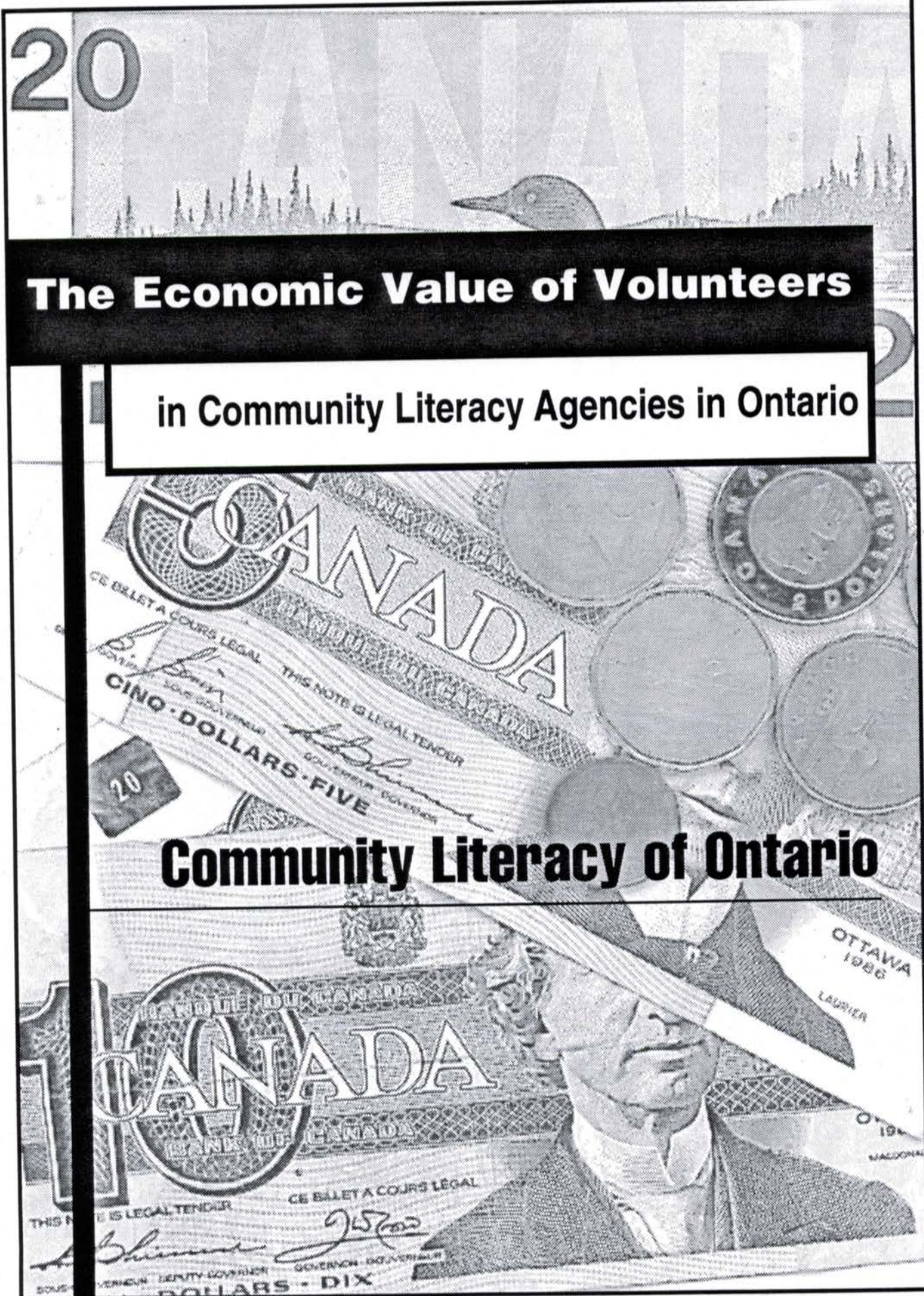


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# **The Economic Value of Volunteers**

**in Community Literacy Agencies in Ontario**

**Community Literacy of Ontario**





## **COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO**

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# **THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS IN COMMUNITY LITERACY AGENCIES IN ONTARIO**

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**APRIL 1998**

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### **Funded by:**

*The Ministry of Education and Training  
Government of Ontario*

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CLO also wants to express our appreciation for the hard work and dedication of the following people and organizations:

- The volunteers and literacy coordinators who took the time to fill out the surveys
- The focus group participants
- The Reference Group to this project

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- Helene St. Jacques of Informa Market Research Co. Ltd.
- Patricia Hajdu and Ursula Tannert from the Northern Literacy Desktop Publishing Centre

**Thank you all for making this project a success!**

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# Study Highlights

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## Introduction

In the summer of 1997 Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) commissioned Informa Market Research Co. Ltd. to conduct a study to document the economic value of volunteer involvement in Anglophone community literacy agencies in Ontario. The following summary is based on an analysis of primary and secondary data. A custom-designed study was conducted among volunteers in Anglophone community literacy agencies. It consisted of four focus groups conducted with 17 volunteer tutors, and 83 surveys completed by literacy volunteers. Survey respondents represented urban and rural agencies, and the geographic diversity of Ontario. The sample was designed to provide an accurate cross-section of literacy agencies in Ontario. Secondary data was provided by the Ministry of Education and Training and other sources, as cited in the bibliography.

### The key findings of this study are:

- 82% of Anglophone literacy volunteers are tutors, and one in four volunteers are involved in Board work.
- Volunteers spend an average of 15.22 hours per month tutoring. The total time commitment to all tasks in community literacy agencies is 30.04 hours per month.
- Half of volunteers (54%) surveyed were interested in receiving a tax credit.
- 60% indicated they would not give more time even if they received some compensation for their efforts.
- 28% of volunteers agreed with the statement that "volunteers don't get the recognition they deserve."



- Only one in five (19%) indicated that they would be able to give more time to volunteer work, yet 47% indicated that they would take on additional volunteer responsibilities in literacy agencies.
- The economic analysis in this study determined an hourly rate of \$17.34 for volunteers in community literacy agencies in Ontario.
- The total annual economic value of volunteers in Anglophone literacy agencies is \$8,922,192.
- Three quarters of volunteers regularly incur out-of-pocket expenses. The annual cumulative estimated value of out-of-pocket expenditures in Anglophone community literacy agencies is \$2,248,382. On average, volunteers who have regular expenses spend \$391.40 annually.
- On average, literacy volunteers have been volunteering for 3.71 years.
- 89% said that learning new skills was “very important” or “somewhat important.” However, only 68% had acquired new skills during the course of volunteering with literacy agencies.
- 77% indicated that the skills they were acquiring applied to other parts of their lives.
- Half of volunteers felt their skills could be enhanced.
- 75% noted they were “very satisfied” with their experience as volunteers with community literacy agencies.
- The single most important value of volunteering expressed was to help others help themselves.

**Volunteers in Anglophone community literacy agencies in Ontario contribute an estimated annual total of \$11,170,574 in combined out-of-pocket expenditures and volunteer time to the Ontario training system.**

# Executive Summary

## Tasks and Time Commitment

The majority of people who volunteer in Anglophone community literacy agencies in Ontario are engaged in tutoring. This segment represents 82% of the total number of volunteers. About one in four (23%) volunteers are involved in Board duties and another 11% take part in committee work. Other tasks performed by volunteers include office work (10%), organizational duties (10%), fundraising (10%), and technical support (4%). It should be noted that some volunteers are involved in more than one activity.

Volunteer commitment can also involve other duties. For instance, three in ten (30%) volunteers indicated that preparation is a major task. Other major tasks include communications (13%), report writing (10%), and record keeping (8%).

