

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)

Your Partner in Client Success

January 2020

Prepared by The Learning Networks of Ontario

Learning Networks Are Well Positioned to be Engaged as Part of your Planning Partner Team

There are 16 regional learning networks across Ontario, funded by the Employment and Training Division of the Ontario Ministry of Labour Training, and Skills Development (MLTSD). We work together as the [Learning Networks of Ontario](#) (LNO). We support our local [Literacy and Basic Skills](#) (LBS) programs by bringing them together to coordinate services and discuss ways to respond to emerging community needs. We are interconnected with employment support agencies and the entire adult education continuum in our communities. We are also aware of key labour market issues and tensions and how adult upgrading programs can contribute to solutions. Many networks also support clients directly through information, educational pathway planning and literacy and essential skills assessment. In addition, LNO works co-operatively with the 10 provincial LBS support organizations who are also funded by MLTSD.



Our strength is strategic partnerships. Networks and programs have deeply developed partnerships that support seamless learner transitions. For example, a learner in LBS at a school board may have come from a second language program and will transition to high school credit studies. Or, a learner may need individualized support from a tutor to work on fundamental literacy skills, while also connected with a targeted training program to develop digital literacy skills. Networks work closely with community partners to coordinate services and find creative solutions for training issues. For example, network staff may meet with pre-apprenticeship clients to connect them with numeracy support. Another example is network staff working with a settlement agency to broker upgrading partnerships for literacy/numeracy support as a component of work training programs.

Upgrading Programs have Meaningful Impacts on Clients' Ability to Get and Sustain Good Jobs

Pre-Employment

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs can be a critical part of clients' Employment Action Plans to ensure they have the skills they need to meet job requirements. LBS programs specialize in 5 goal paths – employment, high school credit, post-secondary, apprenticeship and increased independence. We have established partnerships with our local Employment Service providers, Ontario Works, ODSP and other community partners to serve our clients holistically and look forward to more collaborative case management.

Essential Skills

Many clients may have the education they need on paper (e.g., Grade 12 diploma) but not the Essential Skills needed for jobs and/or further education. [Essential Skills](#) are the 9 foundational skills needed for work, learning and life, articulated by the federal government's Ministry of Employment and Social Development. They are the foundation for learning all other skills and help people evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change. The Essential Skills include reading, writing, using documents, numeracy, digital technology skills, thinking, oral communication, working with others and continuous learning.



“Learning skills I had no idea about put me into a good career spot.”

(Lindsay, Adult Literacy Learner. QUILL – Exploring Adult Learning in Huron County [watch the video](#)).

The level of competency required by an employee in these 9 Essential Skills depends on the specific job they are/will be doing. These skills can be basic (level 1) to very advanced (level 5). In many cases, employees will need to complete tasks up to level 3 and beyond to get and keep good jobs. For example, a welder has to read and understand workplace safety materials and hazard assessment forms to learn safe handling instructions (level 2). A manufacturing order clerk may tally prices, subtract discounts, add sales tax and calculate change to customers (level 3). Without the foundational Essential Skills, these employees will struggle to perform their roles.

LBS programs can help clients upgrade the specific skills they need in [levels 1-3](#).



“Literacy was just reading and writing in my day. Literacy meant you couldn’t read at all, you couldn’t write. I didn’t think there was like, different levels and degrees. And numeracy isn’t just algebra and math. It’s like reading is part of numeracy. Comprehension and count and add and see numbers, but in full terms.”

Source: Ontario Government – Adult Learning and Literacy Training in Ontario [watch the video](#)

Early intervention is key. Local Learning Networks can facilitate partnerships for literacy assessments with educational action plans. If part of the client’s plan is further education/training, they have a better chance to successfully complete those programs when they have first upgraded their foundational skills.



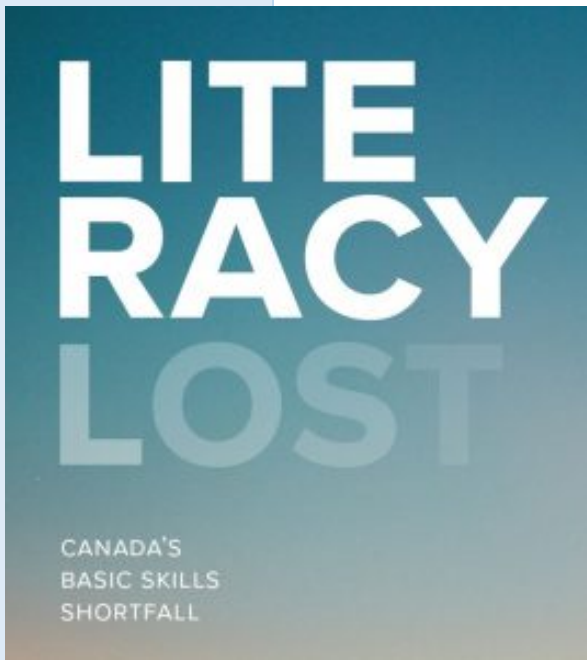
PIAAC

Programme for the International
Assessment of Adult Competencies

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies ([PIAAC](#)) was released in 2013. It is an international study of adults measuring literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments.

