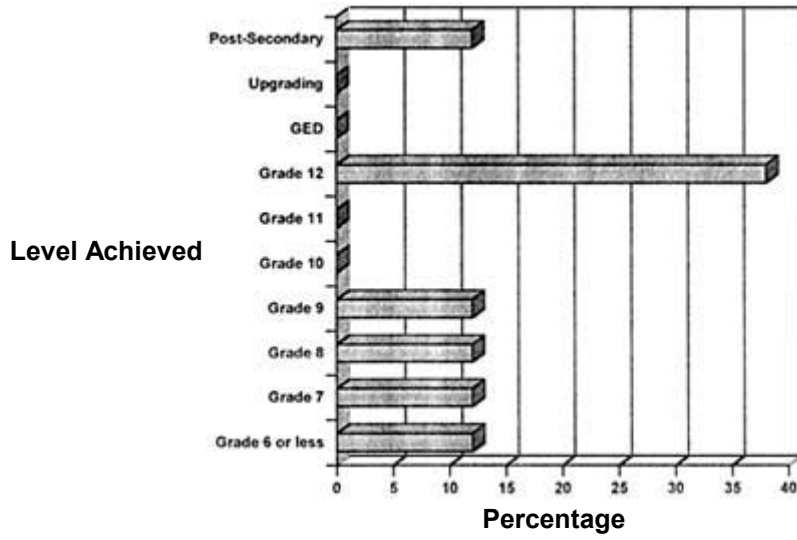
Age 35 to 44 – 254 Surveyed



Age 45 to 54 – 82 Surveyed



Age 55 to 64 – 16 Surveyed



There were only four people over 65 who responded. Two had a grade 10 and 2 had a grade 12. A graph has not been provided to demonstrated this education levels for this age group.

Areas Of Interest

Computer studies was the most popular choice by people of all educational backgrounds by far. The following table describes how many people in each age group wanted computer training.

Age Group	Percentage
15 to 24	53
25 to 34	67
35 to 44	67
45 to 54	71
54 to 64	50
65 and older	0

"I am in a program now. It's good, but I would really like to learn with computers. I know other people who are doing it in their classes."

The other areas of study listed on the survey form were math, oral, communications, writing, GED, problem solving, reading, science, social studies, pre-GED, and other. However, people were encouraged to write down their own thoughts on subjects which would interest them. The following were some of the ideas the participants suggested: bookkeeping, drama, spelling, art, English, French, accounting, psychology, carpentry, woodworking, and forestry management.

The next chart shows the percentages of people interested in various subjects listed on the survey form. Respondents were allowed to select more than one subject.

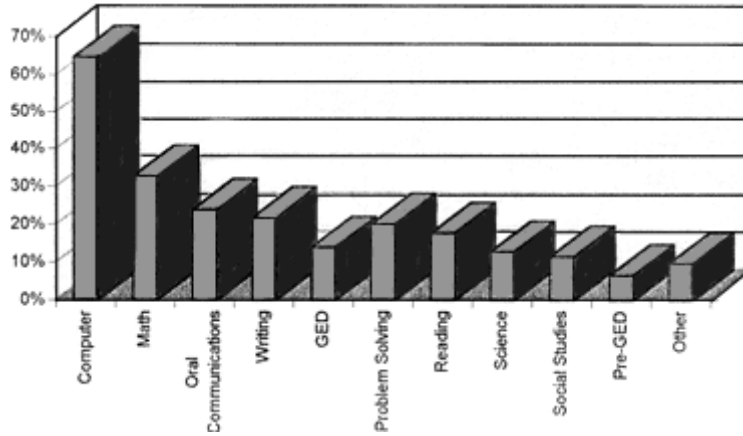
"Computer is really the only thing, I'm interested in. You have to know computer to do anything, even get the job in the first place. Besides its more fun to learn. There should be more courses."

Math was rated the highest after computer. Thirty percent of participants wanted to take math. Language related courses were also rated Oral communications, writing and reading came after math individually.

"Please don't leave out life-skills training. That's the most important. I got a lot out of my course."

Collectively, however, they outranked computer training. Problem solving was also considered important.

Areas of Interest



The remainder of the questions were answered only by those who agreed or were uncertain about upgrading. Six hundred seventy-eight people completed the entire survey. Ninety-four said they didn't want to upgrade and did not complete the entire survey.

Reasons for Upgrading

There were three possible reasons listed on the questionnaire for wanting to upgrade, respondents were asked to check whichever applied to them. Sixty-three percent (426 of 678) would like to upgrade their skills for personal use.

Most people checked one of the following two reasons as well: 54 percent (363 of 678) to be able to get a job or a better job, and 40 percent (268 of 678) to help their children. The age groups most interested in upgrading to be better prepared for work were 15 or 24 and 45 to 54 years. The age group most interested

"I think upgrading would help more people get jobs or even just improve themselves."

"It is important for government to realize that there are a lot of people out there ages 40 to 70 who must work for a living who must be re-trained or updated in their skills to be able to support themselves."

