

# **Foundations for Independence Framework**

## **OVERVIEW**

**COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO**



## Acknowledgements

Researched and Written by: Robyn Cook-Ritchie

Project Management Support: Jette Cosburn  
Co-Executive Director, CLO

Pilot Sites: Literacy Program, Toronto Public Library  
Northern Connections Adult Learning Centre, Sharbot Lake  
Skills for Employment, Life and Family, Mississauga  
Tillsonburg and District Multi-Service Centre Adult Basic

Editing: Tamara Kaattari

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508 – 80 Bradford Street  
Barrie, ON L4N 6S7  
705-733-2312 (voice)  
705-733-6197 (fax)  
clo@bellnet.ca  
**[www.nald.ca/clo.htm](http://www.nald.ca/clo.htm)**  
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# Success Indicators for Independence Goals Project

## Foundations for Independence Framework

### OVERVIEW

## Learner Skill Attainment Initiative Background

In winter 2007, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) funded seventeen projects to support the development of a Learner Skill Attainment (LSA) Framework. The LSA Initiative is exploring the use of Essential Skills/ International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey scales as a common assessment language for learner skill attainment. Representatives from the seventeen funded projects, organizational participants from the streams and sectors, representatives from MTCU and representatives from MET formed the Learner Skill Attainment workgroup. Five key MTCU-funded projects, including CLO's "Success Indicators for Independence Goals" project, were identified to consult with College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (lead project) on the development of an overarching LSA Framework. Representatives from the five projects comprised the **LSA Framework Project Development Team**. Building on the recommendations made in the Vubiz Ltd. Report (May 31, 2006) and through discussion and consultation with the LSA workgroup, a "pathway approach" to learners' goals was utilized to build the draft LSA framework. Correspondingly, five learner transition paths, each closely linked with a key project, were identified:

### Foundations for Independence

Transition to Employment

Transition to Apprenticeship

Transition to Postsecondary

Transition to Credit

Lead Projects

## Lead Projects

Organization	Path	Project
<b>Community Literacy of Ontario</b>	Transition Path: Foundations for Independence (Home, Community)	<i>Success Indicators for Independence Goals</i>
<b>Preparatory Training Programs</b>	Transition Path to Employment	<i>CAMERA Development</i>
<b>Centre d'apprentissage et de perfectionnement</b>	Transition Path to Apprenticeship	<i>Measuring Essential Key Skills: Indicators of Concerted, Uniform Progress</i>
<b>College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading</b>	Transition Path to Postsecondary	<i>Academic Upgrading Template Development</i>
<b>Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators</b>	Transition Path to Secondary Credit	<i>Strategic Partnerships for Academic Upgrading in LBS</i>

CLO's project informed the development of the “**Foundations for Independence**” pathway and identified critical skills needed for successful transition in an independent framework that also fits within the overarching LSA framework.

Project representatives were brought together on January 10, 2007 to discuss the organization of project teams and workgroups. In addition to representatives from the seventeen funded projects, organizational participants from all literacy streams and sectors were invited to participate in the **Learner Skill Attainment Workgroup** led by MTCU. The purpose of the workgroup was to inform the work of the **LSA Framework Project Development Team**. The goal was to support a manageable and transparent assessment approach that reflected achievement between levels as well as across levels. The inclusion of representatives from all of the sector and stream projects facilitated the identification of gaps in the framework resulting from any cultural differences and philosophies.

The project representatives and other organizational participants making up the **LSA Workgroup** were divided into two smaller/more focused working groups:

- ▶ **The Foundation Skills Workgroup**
- ▶ The Higher Skills Workgroup

As one of the five key projects in the **LSA Framework Project Development Team**, Community Literacy of Ontario was charged with keeping the **Foundation Skills Workgroup** informed regarding the development of the “Foundations for Independence” framework at four meetings held between January and April 2007.

## Data Collection and Draft Development

The first step in CLO’s project was to collect comprehensive information from the field regarding learner goals that relate specifically to independence. The intent of the data collection phase was to:

- ▶ Ensure that the foundation skills for the *Foundations for Independence Framework* supported learners in the LBS field
- ▶ Identify the most common goals or goal areas associated with the foundation skills for independence pathway
- ▶ Determine/affirm key skill areas associated with the independence pathway
- ▶ Identify gaps and challenges associated with assessing independence goals
- ▶ Establish a “temperature reading” on community-based LBS agency familiarity and comfort with Essential Skills and determine how Essential Skills are currently being used to support learners in community-based LBS programming

Interviews were conducted with key informants from a broad geographical range of community-based Literacy and Basic Skills programs across the province (fourteen programs in total) to determine the most common learner goals related to independence and to identify the core skills necessary to achieve those goals. Agencies were provided with an extensive questionnaire to review prior to a

scheduled interview. Agencies were encouraged to have as many practitioners as possible provide input into the survey process.

