

*Literacy for Life* was funded in part by:



**United Way**  
of London & Middlesex

*Return to Learn...*

**LITERACY LONDON INC.**



**Hutton House**

*Supporting adults & youth with disabilities*



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Literacy Link South Central

**EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO**



**ADULT & CONTINUING EDUCATION**



The Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford  
Local Training Board

Commission locale de  
formation pour les comtés  
d'Elgin, de Middlesex et d'Oxford



**FANSHAWE COLLEGE**

*Your guide to...*

# Literacy

for  
**LIFE**



# Experience it!

**W**e would like to thank all of our partners for investing in “Literacy for Life”. We could not have held this important event without the time, energy, and resources contributed by:

- Centre for Lifelong Learning
- Fanshawe College
- Literacy London, Inc.
- London Public Library
- Thames Valley District School Board (Gateway to Learning)
- The London Council for Adult Education
- Hutton House



**W**e would like to thank the committee members who helped us plan this event, as well as Deb Prothero, for her help with registrations and Tracy Buchkowsky, for her graphic designs that have helped to brand this event. We would also like to thank the Community Champions who gave of their time to make this event a success and will go back to their own organizations and spheres of influence to continue to raise awareness around literacy.

**O**ur thanks also go to the United Way of London and Middlesex for their support of the community dialogues. Through these dialogues, we will gain new information to help us raise awareness of literacy in the community. Thanks to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), for its ongoing support of literacy programs and activities in Ontario.

## Some myths about literacy

**P**art of raising awareness around literacy is recognizing some of the myths that surround this important social issue. Here are things we commonly hear about literacy that we’d really like to change!

**Myth:** People can either read or not – there’s nothing in between.

**Fact:** Many people – in fact, the majority of people who struggle with literacy – have some level of reading, writing, or math skills. They just don’t have enough to do the tasks that are required of most of us on a daily basis.

**Myth:** If you have a Grade 12, then you’re literate.

**Fact:** A surprising number of people who have Grade 12 or better have literacy challenges. People do not necessarily have the skills that correspond to the level of education they have on paper.

**Myth:** People who can’t read well just didn’t try hard enough at school.

**Fact:** There are lots of reasons why people reach adulthood without having strong literacy skills. Some people have learning disabilities that were never diagnosed and they need information presented them in different ways in order to learn. Others struggled with family or health issues as children, which made it difficult for them to spend enough time in school to learn what they needed.

**Myth:** Literacy is only an issue for immigrants, not for people who are born and educated in Canada.

**Fact:** There are 49 000 people who attend adult literacy programs in Ontario every year and very few of them are immigrants. Most were born and raised in Canada.

## Literacy organizations that can help

**If you know someone that you think might benefit from a literacy program, there are many free programs in London and Middlesex that can help. They are:**

- Centre for Lifelong Learning
- CNIB Literacy Program for Deafblind Adults
- College Boreal
- Fanshawe College
- Literacy London Inc.
- Nokee Kwe Occupational Skill Development Inc.
- Thames Valley District School Board (Gateway to Learning)

**T**hese programs represent the range of literacy programs in our community. The good news is that you don't have to know how they all differ. If you would like to refer someone to a literacy program, just contact:

### **Literacy Link South Central**

**519.681.7307**

**1.800.561.6896**

**[www.llsc.on.ca](http://www.llsc.on.ca)**

Literacy Link South Central works closely with all the literacy programs in London and Middlesex. We'll find the program that best meets the needs of your client.



## What's this day about?

**F**or years, literacy programs and literacy organizations have worked to raise awareness around literacy – to show how literacy impacts a person's ability to be involved and contribute to home life, to work and to the community. Our efforts seem to be paying off and slowly, but surely, people are beginning to see literacy as a foundation upon which individuals and communities can build success.

**F**or this event, we have chosen a different approach to raising awareness around literacy. Instead of talking about statistics, we have developed four stations – health, employment, family and community – to help you get a sense of what it feels like to have low literacy skills. We invite you to “walk a mile” or at least a few paces in the shoes of someone who doesn't have strong literacy skills. Our hope is that you will have a greater understanding of how low literacy may affect clients that you see. Literacy is about more than recreational reading – we hope that our four experiential stations will help you to see how far reaching the effects of low literacy can be.