Extent of Involvement in Major Tasks	
No. of Respondents: 83	Major Task
	%
Tutoring	82
Board member	23
Committee member	11
Office work	10
Organizational duties	10
Fundraising	10
Technical support	4
Preparation time	30
Record keeping	8
Report writing	10
Communications	13
Other	13
Don't know/Refused	4

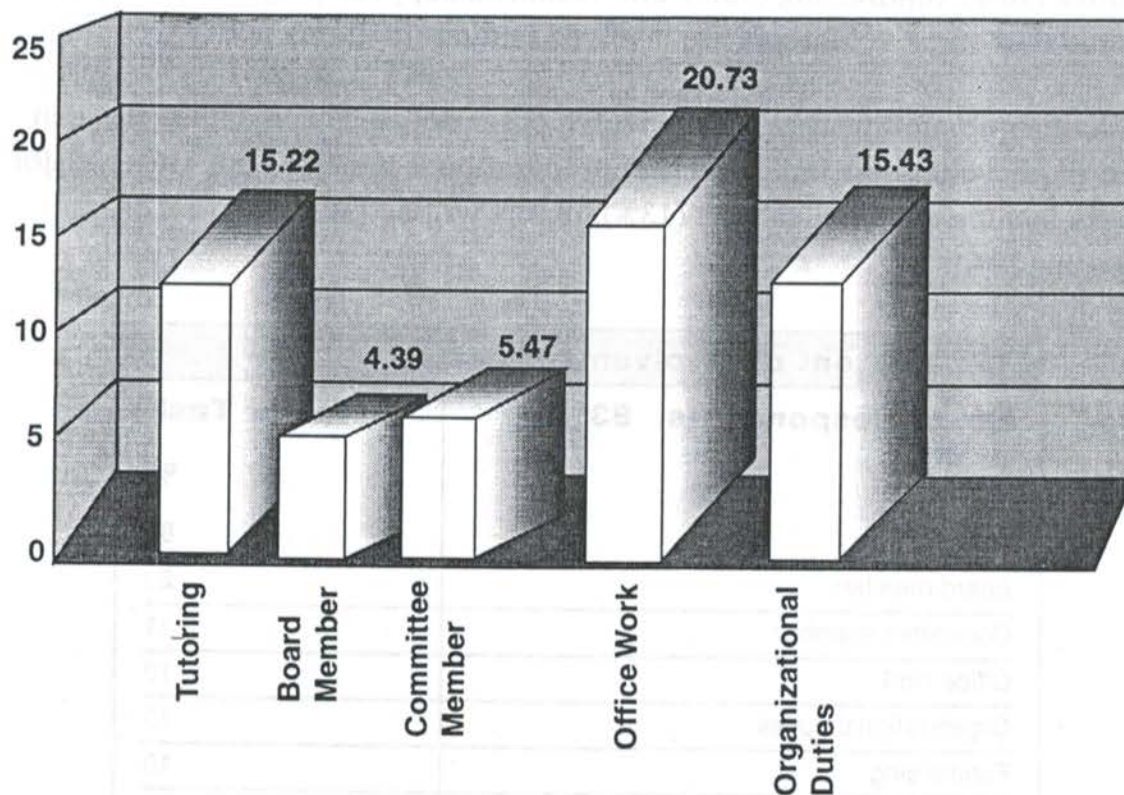


## Involvement in Major Tasks

Tutors reported that, on average, they spend 15.22 hours each month tutoring. Volunteers who help out with office work and organizational duties averaged a large number of hours each month, at 20.73 and 15.43 respectively. The commitment of Board and Committee members was less onerous, with the average number of hours per month at 4.39 and 5.47 respectively.

Given the overlapping nature of duties undertaken by volunteers, and the large number of hours spent on these different tasks, some people spend more hours than others completing their volunteer assignments.

## Average Number of Hours Per Month



Overall, volunteers in our study reported that they regularly spent 30.04 hours each month engaged in major tasks. Thus, it is reasonable that only one in five (19%) volunteers felt they would be able to give even more time to volunteer work.

The economic analysis in this study determined an hourly rate of \$17.34 for volunteers in community literacy agencies in Ontario.

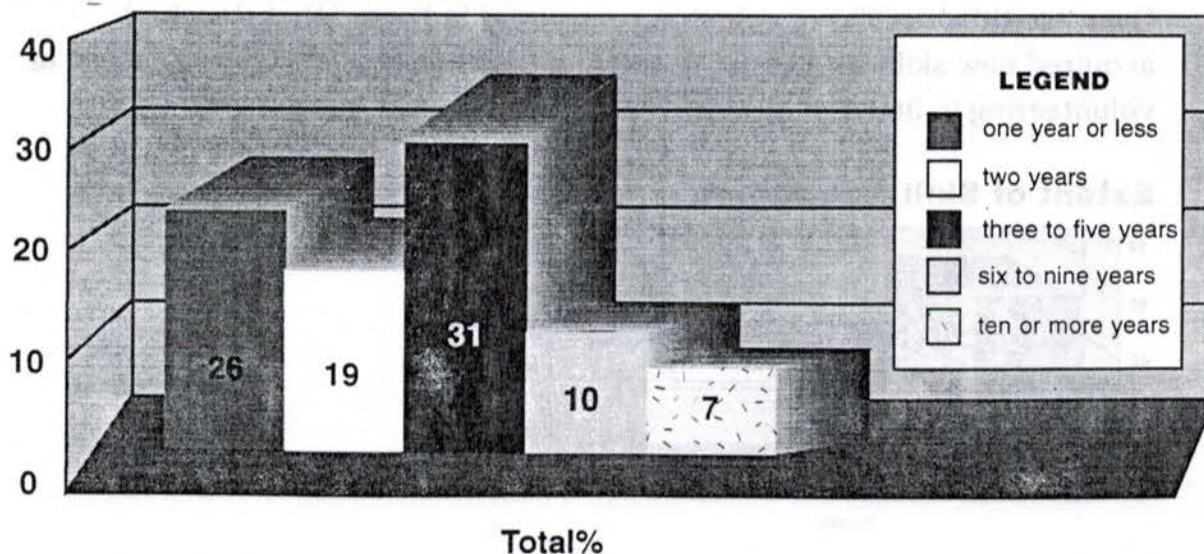
This was based on various data, including the 1996 survey *"Human Resource Study of Community-Based Training in Ontario"* conducted on behalf of the Ontario Network of Employment Skills Training Projects. A total of 94 community-based organizations that provide training in Ontario took part in the ONESTEP study. **Using this figure, the total economic value of volunteer time in Anglophone community literacy agencies in Ontario, for the period 1995-1996, is \$8,922,192.**

### Total Economic Value of Volunteer Time

Duties	Annual Total Number of Hours Volunteered (MET Data 1995-96)	Annual Salary per Volunteer (\$) (based on \$17.34 per hour)	Total Annual Salary per Volunteer Category (\$)
Tutoring	391,280	987.51	6,784,795
Other	123,264	789.31	2,137,397
<b>Total:</b>	<b>514,544</b>		<b>8,922,192</b>

On average, literacy volunteers have been volunteering for 3.71 years. This figure incorporates a distribution of recent and long-term commitment: about one-quarter (26%) of volunteers had become involved in the last year, while about one-third (30%) had been volunteering for five years or more. Just under half (45%) had joined the agency within the past two years.

### Length of Volunteer Involvement





## Out-of-Pocket Expenditures

Almost three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents reported that they regularly incur out-of-pocket expenses in the course of volunteering with literacy agencies. Transportation-related costs represented the major personal outlay, and included gasoline, parking and public transit fare. Other, less widespread expenses included refreshments, long distance telephone charges, and resource materials and supplies. It is noteworthy that the vast majority of regularly incurred expenses were not reimbursed. Expenses incurred on an irregular basis were not included in the calculation of total out-of-pocket expenditures.

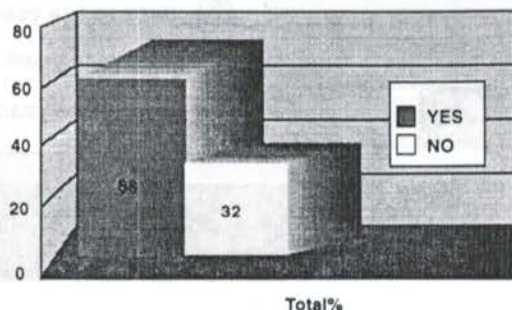
**The total annual value of out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the regular course of contributing volunteer time to Anglophone community literacy agencies was estimated at \$2,248,382.** On average, volunteers who had regular expenses annually spent \$391.40. This figure represents expenditures which were regularly required.

While most volunteers gave both their time and their money without the expectation of compensation, about half the volunteers (48%) in the survey expressed interest in receiving a tax credit for their efforts. Willingness to engage in future volunteer assignments, however, was not contingent on receiving a monetary reward. In fact, only three in ten (29%) indicated that they would be prepared to give more time to volunteer work if they were compensated for their efforts.

## The Acquisition of New Skills

Over two-thirds (68%) of volunteers surveyed indicated that they had acquired new skills as a result of training they received during the course of volunteering in literacy agencies.

