

Working Together for Adult Literacy:

An Adult Literacy Strategy
for New Brunswick

Be part of it

December 2009



“The fundamental cure for poverty is not money but knowledge”
by Sir William Arthur Lewis

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Working Together for Adult Literacy:

An Adult Literacy Strategy for New Brunswick

Introduction

Literacy affects people's lives. Literacy skills can enable individuals to fulfil their potential, achieve their goals, and take advantage of opportunities. When individuals do well, so do their families, communities and employers.

Adult literacy also has a direct impact on the economic well-being of the province, which eventually affects us all. Demographic shifts and potential economic development initiatives in New Brunswick present the province with significant labour force challenges. It is imperative that we equip New Brunswickers with the skills they need to gain and maintain employment, and to take advantage of opportunities that arise in the workplace.

It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a growing focus on literacy – nationally, regionally and provincially.

Literacy is the responsibility of us all, and if we wish to break the cycle of low literacy levels we need to address the literacy challenge at all life stages. We must strive for excellence in preparing our young children for learning, in the education of our school-age children, and in providing relevant, diverse learning opportunities for adults.

Over half of the adult population in New Brunswick has literacy skills that are considered to be below the level that enables them to function adequately at home, at work and in their communities, and to deal with the demands of a knowledge-based economy. We want New Brunswickers to prosper and to have every advantage in their efforts to do so, which is why adult literacy is important to us.

When it comes to improving literacy levels, governments cannot act alone. We recognize that across New Brunswick, community literacy organizations are doing great work, reaching out to many adults who need help, but further co-operation, collaboration and investment is needed to provide learners with a range of options that respond to their diverse needs and to provide a cohesive network of support in their communities. *Working Together for Adult Literacy: An Adult Literacy Strategy for New Brunswick* is the result of a structured strategy development process informed by consultation with the stakeholder community.

Working together for adult literacy, we can provide continuing service that enables adult learners to get access to relevant learning opportunities when and where they're needed, and allows them to progress seamlessly to their next steps when the time is right. In doing so, we all benefit.

What do we mean by literacy?

For the purposes of this strategy, literacy is defined as the ability to understand and use printed information in daily activities at home, at work and in the community, and to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential. In recognition of the strong employment-related needs in the province, our definition of literacy also references essential skills – skills that help people perform the tasks required by their occupation (or desired occupation), provide a foundation for learning other skills, and enhance people's ability to innovate and adapt to workplace change. These skills include reading, document use, writing, numeracy, oral communication, working with others, thinking, computer use, and continuous learning.

Who is the target group?

The target group comprises adults whose literacy skills are below the level that enables them to function adequately at home, at work and in their communities; and those who strive to maintain and/or gain recognition for achieving functional skills levels. In terms of the International Adult Literacy Skills Survey (IALSS), this translates into adults who have literacy skills at levels 1 and 2.

Why invest in adult literacy?

Higher literacy levels not only benefit individuals, but society as a whole, in economic, educational, social and health terms.

Improving literacy skills can have a positive impact on people's lives in areas such as employability, wage rates, income, and healthy lifestyle. A 2007 report by TD Bank Financial Group states that there is a strong relationship between literacy and personal income. In 2003, the average income level of individuals with strong (Level 3) literacy skills was \$42,239, more than double the \$20,692 of those with poor (Level 1) literacy skills.

In the workplace, companies have consistently reported the benefits from improved literacy skills of employees: increased ability to undertake training; better team performance; improved labour relations; improved quality of work; increased output; fewer errors; better health and safety records; and better employee retention. These all contribute to greater productivity and flexibility, and ultimately economic competitiveness and success.

A Statistics Canada study found that a one per cent increase in literacy produces a 2.5 per cent increase in the level of labour productivity, and a 1.5 per cent increase in output per capita, compared to other nations. In 2007, this represented a potential boost in national income of \$32 billion.

The bottom line is that it is in all our interests to improve the literacy levels in New Brunswick. *Working Together for Adult Literacy* outlines a strategic approach to New Brunswick's efforts to do so.

Our vision

All New Brunswickers have the literacy skills they need to participate fully at home, at work and in their communities.

Our priorities

Working Together for Adult Literacy focuses on four strategic priorities to support that vision:

1. **reduce barriers and increase participation;**
2. **increase the number and range of effective adult literacy learning opportunities;**
3. **ensure the quality and effectiveness of adult literacy programs; and**
4. **strengthen partnerships to develop a robust and effective adult literacy system.**

Priority 1: Reduce barriers and increase participation

At present, we are not reaching the vast majority of our target client group, and demand for services does not reflect the reported need. The reasons for this are many and complex, but need to be addressed if we are to affect literacy levels in the province.