The goals in the *Foundations for Independence Framework* were identified by asking each agency to identify their top five learner goals related to independence and the core skills necessary to achieve those goals. *The Foundations for Independence Framework* organizes these independence goals along a continuum of personal focus from “home to community” into four broad goal sets:

- 1 Manage my basic needs
- 2 Manage my health
- 3 Manage my personal issues and relationships
- 4 Participate fully as a member of the community

Many of the goals identified through the survey process overlapped or were related. This overlap facilitated the decision to break the goals into more manageable sub-goals with associated generic tasks that learners might need to master as they worked towards attaining a particular goal. The inclusion of tasks reflects the approach that is being used in the overarching learner skill attainment framework. Sample transition and success indicators are included for each sub-goal area. The transition or success indicators describe integrated activities that the learner is able to complete independently to demonstrate achievement of the goal as it relates to the three Essential Skills: Reading Text, Document Use and Numeracy. The *Foundations for Independence Framework* also links each sub goal to the other six Essential Skill areas and a listing of soft skills that the learner is utilizing in the attainment of the particular goal.

In addition to the survey process, a broad range of documents and websites were reviewed to inform the development of the *Foundations for Independence Framework*.

Active participation by Community Literacy of Ontario in several meetings (teleconference and face-to-face) with the LSA Framework Project Development Team supported continuity between CLO’s *Foundations for Independence Framework* and the work of the five other pathway projects.



## Consultation

The LSA Foundation Skills Workgroup was comprised of representatives from the following organizations/project teams:

- ▶ Durham Deaf Services
- ▶ Kingston Literacy
- ▶ Literacy Network Northeast
- ▶ Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) Project Team
- ▶ Preparatory Training Programs of Toronto (PTP) Project Team
- ▶ Literacy Link Eastern Ontario Project Team
- ▶ Deaf Literacy Initiative Project Team
- ▶ La Coalition Francophone
- ▶ Laubach Literacy of Ontario

CLO's *Foundations for Independence Framework* was vetted through this LSA workgroup at two separate stages. After data from the survey process with community-based agencies was compiled, it was organized into two separate documents. The first document organized the most common goals/goal areas identified along a continuum from “home to community” and in columns as they *might* relate to the three Essential Skills (Reading Text, Document Use and Numeracy) being addressed by CLO's project. The second document listed the other skills/skill areas (including the other six Essential Skills) that the programs identified as being important for attaining independence goals. Both lists were shared with the Foundation Skills Workgroup in February 2007, giving the group an opportunity to comment and provide feedback. All feedback received was considered in developing the *Foundations for Independence Framework*.

Once the first draft of CLO's *Foundations for Independence Framework* was completed, it was distributed to the Foundation Skills Workgroup at the March 2007 meeting and it was also shared with them later in March 2007, for an additional opportunity to comment prior to the piloting phase. Workgroup

members were invited to comment on the framework itself and its applicability and implications for their specific projects. CLO attended the April 2007, Learner Skill Attainment Workgroup meeting in Toronto to discuss progress with other project representatives. After the April meeting, CLO linked with the new project representative from the ONLC to share the *Foundations for Independence Framework* and to discuss the process to that point. An updated draft was sent to the Foundation Skills Workgroup early in May 2007. The Deaf Literacy Initiative invited CLO to present the *Foundations for Independence Framework* at its regional meeting on May 25, 2007. A copy of the framework was sent to the invitees prior to the meeting. CLO's project consultant attended the meeting to answer questions from the members through an ASL interpreter. All Deaf Literacy Initiative committee members were invited to take the framework back to their respective groups and send any additional feedback or comments by email during the piloting phase.

The *Foundations for Independence Framework* was presented for discussion at a focus group of the CLO board of directors on May 31, 2007. Board members actively reviewed the framework and provided extensive feedback regarding the global descriptors and goal sets. This was the last consultation prior to the formal piloting phase.

