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Our Voice

Marketing LBS and the OALCF

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies have been working on the full implementation of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) since April 2012. The formal structure of the OALCF, which uses three levels to describe developing proficiency in six different competencies and introduces new assessment standards in the form of milestones and culminating tasks, is new to community-based literacy practitioners. However, the concept of a goal-directed, task-based, learner-centred approach remains the same.

While much remains the same with the implementation of the OALCF, there are still changes in programming and Community Literacy of Ontario was interested to see how community-based literacy agencies are marketing the new approach to external stakeholders.

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Throughout the late spring and fall of 2012, CLO conducted research with community-based literacy agencies to:

- identify key external stakeholders
- determine how agencies are connecting with stakeholders
- find out how agencies are marketing their services, in which the OALCF is now embedded

Agencies were also asked to identify successes and challenges, and whether or not their marketing messages have changed as a result of the OALCF. To get this information, CLO conducted key informant interviews, a focus group, and ongoing informal research with community-based agencies. This newsletter will share the results of this research and highlight some of the interesting marketing approaches that community-based literacy agencies are using in their marketing and partnership efforts.

Marketing:

“The process or technique of promoting, selling, and distributing a product or service”

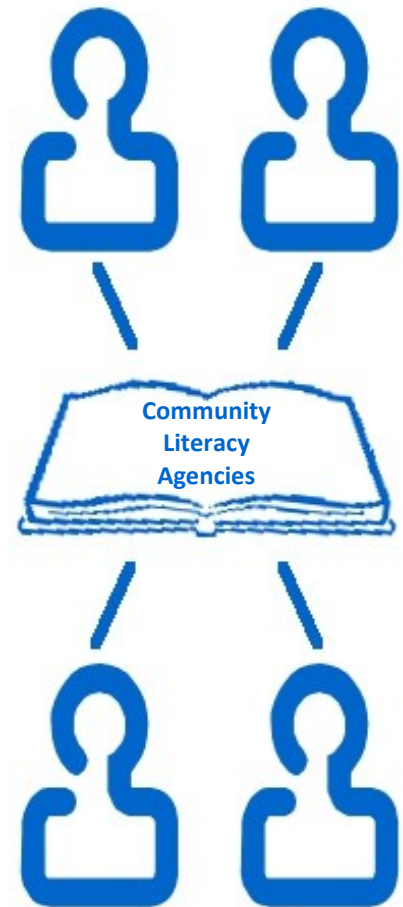
Merriam Webster Dictionary

Who Are Our External Stakeholders?

CLO's research clearly indicated that community literacy agencies have many external stakeholders in common; however, many agencies have also engaged additional stakeholders from within their own communities.

The following list features some of the many connections that are being made by community literacy agencies. It is not an exhaustive list, but it is a great sampling that clearly showcases how large the audience is for LBS agencies and their services.

- ⇒ Learners
- ⇒ General Public
- ⇒ Regional Literacy Networks
- ⇒ Employers
- ⇒ Ontario Works
- ⇒ Ontario Disability Support Programs
- ⇒ Homelessness Services
- ⇒ Early Years Centres
- ⇒ Women's Shelters
- ⇒ Employment Ontario Agencies/Other Employment Services
- ⇒ Offices of Economic/Workforce Development
- ⇒ Mental Health/Addiction Programs
- ⇒ Out of the Cold Programs
- ⇒ Boys and Girls Clubs
- ⇒ College and School Board Programs
- ⇒ Multi-Service Centres
- ⇒ Local Businesses
- ⇒ Libraries
- ⇒ Local Training Boards
- ⇒ United Ways
- ⇒ Labour Adjustment Committees
- ⇒ YMCAs
- ⇒ Rotary Clubs/Local Service Clubs
- ⇒ Volunteer Associations
- ⇒ Townships/Cities/Political Leaders
- ⇒ Community Living/Community Care Organizations
- ⇒ First Nations
- ⇒ WSIB Offices



Marketing Strategies

The 12 representatives from CLO's Board of Directors, all of whom represent community-based agencies from across Ontario, participated in a focus group in June 2012 to discuss how they currently market their services, how they would like to market their services and some of the challenges that they face.