Some key findings include the following:

- a. More education does not automatically translate into better skills. The longer a person is out of formal education, the weaker the direct relationship is between formal education and skills.
- b. Those with low literacy skills are more than twice as likely to be unemployed.
- c. As the demand for skills continues to shift toward more advanced tasks, individuals with poor literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to find themselves at risk.
- d. On average, as adults' proficiency increases, their chances of being in the labour force and being employed increase.
- e. Just over half of adults scoring at or below level 1 are employed compared to 4 out of 5 adults scoring at level 4-5.
- f. Tackling skill deficits will be important to enhance longer-term employment prospects and to expand the overall supply of skills.



“The good news is that recent analysis of international adult skills data and key macroeconomic performance indicators (GDP per capita and labour productivity) shows that increasing the literacy skills in the workforce by an average of 1% would, over time, lead to a 3% increase in GDP, or \$54 billion per year, every year, and a 5% increase in productivity... What is more, this research also shows that improving the skills of people at the lower end of the scale (Levels 1 and 2 on the five-level

scale for literacy) will have more impact than improving the skills of people who are already at Level 3 or higher. As the people most at risk of losing their entire job to automation are the people employed in low-skilled jobs, upgrading their skills would have the added advantage of making them more employable in a new higher-skilled job.”

Source: Canada West Foundation - Literacy Lost: Canada’s Basic Skills Shortfall (Lane & Murray, 2018) [Access the full report here.](#)

About the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program

LBS programs are learner-centred and task-focused. LBS service providers assist learners at low, medium and high risk of long-term unemployment – most of whom have complex needs – and tailor upgrading to the support the learners’ needs. Learners may only require a very short, targeted training program, or they may need foundational literacy support over several months. For example, some learners may need digital literacy upgrading or a short customer service program, while other learners, such as those with learning challenges, may need more intensive supports. Many higher-level learners are able to complete grade 12 equivalent courses that provide admission to postsecondary programs and/or apprenticeship training.

[Watch this video](#) that highlights the various goal paths.

Nick comments about getting his GED, “It went quite quickly, but it was very educational. I learned a lot in a very short period of time. I’m working in construction, running heavy equipment now...”

Source: Adult Learning centres in Grey, Bruce and Georgian.

[Watch the video.](#)

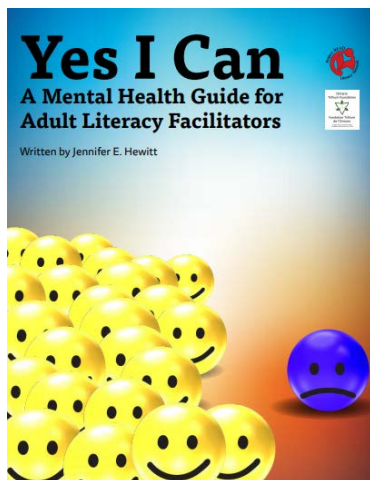


In “two years I completed my Grade 12...went on to college and chose the dental path. Everything has changed when I look in the mirror” (Debbie, Literacy Link Niagara. Voices of Adult Learning, [watch the video](#)).

“Academic Upgrading completely changed everything...not just the “academic” ... I feel that the “upgrading” part is more than just academic. It’s about the skills you learn, keeping that average, being consistent, showing up to class every day, and honestly when I came into [the program] I didn’t even know I could do that.” (Joe, Algonquin College LBS/Academic Upgrading Program - [watch the video](#)).



LBS service providers rely on a vast array of resources and continually engage in professional development to enrich their practice, often facilitated through local literacy networks and provincial support organizations. Programs, networks and support organizations also have expertise in program and curriculum development. If there is a need and the resource doesn’t exist, we create it.