The *Foundations for Independence Framework* was sent to four community-based sites in June 2007 to be piloted with both practitioners and learners. Twelve practitioners and twenty-one learners reviewed the framework. An extensive questionnaire accompanied the framework.

Pilot sites were asked to:

- ▶ comment on the goal sets and goals that had been identified and add goals that they felt were missing
- ▶ review the goal sets and sub goals with learners to identify items that should be removed or added
- ▶ comment on the clarity of the global descriptions
- ▶ review the core skills lists and critical skills lists for inclusiveness
- ▶ review the framework sub goals and add additional tasks and success and transition markers

The feedback from the pilot sites was utilized to expand the framework content to include a wide variety of success and transition markers from community programming that relate to the foundations for independence pathway.

On October 12, 2007, CLO's updated *Foundations for Independence Framework* was presented in a workshop format to CLO member agencies at the annual conference. Members were given a week to share the document at their respective programs and to provide any final feedback by email or telephone.

## Framework Overview

CLO's *Foundations for Independence Framework* focuses on the “**Foundations for Independence**” pathway. Although the framework is a stand-alone document, it contains all of the components of the overarching LSA framework. This particular pathway is goal driven so an additional category has been included in the *Foundations for Independence Framework* that identifies goals and links them to associated tasks. The “Foundations for Independence” pathway encompasses many goal areas whereas the other transition pathways specifically describe the learner goal (for example, employment or apprenticeship). It is important to note that learners with more than one goal path may need to access different parts of the overarching LSA Framework. For example, a learner with independence-related goals may also have employment goals. Although the goals themselves may be interrelated, a learner may need to access other parts of the overarching LSA Framework as all of the pathways have been dealt with separately.

The *Foundations for Independence Framework* identifies the success and transition indicators related to the goal of “independence” that are needed to demonstrate foundations for learning relevant to the three Essential Skills that will be utilized by MTCU for corporate reporting:

- ▶ Reading Text
- ▶ Document Use
- ▶ Numeracy

The first page of the framework document gives a global description of the independence pathway and lists the common goals as they relate to three key Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) Essential Skills areas: Reading Text, Document Use and Numeracy.

On page 2, global descriptions for each of the three Essential Skills are provided. Core skills, based on the LBS level descriptors and feedback from the pilot sites, are also identified for each Essential Skill area. Critical soft skills that were identified through our interview process are listed in the last column on page two. This listing carries through the *Foundations for Independence Framework* in relation to each sub-goal area. However, it is important to remember that these soft skills can only be addressed in programming as they relate to the particular LBS goal. It is not an expectation that a learner would acquire all of these skills by accomplishing a chosen goal.

Starting on page 3, the *Foundations for Independence Framework* organizes sub goals along a continuum of personal focus from “home to community” into four broad areas or goal sets:

- 1 Managing basic needs
- 2 Managing health
- 3 Managing personal issues and relationships
- 4 Participating fully as a member of the community

Each goal set is then broken down into more specific sub goals. For each sub goal, associated tasks are given as they relate to each Essential Skill area. Most of the tasks are generic and can be related to several different independence goals. This finite sample listing of tasks could be utilized as a list of “assessment” tasks in the future application of the *Foundations for Independence Framework*. Transition and success markers are identified in the shaded column. The transition or success indicator often requires the integration of several key Essential Skill areas. For example – obtaining housing requires not only Reading, Document Use and/ or Numeracy – it also may require Writing, Oral Communication, and Thinking Skills. Where possible, the transition and success indicators have been listed in

order of increasing complexity with respect to the tasks required. However, the complexity does not relate specifically to Essential Skill profile complexity ratings. The markers have not been identified specifically as either transition or success markers as this designation is learner specific. A success for one learner may only represent a transition point for a different learner, depending on the goal. The last column (pages 3-22) combines the critical soft skills list from page 2 and the other Essential Skills that are related to the goal. These soft skills and related Essential Skills are listed as a guideline only.

The *Foundations for Independence Framework* has been developed as a guideline for students with goals that relate to independence. It is meant to be inclusive and adaptable to cover a broad range of learner needs from those that are very basic to those that are more complex. The framework should be utilized as it applies to the goal(s) of the individual learner. Only the goal sets and/or sub goals that specifically relate to a particular learner should be employed. There is not an expectation that a learner will move through the entire continuum of personal focus because a learner may already be independent in many aspects. Although the *Foundations for Independence Framework* was developed for community-based Anglophone programs, the intention is for it to be transparent and transferable to learners with independence-related goals in other sectors and streams. The consultation and subsequent integration of feedback from the Foundation Skills Workgroup supports the transferability of the *Foundations for Independence Framework*.