Current marketing strategies:

- ◇ Work with local training boards
- ◇ Promote programming at fee-for-service activities
- ◇ Bring promotional materials to fundraising activities
- ◇ Make one-to-one connections with other agencies in their communities
- ◇ Build linkages one agency and one person at a time
- ◇ Use "word of mouth" advertising through learners and partnerships
- ◇ Connect with other agencies and share ideas at regional literacy network planning meetings
- ◇ Attend meetings at local Employment Service agencies on a regular basis to share LBS information
- ◇ Share promotional material at Multi-Service Centre meetings
- ◇ Present at partner/stakeholder agencies (EO, ES, OW, First Nations, Social Services Inter-agency group, WSIB, employers) about the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) goal paths and a task-based approach
- ◇ Train and share information about the OALCF using videos and information available on CLO's website (www.nald.ca/clo/oalcf.htm) and (www.nald.ca/clo/publications.htm)
- ◇ Use existing materials from regional literacy networks for presentations to key stakeholders
- ◇ Introduce the key concepts of the OALCF to learners and tutors a little bit at a time
- ◇ Develop agency brochures that use OALCF language and highlight LBS services
- ◇ Place small ads in local papers, highlighting a different goal path each time
- ◇ Develop a "welcome package" for learners to introduce them to the OALCF
- ◇ Budget for marketing
- ◇ Promote programming to all stakeholders

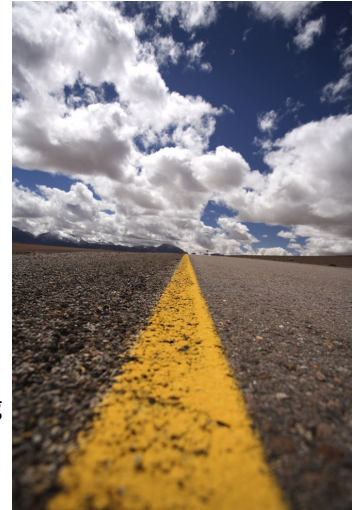


Challenges and Looking to the Future

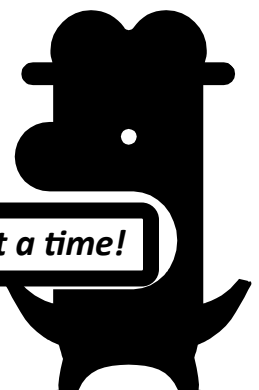
It comes as no surprise that agencies are encountering some challenges when trying to market their programs and services. The most common themes are lack of resources—both financial and human, the complexity of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF), a lack of social media knowledge and finding an approach that works for each agency.

However, with challenges come opportunities. CLO's Board of Directors offer the following suggestions as strategies for the future:

- ⇒ Update your agency website with general OALCF information
- ⇒ Link to the materials on CLO's website—videos, newsletters
- ⇒ Develop professional promotional materials
- ⇒ Put aside some time to learn more social media
- ⇒ Develop a basic PowerPoint that can be easily adapted for different audiences
- ⇒ Start using the language of the OALCF on a regular basis when talking about services
- ⇒ Update current program materials to be more reflective of the services offered
- ⇒ Talk about marketing and possibilities at staff meetings
- ⇒ Develop a concrete marketing strategy
- ⇒ Consider developing a simple referral card with pathway/goal information
- ⇒ Write some Public Service Announcements
- ⇒ Invite stakeholders to a community event
- ⇒ Allow yourself, your students, and your stakeholders time for a learning curve
- ⇒ Host an Open House
- ⇒ Aim to reach new partners and learners
- ⇒ Keep it simple—sometimes less is more
- ⇒ Have realistic expectations—make one additional call per week or take half an hour per week to start revamping existing material
- ⇒ Talk to other agencies in your community to find out how they market their services—there may be opportunities to share resources
- ⇒ Start small and dream big!



Q: How do you eat an elephant?



A: One bite at a time!

More Service Coordination Success Stories

In the June 2012 edition of *Our Voice*, CLO highlighted several community-based literacy agencies' service coordination success stories. By coordinating with other programs, members have been able to market to additional stakeholders, facilitate ongoing communication and maintain flourishing partnerships. Since the publication of the June edition, we have gathered a few more excellent service coordination success stories to share with you to highlight the benefits of marketing your agency and its services to external stakeholders.



