

Happy 25th Anniversary to Community Literacy of Ontario!

A Brief History of the Little Organization that Could

By Joanne Kaattari, October 13, 2001

It's a quiet Sunday today. The kids are playing Nintendo and chess, so I snuck away from my family to take the opportunity to write down something very dear to my heart: the history of Community Literacy of Ontario.

I hope that this can serve both as an historical record and a tribute to the many inspiring and dedicated people who have contributed immensely to the development of Community Literacy of Ontario.

I never dreamed that in June 1994 when I answered a job ad recruiting an *"interim coordinator"* for a three-month contract that I would become part of a team that would create the exemplary organization called [Community Literacy of Ontario](#).

So how did CLO come to be? How did it grow from an organization that had a three-month lease on life in 1994 to the dynamic organization that is known today?

Well, it all started like this...

In 1993 the Ontario Literacy Coalition went through an evaluation. The results of that evaluation suggested that a majority of people felt that OLC had become too focused on the needs of community-based agencies. The OLC committed to returning to a more inclusive vision of serving all sectors – school boards, colleges and community-based. In January 1994, OLC members adopted *"New Directions for OLC"*. AS OLC moved in this more inclusive direction, it was recognized that community-based programs still needed to have their own voice. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) agreed to provide start-up costs for a network that would focus exclusively on the needs and concerns of community-based literacy agencies. This network was called *"Community Literacy of Ontario"*.

Enter CLO's *"founding five"*. Carynne Arnold, Lindsay Kennedy, Doug Rankin, Vicki Trottier and Sheila Vlachos first met in January 1994 to prepare a funding proposal to develop Community Literacy of Ontario (or CLO). In October 1994, CLO hosted a provincial meeting in Ottawa of 55 people from community-based literacy agencies from all across the province. At that time, the role, direction, mission, membership and operating structure for Community Literacy of Ontario were developed.

"Like attracts like" as they say, and dynamic people such as CLO's *"founding five"* soon attracted other excellent steering committee members from every region of Ontario. Whether steering committee members or in later times, members of the board of directors, CLO was invariably governed by people with vision, dedication and commitment.

The initial Steering Committee agreed that CLO's office would be set up wherever the successful applicant for the position of CLO coordinator lived. When Joanne Kaattari was hired as coordinator in July 1994, her home office in Sudbury, Ontario became the headquarters of Community Literacy of Ontario. In March 1998, Joanne moved to Barrie, Ontario and the CLO home office moved with her. In August 1998, CLO moved to a formal office location at 80 Bradford Street in Barrie. At that time the additional staff that you know today, Jette Cosburn, and soon afterward Joan Beaudry, were hired.

So where are we in October 2001? Thanks to the dedication and support of our wonderful board members, volunteers, staff, member programs, partner organizations and the staff of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS), Community Literacy of Ontario has grown to be an organization that is respected provincially, nationally and internationally for its work.

Community Literacy of Ontario is proud to have 109 paid members, and an active and dynamic board, staff and volunteer team. CLO is governed by an twelve-member board of directors who represent every region in Ontario. Our staff complement is surprisingly small; we have only 2.5 core staff members and two project staff members. Staff are assisted by 35 amazing volunteers who donate their time and talents to CLO.

Some of CLO's highlights include our focus on adult learners in Ontario, our excellent relations with our member programs, MTCU, NLS, our partners such as the Ontario Literacy Coalition and the regional and sectoral networks, and the broader voluntary sector in Ontario and Canada. CLO has introduced measures to link it more closely with our members such as our monthly e-bulletin. We have produced exemplary resources such as the *"Guide to the Development of Policies and Procedures in Ontario's Community Literacy Agencies"* and *"Celebrating Literacy Volunteers in Your Community: A Promotional Tool Kit"* that have received acclaim in Ontario, Canada and beyond. This October, CLO is very proud to co-sponsor with our long-term partner Laubach Literacy Ontario *"A Celebration of Literacy Volunteers"* conference. On October 19, 2001 over 350 people will gather at a gala even to honour and recognize Ontario's literacy volunteers.

On the external front, in January 2001, Community Literacy of Ontario was very proud to present at the World Volunteer Conference in Amsterdam.

While CLO may be small, we have always dreamed big, worked hard, and accomplished much. Community Literacy of Ontario has truly become the little organization that could.

"We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give"

(Sir Winston Churchill)