**T**hen you'll be participating in a community dialogue. We're looking forward to hearing what you thought about your experiences at the stations. Our goal is to get some ideas from you on how we can continue to raise awareness of literacy and of the programs that exist to promote literacy, in our community.

**T**his booklet is designed to walk you through the day, to take some notes and to use as a resource for when you return to your agency. To begin, we encourage you to take the time to write down three words that come to mind when you think about literacy:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Literacy Facts

According to a recent study, almost 50% of Canadians do not have the necessary literacy skills to function effectively in today's society.

### Social Problem

- Low literacy affects employment stability and opportunities.
- Low literacy represents a massive loss of productivity in our labour market.
- Low literacy could lead to crime and violence.
- Low literacy youth could become disadvantaged adults.
- Low literacy affects health.
- Low literacy people are less likely to vote.

### Literacy Can Help!

- We need literacy skills to find employment and to keep employment.
- We need literacy skills as a country to attract new businesses and to have success in the trade industry.
- We need literacy skills to empower us and to participate in our community.
- We need literacy skills to seek options for a successful future.
- We need literacy skills to read prescriptions, directions and preventative information.
- We need literacy skills to be informed and to participate in the democratic process.

## Literacy for COMMUNITY

How you can help clients who have low literacy skills to participate more in their community:

- Make information available in a clear and easy-to-read format
- Talk about opportunities and events – don't just rely on the printed word
- Consider an on-site literacy program
- Promote FREE local literacy programs so clients know that there are programs that can help

### Questions to consider:

1. What kinds of things do you do outside of the home or your place of work that require literacy skills?
2. How would your life be affected if you didn't do any of these activities?
3. How can we promote literacy as a social issue that impacts our communities as well as individuals and families?

### Your Notes

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## Why is literacy a community issue?

Have you ever considered all the different ways that someone can be an active member of their community? People with lower levels of literacy often do not feel comfortable participating in, or volunteering for, community activities, even those that are considered essential. Low literacy skills often prevent people from participating in their local community fully, as citizens.

## In the community, you need literacy skills to:

- Get information about community events and opportunities
- Spend money wisely
- Know your rights
- Participate in elections
- Find the help you need – housing, income support, child care, transportation
- Enjoy the benefits of leisure activities

## We know that adults with low literacy skills:

- are nervous about filling in forms in front of people
- like face-to-face interactions (use a bank teller rather than an ATM)
- are less likely to vote
- avoid new or different situations
- often sign legal papers they can't read
- are more likely to get in trouble with the law (65% of prison inmates lack literacy skills)
- are less likely to join groups such as Home and School or co-op housing committees
- have difficulty reading a bus schedule (20% of Canadians)
- ignore mail unless it looks like a cheque or a bill
- rely on television and radio, not newspapers, for news and information
- tend to avoid buying “no name” brands because there are no picture clues on the packaging
- purchase more prepared foods rather than planning to cook from recipes

**Experience it!**

**Experience it!**

## You might wonder if literacy is an issue if your client...

### Life Experience:

- Left formal schooling without a Grade 12
- Changed schools a lot as a child
- Is or was employed at many short-term, low-skilled jobs
- Is often in conflict with the law
- Is or was affected by poverty
- Has a low self-esteem; feels stupid

### Written material:

- Needs a lot of help to fill out forms
- Answers questions on forms improperly
- Signs things without reading them first
- Reads very slowly and laboriously
- Has serious spelling and grammar problems
- Tries to avoid reading “on the spot”

### Communication:

- Says “I have trouble with reading and writing”
- Didn't like school
- Offers one-word answers
- Answers questions inappropriately
- Says “I read, but I don't like it”
- Doesn't follow the flow of ideas or logic
- Uses very poor grammar
- Can't summarize what he or she has read



**Experience it!**

**Experience it!**

**Some FACTS about Health Literacy****What is Health Literacy?**

Health Literacy refers to how people get, use and understand basic health information and services they need to make good health decisions.

**We need Health Literacy skills to:**

- know where to go for help
- read nutrition labels on foods
- shop within a budget
- read medical instructions and take medicine properly
- get information on the best treatments for disease
- fill out medical release forms
- follow safety instructions

**Who is affected?**

More than 55% of Canadians (88% of seniors) lack the literacy skills to understand medication and safety instructions.