The Learning Centre for Georgina

The Learning Centre for Georgina has established a wide variety of partnerships with various programs and services within their community. They have paired up with Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers which is delivering parenting programs and will soon be offering workshops for young moms struggling with addictions. They have also partnered with Seneca College and Contact North, coordinating the delivery of ACE credits as well as online training, high school credits and transitions to College and University programming. Not only do they coordinate services, but they also share their location, being co-located with Addiction Services York Region as well as their local Women's Shelter. The Learning Centre for Georgina is consistently searching for new partnerships and opportunities within their community.

The Literacy Council of York-Simcoe

The Literacy Council of York-Simcoe has been working diligently to expand their partnerships as well, and has developed a unique way to do so. They have started a mobile computer lab that provides computer training to host agencies in several different locations, such as at an Employment Ontario (EO) agency and at an Ontario Works (OW) agency. Utilizing a program manager to conduct the initial coordination of the program, a tech person to set up the mobile lab itself and a facilitator to deliver the class, the Literacy Council of York-Simcoe provides six weeks of classes in areas that are outside of their agency's home office location. They have collaborated with four other community agencies and with two different communities, which has enabled the Literacy Council to expand its community of learners.

Adult Language and Learning

Adult Language and Learning (ALL) in Chatham has developed an ongoing partnership with Ontario Works in which potential learners use their facilities for OW programs—sharing computer time as well as resources. In her experience, Chris Benninger has found that many OW clients feel intimidated by the thought of returning to academics. By sharing facilities and resources, Adult Language and Learning becomes a familiar face to these clients, which helps reduce client anxiety. The OW clients are able to see that ALL can support them in the pursuit of their goals.



Communicating with External Stakeholders

With the implementation of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) and a pathways approach, communication between stakeholders has become even more important. Stakeholders need to be aware of the changes that are taking place in LBS programming to further support learners. After speaking with several different CLO members, it was evident that the most common forms of communication between agencies and stakeholders are phone calls, e-mails and face-to-face interactions. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, online advertising and websites, are being used more frequently as well. Many members also indicated that ongoing referrals in and amongst partners take place on a regular basis and serve as another common form of communication. In addition to the above methods of communication, several CLO members have stepped out of the box to expand their communication methods in order to outline the changes of the OALCF in easy-to-understand formats.



While agencies are still navigating through OALCF implementation, it is important that these changes are being communicated so that partners and potential learners are aware of how the programming can help. The following ideas from some creative community-based agencies may be useful when you are thinking about different options for communicating with external stakeholders.

Literacy Council of York-Simcoe

Trisha Patrick of the Literacy Council of York-Simcoe has created what she calls a “Mail Blitz,” where she mails out brochures that explain what her agency does and what services they have to offer. Trisha also ensures that her program is actively involved in community meetings. She explains that they attend Ontario Works’ “Power Your Future” as well as their staff meetings to continue their ongoing partnership and to ensure that updates are being communicated appropriately. Trisha also takes part in a speaker’s bureau where she is able to connect with service clubs, conduct speeches and deliver presentations on a regular basis.

Iroquois Falls Adult Learning Centre

Similarly to Trisha, Denise Tremblay of Iroquois Falls Adult Learning Centre has published information to showcase the changes of the OALCF. She sends a newsletter out to stakeholders twice a year, and she also tries to conduct a survey once a year to touch base with these partners. Denise also explained that in order to communicate the OALCF changes to not only the board members, but also to the general public, they have dedicated one page of their Annual Report to the OALCF. This page showcased the implementation along with what it entails. Denise mentioned that she is hoping to have this same information carried over to their website so it is available to a larger audience.



The Literacy Group of Waterloo

The Literacy Group of Waterloo is actively involved in their community, solidifying their communication by taking part in various events and meetings. Carol Risidore explains that their LBS network, comprised of all three literacy sectors, meets on a monthly basis and that they also meet with other programs that directly impact literacy within the area. Carol attends community employment linkage meetings and sits on the board for two advisory committees (for the United Way as well as for the Rural Area German Mennonite population). She will be making adjustments to the Literacy Group’s brochures to reflect the changes resulting from the OALCF.

The Literacy Alliance of West Nipissing

Nanditta Colbear of the Literacy Alliance of West Nipissing (LAWN) is persistent in educating her stakeholders about the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) and a pathways approach. Nanditta explains that she “wants stakeholders to be aware that things are changing and that LAWN is offering services differently than in the past.”