### Extent of Skill Acquisition



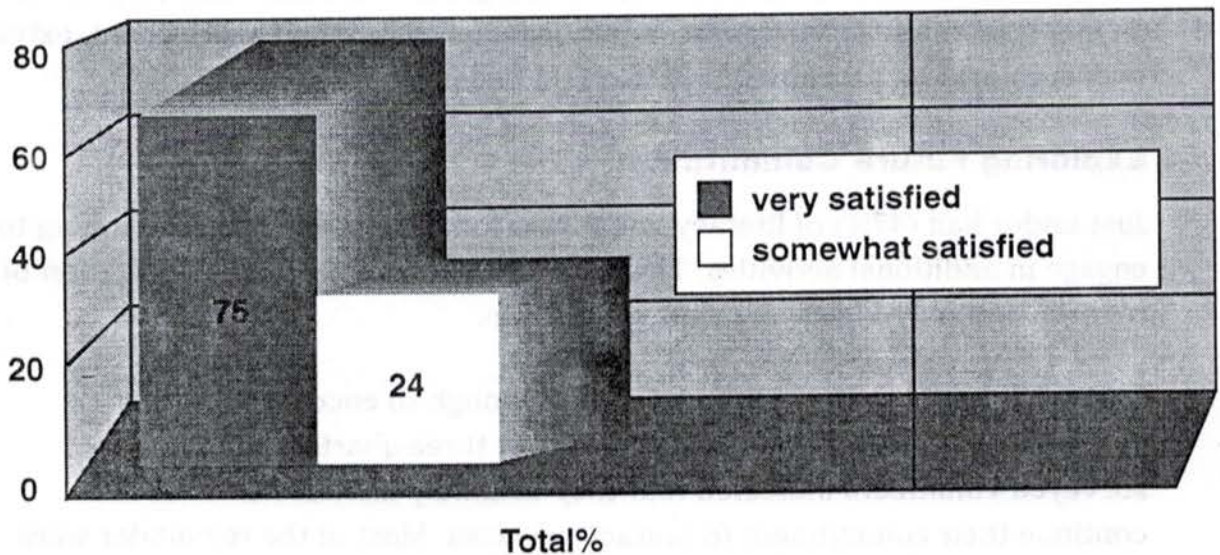
The vast majority of volunteers surveyed (89%) claimed that learning new skills was either a “very important” or “somewhat important” part of their commitment. Further, three quarters (77%) indicated that the skills acquired in this context were readily transferable to the workplace, volunteer activities, home/family life and interpersonal communications.

The skills acquired spanned a number of disciplines, with transferability to areas of expertise such as teaching, literacy/numeracy/spelling, planning/problem-solving, listening/communication, life skills, computer training and marketing.

### Level of Volunteer Satisfaction

Volunteers participating in Anglophone community literacy agencies reported high levels of satisfaction with their commitment. Three-quarters (75%) of those who responded to the survey noted that they were “very satisfied” with this experience. Another 24% indicated that they were “somewhat satisfied.”

### Degree of Volunteer Satisfaction



Most volunteers received great satisfaction from this commitment. Indeed, the vast majority of respondents (92%) wished that more people would get involved in volunteer activities. Almost everyone (93%) agreed that giving back to the community was especially critical at this point in the country's history. However, about one-quarter (28%) did agree that “volunteers don't get the recognition they deserve.”



## **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Volunteer Experience**

The most positive elements of volunteering were the observed impact on learners' self-esteem and the satisfaction that came from "helping others help themselves." Most volunteers clearly enjoyed the experience of making a positive contribution to the community. Volunteers also insisted that this was a two-way experience whereby they gained personally through developing new friendships, being immersed in new lifestyles and developing new skill sets.

Nonetheless, about half of volunteers (45%) indicated that the experience had its low points. Various trouble-spots were identified, including teacher frustrations, lack of student commitment, government bureaucracy, lack of staff support due to staff shortages, time pressures and government cutbacks.

## **Improving Volunteer Effectiveness**

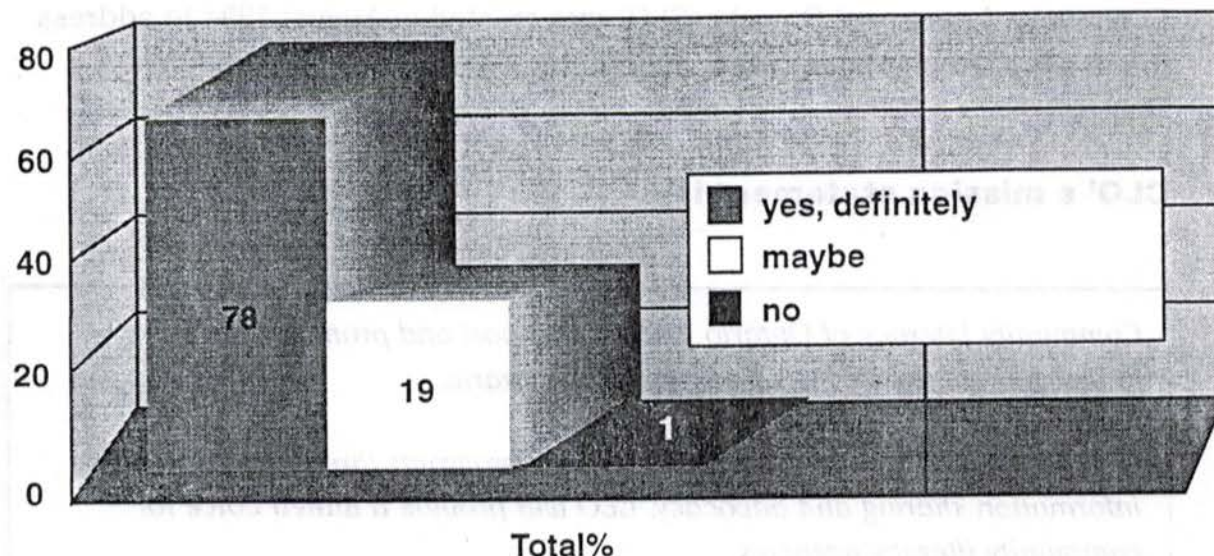
Half (49%) of volunteers surveyed believed that their effectiveness could be enhanced with greater training and support. Volunteers suggested, in order of relative importance: additional tutor training, more contact with other tutors, an increase in public awareness, additional materials, more assessment, extra staff support and less government interference.

## **Exploring Future Commitment**

Just under half (47%) of literacy volunteers indicated they would be willing to engage in additional activities. These included record keeping, preparation of reports, and ongoing assessment of students.

The volunteer experience was rewarding enough to encourage further commitment to the agency. In fact, just over three-quarters (78%) of surveyed volunteers indicated that they definitely intended to continue their commitment to literacy agencies. Most of the remainder were not certain, and only 1% definitely did not intend to renew their ties with the agency.

## Extent of Future Commitment



## Improving the Role of Volunteers

Half the volunteers suggested ways of improving their role. They offered the following ideas:

- update training skills,
- provide more information and materials,
- augment networking,
- increase government recognition of literacy agencies,
- provide more staff and volunteer support,
- provide more recognition of volunteers, and
- reduce cumbersome bureaucracy.



## Study Background

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) was created in August 1994 to address the needs of Anglophone community literacy agencies in the province of Ontario.

### **CLO' s mission statement is:**

*Community Literacy of Ontario exists to support and promote English language community literacy agencies in Ontario.*

*CLO will support and represent its member programs through consultation, information sharing and advocacy. CLO will provide a united voice for community literacy agencies.*

At this point in the history of government-funded services, attention is focused on achieving economies through a variety of measures. These include reducing budgets and services, moving to privatization, and relying more heavily on the volunteer sector.

CLO has commissioned the following study as one component in developing a detailed analysis of the contribution that volunteers make in supporting and delivering community literacy programs. The study was funded by the Literacy and Basic Skills Section, Workplace Preparation Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training.

## Study Objectives

Community Literacy of Ontario undertook the following study to clarify and quantify the value of volunteers in delivering literacy agencies. The objectives were to determine:

1. The economic value of direct volunteer activities in community literacy agencies in Ontario. This also includes hidden factors, such as out-of-pocket expenses that are not reimbursed.

2. The costs of supports needed to maintain volunteers in community literacy agencies in Ontario, for example, volunteer management and coordination, training, and staff and other supports.
3. The positive spin-off value of volunteer activities in community literacy agencies in Ontario. For example, in the course of volunteer activities, volunteers acquire new skills and knowledge which may be transferred directly to their paid jobs, their prospective employment and other employment-related activities.
4. The level of responsibility volunteers would be willing to take on. This could include: the maximum number of hours they would volunteer per week, or additional tasks they would take on, such as documentation, record-keeping, assessment, etc.

## **The Report: An Introduction**

The report is organized into two sections:

### ***Section 1—The Economic Contribution of Volunteers***

Section 1 presents numerical data pertaining to the estimated value of volunteers' time contribution, as tutors, Board or committee members, and to organizational and office duties. It also presents estimates of the out-of-pocket contributions made by volunteers in the course of fulfilling their commitment to community literacy agencies. Estimates are based on data provided by the survey reported in Section 2.

### ***Section 2—Merged Findings: Surveys and Focus Groups***

Section 2 presents the merged findings of the survey, based on 83 structured questionnaires, and the in-depth research component consisting of four focus groups with a total of 17 literacy tutors. It includes both verbatim comments from the focus groups and data from the survey.

The findings address primary issues: volunteer time commitment, the hidden economic component of volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses, and secondary or background issues such as the volunteer experience, motivating factors, rewards and challenges, and the role of staff training and support.



# Study Method and Participants

## Survey

The consultant prepared a structured survey in conjunction with the CLO reference group (See Appendix 1.) The surveys were distributed to literacy volunteers across Ontario by CLO. Agency partners were asked to distribute surveys to volunteers working in Anglophone community literacy agencies. Survey respondents represented urban and rural programs, and the geographic diversity of Ontario. Surveys were distributed and returned to the consultant by literacy agency staff.

