

Valuing Adult Literacy



Collaboration for Progress

*A plan for community-based literacy
in Nova Scotia*

November 2003

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1 Executive Summary

Literacy is a major issue of our times. There are still more than 800 million people in the world who can't read.

Recent studies indicate that almost half of Canadians over 16 have low literacy skills. The data also show that low literacy skills are found in a large percentage of the adult population, not just in marginalized groups. In Nova Scotia, adult literacy rates tend to be lower than those in the rest of Canada are.

Through innovation, commitment, use of best practices, versatility and adaptability, community-based literacy networks across Nova Scotia have become leaders in the field of adult literacy. The networks have successfully unlocked opportunities and empowered thousands of people. Community-based literacy networks have made considerable progress in the use of unique methods. Through research, partnerships and continuous skill and knowledge development, they have facilitated fundamental learning.

At *Valuing Literacy*, the Literacy Nova Scotia Chairs and Coordinators Symposium on November 6th, 2003, literacy practitioners and board chairs or their designates, from all 27 provincial networks joined directors, management and staff of Literacy Nova Scotia in shaping a strategic plan for supporting community-based literacy in the province. The product is an action plan called *Collaboration for Progress*.

Community-based literacy networks in Nova Scotia face unique challenges in continuing to deliver quality adult literacy programs and services. The most important issue is access to stable funding. In response to the challenges ahead, community-based literacy networks and Literacy Nova Scotia have forged a plan of action based on three fundamental strategic directions.

A literacy symposium, Valuing Literacy, gave life to the community-based literacy networks' go forward plan, Collaboration for Progress,



Collaboratively, the networks and Literacy Nova Scotia will:

- develop and implement a targeted communications plan to promote and build awareness of the important and successful work of community-based literacy networks;
- define the funding requirements of community-based literacy and pursue stable funding; and
- expand partnerships to further strengthen community-based literacy and facilitate the delivery of adult literacy programs and services.

One of the main themes of the symposium was how to turn strategic decisions into action to benefit community-based literacy. The consensus of the symposium was that community-based literacy networks and Literacy Nova Scotia would work together within the framework of *Collaboration for Progress* to navigate the challenges ahead.

Community-based literacy networks' go forward plan comprises three strategic initiatives: communications, stable funding and partnerships.



2 Literacy: A defining issue

Data from International Adult Literacy Survey suggest that in the mid-1990s almost half the Canadian population over 16 did not have the literacy skills necessary to participate fully in the labour market. Low literacy skills are found in a large percentage of the adult population. Education strongly influences literacy, but is not the only factor. Having adequate literacy skills is directly related to opportunities, both social and economic.

In going forward, Canada must be innovative and adaptable. In a knowledge-based economy with a high level of individual competency required for success, literacy is an even greater priority. To ensure Canada's continued leadership and the on-going development of a prosperous, healthy, cohesive society, Canada must invest in people to ensure they have the basic skills they need to succeed.

Literacy practitioners and advocates across Canada aspire to provide literacy and learning for all. They stand together to work for public policy that makes literacy learning available to everyone. A recent report by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities stated that Canada has the infrastructure, resources and knowledge to significantly raise the level of literacy skills in the country. What is lacking is the political will to fully address the problem.

Literacy is the essential skill. It is the ability to use printed information to function in society, at work and in the family. It is the combination of thinking and social skills we need to analyze and use information to control our own lives, achieve our goals and develop our knowledge and potential.

Literacy Nova Scotia



3 Community-based Literacy

Collaboration for Progress is the result of a collective effort. It reflects the input from a daylong symposium, *Valuing Literacy*, of directors, management, staff, and partners of community-based literacy networks. The resulting plan for community-based literacy in Nova Scotia is a framework for collective action based on new approaches and a spirit of innovation.

3.1 Elements of Success

The development of *Collaboration for Progress* included examining areas of strategic importance. The plan focuses attention on where change and support are needed. Key ingredients for success are listed below:

(a) People - The power of community-based literacy is in the dedication, passion and commitment of the directors, staff, volunteers and partners. The networks invest in people, see potential in all program participants, and provide the tools for success.

(b) Services/Programs – The contributions of community-based literacy to individual empowerment and advancement are considerable. This is the result of a deep understanding of the challenges of providing learning opportunities to adults. Community-based literacy delivers quality programs and services in an environment that builds confidence, capacity and a love of learning.

(c) Partnerships – Collaboration is key to building a more literate society. Links among people and organizations with different areas of knowledge and responsibility are essential.

(d) Methods - Community-based literacy involves diverse participants, policy issues, and partners. Community-based literacy needs respect. It needs systems and processes that are efficient and effective and congruent with the values and ideals of the national literacy movement.

People, services, partnerships and methods are recognized as key elements of success by Nova Scotia community-based literacy networks.



3.2 The Way Ahead

Nova Scotia faces many challenges in a period of obvious social change. Community-based literacy organizations are striving to develop a more inclusive and functional Nova Scotia, but accept that the past is no longer a sure guide to the future.

Community-based literacy reflects the importance of capturing the imagination and energies of stakeholders. Together, we create new initiatives, forge strategic partnerships and shape innovative programs and services.

