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Community Literacy of Ontario's
MAY 2009 E-COMMUNIQUE

Dear CLO members,

Community Literacy of Ontario is pleased to present its **MAY 2009** Members' E-Communiqué.

In April 2009 Community Literacy of Ontario asked our member programs (Ontario's community literacy agencies) to fill out a four question survey about the most effective ways to allocate the new funding in light of the current economic, social and labour market challenges.

A total of **70 community-based literacy agencies** from programs large and small across Ontario responded to this survey. You gave extremely thoughtful and profound feedback, despite your busy schedules.

CLO has summarized the key needs of Ontario's community literacy agencies for our member agencies and we have also shared these results with MTCU to help inform their planning and implementation of the literacy budget funding.

Thank you for responding to this important survey!

Question One:

What investments in literacy would best meet the needs of adult students?

Priority One: Funds to provide increased core funding for current services

This was a key priority for 56 of the 70 Ontario community literacy agencies that responded or 80%.

Overwhelmingly, Ontario's community literacy agencies are expressing the extreme need for an increase in core funding for their current services. For many, such an increase is a matter of their basic survival as an LBS agency, given so many years of flat-lined funding.
Specifically agencies identified that increased core funding was needed:

- To continue to offer excellent services to adult learners
- To offer services full time and year round
- To cover ever-rising *office costs* of operating an LBS agency including items such as rent; office equipment; office supplies; telephone and Internet; computers, technology, etc.
- To pay for staffing and PD costs for *agency staff* in order to help with staff recruitment and retention
- To purchase student resources, books, curriculum, and supports
- To meet MTCU requirements (insurance, CIPMS, IMS, etc.)
- To meet the requirements of being an independent non-for-profit charitable organization (audit, annual general meetings, legal and policy development, strategic planning)
- To cover the cost of volunteer recruitment retention
- To provide stability after 12 years of flatlined funding

Priority Two: Funds to increase program capacity to enhance existing services or to offer new services

This was a key priority for 47 of the 70 Ontario community literacy agencies that responded or 67%.

Specifically agencies identified that increased funding for enhanced or new services was needed:

- To deliver new types of programming or enhance existing services
- To rent better, larger, more appropriate office space – to serve more learners and to offer enhanced programming
- To increase staffing levels to serve more clients
- To increase hours of operation to better serve the diverse need of adult learners (longer hours, evenings and/or weekends)
- To purchase enhanced resources for learners including: curriculum, workbooks, resources, and supplies
- To offer instruction to more students and by providing services to those on their waiting list
- To continue serve all learners who meet program requirements not just to focus on laid-off workers because of seat shortages caused by the influx of laid-off workers
- To access more funds to serve Second Career and other laid-off workers (additional staff, office space, equipment and resources
- To offer flexible hours for people who are working and who want to learn part-time
- To purchase practitioner resources and PD
- To service un-serviced or under-serviced geographic areas

Priority Three: Resources and Technology

This was a key priority for 27 of the 70 Ontario community literacy agencies that responded or 39%.

Specifically agencies identified that increased funding for resources and technology was needed:

- To purchase better computers, computers labs and access to online resources for teaching and learning
- To increase access to technology for adult learners
- To purchase a variety of resources for adult students including: curriculum, level-appropriate books, workbooks with activities, supplies
- To offer training in the new technologies to practitioners and adult students

Priority Four: Support for Innovative Initiatives and Partnerships

This was a key priority for 19 of the 70 Ontario community literacy agencies that responded or 27%.

Specifically agencies identified that increased funding for innovative initiatives and partnerships was needed:

- To increase support to assist youth who did not complete high school to get their diplomas and partnering with new organizations (i.e. Ministry of Education)
- To increase support and partnering with ESL
- To support agencies to develop expertise in workforce literacy
- To support new partnerships (for example the Ministry of Health and health literacy initiatives)
- To support family literacy programs
- To support effective knowledge transfer about current best practices occurring around Ontario
- To implement a variety of initiatives to support students
- To offer mentoring and hands-on experience programs where people can learn skills in a supported manner but need opportunities to practice them before applying for a job
- To learn about effective methods for online instruction, online communication and new web tools (Web 2.0)
- To help with integration of services under Employment Ontario

Question Two:

How could new investments in literacy better help programs to meet the increased demand for programming due to the current economic conditions?