A total of 83 completed surveys were returned. The data from these surveys was coded, edited and tabulated. The consultant then analyzed the computer tables and prepared summary tables, which have been included in Appendix 2.

## Survey Participants

A total of 83 structured surveys were returned for data processing and analysis. The profile of participants was as follows:

- Four out of five volunteers were female.
- While volunteers spanned a wide cross section of age groups, from young adults to seniors, the majority (74%) were between 31 and 60 years old.
- The educational background of literacy volunteers was extremely varied, with one-quarter having completed some or all of high school, and half having college diplomas or undergraduate or postgraduate degrees.

<b>Number of Respondents: 83</b>		<b>Total</b>
		<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female		81
Male		18
Refused		1
<b>Age</b>		
Under 21		4
21 to 30		10
31 to 40		24
41 to 50		28
51 to 60		22
62 to 70		7
Over 70 years		5
Refused		1
<b>Level of education completed to date:</b>		
Some high school		6
High school		19
Some university or community college		22
University or community college		36
Postgraduate studies/degree		16
Refused		1

## Focus Groups

Literacy coordinators recruited participants, based on guidelines provided by the consultant. The main objective was to represent a range of levels of tutoring experience. The number of volunteer tutors who took part in the individual sessions varied from two to six. The proceedings were conducted according to a Discussion Guide which was prepared prior to the fieldwork and reviewed by the CLO reference group. (See Appendix 3.)

The sessions took place in meeting rooms located in the literacy agencies. Discussion lasted from one to two hours, and was audio-taped with permission of the participants. These tapes were then transcribed and analysed.



## Focus Group Participants

A total of 17 literacy tutors took part in the focus groups. The literacy agencies that participated in the focus group portion of the study were:

- *East End Literacy Centre, 269 Gerard Street East, Toronto*
- *Parkdale Project Read, 1303 Queen Street West, Toronto*
- *St. Christopher House Adult Literacy Program, 248 Ossington Street, Toronto*
- *Wellington County Literacy Council, 284 George Street, Arthur*

Due to budgetary constraints, fieldwork was limited to Metro Toronto and the surrounding area.

The following observations are presented to assist understanding of the perspectives articulated by the focus group participants:

- **Co-operation**  
Participants were generous with their time and were pleased to have the opportunity to discuss their experiences. This was a measure of their considerable commitment to helping adults achieve their goals through literacy training. As well, they were keen to take part in a study that would help inform provincial government funders of the contribution and needs of literacy volunteers.
- **Agenda-Setting and Focus**  
Most-participants appeared to be particularly interested in sharing experiences and learning from other tutors. In some cases, the tutors' desire to interact with peers and discuss particular problems and concerns dominated the agenda. It was clear to the facilitator that they valued the session primarily because it gave them the opportunity to work through issues that arose in working with learners.
- **Reaction to the Study**  
Several tutors indicated that the study was being conducted at an opportune time in the evolution of adult literacy services in Ontario. They were pleased to have the opportunity to provide the Ministry of Education and Training with their input about the program and the challenges of working as volunteers.

# Section 1: The Economic Contribution of Volunteers

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## Introduction

The following section provides a tally of the economic contributions made by literacy volunteers. This will be calculated using two measures:

1. The economic value of the time volunteers spend supporting and delivering literacy agencies.
2. The out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers in the course of their volunteer duties.

Two data sources have been used to prepare the estimates: the Literacy and Basic Skills Section of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (1995-1996), and the survey conducted by the consultant, representing 83 volunteers.

## The Number of Literacy Program Volunteers

The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Section of the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) funded 112 Anglophone community literacy agencies during 1995-1996. The LBS Section provided the following data for the period 1995-1996. (The data pertains only to volunteers working in Anglophone community literacy agencies; agencies serving Francophone and Native learners are served by Francophone and Native literacy networks.)

- 12,716 learners were served by 112 Anglophone community literacy agencies.



- Learners received a total of 1,119,145 contact hours from Anglophone community literacy agencies.
- The total number of volunteers was 9,578, representing 6,870 volunteer tutors and 2,708 other volunteers.
- Volunteers spent a total of 514,544 hours, consisting of 391,280 tutoring hours and 123,264 hours engaged in other tasks.

According to Ministry statistics, while the proportion of volunteer tutors to volunteers engaged in other tasks varied considerably by provincial region, tutoring represented the largest component overall. Seventy-nine per cent of those who contributed time to literacy training were engaged in tutoring. The remainder were assisting in other ways.

This fact was reinforced by this project's survey, which found that just over four out of five (82%) volunteers cited tutoring as a major task. The data reported below also indicate that volunteers, including some tutors, were engaged in various support tasks.

**Table #1- Percentage of Volunteers Involved in Various Tasks**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Major Task %</b>	<b>Minor Task %</b>	<b>Not Applicable %</b>
Tutoring	82	2	16
Board member	23	2	75
Committee member	11	16	74
Office work	10	8	82
Organizational duties	10	17	74
Fundraising-	10	13	77
Technical support	4	5	92
Preparation time	30	33	37
Record keeping	8	37	54
Report writing	10	27	64
Communications	13	22	65
Other	13	6	-
Don't know/Refused	4	-	-
<b>BASE: 83 Respondents</b>			

As Table #1 shows, just over one in three tutors indicated that preparing for tutoring sessions also involved a major time commitment. Additionally, there was evidence that tutors assisted literacy agencies in a number of other ways, such as sitting on the Board or a committee, fundraising, helping with communications, etc. Clearly, some volunteers were carrying a substantial load.

**Table #2 – Time Allocated to Major Tasks**

<b>Task</b>	<b>Average no. of Hours per month</b>	<b>Per Annum Hour Estimate</b>
Tutoring	15.22	152.20
Board member	4.39	43.90
Committee member	5.47	54.70
Office work	20.73	207.30
Organizational work	15.43	154.30
<b>BASE: 83 Respondents</b>		

## Assigning a Value to Volunteer Work

A number of sources were consulted in order to assign an hourly rate for volunteers. These sources included volunteers, staff and program managers, other non-profit organizations, and private tutoring services. The suggested appropriate hourly rates varied considerably, depending on the source:

- The 1996 survey "*A Human Resource Study of Community-Based Training in Ontario*", conducted on behalf of the Ontario Network of Employment Skills Training Projects, studied a total of 94 community organizations that provide training. The average annual salary of full-time support staff members was \$31,560, or \$17.34 per hour, assuming 52 weeks of employment with an average of 35 hours per week. The salaries of executive directors were calculated separately.
- "*The Economic Dimensions of Volunteer Work in Canada*" (Statistics Canada) translated the economic impact of volunteer contribution by choosing an average wage from that part of the service sector that most closely approximated the type of service provided by volunteers. Service sectors included health and welfare, education, hospitals, welfare organizations, amusement and recreation, and services to business



management. In 1986-87, the average hourly rate for Ontario, covering all wage classifications, was \$11.92, and the Canadian average was \$11.79. According to Statistics Canada, the estimated economic value of volunteer work in Canada for the survey period 1986-1987 is \$12.0 billion. When the report was prepared in 1990, and adjusted for inflation, this figure climbed to \$13.2 billion.

- The Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators' (CESBA) *"1996 Adult Basic Literacy/Numeracy"* survey provided useful guidance. It was based on responses from 59 school boards that provide ABL/N programs. The CESBA survey yielded three average hourly rates, as follows:
  - ⇒ The average hourly rate of pay for instructors was \$24.79. The rates varied dramatically among the 58 different programs that responded to this question, from a low of \$15 to a high of \$35 per hour.
  - ⇒ The average hourly wage for part-time instructors was \$25.41.
  - ⇒ The average hourly wage for occasional instructors was \$19.21.
- Some volunteer tutors believed that experienced tutors should be valued at the same compensation rate as public school teachers; they estimated that \$35 per hour would be reasonable, considering benefits. Others thought that \$15 per hour would be a fair remuneration.
- The executive director of a large literacy agency located outside of Metro recalled a period when some tutors received honoraria of \$15 per hour. She felt this was reasonable, given the relatively low pay structure in literacy agencies. Also, it made more sense than higher rates of \$25 to \$35, which was more than she earned for managing the learning centre.
- A literacy program that provides tutoring for disabled persons in Manitoba has paid teaching assistants \$7 per hour for working with clients. This figure was seen as appropriate, given that most teaching assistants were university students, and that the minimum hourly wage was \$5.40.
- Private tutoring services located in Metropolitan Toronto provide a range of learning situations including one-on-one and small group sessions. All four services that were consulted conduct an assessment prior to commencing tutoring. Costs varied from \$45 for an "informal" assessment to \$150 for a complete assessment, including phonic skills, oral reading

and grade equivalency. All but one of the four services quoted rates for a month of tutoring, which consisted of two one-hour sessions per week for a total of eight hours. The monthly rates were \$295, \$315 and \$360, making the hourly cost between \$36.88 and \$45. The fourth tutoring service quoted the one-on-one price at \$30 per hour, excluding GST. Remuneration did not include variables such as education and experience, although some sources were able to provide these data.