For example, mental health concerns are a significant barrier to employment for many clients – this has been a topic of professional development in LBS in the last 3 to 5 years. Recently, a learning network created the “[Mental Health Guide for LBS Practitioners](#)” to support instructors and their learners. Curriculum packages have been created for a wide range of topics including digital technology, trades-related programs, soft skills programs, etc.

There are specific LBS upgrading programs to support Anglophone, Francophone, Indigenous, and Deaf learners and specific support organizations for the Francophone, Indigenous and Deaf cultural streams. Of the more than 200 LBS providers across the province, 5 are funded specifically to deliver online ('e-Channel') programming. LBS programs serve a high percentage of youth (41% of LBS participants across Ontario) and partner with youth-based programs. LBS programs are also increasingly serving more learners who identify as newcomers. Immigration is and will be key to growing our workforce to meet labour market demands – newcomers need specialized supports to succeed in the labour force. LBS and ESL/LINC programs are well connected across the province to support clients with seamless transitions to the programs and services they need.



Employment Retention

LBS programs know that it's about getting the job, and it's about keeping the job. Employers continually cite foundational skills and soft skills as key issues for their labour force and/or talent pool. Employers need employees with up-to-date skills, and those skills are becoming more advanced, and entrenched in digital technology, every day. When clients get the job but don't have the support they need, the likelihood of recidivism is greater. For example, the recidivism rate for Ontario Works (OW) is approximately 52% in Waterloo Region. Almost 69% returned to OW within 9 months (Region of Waterloo, 2011).

Literacy and Poverty

Housing, food and other costs are rising at a rapid rate. Many of our clients cannot afford stable housing – or they are spending well over 30% of their income on housing, leaving very little for anything else. Clients will need to make more than minimum wage to have housing/food security in the long term – they will need the ability to advance in their careers. As an example, minimum wage is \$14/hr. A client working 37.5 hrs/week at minimum wage gives them \$27,300/year. In Ontario, the average rent for a bachelor apartment is \$959, an increase of 6.9% since 2017. In this case, clients would have to make a housing wage of \$19.67/hr based on their gross income. In Ontario, 45.7% of households spend more than 30% of their income on rent and 20.9% of households spend more than 50% of their income on rent.

Literacy and Health

Health literacy also impacts job retention: “(employees) with the lowest levels of literacy are more than twice as likely to be in poor health compared with (employees) with higher literacy skills” (Community Literacy Ontario - [Literacy: Why it Matters, 2018](#)). Many Literacy and Basic Skills programs offer health-related programming to support lasting outcomes for learners, including improving educational attainment, social engagement and labour force attachment.

Literacy and Jobs

We can assist clients at risk of losing their job due to increased skill demands, automation and/or soft skills or employability skills. LBS, by its very nature, is flexible. Programs are continually finding ways to serve more learners who are working – evenings, weekends, online, etc. LBS can play a role in long-term employment retention as well as improvement of employment outcomes. With continued skills upgrading clients can not only keep their jobs; they can get better ones. Key areas of support are digital literacy, financial literacy, job-related literacy and numeracy tasks, and upgrading to access further education and training.

LBS has a long history of working with employed learners to improve their skills development and job outcomes. In 2018-19, 30% of learners supported by LBS were employed. Combined, 38% of learners served were on the Employment or Apprenticeship goal path. With respect to service coordination with Employment Services (ES), around 20% of all LBS referrals were made to ES and about 10% of all ES referrals were received by LBS (EOIS-CaMS 2018-19 60B and 15B reports). Of all learners completing service in 2018-19, 30% reported being employed (67% full-time, 33% part-time) and 23% went on to further education and training in support of their employment goal (EOIS-CaMS 2018-19 60D report).

Literacy and the Skilled Trades

There has been a lot of targeted curriculum developed in LBS around the skilled trades. In this way, programs can support foundational upgrading to specific trades and can also promote the apprenticeship/skilled trades option to learners without clearly defined employment goals. LBS programs can also support signed apprentices to prepare for the academic workload and to prepare for the Certificate of Qualification exam by working on study skills and test-taking. Workplace literacy supports may also be available to help employees keep their job. [Watch a video](#) around this here.



Conclusion

Literacy and Basic Skills programs, learning networks and support organizations are key partners to support a wide range of clients – unemployed, underemployed and those that are working but at-risk. The networks of services are comprehensive and can be mobilized quickly to respond to specific community needs.

Please connect with your local learning network to discuss how we can work together for successful client outcomes. Visit www.learningnetworks.ca for contact details.

Approved by the Learning Networks of Ontario



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These *Employment Ontario* program are funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario and through the Canada-Ontario Job Fund Agreement.