

# *Painting a picture of literacy*

**Literacy —  
a GREAT investment!**



## 20 Reasons To Invest In Ontario's Literacy And Basic Skills Programs:

- 1 Literacy: a critical issue for Ontario
- 2 Employment
- 3 Unemployment
- 4 Poverty
- 5 Income
- 6 Access to education & training
- 7 Lifelong learning
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- 10 New Canadians
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- 12 Youth
- 13 Seniors
- 14 The digital divide
- 15 Justice
- 16 The economy
- 17 The recession
- 18 The labour market of the future
- 19 Skill shortages
- 20 Workplace health & safety



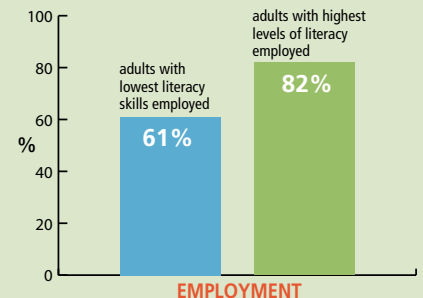
## 20 REASONS to invest in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Programs:

### 1 Literacy: A CRITICAL ISSUE FOR ONTARIO

Literacy is an essential foundational skill in 21<sup>st</sup> century Ontario. However, in our province, 42% of adults do not have the literacy skills they need for home, work and life. In fact, 1.3 million people (16% of Ontarians) struggle with very serious literacy challenges and have trouble reading even the most basic text. Another 2.1 million people (26%) can read but not well enough to meet the demands of today's society.<sup>1</sup>

### 2 Literacy and EMPLOYMENT

People with low literacy skills have much lower rates of employment. In Ontario, just 61% of adults with the lowest literacy levels are employed while 82% of people with the highest levels of literacy are in the workforce.<sup>2</sup>

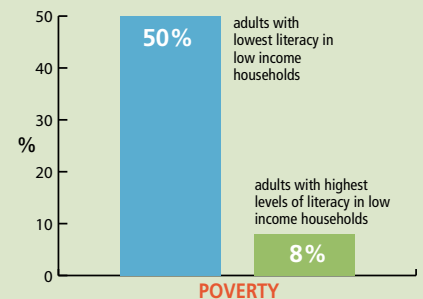


### 3 Literacy and UNEMPLOYMENT

People with low literacy skills are more likely to experience unemployment and they are about twice as likely to be unemployed for six months or more.<sup>3</sup>

### 4 Literacy and POVERTY

Close to 50% of adults with the lowest levels of literacy live in low income households, compared with only 8% of those with high levels of literacy.<sup>4</sup>

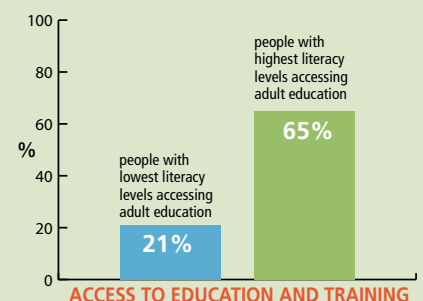


### 5 Literacy and INCOME

People with low literacy skills earn considerably less than those with high literacy skills and they are also more likely to receive social assistance from the government.<sup>5</sup>

### 6 Literacy and ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Just 21% of people with the lowest levels of literacy accessed some form of adult education and training in the year preceding the survey, compared to 65% of people with the highest levels.<sup>6</sup>



### 7 Literacy and LIFELONG LEARNING

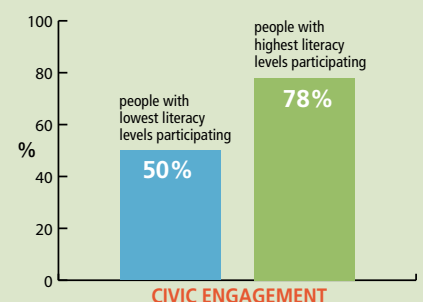
Lifelong learning is important for economic prosperity and personal growth. Raising the literacy levels of Canadians is one of the most important ways to encourage lifelong learning in our country.<sup>7</sup>

### 8 Literacy and HEALTH

Canadians with low literacy skills suffer poorer health than Canadians with high levels of literacy and a person's level of literacy is one of the key determinants of their overall health.<sup>8</sup>

### 9 Literacy and CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

In Ontario, 50% of people with the lowest levels of literacy volunteer or participate in community groups, compared with 78% of people at the highest levels. As well, charitable giving increases with the level of education attained.<sup>9</sup>



### 10 Literacy and NEW CANADIANS

Immigrants make critical contributions to our society, culture, and economy. However, 60% of immigrants in our province have low levels of literacy in English or French.<sup>10</sup>