For the purposes of this study, an hourly rate of \$17.34 per hour was assigned to literacy tutors and volunteers engaged in other support tasks. Support tasks included Board and committee membership, office work, organizational tasks, fundraising, and technical support. This figure reflects the average hourly salary paid to staff members of community agencies engaged in training. While this hourly rate is conservative, it seems appropriate given the wide disparity in education, prior training experience and teaching skills among tutors.

## A Fair Salary – A Tally of the Labour Contribution of Volunteers

MET data for the period 1995-1996 indicates that Anglophone community literacy agencies had a total of 9,578 volunteers, 6,870 of whom were engaged in tutoring. The remaining 2,708 volunteers were involved in other support activities. MET data further indicates that, during 1995-1996, tutors contributed an annual total of 391,280 hours, and other volunteers contributed an annual total of 123,264 hours to Anglophone community literacy agencies in Ontario.

**Table #3 – Total Economic Value of Volunteer Time**

<b>Duties:</b>	<b>Annual Total Number of Hours Volunteered (MET Data 1995- 96)</b>	<b>Annual Salary per Volunteer (\$) (based on \$17.34 per hour)</b>	<b>Total Annual Salary per Volunteer Category (\$)</b>
Tutoring	391,280	987.51	6,784,795
Other	123,264	789.31	2,137,397
<b>Total:</b>	<b>514,544</b>		<b>8,922,192</b>



The total economic value of volunteers is \$8,922,192, based on an hourly rate of \$17.34. This figure is based on the total number of volunteers involved in Anglophone community literacy agencies in Ontario for the period 1995-1996, both as volunteer tutors and as volunteers involved in other major tasks (Board or committee membership, office work and organizational duties).

## Out-of-Pocket Expenditures

The majority of volunteers in community literacy agencies reported that there are economic costs related to volunteering. In addition to their contribution of time, almost three quarters (74%) of literacy volunteers augment their support with direct or indirect expenditures. Volunteers were asked to report the following:

- the type of expense they incur (e.g., child care, transportation, etc.)
- how much they spend regularly, in an average month, for ongoing expenses such as transportation
- how much they spend on other less regular items
- whether they are reimbursed for the reported expense.

**Table #4 – Major Expenses Incurred by Literacy Volunteers**

Type of Expense Incurred	Total %	Average Regular (Monthly) Expense \$	Reimbursed (Regular Expense) \$	Not Reimbursed (Regular Expense) %	Average Infrequent Monthly Expense \$
Transportation Expenses	28.9	20.72	1.2	27.7	2.00
Car/mileage/gas	13.3	44.38	2.4	10.8	8.33
Travel/bus fare	12.0	55.89	3.6	8.4	-
Meals/food/coffee	8.4	5.17	2.4	6.0	10.00
Phone/long distance	7.2	21.25	2.4	4.8	-
Resource materials/supplies	6.0	19.00	-	6.0	15.50
<b>Base: 83 respondents</b>					





The following chart examines other less significant categories of expense incurred in the course of volunteer duty by a minority of volunteers (5% or less). It includes both regular and infrequent out-of-pocket expenses, and is based on data from the survey.

**Table #5 – Minor Expenses Incurred by Literacy Volunteers**

<b>Type of Expense Incurred</b>  <b>Base: 83 Respondents</b>	<b>Total</b>  <b>%</b>	<b>Regular Expense - Average Amount</b>  <b>\$</b>	<b>Infrequent Expense - Average Amount</b>  <b>\$</b>	<b>Reimbursed</b>  <b>%</b>	<b>Not Reimbursed</b>  <b>\$</b>
Parking	4.8	13.00	-	1.0	3.8
Photocopying/ Computer printing	4.8	5.00	1.50	1.0	3.8
Tracking material	4.8	5.00	30.00	-	-
Materials/supplies	3.6	2.50	-	2.0	1.6
Books	3.6	2.00	6.50	-	-
Pens/pencils	2.4	-	7.50	-	-
Special activities	2.4	-	5.00	-	-
Student supplies	2.4	3.00	5.00	-	-
Office expense/supplies	2.4	20.00	-	-	-
Paper	2.4	1.75	-	-	-
Registration fees	2.4	5.00	5.00	-	-
Postage	1.2	5.00	-	1.2	-
Incentives/rewards	1.2	-	15.00	-	-
Library card	1.2	-	25.00	-	-
Cassette player	1.2	-	25.00	-	-
Internet time	1.2	-	5.00	-	-
Daycare	1.2	40.00	-	-	-
Literacy materials	1.2	20.00	-	1.20	-
Meeting expenses	1.2	30.00	-	-	-
Other	2.4	120.50	15.00	-	-

The following table, based on data from the survey, summarizes the amount of money volunteers willingly spend in the course of doing unpaid work for Anglophone community literacy agencies across the province.

**Table #6 – Total Expenses Incurred by Literacy Volunteers**

<b>Types of expenses incurred</b> <i>Base: 83 respondents</i>	<b>Percentage of Volunteers Not Reimbursed %</b>	<b>Estimated No. of Volunteers Incurring Regular Expense</b>	<b>Average Regular Monthly Expense \$</b>	<b>Average Regular Annual Expense \$</b>	<b>Total Annual Expense \$</b>
Transportation	27.7	2,653	20.72	207.20	549,702
Car/mileage/gas	10.8	1,034	44.38	443.80	458,889
Travel/bus fare	8.4	805	55.89	558.90	449,914
Meals/food/coffee	6.0	575	5.17	51.70	29,727
Phone/long distance	4.8	460	21.25	212.50	97,750
Resource materials	6.0	575	19.00	190.00	109,250
Parking	4.8	460	13.00	130.00	59,800
Photocopying/ computer printing	4.8	460	5.00	50.00	23,000
Tracking material	4.8	460	5.00	50.00	23,000
Materials/supplies	3.6	345	2.50	25.00	8,625
Books	3.6	345	2.00	20.00	6,900
Pens/pencils	2.4	230	-	-	-
Special activities	2.4	230	-	-	-
Student supplies	2.4	230	3.00	30.00	6,900
Office supplies	2.4	230	20.00	200.00	46,000
Paper	2.4	230	1.75	17.50	4,025
Registration fees	2.4	230	5.00	50.00	11,500
Postage	1.2	115	5.00	50.00	5,750
Incentives/rewards	1.2	115	-	-	-
Library card	1.2	115	-	-	-
Cassette player	1.2	115	-	-	-
Internet time	1.2	115	-	-	-
Daycare	1.2	115	40.00	400.00	46,000
Literacy materials	1.2	115	20.00	200.00	23,000
Meeting expenses	1.2	115	30.00	300.00	34,500
Other	2.4	230	120.50	1,205.00	277,150

**Total: \$2,248,382**

**\* The average annual expense is based on the monthly cost multiplied by ten months.**



Generally, focus group participants tended to minimize the money that they spent in carrying out their tutoring tasks. However, when they were encouraged to think about this issue, they revealed that there was a cost linked to this volunteer activity. For instance, volunteers living in rural areas realized that the cost of gasoline for the 20 to 30 minute trip back and forth was significant when it was added up. Also, some Toronto residents took public transit; consequently, those volunteers who did not have a Metro pass were out-of-pocket for the fares. Some of those who drove had to pay for parking if it wasn't available at the learning centre. A few volunteers indicated that they regularly bought snacks and beverages for the agency. Apparently this practice had developed after the last round of provincial budget cuts.

Other expenses included the purchase of pencils, books or other materials for learners. Some tutors gradually accumulated their own library of resource books, to augment the range of materials available through the agency. They also acquired print materials (magazines, newspapers, books, etc.) that covered topics of particular interest to their learners.

A few tutors indicated that they periodically took their learners to movies or small theatre productions, to broaden the social element of the learning experience. They also knew that their learners could not afford to pay for these experiences and were pleased to provide a treat. Clearly, they were not seeking reimbursement for these kinds of expenses.

The survey gathered data on the incidence and specific amount of these expenses. In addition, respondents were asked to indicate whether the expense was incurred regularly or infrequently, and whether they were reimbursed. The results indicate that three-quarters (73%) of volunteers had regular out-of-pocket expenses attached to their volunteer commitment. On the other hand, slightly more than one in four (27%) did not regularly incur expenses.

Further, respondents indicated that a very small proportion of the money that they regularly spend in the course of their volunteer task is reimbursed. Thus, most of the money spent by volunteers comes out of their own pockets and is not recorded by the agency that provides the literacy program nor by government funders.