National research has shown that only 5-to-10 per cent of adults with low literacy skills participate in literacy programs. Learners and potential learners identify many barriers to participation in adult learning, many of which speak to access, and program planning and administration. Research has also shown that many adults with below functional levels of literacy believe their skills to be adequate.

Open, positive and wide-reaching messaging is required to raise awareness and motivate adults in the target group to engage in adult literacy opportunities. We need to make it easy for them to get access to those opportunities, and ensure that the programs are relevant, engaging and of high quality so that they remain in the program until they have achieved their learning goals.

Promotional initiatives will respect the challenges of the target group and place greater emphasis on non-print media.

Objectives

- **Develop, through research, understanding of local barriers; develop collaborative solutions to reduce barriers**

Although we have national research to reference, we lack a detailed understanding of those barriers that apply to different target groups and communities in New Brunswick. Understanding is an essential precursor to effectively minimizing these barriers and encouraging participation.

We need to build on work that has been done in New Brunswick and other jurisdictions to reach a better understanding of barriers that affect different target groups and communities. This suggestion is made in light of information in the Landal report (Landal, 2002), and the work of a number of non-government agencies in New Brunswick. The outcomes will then shape the development of targeted, flexible, collaborative solutions and support services to minimize these barriers.

- **Promote the benefits of improving adult literacy skills, to:**

- reduce stigma;
- raise consciousness;
- encourage participation; and
- engage employers.

There is a lack of understanding of the literacy challenges that we face in New Brunswick, and the implications for the province. This is compounded by the fact that society still associates literacy needs with illiteracy, and there is stigma attached to declaring reading and writing challenges. It is important, therefore, to promote adult literacy as part of a lifelong learning process and culture so that literacy development is seen as a positive choice.

There is also a lack of awareness in the public, target groups, and/or employers, of the need for, and benefits of, improving literacy skills. Individuals and employers need to have a reason to engage – to understand what’s in it for them. A significant and cohesive promotional effort is required to raise consciousness about the benefits of improved literacy skills in order to motivate potential learners to take advantage of literacy opportunities, and to encourage employers to support the efforts of their employees to improve their skills.

- **Enable access to quality information and guidance regarding literacy opportunities, through:**

- community groups;
- agencies; and
- government departments.

The public seems relatively unaware of available programs, even those that have been in place for some time. Information regarding existing programs needs to be readily available at a wide range of access points so that potential learners can get reliable information and guidance regarding all adult literacy services, directly or indirectly, from government departments, agencies, community groups, and/or personal contacts.

Given that some government departments are likely to have contact with significant numbers of those in the target groups, appropriate referral mechanisms and support tools will be put in place to facilitate learner access. This implies the need for the training of front-line staff to facilitate this in a sensitive way.

Priority 2: Increase the number and range of effective adult literacy learning opportunities

In order to reach adults with a range of literacy levels and needs, and different motivations and personal circumstances, it is important to offer a variety of learning opportunities – in workplaces, education settings and in the community. Diversity of programming, flexibility in delivery methods and learner-relevant, contextualized resources are all important to encouraging adults to take up opportunities to develop their skills.

Both formal and informal learning opportunities will be considered, and program development will be based on the successes and best practices in New Brunswick and other jurisdictions.

Objectives

- **Support the growth of existing services; increase the adult literacy service provider base**

Co-ordination effort is required to ensure continuity of service across the lifespan of adult literacy learners. Community-based infrastructure needs to be consolidated and developed to support growth and the objectives of the strategy.

- **Develop scalable models of delivery that are responsive to the needs of different target groups in both official languages: priority groups are the employed and those seeking to improve their employability**

With our present infrastructure, we would be challenged to meet the needs of significantly higher numbers of learners. We need to invest in developing robust, scalable and flexible service delivery models that can easily expand or shrink in response to changing environmental factors. It is important that these models are developed as part of one cohesive adult literacy system that facilitates appropriate pathways for learners.

About 70 per cent of adults at lower literacy levels are employed or seeking employment, but at present, New Brunswick has limited literacy options for these people. Development for these target groups is therefore a priority.

- **Explore opportunities to embed literacy training within existing (non-literacy) learning opportunities**

Literacy is not a stand-alone skill set; it underpins all forms of learning and everyday life. Opportunities to embed literacy development within existing, formal and informal learning situations, and to address literacy challenges in the context of everyday life, will need to be explored and developed.