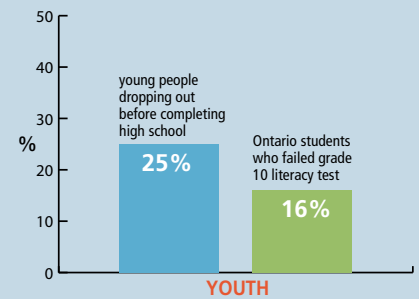


## 11 Literacy and FAMILIES

Parents play a vital role as their children's first teachers. The higher the level of a parent's education, the higher the likelihood the child will succeed in school.<sup>11</sup>

## 12 Literacy and YOUTH

While the high school graduation rate in Ontario has increased from 68% to 75%, still, 25% of young people are dropping out before completing their high school education. In addition, 16% of Ontario students who wrote the grade 10 literacy test in the 2009-2010 school year failed.<sup>12</sup>

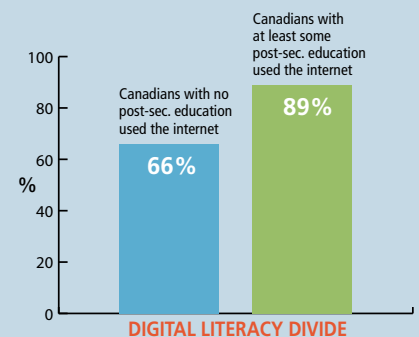


## 13 Literacy and SENIORS

In Ontario, more than 80% of seniors have low levels of literacy. This exposes them to increased health and safety risks which can result in higher health care costs and diminished quality of life. It can also reduce their ability to make informed choices about their health care, finances and other key decisions.<sup>13</sup>

## 14 Literacy and the DIGITAL DIVIDE

Canadians with lower literacy skills are significantly less likely to use computers. In 2009, 89% of Canadians with at least some post-secondary education used the Internet, compared to 66% of Canadians with no post-secondary education.<sup>14</sup>

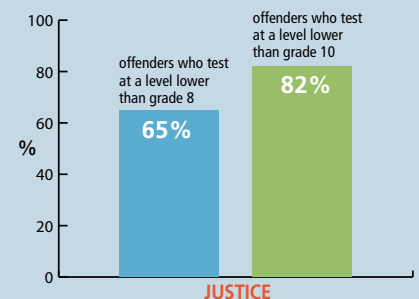


## 15 Literacy and JUSTICE

Upon arrival at correctional institutions, approximately 65% of offenders test at a level lower than Grade 8, and 82% test lower than Grade 10.<sup>15</sup>

## 16 Literacy and the ECONOMY

Increased literacy skills are strongly linked to economic growth and prosperity. A 1% increase in literacy skills would lead to an increase of \$18.5 billion per year in Canada's GDP. Further, literacy is a key component to Canada's economic recovery and to the future prosperity of our country. Government investment in adult literacy yields substantial economic returns.<sup>16</sup>



## 17 Literacy and the RECESSION

Lower skilled workers in Canada have been amongst the hardest hit by the economic recession. Training and employment services should be increasingly targeted at hard-to-place job-seekers such as lower skilled workers.<sup>17</sup>

## 18 Literacy and the LABOUR MARKET OF THE FUTURE

Jobs of the future will require increasingly higher skills levels. It is estimated that by 2031, Ontario will need 77% of its workforce to have post-secondary credentials.<sup>18</sup>

## 19 Literacy and SKILL SHORTAGES

Due to our aging population and progressively lower birth rates, Ontario will start to experience a severe skill shortage in the near future. Improving literacy rates and increasing the participation rates of people currently under-represented in Ontario's labour force, such as people with low levels of literacy, will be critical to our province's future economic health.<sup>19</sup>

## 20 Literacy and WORKPLACE HEALTH AND SAFETY

Low literacy skills can represent a risk to workplace health and safety; however many employers are not aware that there are any literacy skills issues amongst their workforce.<sup>20</sup>



## Investing in Literacy and Basic Skills

*Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) is a network of 105 community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies located in communities large and small across the province. On International Literacy Day, September 8, 2010, we are pleased to share “Literacy: A Great Investment” on behalf of our members in the hope that it will help to increase awareness of the importance and benefits of literacy. Through this resource, CLO is adding its voice alongside the voices of other literacy organizations and networks who are working cooperatively to demonstrate the importance of investing in literacy. We hope that this document will be a useful tool for our members, partners and government.*

The Ontario government, through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), funds the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Academic Upgrading (AU) program. This program provides funding for literacy agencies to help adults improve their literacy skills. LBS/AU programs are part of Employment Ontario – Ontario’s employment and training network.