"Now that I'm taking courses, I feel better about myself."

in upgrading to help their children was 25 to 34 years followed closely by 35 to 45 years. Another reason mentioned by respondents was to increase self-esteem.

Those Wanting to Upgrade to Better Prepare for Work

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
15 to 24	70% (94 of 134)
25 to 34	47% (112 of 239)
35 to 44	47% (100 of 215)
45 to 54	69% (51 of 74)
54 to 64	38% (6 of 16)
65 and older	0% (0 of 0)

Those Wanting to Upgrade for Their Children

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
15 to 24	15% (20 of 134)
25 to 34	53% (126 of 239)
35 to 44	49% (106 of 215)
45 to 54	16% (12 of 74)
54 to 64	3% (4 of 16)
65 and older	0% (0 of 0)

Setting Preferred for Upgrading

Small groups was the preferred format for training at 59 percent of the total 678 respondents. Classroom style was the next most popular but at a considerable decrease from small groups. Twenty-seven percent (180 of 678) said they liked the classroom setting best, and 14 percent (94 of 678) preferred individual tutoring. Some were not clear on which they preferred and selected more than one. Only 1.2 percent (9 of 678) preferred correspondence courses, and 1 percent (7 of 678) had no preference at all.

"I need the group. The only support I have is others in the class. Tutoring wouldn't give me that."

"I am in a program now. It's women only. I am very happy with this program. I hope it can last a long time."

"As a married man, I have found it very hard to get into a program in Yarmouth."

Additional Services to Support Upgrading

Of the people surveyed, 56 percent (382 of 678) said that it would be most beneficial for the cost of materials to be covered, 28 percent (193 of 678) said that assistance with child care would be a help, 26 percent (173 of 678) said that they would need transportation costs to be reduced, and 21 percent (142 of 678) said that none of the above expenses were an issue for them. Other services that were suggested by respondents were for tuition fees and training allowances to be paid.

"I like classes without men. Women need women only classes. It's more comfortable to learn."

"If the right course or opportunity came around, nothing would be enough of a barrier to stop me from attending."

"I don't care what form the class takes, but I get easily distracted and don't want to hear other classes going on at the same time."

"I'm in a class now with only women. It's nice. I feel more comfortable. The other women are very supportive."

Convenient Months

The following chart indicates the preferred months for participating in upgrading courses. Those surveyed often selected more than one month.

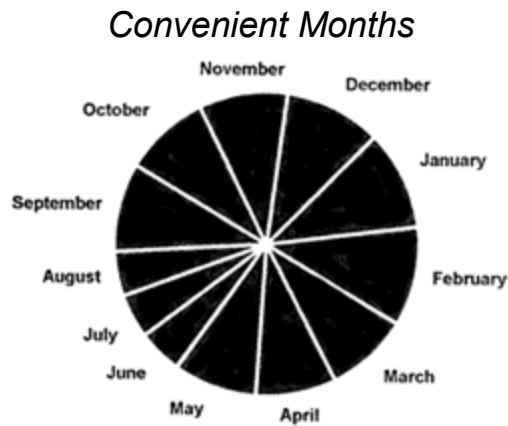
"I fish all year except for the winter. That's the only time I could take a course, but I'd really like to upgrade. I only have a grade nine — I read a lot though."

Month	Percentage
January	72
February	71
March	60
April	59
May	60
June	32
July	32
August	32
September	64
November	64
October	64
December	69

The most popular months were January and February.

December was also a good month. The majority of people surveyed indicated that any time from September through to May was convenient for them. Few people wanted to take a course in the summer.

The following pie chart indicates the relative differences in popular months:



Preferred Time During the Week for Upgrading

Weekdays, followed by evenings, were the most popular choice to attend courses. Fifty-six percent (382 of 678) preferred weekdays, forty percent (271 of 678) preferred evenings, and nine percent (63 of 678) preferred weekends. Many people chose more than one time and four percent (30 of 678) indicated that anytime was acceptable.

"I fish all year except for the winter. That's the only time I could take a course, but I'd really like to upgrade. I only have a grade nine — I read a lot though."

Preferred Time Frequency

This chart shows the percentages of the people interested in each of these time frequency options. Not all people surveyed answered this question. A few people indicated that they had no preference.

"I fish all year except for the winter. That's the only time I could take a course, but I'd really like to upgrade. I only have a grade nine — I read a lot though."

Frequency

AMOUNT OF TIME	PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE
5 days a week	50% (309 of 609)
2 days a week	32% (195 of 609)
1 day a week	12% (72 of 609)
4 hours a week	2% (12 of 609)
2 hours a week	2% (12 of 609)
1 hour a week	1% (8 of 609)

Distance Willing to Travel

The participants were asked if they would travel within their community only or to surrounding communities. The results are as follows:

Those Wanting to Upgrade for Their Children

AREAS	PERCENTAGE
Within my community only	50% (316 of 627)
Surrounding communities	46% (289 of 627)
Anywhere	1.3% (8 of 627)
Within 40 km	0.2% (1 of 627)
Within 25 miles	0.3% (2 of 627)
With Yarmouth County	0.6% (3 of 627)
Within Yarmouth and Shelburne counties	0.6% (3 of 627)
Cannot travel at all	0.2% (1 of 627)

The majority of people surveyed, 50 percent (316 of 627), preferred to upgrade within their community only. However, a close 46 percent (289 of 627) said that they would be willing to travel to surrounding communities. Respondents from the municipalities were more likely to be willing to travel than those from the Town of Yarmouth. Not all people surveyed answered this question.