- **Encourage innovation that supports the strategy**

New Brunswick has a small number of well-established programs that have been in place for some years, and some recent innovation in workplace essential skills that is yet to gain provincial coverage. Given the diversity of learners' situations, goals and personal circumstances, a wider range of services and innovative solutions is required. Innovation will be supported through programs that build on best practices from other jurisdictions and respond to local needs.

Priority 3: Ensure the quality and effectiveness of adult literacy programs

Adult literacy learners have not generally had positive experiences of formal education, and traditional teaching methods have not resulted in positive outcomes for them. It is important that the support they receive on their return to learning be responsive to their individual needs, and be of the highest quality.

Given the level of investment and significant need in this area, it is also imperative that we ensure the effectiveness of the programs and that we maximize resources. In order to do this we need to build on current measures of success, and mechanisms to monitor them, to ensure that they are meaningful to both learners and service delivery providers. We need to review, redefine and report on our measures of success on an ongoing basis.

Objectives

- **Improve quality standards and assurance mechanisms**

Standards and quality assurance processes, as they relate to organization, content, delivery and support systems, are key to ensuring equality of access, positive learning experiences, and meaningful and measurable learning outcomes. We will: establish provincial quality standards for adult literacy; develop processes whereby providers can gain an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in relation to the standards; and support providers and programs to strive to meet these standards.

- **Review adult literacy teacher and practitioner qualifications, and improve professional development**

One of the most significant factors in learners' literacy outcomes is that of the quality of the teaching instruction. Adult literacy teachers and practitioners need to: value and build on what learners know and can do; draw from a range of teaching practices to develop balanced approaches to meeting the literacy learning needs of individual learners and diverse learner communities; contextualize learning programs; and monitor learners' progress over time.

To that end, there is a need to build on standards for adult literacy teacher and practitioner qualifications at different levels, and to provide further professional development opportunities that equip them appropriately for the challenge.

- **Ensure that programs monitor learner progress and lead to relevant learner outcomes; ensure clearly defined learning pathways**

Learners have a right to expect meaningful outcomes from their learning, and that their learning is recognized within relevant jurisdictions. Wherever possible, learning should result in recognition and/or accreditation that is widely accepted and transferable. They also have a right to clearly defined learning pathways so that they can make informed choices consistent with their goals.

- **Review standard measures of progress and success, and processes for evaluation of programs**

To be able to measure progress and success of the strategy, we need to review high-level and program-stream targets in terms that can be measured and reported on. This implies a provincial framework of measures and processes that cascade from the high-level targets. To be as effective as possible we need to be prepared to subject programs to objective review, and adopt, adapt or discontinue, as appropriate.

Priority 4: Strengthen partnerships to develop a robust and effective adult literacy system

There are many different reasons for low literacy in New Brunswick. Existing delivery providers are doing good work in reaching out to people and making a difference in their lives, but no one organization acting alone will be able to meet the magnitude of the challenge that New Brunswick faces.

We need to find ways of working together more effectively at different levels - to set aside historical, cultural and philosophical differences, and focus on developing a cohesive adult literacy system in New Brunswick that provides learners with options and an effective support network.

Increased co-operation will enable us to make best use of the resources we have in the province, and to leverage other funding sources. This implies a commitment from all parties to the development of true partnerships based on mutual respect; to ongoing consultation and consideration of stakeholders' input; and to the development of clear roles and responsibilities so that we can all focus on fulfilling our respective responsibilities well.

Objectives

- **Improve interdepartmental collaboration with non-governmental organizations and communities to develop collaborative and cohesive solutions in common areas of policy and service delivery**
 - Learner referrals
 - Learner supports

- Learning opportunities for specific target groups, including but not limited to:
 - employees, including public sector workers;
 - adults who wish to improve their employability;
 - newcomers to Canada (link to language training);
 - families (link to family literacy); and
 - First Nations.

Literacy inevitably cuts across the mandates and agendas of a number of different provincial government departments. Mechanisms will be developed to facilitate greater interdepartmental collaboration with non-governmental organizations and communities to maximize resources and develop cohesive adult literacy solutions.

- **Develop and strengthen partnerships with industry, business, labour and community sectors**

Partnerships with stakeholders from the industry, business, labour and community sectors are as yet underdeveloped. These partnerships will be important to the success of adult literacy models and programs for those who are working and those seeking work. The expertise of this stakeholder group will be important in shaping contextually relevant options for these target groups. Ownership and/or sponsorship of the literacy programs by members of this stakeholder group will be instrumental in their success and continuity.

