

# ONTARIO'S LITERACY SECTOR NETWORKS

## *Providing effective support and coordination for literacy programs across Ontario*

ONTARIO HAS A WELL DEVELOPED delivery system and infrastructure to support the success of adults in Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) funded Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) / Academic Upgrading (AU) programs. The LBS program is offered by three delivery sectors: colleges, school boards, and community-based programs. In order to meet the unique cultural needs of learners, it is also structured based on four streams to serve Anglophone, Francophone, Deaf, and Aboriginal learners. The diverse range of deliverers ensures that the needs of all adults who require literacy and basic skills upgrading are met.

Each delivery sector is supported by a provincial network: the College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC), Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO), Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO), and the Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA). The sector networks support their members and consequently their learners in a very targeted manner, providing direct, timely and practical assistance to programs, and thus contribute in a substantial way to the delivery of quality literacy programming in Ontario.

Anglophone programs represent 90% of adult literacy programming in the province. The sector networks maintain communication links with over 200 literacy programs serving 48,000 learners annually in programs offered in approximately 300 delivery locations.

The majority of literacy instruction occurs in classrooms and literacy programs in communities large and small across Ontario. Distance delivery is also used for some adult learners. In addition, distance delivery is an important component in the training of practitioners. Each of the sector organizations maintains a network of linkages to the broader educational system which enhances their capacity for effective communication, consultation, and implementation.

### **Literacy Sector Networks' support for Ministry priorities and government directions**

Sector networks support Ministry priorities and initiatives in a productive and positive manner. Because of their direct program communication links and understanding of their individual sectors from a provincial perspective,

the sector organizations are in a unique position to provide the government with advice on literacy issues, policy and implementation support, and facilitation of communications and training. The executive directors of the sector networks or their delegates serve on committees and attend consultations, providing advice, information, and communication with their members.

With the integration of the LBS/AU program into the **Employment Ontario (EO)** process, the sector networks are integral to successful transformation as they provide provincial services and perspectives, informed advice, and communication links with the field. As well, their association with other EO programs allows them to contribute to the building of an integrated employment and training system for Ontario by facilitating the coordination of next-step training for learners, linking literacy programming with secondary school credit, postsecondary, Apprenticeship, and Job Connect options.

Distance delivery is recognized by the sector networks as an important component in the training of literacy practitioners as well as learners. All four sector networks offer practitioner training and resources online. The CSC supports the government's E-channel priority through their direct involvement in the provision of training to learners (1,500 in 2008–09) through the ACE Distance initiative.

While the literacy sectors have a primarily Anglophone focus, two sector networks provide support to Francophone deliverers of literacy services. The CSC includes the two Francophone colleges, Collège Boréal and La Cité Collégiale, in all of its research, materials development, communications, and training activities. CESBA includes Ontario's Francophone school boards in its activities.

### **The roles of the literacy sector networks in supporting the delivery of adult literacy programs in Ontario**

The provincial sector networks support the three delivery sectors (colleges, school boards, and community-based programs) from a unique provincial perspective, providing a wide range of services, all focused on promoting literacy programming for adults in Ontario and its delivery to consistently high standards in various environments to meet all learners' needs.

## Communications

The provincial sector networks maintain direct and effective communication with their members across the province through newsletters, websites, email, provincial meetings, training events, and annual conferences.

They contextualize information for applicability to the particular sector, filter it, and sequence the timing of the communication so that it is appropriate for their sector. CLO has strong, direct linkages with 110 community-based literacy delivery agencies across Ontario. The CSC is actively connected to the deliverers of Literacy and Basic Skills / Academic Upgrading programming in each of the 24 Ontario colleges. CESBA maintains linkages with the 50 school boards, each with multiple agency sites, offering LBS programming. LLO is actively connected to 52 community-based and school board programs across the province, as well as one prison program.

### Single voice representation and communications

The sector networks speak for their members provincially; the members have confidence in their sector organizations to represent them well and fairly. With in-depth knowledge of the programs and the dynamics of their sector, they are able to move forward quickly on issues and opportunities as they arise.