Community-based literacy in Nova Scotia faces varied and complex challenges in a period of obvious change.



4 Collaboration for Progress: The plan

4.1 Resourcefulness

Community-based literacy is the product of resourceful, innovative, philosophically and pedagogically sound regional and community organizations. These organizations are made up of dedicated people with distinctive skills, aspirations and capacities. Like their colleagues across the country, community-based literacy stakeholders believe that Canada will be a richer society when people facing literacy challenges have equal access to the programs, services and supports they need to integrate into community life.

Literacy is a major determinant of the nation's overall social and economic well-being.

4.2 Vision

Community-based literacy is based on our shared vision of the future. The vision is:

To provide literacy programs and supports in a country that acknowledges and supports literacy as a foundation for individual success and as a fundamental pillar of the nation's social and economic wellbeing.

4.3 Principles

To be true to the focus and philosophy of community-based literacy and the shared vision, we support the following core principles:

Ethical and accountable - The values and beliefs of community-based literacy organizations will be upheld.

Collaborative – Community-based literacy will work with the aspirations and expectations of partners and all levels of government.

Open and responsive - Ideas will be welcome, dialogue encouraged and leadership responsive to stakeholders, learners, volunteers, partners and community needs.

Community-based literacy networks embrace common principles in the delivery of programs and services.



Pro-active - The interests of stakeholders, learners, volunteers, partners and the community will be advanced and protected.

Sustainable – Consistent with the direction and emphasis of public policy, community-based literacy organizations will support goals, practices and techniques that facilitate access to resources and contribute to sustainability.

Innovative – New ideas will be embraced, research undertaken and best practices employed to provide clients and learners with the most innovative programs, teaching methods and learning opportunities.

Leadership – The needs of adults with literacy challenges will be best addressed through collaborative efforts.

4.4 Mission

Collaboration for Progress talks about the purpose of community-based literacy. The mission statement demonstrates a commitment to community-based literacy within the framework of the broader literacy movement:

To employ the energy, talent and resources of the community-based literacy networks to sustain and enhance adult literacy.

Community-based literacy builds on the strengths of networks and strives for recognition of their important work and the invaluable contribution they make to society.

4.5 Context

4.5.1 Community-based

In Atlantic Canada, adult literacy levels are lower than in the rest of the country. In response, the provincial government supported the establishment of a community-based structure of 27 independent literacy networks.

Adult literacy rates in Nova Scotia tend to be lower than those of the country as a whole.



4.5.2 Partnerships

Partnerships are of vital importance to the success of community-based literacy. Without alliances between government, the private sector, networks, schools, non-governmental organizations and Literacy Nova Scotia, promoting and supporting adult literacy and upgrading in the province would be very difficult.

There has been a significant downloading of responsibility for literacy from governments to not for profit organizations. Literacy organizations in Nova Scotia have taken on this responsibility and now it appears that they have been victims of their success. With responsibility must come the resources necessary to succeed. Governments and literacy organizations must form new and enduring partnerships that will ensure success for all parties.

4.5.3 Literacy Nova Scotia

Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS) evolved from a province-wide coalition established in the early 1990s. LNS provides a forum for provincial and regional organizations and individual members to work together to ensure every Nova Scotian has equal access to quality literacy education. LNS supports a movement of people and organizations involved in adult literacy, works to make governments and the public more aware of adult literacy issues and supports the adult student/learner voice in Nova Scotia.

LNS is the province's link to a national literacy organization, the Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL), that represents literacy coalitions, organizations and individuals from every province and territory. LNS also maintains a close working relationship with other national literacy organizations such as ABC Canada, Frontier College, Laubach Literacy of Canada, Fédération canadienne pour l'alphabétisation en français, and National Adult Literacy Database (NALD).

Literacy Nova Scotia provides a forum for literacy networks to work collaboratively and is a link to the national literacy movement.



4.5.4 Issues

Nova Scotia has been recognized as a province where best practices prevail in addressing adult literacy issues, but troubling challenges lie ahead. Public policy changes, particularly at the federal level, have left community-based literacy networks struggling to maintain the level and breadth of programs and services that thousands benefit from and expect. This situation has the potential to erode, if not destabilize, the entire community-based literacy system.

Federal policy changes have left Nova Scotia community-based literacy networks struggling.

4.6 Challenges

Community-based literacy faces the following challenges:

Awareness - Understanding the nature and scope of community-based literacy determines the importance attached to adult literacy by policy makers. Targeted internal and external communications and promotion will improve awareness of community-based literacy.

Resources – The availability and quality of programs and services is the centrepiece of all community-based literacy. Community-based literacy must ensure that programs and services are not compromised by lack of resources.

Networks and partnerships – Community-based literacy faces many issues. Group action is essential to maintain the quality, scope and effectiveness of community-based literacy. We must expand and refine provincial and national networks, partnerships and volunteer supports in the spirit of co-operative action and shared responsibility.

Action – The improvement of programs and services and creation of new initiatives largely depends on progressive decision-making. We must strengthen current practices to accommodate pro-active methods within community-based literacy networks.