- **Review and revise funding models to support both operational and developmental needs of partners, and to ensure continuity of services**

As we implement many of the changes implied in the strategy, existing provincial funding models will need to be reviewed and revised to reflect and support greater flexibility and diversity in initiatives. New models will take into account both operational and developmental needs of organizations, and both direct and indirect costs associated with programming and common evaluation processes.

- **Develop a framework for distributed leadership, consultation, collaboration and sharing best practices in the stakeholder community**

One balanced and cohesive adult literacy system is the ultimate goal to maximize both resources and impact. In such a system it is essential that all parties understand their roles and responsibilities, and are truly working together to a common purpose. Achieving this in New Brunswick will require some effort on the parts of all stakeholders. It implies the development of mechanisms for better communication, ongoing consultation, effective collaboration and sharing of best practices.

Other jurisdictions have demonstrated the strength and value of a distributed leadership model that involves provincial government taking the lead in certain areas; non-governmental organizations taking the lead in others; and clear channels for communication and partnership. Clear leadership leads to better organization and co-ordination of programs and services, and increased levels of support for delivery providers, but requires appropriate knowledge, skills and resources. Further development is required before New Brunswick can adopt a balanced, distributed leadership model.

How will we implement and measure progress?

To support *Working Together for Adult Literacy: An Adult Literacy Strategy for New Brunswick*, the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour will be releasing adult literacy targets, along with a departmental action plan that will reference the priorities and objectives of the strategy, in winter of 2009-10.

Short-Term Action Plan for Working Together for Adult Literacy:

An Adult Literacy Strategy for New Brunswick

December 2009

Preamble

The adult literacy strategy, *Working Together for Adult Literacy: An Adult Literacy Strategy for New Brunswick* provides overall direction for adult literacy initiatives, in partnership with the private and voluntary non-profit sectors. The vision is that New Brunswickers attain the literacy skills they need to participate fully at home, at work, and in their communities. In terms of the International Adult Literacy Skills Survey (IALSS), this translates into adults achieving Level 3 literacy skills. Level 3 is the level needed to function in a modern, industrialized economy and society.

Adult literacy is of fundamental importance to the growth and prosperity of our province. We all know that New Brunswick's adult literacy levels present a significant challenge, with 50 per cent of the population between the ages of 16 and 65 having less than IALSS Level 3 skills. In addition to literacy challenges, the province faces demographic challenges in the coming years in the form of an aging population and a smaller youth cohort. New Brunswick is also experiencing an increasing need for skilled workers, with restructuring of the economy away from the traditional primary sectors. The current economic situation presents a challenge as well, with government needing to support the economy and help maintain and create jobs in order to stay on the road to self-sufficiency.

The adult literacy strategy is a timely response to these challenges, as it identifies the initiatives needed to provide a foundation for further learning that is lifelong, relevant and immediate, and that meets the needs of individuals and of our economy and society.

The strategy focuses on four priorities: 1) reducing barriers and increasing participation; 2) increasing the number and range of adult literacy learning opportunities; 3) ensuring the quality and effectiveness of adult literacy programs; and 4) strengthening partnerships to develop a robust and effective adult literacy system.

Work has already begun in some of the priority areas identified in the strategy. This will serve as a foundation for continuing initiatives to be outlined in a long-term action plan for 2010-14. Adult literacy targets, together with the long-term action plan referencing the priorities and objectives of the strategy, will be released this winter.

Action Now to Improve Adult Literacy Levels in the Province

The following activities, which align with the strategy, demonstrate the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour's (PETL) commitment to working with New Brunswickers in all sectors of society to improve literacy levels in the province.

1. The Community Adult Learning Network (CALNet) provides literacy training to individuals to IALSS Level 2; GED preparation, both in class and online; and e-learning programs that offer computer training and other lifelong learning opportunities. In 2008-09, more than 2,700 adults in more than 100 communities throughout the province took advantage of these learning opportunities. This was an increase of 11 per cent over the previous year. A further increase is planned for 2009-10. To date, funding has been approved for more than 200 academic and e-learning programs. This represents 20 additional academic programs, compared to the same time last year.