### Support for the delivery of quality LBS / AU programming

The provincial perspective of each sector organization contributes to ensuring quality delivery and equitable access to Literacy and Basic Skills programming across Ontario. The delivery of coordinated, quality programming requires that there be venues for province-wide discussion, support for initiatives with province-wide input and impact, and the sharing of ideas and best practices across the province. The sector networks provide:

- ▶ **Professional development for practitioners** — The sector networks offer practical, timely, and sector-specific training to their members in a variety of delivery formats, in person and online. The range of professional development opportunities includes:
  - Training sessions on topics such as the Continuous Improvement Performance Management System (CIPMS) via CLO's online Performance Management Training website
  - Online orientation workbooks for managers and practitioners on the CSC website
  - Essential Skills training online and in workshops
  - Online training for volunteer tutors and practitioners
  - Publications such as LLO's quarterly *Expressions* E-Magazine
- ▶ **Meetings and conferences** — The sector networks host well attended annual meetings, symposiums, colloquiums and conferences, thus providing venues for formal and informal information sharing, knowledge exchange, structured professional development workshops, and opportunities for dialogue on key issues.
- ▶ **Websites** — The literacy sectors' active and well maintained websites provide their members with current information, updates on current government initiatives, resources, reports, access to online practitioner training, program information, broad contextual information on literacy in Ontario, links to other helpful websites, online discussion areas for members only, and interactive wikis. The websites are used extensively — more than 95,000 visitors use these sites each year.
- ▶ **Resources** — The sector networks identify learning resources and support collaborative projects to develop learning materials such as the Ministry led Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Project, the development of practitioner training manuals, student learning resources, and other materials designed to help members in teaching / tutoring as well as administrative settings.
- ▶ **Coordinated research and development initiatives** — All the sector networks do action-oriented primary and secondary research with direct applicability to programs. Ongoing research varies among the sector networks and can include data collection for annual reports, CIPMS, client profiles, and surveys of the needs and priorities of the programs. Situational response research often links a question or problem in one jurisdiction with a solution or approach developed in another. The sector networks support larger, funded research initiatives such as the Learner Skill Attainment Project which provided the foundation for the creation of a framework to assist LBS learners in Ontario to move more easily among the programs that serve their educational and training needs.

## Cooperation and collaboration

In addition to supporting their individual sectors, the literacy sector networks foster communication, cooperation and collaboration between and among themselves, as well as with regional literacy networks and the four provincial umbrella networks representing the streams serving literacy programming in Ontario. The unique culture and cluster of services of each organization add to the richness and responsiveness of Ontario's literacy delivery system. Communication among the sectors, regional literacy networks, and the provincial umbrella networks is crucial for ensuring effective delivery and equitable access to LBS programming across the province.

The sector networks recognize the commonalities that exist between their organizations, focus on the areas of common interest for collaboration, and respect the differences that exist between the organizations and the sectors they represent. They have a history of

informal communication as well as formal collaboration to work in areas of mutual interest, and continue to seek opportunities to work together in meaningful and authentic ways to improve the delivery of literacy programming in Ontario.

*The sector networks have, for many years, offered unique and vital provincial support to the deliverers of literacy programming and have worked to keep the literacy services delivered by their sectors strong and coordinated. They advise and support government in meeting the needs of adults requiring literacy programming, and look forward to continuing to serve Ontario well as it develops a highly responsive and integrated employment and training system.*

## The mandates of the literacy sector networks

The provincial literacy sector networks, funded by MTCU, play distinct but complementary roles, all critical to the success of the Literacy and Basic Skills delivery system in Ontario.

**College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC)** supports the Ontario College system by developing student learning resources for classroom and distance delivery, and practitioner training materials; by facilitating communication among colleges resulting in improved procedures and standards; and by providing practitioner training at workshops, at an annual conference and regional workshops to promote the continuous improvement of the delivery of upgrading programs. The CSC works closely with the other provincial college organizations which support Apprenticeship, Job Connect and Employment Assistance Services to promote greater program interaction.

**Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO)** supports, promotes and provides a united voice for Anglophone community-based literacy programs in Ontario. CLO provides services to Ontario's community literacy agencies such as sharing information via e-bulletins and newsletters, producing exemplary resources and tools,

hosting two websites, providing online training, holding an annual training event, and researching the needs and priorities of their members.

**Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO)** represents a network of community-based literacy programs using the services of trained volunteer tutors and trainers who provide one-to-one and small group instruction for adult students who want to upgrade their skills. LLO supports its member agencies with a training and accreditation system for tutors and tutor-trainers, training resources, and annual professional development events. They are also province-wide distributors of New Readers Press materials through their social enterprise "Laubach Literacy Bookstore."

**Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA)** represents and promotes a broad spectrum of adult and continuing education programs offered by Ontario's French, English, Catholic and Public school boards. CESBA operates two conferences, and two symposium style meetings for the managers of the LBS programs annually; its magazine style newsletters, regular e-updates, and two web-based training sites provide authentic and meaningful in-service for LBS program staff.

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