68 community literacy agencies responded to this question.

In priority order, here were their key needs and issues:

New Funding for Increased Capacity to Serve Adult Learners would allow agencies to :
- Recruit and retain excellent staff to provide excellent service to learners
- Increase program hours to meet the high demand for services
- Provide more space and more instructors to accommodate a wider variety of student skills and student goals
- Provide enhanced support to better reach hard to serve learners

New Funding for Enhanced or Expanded Programming would allow agencies to:
- Offer more flexibility and evening and weekend classes
- Offer more programming to meet the demand and reach more people
- Provide new and different types of programming (math, computers, etc.) or targeted programming to certain groups of people
- Develop new programming to give learners hands-on experience
- Provide more program locations in un-serviced areas
- Offer longer operating hours and more intensive instruction
- Purchase more equipment, resources and supplies to meet the increased need

New Funding for Learning Resources would allow agencies to:
- Purchase more student resources, materials and teaching tools in both hard copy or online formats
- Provide better resources and curriculum for students with workforce goals

New Funding for Technology / Computers would allow agencies to:
- Purchase more computers and computers labs
- Provide high speed Internet access for all computers
- Purchase technology resources

New Funding for Workforce Literacy would allow agencies to:
- Provide assessment and training for laid-off workers
- Offer full time instruction and support Second Career Students
- Address the needs of ALL laid-off workers, not just unionized ones with an Action Centre
- Serve the underemployed, the marginally employed, and those bound by the limitations of OW and other support programs.
- Make more linkages with employers
- Offer more intensive programming to laid-off workers

New Funding for Partnerships and Networking would allow agencies to:
- Improve partnerships and service integration with EO providers and partners
- Begin new partnerships with EDU organizations and ESL and others
- Share resources and best practices more effectively
- Assist with developing better referral processes

66 community literacy agencies responded to this question.

Ontario's community literacy agencies came up with many innovative ideas, including:

Workforce:

- Design new programming to give learners hands-on experience
- Incorporate the essential and employability skills into all goal paths
- Develop new partnerships between LBS agencies and other Employment Ontario agencies to develop effective pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programming
- Develop pilot programs to deliver workplace literacy in small and medium sized business
- Incorporate the use of job developers and job coaches
- Offer more transition to work programs (i.e. the Daily Bread's food services training or Goodwill's customer service or janitorial programs) to bridge people with low literacy levels into the workforce
- Provide training at community literacy agencies and certificates on food handling, first aid, etc. to increase their job competitiveness
- Develop curriculum to offer literacy training where job skills are embedded so students learn both at the same time
- Offer programs that give literacy and hands-on experience for learners – practice firms or volunteering for example, to gain experience
- Offer literacy upgrading linked to specific trades or post-secondary programs
- Offer the successful Rapid Re-Employment partnerships in SW Ontario elsewhere
- Offer more literacy linked with career and job exploration programs
- Offer co-op programming which not only trains adult but provides placements with employers
- Partner with OW and others to deliver literacy related to basic employability
- Offer essential skills workplace modules focusing on specific topics i.e. working in a store – with practical tasks and actual work placements and certification of completion, designed for level 1 and 2 learners
- Offer interactive workshops on the soft skills
- Provide mentoring programs/ employer subsidies for employers to take on LBS learners while s/he is still learning skills
- Offer supported job placements, job coaching, practice firms, workplace simulations, etc. that give practical work experience
- Offer financial literacy programs
- Provide funds for career counseling and guidance

Technology:

- Offer more e-learning opportunities
- Offer more flexible distance learning – that is not hamstrung by the Ministry's requirement that an instructor be present with the learner in order to "count the learning hours"
- Help learners to use technology as a basic part of classroom activities
- Offer training to literacy students in using computers and give certificates

- Provide funding for assistive technologies for disabled students
- Offer training in the new technologies (Web 2.0) to learners and practitioners
- Provide more funding for computer literacy
- Increase the incorporation of computer-based learning which would help expand important workplace abilities while facilitating learning
- Develop and offer online modules that provide training in literacy related to specific jobs
- Provide more software related to learning disabilities
- Support students to develop e-portfolios of their learning and workplace experience
- Increase online interactive training to rural and remote communities (for learners and practitioners)

Assessment:

- Provide better assessment of literacy skills for people not entering LBS programming but who are entering other EO programming – so that they will know going in whether literacy is an issue for them and so they will get appropriate support
- Increase the capacity for assessment to determine if employment goals are realistic academically and vocationally
- Provide more funds for staff to perform intake and ongoing assessment

Other:

- Provide access to core funding – not funding for new research projects
- Provide access to more relevant and innovative curriculum
- Build linkages and partnering with ESL – other jurisdictions have done this and we need to learn from them
- Recognize and support for the fact that literacy needs come wrapped in housing, poverty, disability, post-incarceration, newcomers, etc.
- Develop a framework to allow all EO programs to interface effectively and efficiently to meet the needs of clients especially in regards to literacy needs
- Offer family literacy programming
- Offer after school literacy programs, homework help clubs and literacy strategies for parents
- Make better linkages with health literacy and the Ministry of Health
- Expand child care and transportation to make programs more accessible
- Provide access to counseling because literacy students face multiple barriers

Question Four

What supports would help literacy programs to more effectively support initiatives such as Second Career and Rapid Response Training Strategy?

61 community literacy agencies responded to this question.

A key finding in CLO's survey of Ontario's community literacy agencies is that many require **additional and clearer information on Second Career and how it might be delivered and supported in our sector.**

Essentially, many community literacy agencies believe that they are not eligible to delivery literacy training to Second Career participants because they often to do not offer full day; full time instruction to learners. More information from MTCU and how community based literacy agencies could support Second Career initiative was a key need identified.

Additionally, respondents noted that following support would be helpful related to Second Career:

- Provide increased funding to offer more intensive instruction and longer hours of instruction to SC clients
- Recognize that it is not reasonable to raise the skill level of someone at level 1-2 to a level 3 in one year and that lower level students typically face multiple barriers and require substantial support so progress is slower than at the higher levels
- Create enhanced partnerships between LBS agencies and other EO agencies to develop effective pre-employment and pre-apprenticeship programming
- Offer increased capacity for assessment to determine if client employment goals are realistic academically and vocationally
- Provide adequate funding so agencies can effectively serve SC learners and be able to hire instructors who have the training to serve laid-off workers and so that the agency can provide quality learning resources to clients
- Offer training in literacy assessment/needs to EO partners so that they can better assess for literacy skills because if their clients have literacy needs; they will require additional support to succeed in the EO program.
- Increase awareness amongst EO partners of skills degenerating (use it or lose it). Many laid-off workers have been out of school for many years – and their skills have degenerated or weren't very high to begin with. Even if they attained their high school diploma, their skills may still be very low due to skills degeneration. Many will need a literacy refresher course despite having a high school diploma.
- Ensure that the acceptance of SC clients does not mean that other adult learners have to be turned away because of insufficient spaces
- Share best practices on serving SC learners in LBS
- Provide more information about the roles and links between literacy and Action Centres as this seems to vary greatly between communities
- Provide increased funding for classroom space for SC clients
- Develop pilot models on how literacy can support Second Career
- Create new learning programs for laid-off workers customized to their needs
- Create more workplace resources for low level learners
- Enhance community linkages, partnerships and marketing to better serve SC clients