A majority of volunteers reported that they regularly incurred out-of-pocket expenses as part of their commitment. As the foregoing data indicates, most of these expenses were not reimbursed. In total, volunteers spent \$2,248,382 annually on a wide variety of items related to their commitment. This estimate is based on 1997 volunteer expenditure figures from the survey done for this project, and the number of literacy volunteers in 1995-95 as provided by the Ministry of Education and Training.

In conclusion, volunteers in Anglophone community literacy agencies in Ontario contributed an estimated annual total of \$11,170,574 in combined out-of-pocket expenditures and volunteer time to the Ontario training system.





# Section 2: Merged Findings: Surveys and Focus Groups

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## The Volunteer Experience

### Introduction

This part of the report examines the central elements of the volunteer experience. Topics covered include why people commit time (and money) to community literacy agencies, their tasks, and the rewards, challenges and frustrations of volunteering. It closes with the measurement of volunteer perceptions about the rewards and public profile of volunteering, and about forms of remuneration.

What is volunteering? How is it defined by those who choose to give their time to literacy? According to one volunteer:

*"The word volunteerism has meant work that is unpaid, and unsung really. It's something that you do almost for yourself."*

Most volunteers indicated that they had started their volunteer careers moved by the desire to help others. It is important to note that this motivation was not patronizing, but included the clear understanding that reaching out in this manner had rewards for both the giver and the receiver.

Literacy volunteers exhibit a strong commitment to helping others develop their reading and writing skills. Indeed, some tutors seemed to have been introduced to the world of volunteer activities through teaching literacy, while others had a varied and often substantial commitment to contributing social capital, that is, making a non-monetary contribution to enrich individuals and the community.



Some volunteers were committed to volunteerism per se, and had considerable histories of donating time to community organizations and causes. Some volunteers indicated that they were currently active in a number of other volunteer pursuits as well, despite having busy lives. Indeed, it seemed that the old adage was true, that the busiest people had the most time to help others.

Volunteers felt that the experience of giving time to help others was important, both for themselves and for those who accessed volunteer services. This sense of wanting to give to the community spanned younger and older participants.

Giving to literacy usually evolved into a deep, respectful relationship of giving to a "friend." This is the best reward for many, the satisfaction that they have been able to make a contribution to someone's life. Usually tutors had a strong admiration for their learning partner. They had great empathy and admiration for learners; they marvelled at their motivation and willingness to admit that they needed help. The words they chose and the feelings of warmth that were expressed left no doubt of the profound nature of the relationship. However, some tutors tended to adopt a more distant and formal relationship with learners.

Why did participants devote their time to literacy tutoring? Most people indicated that they were prompted to help others improve their literacy skills by their own love for reading. The following comments are typical of the enthusiasm:

*"I suppose I enjoyed being read to from the very beginning, so I thought 'oh, life must be so dull for people who can't read' and I really wanted, I thought it would be marvellous, to help someone read."*

*"I was constantly looking at this ad looking for people. I read all the time, I don't think I could live without reading, that's my life, and I said 'I have to do this.'"*

## Motivating Factors For Volunteers

Why were participants volunteering in literacy agencies? Some participants were attracted to volunteerism through the specific desire to help impart literacy skills. They liked to read and wanted to help others to improve their abilities.

*"I get tremendous satisfaction out of volunteering.... I'm delighted if I can help somebody, and I couldn't stand somebody not knowing how to read."*

This desire, along with available time and the urge for new challenges, was pivotal to the seeking of volunteer opportunities. Some homemakers, for instance, felt that it was a healthy, rewarding way of adding diversity to their lives.

*"I've always helped kids along, like in elementary school I helped younger ones. I thought I might as well keep doing it. It gives me something to do with my time."*

*"My husband nagged me, 'you need time away from us.' That's where it all started."*

A few people had sought out volunteer activities as a method of making contacts when they moved to Canada from elsewhere, or moved to a new community. Others took up volunteer jobs as a break from their careers—they wanted to expand their experiential base. Not only did it enhance their résumé but it broadened their understanding of society. And still others had deliberately postponed volunteering until they retired.

One participant had deliberately chosen tutoring because it fulfilled a lifelong ambition to become a teacher. Although he said his school days had been largely unfulfilling, he had retained a deep respect for learning and the art of teaching.

A few people were prompted to help others in this way because of social and political concerns. They knew that in order to be a fully active member of society, engaged in community and the political process, people had to have



literacy skills. The root of a democratic society is information and participation, both dependent on the ability to read and write.

*"I think if you look at the empowerment aspect of just being able to decode what this vast society is all about and how to communicate.... Knowledge is power, it empowers you to be an active participant in this society."*

Several tutors indicated that repeated exposure to notices in community newspapers calling for volunteers to work in literacy agencies had prompted them to get involved.

## **Volunteer Tasks**

The survey was distributed to volunteers. Eighty-three volunteers representing the diversity of community literacy agencies responded.

- Four out of five respondents (82%) were tutors. A small number of tutors were also engaged in other unpaid tasks for literacy agencies.
- About one in four (23%) indicated that participation as a Board member was the major element of their commitment to their local community literacy agency.
- A smaller proportion, about one in ten survey participants, was engaged in a variety of support tasks, including committee work, office duties, organizational tasks or fundraising.
- A few respondents (4%) indicated that their major contribution to literacy agencies was to provide technical support.

Other tasks, most likely connected with the role of volunteer tutor or with Board or committee work, included preparation time. Just under one in three (30%) indicated that this formed a major part of their commitment to the agency. Another one-third indicated that preparation was a minor task, and the remaining 37% claimed that their volunteer hours did not require advance preparation.

Record keeping, report writing and communication-related tasks were significant areas of involvement for a small proportion of volunteers. Another

one-quarter to one-third were engaged in some or all of these tasks but indicated that it was a minor commitment.

In summary, literacy volunteers who completed the survey were engaged in the following activities, listed according to relative importance:

- Tutoring (84%)
- Record keeping (45%)
- Communications (35%)
- Fundraising (23%)
- Preparation time (63%)
- Report writing (37%)
- Organizational tasks (27%)
- Other (19%)

Several focus group participants indicated that they were also lending support to their literacy agency by helping out in areas other than just preparing for sessions. Often they mentioned these added responsibilities to illustrate that literacy agencies and volunteers were being stretched to the limit. Some were extremely concerned about the fragility of the agency due to funding restrictions and potential new government guidelines that would affect literacy training methods. Also, some were worried at the prospect of raising funds and attracting new volunteer tutors during a time of accelerated competition for human and financial resources.

## **The Rewards Of Volunteering**

The focus group sessions provided detailed and moving insights into the rewards that volunteers felt as a result of their experience. This knowledge was augmented by the survey results, and can be divided into two categories:

- the new skills acquired by volunteers, and
- the emotional rewards of volunteering.

### **New Skills Acquired by Volunteers**

Just over two-thirds (68%) of volunteers said that they had acquired new skills as a result of the training they received from the literacy agency. It is interesting to note that the volunteer's level of formal education is irrelevant in this context: people with university degrees or better were as likely to have learned new skills as those who had not completed post-secondary education.



**TABLE #7: The major new skill sets acquired by volunteers**

Skill Sets	%
1. Teaching skills	54
2. Literacy/numeracy/spelling skills	43
3. Planning/problem-solving skills	38
4. Listening skills	29
5. People/life skills	20
6. Marketing skills	11
<b>Base: 83 respondents</b>	

The new skills were applied to many areas of their lives, including volunteering, job/work contexts, and home and family realms. Clearly, judging from the focus group respondents, most volunteers gained new capabilities or refreshed previously learned skills as a result of this experience.

*"I am amazed that many so-called educated people are so ignorant about the true feelings, knowledge and problems of the disabled, and I try to "educate" them when the opportunity arises."*

*"I also apply these skills when volunteering at my neighbourhood elementary school, helping students with basic literacy and numeracy skills, problem solving, and critical thinking."*

*"The ability to communicate clearly is very important in my daily life. For example, in my capacity as a crisis counsellor (volunteer) and receptionist (paid employee), I often meet people who have difficulty speaking English. Tutoring ESL has helped me to become more sensitive to these people's language skills, and to adjust my speech accordingly."*

*"I can edit documents in a critical, analytical thinking process. (I do) editing/formatting for five medical rehabilitation consultants on a daily basis. I now have more skills to offer."*

In addition to learning teaching techniques that could be applied on the job and in other volunteer work, the new skill that received the most appreciative comments during the focus group discussions was enhanced listening ability.

Volunteers felt that they had personally benefited by learning to put their egos and personal agendas aside to become better able to hear what others had to say. For some this was a new-found skill, and they marvelled at the impact that it had on other parts of their lives. For example, several respondents noted that they had improved their interaction with fellow workers and were better able to deal with conflicts.