Nanditta tries to meet with case workers from Ontario Works, Employment Ontario agencies, WSIB and the Canadian Mental Health Association at least twice a year and she sends out regular e-mails, sharing success stories or new information with her stakeholders. Breakfast meetings are another method that Nanditta uses to communicate with her stakeholders; she always aims for face-to-face interactions. Once a meeting is established, Nanditta uses a slide show presentation that she has developed, which offers stakeholders a look at the full picture of the OALCF. Aware that there are many components of the OALCF, Nanditta has summarized the information, showcasing everything from the intake interview, to looking at each of the learner goals, to the pathways where learners are headed, to the assessment process, to training plans, to learner outcomes, to the expectations of the program, including attendance. Following this information, she outlines how learners transition to the next stage. Nanditta tailors her presentations, and specifically the goals, to the market she is speaking to. She stresses to stakeholders that clients must be willing to look at goals, pathways and transitional outcomes so that they can decide if LAWN is the right program for their client. Although there is a lot to incorporate into these meetings, she has limited the presentations to approximately twenty minutes.

Nanditta also conducts a comprehensive two-day training session for her staff and volunteers to educate them on the policies and procedures of the new OALCF. The hands-on session begins with an introduction to new vocabulary in the OALCF. After this introduction, she showcases the transition into implementation. She also includes an outline of program and administrative changes. Conscious of the amount of information to include, Nanditta has developed a series of activities to maintain interest, get staff/volunteers involved and highlight the real-world application of the OALCF.

Nanditta has demonstrated that a little persistence goes a long way. She has developed a comprehensive plan that begins with her staff and volunteers and extends to her external stakeholders, all in support of the success of adult learners.

In Some Cases, Less is More

How are community literacy agencies sharing information about their programs? Has program messaging changed since the introduction of the OALCF? In their discussions with CLO, many agencies indicated that they continue to focus on learner goals and skill development when talking about their programs. Some agencies have encountered difficulties when they attempt to explain too many details of the OALCF to some of their external stakeholders. Some stakeholders are more interested in whether or not the LBS agency will be able to help learners and less interested in the specifics of *how* they will help. The degree of detail that you will want to share should be based on who you are communicating with and the reason that you are communicating. In many instances, it will be more appropriate to focus on what happens as a result of LBS programming. And naturally if stakeholders are interested, more detail can be provided.



CLO would love to hear about your marketing successes and challenges. Please email us at clo@bellnet.ca to share!

Free Resources!!

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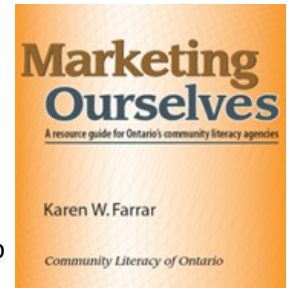
EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO

OALCF

CLO has produced a number of resources, including training guides, newsletters, webinars and training videos that agencies can use to help practitioners, learners, volunteers and stakeholders to learn more about the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework. These resources are freely available on CLO's website at: www.nald.ca/clo/

Marketing

For those who are interesting in marketing, CLO has produced **Marketing Ourselves**—a marketing guide for community literacy agencies. This resource provides useful marketing strategies, tools and resources to help literacy agencies as they work to market their agencies' services and is available at: www.nald.ca/clo/resource/marketing/cover.htm



CLO has also developed an **online training module** for anyone who wants to learn about marketing. We suggest that you explore the Marketing module on CLO's **Literacy Basics** training website at www.nald.ca/literacybasics/

CLO's website also hosts **six online audio-visual presentations** about literacy, and they are an excellent way to share information about the work that community literacy agencies do. Visit www.nald.ca/clo/presentations.htm for presentations on:

- ◇ What is literacy?
- ◇ Recognizing literacy
- ◇ Literacy and Basic Skills in Ontario
- ◇ Making referrals
- ◇ Literacy and employment
- ◇ Learner success stories

Literacy: Why it Matters

CLO's **Literacy: Why it Matters** document is another great resource that provides details about why literacy is a critical issue in Ontario, as well as an overview of the LBS Program and its importance. For a free downloadable copy, visit :

www.nald.ca/clo/resource/literacy_why_it_matters.pdf