MTCU provides more than \$63 million annually to support delivery of the LBS/AU program at more than 300 sites throughout Ontario. The LBS program is delivered by community-based agencies, school boards, and colleges. The program supports literacy upgrading for English language, Francophone, Native, and Deaf adult learners. Each of these sectors and streams brings their unique strengths and together we effectively serve the diverse needs of adult literacy learners in Ontario. Over 50,000 adults receive training each year from LBS/AU programs.

However, over a ten-year period prior to 2009, core funding from MTCU for Ontario’s LBS programs remained static. As a result, programs and adult learners experienced serious program capacity issues and hardship such as growing waiting lists, reductions in hours of service, and insufficient staff to fully support all adult students.

In 2008, the federal and provincial governments signed the Canada-Ontario Labour Market Agreement (LMA). The LMA is projected to inject an additional \$1.2 billion dollars over six years from the federal government into Ontario’s labour market programs. The Federal government also provided a two-year funding increase to Ontario under the Strategic Training and Transition Fund (part of Canada’s Economic Action Plan). These initiatives made new resources available to the province’s employment and

training system and augmented the investments already being made by the Ontario government. Both levels of government have identified adult literacy as one of the four principal areas for investment under the LMA.

Strong support from all political parties for literacy was also demonstrated when the following private member’s resolution (presented by Garfield Dunlop, MPP for Simcoe North) was unanimously passed by the Ontario Legislature in February 2009.

*“I move that, in the opinion of this House, the Government of Ontario should provide adequate funding to community-based literacy and basic skills programs so that the agencies can properly address the growing enrolment.”*

There is also significant public support for government involvement in literacy. Recent research conducted by Ipsos Reid for ABC Life Literacy Canada revealed that 93% of Canadians agree that governments need to support improving the literacy levels of Canadians.<sup>21</sup>

In the March 2009 Ontario Budget, the Province of Ontario announced its two-year literacy budget initiative funding. This important initiative invested \$90 million (\$45 million over two years) to expand literacy training for up to 13,000 more adult learners. Of the \$45 million allocated annually, \$25 million was distributed to existing Literacy and Basic Skills programs, \$5 million was provided to expand online literacy training, and \$15 million was allocated to other literacy initiatives. The literacy budget initiative funding was supported by Canada-Ontario labour market agreements.

*The Ontario’s government’s two-year literacy budget initiative funding provided critical support to the province’s Literacy and Basic Skills programs. In fact, because of this funding, 36% of Ontario’s community-based LBS agencies were able to keep a program or service open that would have otherwise been in danger of closing. We are very grateful for this important and significant government investment.*



*“Literacy helps a student to get a good schooling. And to get good jobs. If it was not for the funding, a lot of students would not be in school.”*

— Quote from an adult learner in a community-based LBS program.

## Literacy: Return on Investment (ROI)

Literacy and Basic Skills agencies from all sectors and streams used the new two-year funding from the literacy budget initiative to provide a wide array of valuable new or enhanced services to adult learners across Ontario.

In January 2010, Community Literacy of Ontario surveyed its members and found that the Ontario government’s literacy budget initiative funding provided a strong return on investment. Sixty community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies from all across Ontario shared the impact of literacy budget initiative funding on their programs, adult learners and communities.

### **ROI** Over 80% of community-based literacy agencies used the new funding to:

- ▶ Provide literacy instruction to more adult learners
- ▶ Purchase additional learning materials for learners

- ▶ Offer additional training and professional development to staff
- ▶ Hire additional staff to support learners
- ▶ Offer literacy programming to new client groups

### **ROI** Over 65% of community-based literacy agencies used the new funding to:

- ▶ Provide enhanced support to current adult learners
- ▶ Provide new types of literacy programming
- ▶ Increase their hours of service

### **ROI** Over 30% of community-based literacy agencies used the new funding to:

- ▶ Offer literacy services in new program site(s)
- ▶ Recruit new volunteers or provide enhanced support to current volunteers
- ▶ Keep a program or service open that would have been in danger of closing
- ▶ Purchase new office equipment
- ▶ Expand their current office space
- ▶ Engage in more partnership activities with other service providers

### **ROI** Over 50% of community-based literacy agencies used the new funding to:

- ▶ Increase marketing and community promotional activities
- ▶ Purchase new technology

*“There never seems to be enough funding to provide for the basic things like office maintenance and staff time. I hope this new money can help to cover some of the things needed to keep the place going.”*

— Quote from an adult learner in a community-based LBS program.



## Investment Needs

This two-year literacy budget initiative funding from the Ontario government is currently slated to come to an end on March 31, 2011.