**Health Literacy is affected by:**

- Poverty
- Increased use of print material and an increase in outpatient services and home care
- Health information and pamphlets being typically written at a Grade 12 reading level, well above the literacy skills of the average Canadian.

**Questions to consider:**

1. Have you ever thought about the Essential Skill needed to do your job? Try looking it up by going to:  
Essential Skills website <http://srv108.services.gc.ca>
2. Do you agree that jobs today require more literacy skills than the jobs of the past? Why or why not? What skill levels did your grandparents need for employment? Your parents? And today...what about your children?
3. How forthcoming do you think people typically are with the fact that they have low literacy skills? Why do you think this is so?
4. What do you think your role is in helping people to improve literacy skills so that they can find or keep employment?
5. Did you know that there are community literacy programs that are available in the daytime and evening, and on a full-time and part-time basis?

**Your Notes**


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**Why is literacy an employment issue?**

A lack of literacy skills could result in missed opportunities and continual unemployment. In our information-based society, reading, writing and math have taken on a lead role in the employment process.

**People use literacy skills to find employment when they:**

- Use the job bank
- Read the classified ads
- Find job search agencies and resources
- Develop a résumé
- Fill out application forms
- Take tests during interviews

**People use literacy skills to keep employment when they:**

- Review policy and procedure manuals
- Take on-site training
- Learn and understand new concepts (like WHMIS)
- Use new equipment and computer programs

**How you can help clients who have low literacy skills find employment:**

- Look at your services through the eyes of someone who may have low literacy skills
- Recognize that literacy is a foundation employment skill
- Become familiar with the Essential Skills and their strong link to literacy
- Understand that jobs today require more literacy skills than ever before
- Be aware of FREE local literacy programs that can help your clients
- Develop job search materials that are written in clear language.

**What can we do?**

- Create partnerships between healthcare programs and literacy programs
- Help a person with low literacy skills get the Health and Literacy information they need
- Take a good look at clinical communication (verbal and written) and look at potential areas of misunderstanding
- Adopt clear language in Health Information and forms
- Communicate health information in a way that is sensitive to people's cultural and educational background.

*(Adapted from the fact sheet from the Ontario Literacy Coalition)*

**Questions to consider:**

1. How did it feel to have to pick out the right product based simply upon the colour of the can?
2. If you had to medicate yourself or a family member, how easy would this be if you couldn't readily identify what kind of medicine you were looking at?
3. Literacy isn't one of those social issues that's usually considered "life or death". Can you think of ways though in which poor health literacy could actually lead to emergency health situations?
4. In a society that is becoming more focused on preventative health, how will people who cannot use print information look after themselves or their families?

**Your Notes**


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**Why is literacy a family issue?**

Caregivers and parents set a literacy tone within a family. If they don't read or write well, then literacy likely won't have a strong presence within the home. If there isn't a literacy culture within a home, then children who are brought up in that environment will likely struggle with low literacy skills. Literacy becomes an intergenerational issue and the cycle is repeated across generations.

**People use literacy in the home to:**

- Read notes from a child's teacher
- Pay bills
- Shop for groceries
- Follow recipes
- Help children with homework
- Play games
- Build their knowledge and skills

**How you can help the families you work with**

- Look at your services through the eyes of someone who may have low literacy skills
- Talk with your coworkers about the possible literacy challenges of the people who use your services
- Make yourself aware of how to recognize the signs of low literacy
- Know how to talk about literacy with sensitivity
- Know how to direct someone to get literacy support
- Create written materials that are easy to read (Clear Writing)

**How families can help themselves?**

From the early years to adulthood, everyone in the family needs to use their reading, writing, and math skills. Here are some tips on how to create a home that supports literacy:

- Take a trip to the library as a family
- Play board games
- Read books to each other
- Have a "quiet time" when family members read, do homework or do word puzzles
- Write letters or send emails to friends and family
- Pick a topic to research together on the Internet
- Make a scrap book (with stories) about a recent event or vacation
- Do some budgeting together

**Questions to consider:**

1. Were you surprised at all the different ways that literacy can be promoted within the family home?
2. How can you transfer this message to the work you might do with families?
3. Were there any activities that you would not normally have considered to be literacy activities?
4. Had you considered the role model effect of literacy within the home?

**Your Notes**


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