Innovation - Innovation is key to the future of community-based literacy. In strengthening services, programs, practices and delivery methods and forging new initiatives,

In going forward, community-based literacy in Nova Scotia must address a number of challenges, including the requirement to secure stable funding.



community-based literacy networks must embrace change and foster adaptability and leadership.

4.7 Strategic Directions

The process that gave rise to *Collaboration for Progress* produced consensus on three essential strategic directions. They are focused on outcomes that enhance and support community-based literacy.

4.7.1 *Strategic Direction 1: Communications, promotion & awareness*

Demand for literacy programs is expected to grow with the changing economy. Community-based literacy organizations will need to build on their unique capabilities and methods while recognizing financial constraints. They must base their strategies on communication, promotion and awareness initiatives. These initiatives will promote understanding of adult literacy, the diversity of consumers, and the not-for-profit sector.

Objective: To strengthen and broaden public awareness of community-based literacy.

This strategic direction is based on the following principles:

- The effectiveness of communication, awareness and promotional activities is determined by the willingness of community-based literacy organizations to make them a priority.
- Successful communication, awareness and promotional activities require the allocation of enough human and financial resources.
- Innovation is fundamental to success in communication, awareness building and promotion.
- Relationships with partners, networks, local, regional and national literacy associations and organizations and key stakeholders are fundamental to success.

Awareness and understanding of the special nature of community-based adult literacy must be improved and broadened.



Tasks for Strategic Direction 1

- ❑ An internal committee made up of representatives of Literacy Nova Scotia and the six regions of community-based literacy networks will be struck.
- ❑ An initial framework for a communications, promotion and awareness plan will be developed with the help of outside expertise, if necessary, and presented to Nova Scotia literacy networks for consideration.
- ❑ A final promotion and awareness plan will be ready early in 2004.

4.7.2 Strategic Direction 2: Resources

Continued investment in people to ensure they have the basic skills necessary for success is central to community-based literacy. Investing in people means giving Canadians the literacy skills they need to reach their potential and to contribute to the development of a prosperous, healthy, cohesive society.

Based on shared beliefs, community-based literacy will contribute to this process while focusing on provincial and national partnerships and associations. Accessibility and quality in the delivery of programs and services is central to the effectiveness of community-based literacy.

Objective: To address the current and future resource needs of community-based literacy organizations to include continued financial support and innovative ways of responding to the provincial and national fiscal and policy context.

This strategic direction is based on the following principles:

- For community-based literacy organizations to be effective, they require consistent funding and stable resources.
- To identify and secure the resources necessary to ensure sustainability and vitality, we must work together.

Accessibility is central to community-based literacy in Nova Scotia.



Tasks for Strategic Direction 2

- ❑ Under the direction of a committee made up of representatives of Literacy Nova Scotia and the six regions of community-based literacy networks and with the assistance of key partners, an assessment of the networks' resource needs will be completed.
- ❑ A resource needs statement will be developed and potential funding sources identified.
- ❑ Clear messages to government partners about the need for appropriate, long term commitments to addressing the literacy issues will be developed and presented.
- ❑ A program to assemble necessary resources will be started based on the needs statement.

4.7.3 Strategic Direction 3: Partnerships

Literacy practitioners and advocates across Canada aspire to provide literacy and learning for all. To be effective, they must pursue a new model in which public policy supports literacy and learning. A recent report by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities emphasized that Canada has the infrastructure, resources and knowledge to significantly raise the level of literacy skills in the country. Literacy practitioners and advocates must forge new partnerships in the development of a pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development, an agreement that establishes joint funding, strategic approaches, shared goals and outcomes measurement.

Objective: To forge partnerships in the advancement of community-based literacy.

This strategic direction is based on the following principles:

- Community-based literacy organizations value and encourage partnerships in the advancement of adult literacy.

A pan-Canadian accord on literacy and numeracy skills development is needed.



- Community-based literacy organizations have a responsibility to identify potential partners and build partnerships.
- Resources must be devoted to building partnerships.
- Literacy Nova Scotia will play a direct role in forging new partnerships.
- Change will be necessary to forge new partnerships.

Tasks for Strategic Direction 3

- Under the direction of a committee made up of representatives from Literacy Nova Scotia and the six regions of community-based literacy networks, a partnership development plan will be completed.
- An initial framework for a partnership development plan will be prepared and presented to community-based literacy organizations for consideration.
- A final partnership plan will be ready for adoption and implementation in 2004.



5 *Moving Forward*

Community-based literacy in Nova Scotia needs strategic decisions that result in action. These decisions and actions require commitment and resources. If we do not think and act strategically, available resources may not be used to their best advantage and effect.

Collaboration for Progress is a dynamic plan. It reflects an understanding of the rapidly evolving and challenging situation of community-based literacy in the province. It also identifies the steps we must take to build on the successes of the past and the importance of flexibility in managing under challenging circumstances. The task ahead for community-based literacy is to employ *Collaboration for Progress* in sustaining and enriching adult literacy throughout Nova Scotia.

Collaboration for Progress is a dynamic plan that addresses the challenging context of community-based literacy in Nova Scotia.