The years prior to 2009, when LBS agencies had not received a funding increase in more than a decade, were extremely detrimental to agency capacity. Even with the passion of adult literacy providers and volunteers, and their ability to carefully manage scarce resources, many literacy programs have become overcrowded and overextended. Community Literacy of Ontario, along with our members and various partners in the literacy community, is deeply concerned that if Literacy and Basic Skills agencies are forced to return to the funding levels of ten years ago as of April 1, 2011, that many Ontarians with low literacy skills may find themselves unable to access the upgrading services that they need to help them find work, continue their education, and meet day-to-day needs.

### The provincial picture

**Given the extreme importance of literacy to the economic and social well-being of Ontario, Community Literacy of Ontario requests that the two-year enhanced provincial investment in Literacy and Basic Skills programs continue at the current level of investment, and that this investment be converted into permanent, core funding.**

### The federal picture

Another part of the literacy funding picture involves the federal government. Economic stimulus funding under the federal government's Strategic Training and Transition Fund (STTF) provided much needed support to Ontario's labour market programs, including adult literacy. We are very grateful for that important support. Because the recession is not yet over in Ontario, and many communities are still suffering the effects of the economic downturn, we urge the federal government to continue to provide much needed STTF stimulus funding to Ontario.

As well, while literacy agencies receive core funding from provincial sources, funds from the federal government under the Labour Market Agreement (LMA) have augmented funding for literacy. We ask that the federal government continue its important investment in the LMA with Ontario beyond 2014, when it is due to expire. It is also important for Ontario to receive its fair share of EI funding from the federal government relative to the size of our province's contribution to the EI account.

## Impact if Enhanced Funding for Literacy is Discontinued

In a survey conducted by Community Literacy of Ontario in January 2010, community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies indicated that if enhanced funding for literacy from the Ontario government does not continue, they will experience the following program impacts:

- Reduction in overall services provided (72% of community-based agencies)
- Discontinuation or reduction of some types of programming (54% of community-based agencies)
- Increase in client waiting lists (49% of community-based agencies)
- Reduced staffing and reduced ability to support adult learners (45% of community-based agencies)
- Reduced hours of operation (30% of community-based agencies)
- Reduced number of program sites and locations (23% of community-based agencies)

Ontario's community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies typically operate on extremely small budgets to begin with; in fact, 50% have total annual operating budgets of less than \$150,000. Community-based literacy agencies also raise an average of one-third of their budgets from other sources of funding, including from private citizens, local businesses, service clubs, and fundraising activities. Staffing components in community-based literacy agencies are typically small, with agencies having an average of just four paid staff. Additionally, province-wide, almost 6,000 volunteers support the operations of Ontario's community-based literacy agencies.

### Painting a picture of literacy

Lifelong learning, health, poverty, employment, the economy, civic engagement, seniors, families ... these are issues the people of Ontario care deeply about and issues which also impact all levels of government in profound ways. Along with the college and school board sectors, community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies provide critical training support to adult learners in Ontario. Now, more than ever, there is a crucial need to continue the enhanced investment in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs to ensure that Ontarians have the skills they need to be fully engaged at home, work and in the community.



## Quotes from Adult Learners in Community-based LBS Agencies

The people most capable and deserving of “painting a literacy picture” are the adult students themselves! At CLO, we leave the last word to them.

*“I went to a local Employment Ontario employment agency and I was then referred to the Learning Centre as I did not have enough education to get a job. I had also injured myself; and the skills I did have, I could no longer use. The Learning Centre staff helped me prepare for my GED, and with increased funding to the literacy field I am going to take College Prep courses at the Learning Centre. I am well on my way to becoming an Addictions Counsellor.”*

*“Coming to the literacy centre has benefitted me to believe that I can help my children with their school work. Also, the information I was given about auto mechanics will help me in the long run when I go to college. I struggle with math and spelling, so the one-to-one tutoring has helped me with this.”*

*“The literacy program has helped me to start my education again giving me the confidence to start over.”*

*“The individualized learning venue is perfect for individuals who may require a little extra time for skill acquisition. Thank you for your patience and support. I look forward to continuing my journey in education.”*

*“I am writing to show my appreciation for the extra courses available at the Literacy Council. This course taught me many things that I can use every day. This course also motivated me to want to take more courses and expand my knowledge. My goal is to someday have completed enough courses to find employment using the skills I have learned.”*

*“The classes have been extremely helpful for me as a business owner. I know now that I can succeed when I attempt other learning.”*

*“I heard that our learning centre may have to start a waiting list soon because it is so busy here. That would be too bad. This has helped me so much that I will soon be able to go to college. There are a lot of people around here that are getting laid-off and will need some place like this to go.”*

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Literacy ► a GREAT investment!



Community Literacy of Ontario

## Celebrating Adult Learners in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Agencies



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