Because the complexity of the tasks themselves can be varied, it is important to take into account the learner's current need to apply the skills when discussing the concept of "success". For example, a learner's shopping list may have several items misspelled, but if the learner is able to utilize the list to successfully complete the activity, the indicator of success is the ability to do so with some degree of independence, not necessarily with perfect spelling.

"Employment" as a goal area is not included in the *Foundations for Independence Framework* because it is considered a separate transition pathway. This exclusion is not meant to diminish the importance of employment as a goal for a learner who also has independence goals. References to work-related activities have been

included but the focus of this pathway is not employment itself. For example, a basic need is having some form of income to support oneself. Income may be derived through employment but it may also be derived through an alternate source such as Ontario Disability Support Program. The sub goal of the basic need for an income is acknowledged through the inclusion of markers related to alternative sources of income (e.g., through social services). Employment as an overall learner goal is supported by the “Employment Pathway” documentation in the larger LSA framework.

## Goal Sets

### Manage my basic needs

This goal set was included in the *Foundations for Independence Framework* as some LBS programs have clients who are currently homeless; are seeking to better manage or improve their basic needs; or are entering the program after incarceration. Their first and foremost need may not be literacy but rather something more basic such as shelter. However, satisfying even the most basic needs necessitates some level of literacy skills and the *Foundations for Independence Framework* is attempting to acknowledge this by the inclusion of this goal set. As reported through the survey process, many of the basic needs will end up being satisfied with the support of an outside worker prior to the learner having the time to acquire the skills to reach the transition or success markers indicated in the framework. However, acknowledging the needed skills and markers may ensure that the skills are addressed in LBS programming so that learners can be more independent in the future if they need to acquire these transitions and successes later in life. The skills being taught are Essential Skills. These Essential Skills will support learners’ ability to complete specific tasks in the present and the same, related or similar tasks in the future. The needs listed here are related to survival. The acquisition of the skills is still necessary and may assist learners to reach a level where they are able to focus on Essential Skills instead of just survival.

Practitioners, through the feedback process, also noted a need to consider basic needs within the context of cultural differences and expectations that may differ between practitioner and student. For example, when addressing the use of Canada's Food Guide, it is imperative to be culturally sensitive to the fact that people who have come from other countries may have different eating habits that are culturally linked.

### **Manage my health**

As with every section of the *Foundations for Independence Framework*, this section would only be accessed if learners identify or indicate a desire to manage their health. Pilot feedback indicated that most people will only take steps to improve health or be proactive or preventative when faced with a health issue or crisis.

### **Manage my personal issues and relationships**

Many of the sub goals found in this goal set are not necessary for independence for each individual but still need to be considered relevant where the individual feels managing these issues will help them move along the pathway to independence. For example, reading to one's children may not be considered an independence-enhancing goal for every client, only to the client that actually has small children and wants to be able to read to them. The critical soft skills associated with the sub goals in this goal set are often very important. Learners may need work on critical soft skills such as "communicate effectively", "act self-confidently" or "use strategies to build and maintain self-esteem" before being able to meet transitions or successes associated with the sub goals in this goal set.

### **Participate fully as a member of my community**

Although people can live independently without being involved in the community, people who participate fully in their communities tend to build a solid foundation for moving to other transition pathways such as employment or education. In order to participate in community activities, the first step for many learners may be to successfully accomplish some of the goals outlined in the independence pathway. Independence for many learners may also involve being able to support

members of their family in the community. This goal set supports this notion. However, it is also important to respect and acknowledge the fact that many literacy learners do not get involved in the community before or after literacy assistance and are still quite independent.

## Conclusion

As CLO gathered data and conducted research to develop the *Foundations for Independence Framework* it was apparent that achieving success in the goals of independence is integrally linked to achieving success in the other pathways. Independence is a foundational cornerstone for successful transitions to further education, training and employment and to help learners achieve personal goals related to their families, communities and individual needs.

The *Foundations for Independence Framework* is a resource to help literacy practitioners capture the successes of learners with independence goals. This framework is comprised of a wide variety of goals and success and transition markers that literacy practitioners can use to validate the achievements of learners with the complex goals of independence.