*"At work I am finding it easier than before to get to the heart of a problem in conversation with my fellow employees. I do this by listening carefully and identifying the message in their words and gestures."*

*"Putting together materials, knowing how adults process information. Also listening to people without interrupting or formulating an answer before individual has completed it."*

Although about one-third (32%) of volunteers claimed that they did not acquire any new skills as a result of training provided by the literacy agency, almost nine out of ten (89%) indicated that learning new skills in this context was a key element of their volunteer experience. Clearly, volunteers had anticipated that they would develop new capabilities. It is possible that the discrepancy noted above could mean that they honed skills during the course of working with learners, rather than picking up new competencies during the initial training.

**TABLE #8: The Importance of Acquiring New Skills Through Volunteering**

<b>Volunteer Perception</b>	<b>%</b>
Very important	61
Somewhat important	28
Somewhat unimportant	5
Very unimportant	5
Don't know/refused	6
<b>Base: 83 respondents</b>	



Again, although two-thirds indicated that they had learned new skills in the course of training, over three-quarters (77%) claimed that they had applied these new capabilities in other parts of their lives. There are indications that younger volunteers, under the age of 40, might have benefitted in this regard more than their older counterparts.

The outline of the skill applications provided below blends new skills learned and ways in which skills are used. The table is based on open-ended responses provided by volunteers who indicated that they had made use of the new skills.

**Table 9: Application of skills learned through volunteering to other areas of life**

<b>Applicability to other areas of life</b>	<b>%</b>
Applying skills to home/work	28
Improved communication skills	19
Understanding other people's needs	19
Personal growth	14
Skills for grammar, editing, writing, etc.	13
Applying skills to other volunteer activities	11
Promotion of literacy agencies	8
Help with job hunting	6
Improved listening skills	5
Helping others	3
Ability to explain more clearly	3
Educating others about disability	2
Other	3
Nothing	6
<b>Base: 83 respondents</b>	

On the application side, newly acquired abilities had a positive impact on volunteers' work and family/home relationships. In addition, a small number indicated that they were able to make use of new skills in their other volunteer activities and in seeking employment.

On the content side of the equation, as seen in the above table, literacy volunteers indicated that what they learned was more significant to them than the day-to-day applications. Their enthusiasm about their experience clearly demonstrated that volunteers feel richly rewarded in the course of helping others improve literacy skills. Many volunteers were qualitatively affected by their exposure to literacy training and interaction with learners. Through this exposure, they honed critical communication skills and developed empathy for others from different social or cultural groups. This positive impact was the subject of considerable discussion during the course of the focus groups.

### Emotional Rewards

Volunteering was repeatedly described as a deeply rewarding experience. Although working with learners had its frustrating moments, almost everyone who completed the survey concluded that it had been a fulfilling experience. As the table below indicates, their efforts were richly compensated.

**Table 10: Satisfaction With Volunteer Experience**

Volunteer Satisfaction	%
Net: Very/Somewhat satisfied	99
Very satisfied	75
Somewhat satisfied	24
Somewhat dissatisfied	-
Very dissatisfied	-
Don't know/refused	1
<b>Base: 83 respondents</b>	

Examination of the focus group input sheds more light on this important issue. Many participants indicated that teaching someone to read was a major motivating factor and a reward in itself. They hoped that new reading skills would bring the same joy to learners that they themselves derived from this pursuit. Many of the focus group participants had a strong love of literature and the printed word. They pursued reading with a passion and hoped to open up this avenue for others.

*"I just love to read!"*



The volunteer experience also was rewarding because it expanded their social and cultural horizons. It was evident that several participants had lived in a relatively restricted social framework and that volunteering had added to their appreciation of the diversity of the population. In some cases, it challenged cultural biases.

*"Actually, it's a shocker when you realize, "oh my goodness, what have I been doing, sleepwalking through this life or what?" You learn things about other people and you learn things about other cultures. A lot of learners here are from the Caribbean so you learn about their culture."*

*"You learn about yourself. I think for me, from the very beginning it was quite an eye-opener to recognize that I was definitely biased. That was good for me. You definitely learn to be more tolerant. It's positive fall-out from it."*

*"You learn so much about the lives of people that are from totally different social and cultural fields than you've ever been in. It's so educational, and then you think "my god, how has this person survived with such a horrendous background?" and you have so much respect for the way they have survived. They're such fighters and that's how you learn a lot from them also. You see these glimpses on TV but you think they are just TV programs, and then you actually meet people that have these backgrounds."*

The volunteer experience brought disparate groups together with surprisingly positive results. For instance, another participant talked at length about the profound impact of working with a learner who was in the prison system. It had brought new insights and deepened her appreciation of the comparatively privileged life she had led. The net result was that both parties gained from the experience. The following illustrates the remarkable transformations that can occur:

*"I feel this was pretty powerful stuff. He started out scruffy, unshaven, stubby pencils and wouldn't write on lines, nothing was neat. He wouldn't look in my eyes and he wouldn't smile. At the end, he was writing with a pen, he was neatly dressed, well-shaved, laughing. This man just grew, it was the most amazing thing I had ever seen and it wasn't just me. It was a whole bunch of staff—the support system in there (prison) was wonderful."*

Although the rewards were of a non-monetary kind, they clearly had tremendous value to volunteers. They spoke of the perceptible changes to demeanor and appearance that resulted as learners progressed. The slow movement towards attaining literacy and numeracy skills worked wonders on learners' self-esteem. With the help of their tutors, learners visibly blossomed.

Tutors also reflected that often the rewards could be few and far between. And, in some particularly frustrating relationships, the small rewards in the form of progress had to be savoured.

*"You take your rewards in small doses. Like on good weeks, I go home smiling, but you don't expect it to happen every week because it won't."*

*"You have to know where to draw the line and you've got to keep focused because you don't want to get bogged down. We're not social workers."*

New friendships and contacts in their community were of great value. Clearly, some relationships had evolved over time into friendships. Although they knew that it was important to maintain a certain professional distance, bonds developed. A few tutors mentioned that they spent time with students beyond the appointed sessions. For instance, they might go to a movie or bake cookies together.

Also, some volunteers found that the experience had helped them establish links in their community so that they felt more at home. Now when they went shopping locally they recognized many people, even if they weren't on a first-name basis with them. It was simply nice to feel that they belonged to a community.

It was very clear that tutors had profound regard for their learning partners. Indeed, many marvelled at the resourcefulness and intelligence required to manage in this complex world with limited literacy skills. Several examples were given of clever compensation strategies. For instance, one man who owned and operated a service business had developed a system of symbols to record transactions. Another learner avoided embarrassment in restaurants by always ordering the same thing—a hamburger and a coke.



*"They've got amazing memories, phenomenal. Everything depends on remembering what it looks like or how to get around, especially a landmark. They have incredible memories and some learners have incredible vocabularies just because they hear and retain it."*

Respect was also accorded to learners for the goals they chose. For example, the objective of a recently retired learner in his mid-sixties was to get a library card. He had swallowed his pride and told the librarian that he would be starting to read using children's books.

The learners' enthusiasm and desire to accomplish also provided a measure of gratification. Tutors realized that learners had to overcome considerable self-doubt in order to take steps towards literacy training. Many tutors put themselves into the shoes of learners and could well imagine what emotional hurdles had to be scaled in order to seek out assistance.

*"Their enthusiastic responses—students are very keen to learn by the time they come to the program. They are here by choice."*

## **The Challenges and Frustrations of Tutoring**

First, what does a literacy tutor do? Focus group participants described it this way:

*"What we have to do is try to find out how we can motivate a learner to reach a higher level of overall literacy. Take someone who is at a certain level and find a way to get them to another level that may help them in the workplace or the home or wherever. That's for them to decide."*

*"It's a learning partnership—it's more of an adult thing, working in cooperation. (Contrasted with traditional education system.)"*

*"It depends on where you are starting from. I have worked with people who don't recognize a, b, c so you have to be able to reach, you have to be able to teach."*

*"The qualification is commitment: You are willing to be persistent, you are willing to try. You have to be friendly, within limits, and be able to accept the person."*

The challenges and frustrations were explored both within the context of the focus group discussions and the survey. The information gathered from both research approaches was consistent and complementary. However, the focus groups provided considerable opportunity to air dissatisfactions and concerns, and consequently shed more light on issues that make volunteering a challenging experience.

Overall, fewer than half (45%) of those who completed the survey expressed "dislikes" about volunteering with literacy agencies. The remainder (55%) claimed that there was nothing worth noting. The main factors that caused concern were, in order of priority:

- Teaching frustrations, expressed in the following comments: "when progress is slow with the learner"; "that a student may not reach her goals"; "watching someone else's frustrations"; "difficult students"; and "being looked at as discreditable as a workforce." Clearly, most of the sense of defeat that tutors experience would seem to be an empathetic response to learners' difficulties in mastering new literacy skills.