"I'm already traveling 90 kilometers per day to upgrade."

Conclusion

Most people who are in the normal work force age range (16 to 65) have an interest in upgrading their skills. Although there is a slight dip in interest for people aged 25 to 44, comments made by these participants indicate that the reason for this may be related to the difficulties of studying and raising a family. Both financial and time considerations were mentioned.

There is a very great need to continue upgrading programs throughout the county. Forty-five percent of participants in the study had not completed a grade 12. Only three percent had done upgrading, either GED or other formats. Comments by participants on the materials they read or problems they face indicate that reading/writing levels are often low.

Across all age groups (16-65), and all educational backgrounds, computer studies were overwhelmingly perceived to be the most pressing need.

Perhaps a greater effort should be made to use the computer as a tool for teaching all forms of upgrading. Participants may see the training as more relevant and more interesting. The integration of technology into the learning process may ultimately encourage more people to upgrade their reading and writing skills.

The need for skill development in areas relating to language and math were also listed many times by respondents. Clearly, the need for upgrading courses in these more traditional areas remains high. The greatest motivation participants had for increasing skill levels seems to be to get a job, to get a better job, or to keep the job they have. Not surprisingly the highest percentage in this category were aged 15 to 25, but it was an important priority for all age groups under 65. Secondly, people wanted to increase skills to help their children. Improving self-esteem was also mentioned as valuable.

The most important support for upgrading is to have the cost of materials covered, followed by child care cost, and finally transportation costs.

Winter is the best season to hold courses in Yarmouth County, and weekdays are the best time.

An unsolicited comment which was repeated several times related to a desire on the part of women to have women-only classes. The participants seemed to feel such classes would make learning more comfortable for them. These women had taken upgrading courses for women and had found them very satisfactory.

The majority of people in the Municipality of Argyle and the Municipality of Yarmouth were willing to travel to surrounding communities to take upgrading. Within the Town to Yarmouth there was less interest in traveling. Likely this is simply a recognition that such services will be available in the town, but people who live in small villages may need to go to larger centers. Be that as it may, the desire to travel long distances (over 40 kilometers) was extremely low. Perhaps more upgrading courses should be planned for the extremities of Yarmouth County.

Yarmouth County Learning Network Upgrading Needs Assessment

The Yarmouth County Learning Network is very active in promoting and facilitating the upgrading needs of people in Yarmouth County. By completing this questionnaire, you are helping the network design programs that are relevant to the needs of the people in your community.

A. In what community do you reside?

B. Please indicate your age group by CIRCLING the number beside the 'correct answer'.

- | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. 15 to 24 years | 3. 35 to 44 years | 5. 55 to 64 years |
| 2. 25 to 34 years | 4. 45 to 54 years | 6. 65 and over |

C. Please give your last grade completed and when?

D. Please tell us what type of things you read and how often?

E. Please tell what type of things you write and how often?

F. Would you like to improve your skills in any of the areas listed below? Please check all that apply.

- | | | |
|-------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Reading ____ | Math ____ | GED ____ |
| Writing ____ | Pre-GED ____ | Problem Solving ____ |
| Oral Communication ____ | Computer ____ | Science ____ |
| Social Studies ____ | Other _____ | |

G.

H. I am interested in upgrading my skills. (Please circle the number beside the best response.)

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| 1. Strongly agree | 3. Uncertain | 5. Strongly disagree |
| 2. Agree | 4. Disagree | |

If You Answered Disagree Or Strongly Disagree to Question G You Do Not Have to Complete The Rest of This Survey. Thank You For Your Time!!! Otherwise, Please Continue...

H. Please complete the following sentence by CIRCLING the number beside the appropriate answer(s). I would like to upgrade my skills...

1. for my personal use. 2. to help my children. 3. to be able to get a job.

I. Which would you prefer?

Small groups ____ Individual tutoring ____ Classroom setting ____
Other _____

J. What additional services would make it easier for you to attend?

Child care ____ Transportation ____ Cost of Materials covered ____ None apply ____
Other _____

K. What months are most convenient for you to attend?

January ____ April ____ July ____ October ____
February ____ May ____ August ____ November ____
March ____ June ____ September ____ December ____

L. When could you attend?

Weekdays _____ Weekends _____ Evenings _____

M. How often?

5 days a week ____ Once a week ____ 2 hours a week ____
Twice a week ____ 4 hours a week ____ 1 hour a week ____
Other _____

N. How far would you be willing to travel?

Within my community only ____ Surrounding communities ____
Other _____

O. Additional comments

THANK YOU for your time!!!