2. PETL is partnering with Laubach Literacy New Brunswick (LLNB) to help the organization build its capacity to expand and improve the quality of its one-on-one literacy tutoring service. LLNB has recently determined that changes were needed to improve the quality and consistency of the service offered. PETL's Community Adult Learning Services branch has provided financial support to LLNB to help effect the necessary organizational and service delivery changes needed for the organization to improve the quality and quantity of service provided. PETL has also established a partnership with the Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick (FANB) to explore development of a one-on-one tutoring service in French.
3. The new Workplace Essential Skills (WES) model will provide an accelerated process for adults, both employed and unemployed, to gain needed knowledge and skills. It is being delivered at the community level and in the private sector in partnership with business and labour. This initiative is funded through the Canada-New Brunswick Labour Market Agreement (LMA). A target of 30 initiatives has been set for 2009-10. Currently, there are 12 active initiatives, and a further 22 are in discussion and development. Among the active initiatives are:
 - **Destination Bathurst, Chaleur:** A group of four hotel operators in the Chaleur region will provide WES training to employees, including front desk clerks and customer service employees.
 - **Le Phare des services communautaires, Bouctouche:** WES training with emphasis on reading, writing and comprehension is offered to employees in home-care and special-care services to address new certification requirements.
 - **Ganong Bros. Ltd., St. Stephen:** An international chocolate manufacturer, Ganong Bros. Ltd. will use WES training as a vehicle to help address issues such as job retention, effective interpretation of policy and procedures, and job satisfaction.

The WES model also includes two centres of excellence (one in each official language) to serve the province by providing expertise in the areas of learning content, tools, prior-learning assessment, measurement and evaluation, and related services.

4. Recognizing that adult learners who are returning to learning at a time when they have many responsibilities in other areas of their lives, it is essential that they have a clear sense of the educational and training options available to them, as well as a knowledge of the linkages between these options. To provide this, clear learning pathways will be outlined to link CALNet's academic and e-learning programs, the WES program, and other related programs, in a system that permits adult learners to move from one training option and delivery mode to another in order to reach their goals.
5. PETL's Community Adult Learning Services branch is initiating a process to develop quality service and assurance standards relating to adult literacy and essential skills training programs. These standards will address program design, content, delivery, and support systems to ensure uniform, quality and meaningful learner experiences and measurable learning outcomes. Standards will be completed and ready for implementation in April 2010.
6. PETL will be a partner over the next three years to support a family literacy initiative by la Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick (FANB). FANB will pilot a family literacy program for Acadian and francophone parents in urban and rural New Brunswick. The goal of the program is to help parents develop essential skills that will enable them to contribute to the growth and development of their children, families and communities.

7. The governments of Canada and New Brunswick have worked in partnership, investing \$10 million and extending, until March 2012, the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers. Activities undertaken through this initiative will involve promoting the value of older workers to employers, delivering training workshops, matching participants with employers to help them gain new work experience, and supporting them throughout their placements. The support of this initiative will assist about 1,000 workers across the province.
8. Beginning in October 2009, the New Brunswick Community College/Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick (NBCC/CCNB) network is offering adults free academic upgrading courses leading to an adult high school diploma. This initiative is an important component of building economic capacity in New Brunswick by ensuring that more people have the training and skills required to participate in the labour force. NBCC is offering e-learning courses across the province. In four communities (Woodstock, Fredericton, St. Andrews and Saint John), students may choose to complete courses completely online, entirely in the classroom, or by meeting directly with instructors at community access centres for additional instruction/support. Classes are also being offered in Moncton, Miramichi, and Sussex. CCNB is offering a series of class-based evening courses at the five francophone campuses to provide training access for adults who are unable to attend classes during the day. Classes are being offered through CCNB at the Bathurst, Campbellton, Dieppe, Edmundston and Acadian Peninsula campuses. Courses are being offered in French or English, depending on the area served.
9. The New Brunswick Public Library Service (NBPLS) has launched the Adult Literacy Collection of more than 15,000 books in both official languages. The collection is available through the public library system, and is an important resource for adult learners and literacy tutors. It will help reluctant readers, or those who want to improve their reading skills, by providing easy-to-read titles. The province is investing an additional \$100,000 in the collection in 2009-10.
10. In September 2009, NBPLS implemented provincewide access to bookmobile services in rural areas not served by a public library. The bookmobile stops in rural communities on a scheduled basis to provide access to reading materials for people of all ages, thereby fostering a culture of reading and lifelong learning.
11. In recognition of the fact that all New Brunswickers may not have access to a public library or a bookmobile, NBPLS is offering a new, provincewide Books-by-Mail Service. This service permits patrons to receive books through the mail for free, from a central NBPLS service point. This is made possible through Canada Post's Library Book Rate Program.
12. To help improve information literacy in New Brunswick, NBPLS has developed a tool kit for three major audiences: grades 5-8 students, grades 9-12 students, and the general public. The core modules, which can be delivered by staff in library sessions or as self-guides for the public, address general competencies in information literacy such as judging information, search techniques, and finding material in the library. Additional modules focus on more specialized themes, including search engines, electronic resources and writing a research paper.