*At times, progress is slow and difficult. You sometimes wonder whether you are teaching effectively and whether the student will be able to reach her goals.*

*I sometimes feel concerned that I am not teaching as well as I could. There is a definite lack of supervision by more experienced personnel (tutor with 1½ years experience).*

- Lack of learner commitment was also a cause for dissatisfaction among some tutors. Indeed, some tutors had initially concluded that this lack of commitment was a response to them. After getting to know their learning partners better they understood that arriving late or not at all, for instance, was a function of other factors.
- Government bureaucracy was not frequently mentioned, but it posed a major challenge for a small number of volunteer tutors. The extra time



required to accumulate data for government reports was a trial for these respondents.

- Lack of staff supervision and support also caused some anxiety among a small number of volunteers. Although it appeared volunteers understood that the staff was stretched for time and that more work had to be done with less support, some relatively new volunteers would have liked more help in dealing with problems as they arose.
- Time pressures were an extra burden for a minority of volunteers who were juggling a number of other commitments. Some tutors felt that they were wasting time when their learners were not punctual. In a few instances learners didn't come at all.
- Government cutbacks were having a negative impact on volunteers, according to a minority of survey respondents. However, this topic emerged in the focus groups as a real worry for a number of volunteers. They were deeply concerned about the cumulative impacts of budget slashing on low-income people and on the educational sector.

The following section examines some of these dissatisfactions at greater length, as amplified in the focus group sessions.

### **Emotional and Social Dependency**

Some tutors feared that, despite their best intentions, they could get caught in emotionally dependent relationships with needy learning partners. This problem was seen to be particularly significant by tutors who worked in small town and rural settings. Possibly, lack of access to or awareness of other resources and support services was a major factor. Tutors who expressed these concerns also often found that they could be torn by the desire to lend assistance “above and beyond the call of duty.” They felt genuine empathy for the individual and wanted to help.

*“It's not a cut and dried issue: you walk in and do your two hours and walk out. You become emotionally tied—you're not just teaching her how to read, you're supporting her all the way along. You're doing a whole lot of background stuff that was never in your résumé, so to speak.”*

On the other hand, the tutors knew that this ultimately wouldn't benefit either party. It was evident that the degree of dependency that subsequently

developed had become a problem. In a few cases, this led to terminating the learning relationship. Although most learning relationships seemed to come to a natural end, some were forced to end abruptly. This could be hard on both the learner and the tutor.

*"The book says 'do not get involved, do not get involved.' I think that's very wise because you can get pulled in and they expect you to solve their problems. But that doesn't mean you can't listen."*

*"I have feelings, but I don't want to get involved."*

### **Learner's Commitment**

According to focus group participants, late arrivals and no-shows were a source of frustration for a few tutors. Unfortunately, some tutors found that some learners were unpredictable and repeatedly arrived much later than planned. This created considerable scheduling problems and left tutors wondering if this reflected the learner's lack of commitment to the tutoring relationship. Did it mean that their tutoring skills were lacking, or that they were not able to form a strong connection with the learner? Some tutors indicated they had come to realize that learners who were always late had no experience in keeping appointments, and might be operating from a different cultural perspective on time. As one tutor reported:

*"Sometimes they don't even show up and you wait and wait and wait. There's no consideration that you have somewhere else to go. I don't know whether it's because some of the learners cannot tell the time and have no concept of time. I don't know how you do anything with that."*

The learner's time commitment to homework or to other applications beyond the learning session was an issue in some cases. Some tutors understood that learners had to juggle family, work and other factors, but they had hoped that learners would apply themselves more to the task. This failure to spend time not only reflected negatively on the pace of learning but was seen by some tutors as, possibly, a lack of commitment to the process. Several wondered if it was also a reflection on their relationship with the learner. Some tutors insisted that their learners do homework, though this was associated with a more traditional style of teaching.



*"That was his background and it worked very well for him (referring to a tutor who handed out homework). He wasn't rough on them. He was very respectful, but you knew he had his agenda and he expected them to do homework. But it was amazing how quickly they did come along and the insight they had into what they were reading. It wasn't rote memorization."*

The issue of whether or not homework should be obligatory was discussed. Some tutors were reluctant to insist that homework assignments be a standard part of the requirement. Did they have the right to impose this condition on adult learners? Was homework too potent a reminder of the traditional school system? On the other hand, some tutors felt no hesitation: homework was critical to making progress. Without this extra time commitment, they were convinced that progress was too slow.

### **Assessing Learner Needs**

Several tutors who participated in the focus groups indicated that they had initially encountered great difficulty defining and shaping lesson plans, due to lack of information about the learner. Although they had been trained to develop a program in conjunction with the learner, actually doing this had presented great challenges for some new volunteer tutors. One tutor described how she had laboriously prepared a lesson plan and materials in advance only to find that it didn't fit with her learner.

### **Setting Learning Goals**

Some tutors also found that the learners' goals weren't necessarily related to their literacy level. Indeed, although the program was designed to respond to the goals set by the learner, their objectives were often narrow and limiting. However, some tutors were encouraged to find that learners expanded their horizons after they gained some confidence.

## **Measuring Volunteers' Attitudes And Perceptions**

The survey explored attitudes and perceptions about the volunteer experience using a series of statements. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed, as follows:

**Table 11: Volunteer Attitudes about Volunteerism**

Volunteers Perception	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
	%	%	%
The changes that our country is experiencing mean that the role of volunteers is more than it used to be.	93	6	1
I wish more people would get involved in volunteer activities.	92	4	4
I feel that I have gotten as much as I have given as a volunteer.	92	6	2
Volunteers should get a tax credit for their efforts.	54	31	15
If I got some compensation for my efforts, I would devote more time to volunteer work.	29	60	11
Volunteers don't get the recognition they deserve.	28	68	5
I think that I could give more time to volunteer work than I do now.	19	72	8
<b>Base: 83 respondents</b>			

The strong endorsement of the literacy volunteer experience, as discussed elsewhere in the report, is demonstrated above. Volunteering was richly rewarding: most indicated that they got as much as they gave. This endorsement was strong enough that most volunteers would like to see others get involved too.

Most volunteers felt that getting involved in volunteer work was not only a key part of their lives, but was of critical importance during this period in the country's history. Almost everyone felt that volunteer activities could help make a difference as the social safety net weakened. Some focus group respondents observed that reforms in the educational system were taking a toll. Funding cuts, leading to larger class sizes, were having a negative impact on students' ability to learn and teacher's ability to educate.

*"That really bothers me. They haven't got a clue how to read. This "whole language" learning system—some kids do fine with it but there are other ones that need that structure. They need phonics, they need repetition, they need spelling lessons, they need all that stuff."*



*"But I don't think it should be up to an organization like this pick up the slack."*

Some of the volunteers had volunteerism "in their blood." As far as they were concerned, any capable person who didn't give back to their community in some way was highly deficient. While not everyone who participated in the survey felt this strongly about it, most (93%) wished that others would get involved. As indicated previously, literacy volunteers felt that the personal rewards were ample compensation.

For the most part, volunteerism is its own reward. The majority (68%) felt that they received ample recognition for their efforts, although about one quarter disagreed.

*"I'm sure that in the days before women worked, (volunteering) must have given a marvellous sense that you belonged somewhere, that you had talent that you weren't able to use on the job, so volunteering became a great way to cook or whatever. Now they actually get paid for those things."*

A few women felt that the government's perception that volunteers should be willing and available to fill in the gap resulting from funding cuts to social services and non-profit service groups was anachronistic and out of step with societal changes. With a majority of women in the workforce, the pool of available homemakers had shrunk dramatically. The reality was that most families were economically dependent on two incomes.

*"I think the reality is that we live in a society where money is the driving force—you need money to live on—and there's this huge movement to put everything back into the volunteer sector. You hear about coming back into the community and looking after your own. Of course we should look after our own, but we can't do it all for free. So I am hoping that out of a discussion like this the government realizes there is a huge dollar component to what people are putting in already that's not being counted."*

*"And, as they (government) pull back on their funds they're going to lose it (volunteer involvement) because you're going to have to make the money somewhere, so you end up dropping the things that aren't contributing some kind of income."*

While the survey did not gather data on the employment status of volunteers, insights from the focus groups indicated that at least half of volunteers were working. The remainder were occupied at home either caring for young children or with household duties. A small number were retired or had left employment and had the means to devote spare hours to volunteer activities.

Volunteers were busy people, to the point that only a minority indicated that they would be able to spend additional time on volunteer activities. The majority (72%) indicated that they would not be able to devote more time to volunteer work. Offering the added incentive of financial compensation had negligible impact. Six out of 10 (60%) indicated that they would not be able to spend more time volunteering even if they received a financial incentive. As far as the majority were concerned, money was irrelevant in this context.

The role of financial incentives was further explored in relation to the idea of tax credits. Should volunteers receive tax credits as a measure of recognition for their services? Just over half (54%) agreed with this concept, while one-third (31%) felt that it was inappropriate. A further one in seven (15%) were unable to provide a response on this issue. The concept of tax credits as discussed in some of the focus groups is addressed elsewhere in the report.

## **Role Of Staff—Training And Support**

Focus group participants appeared to have a high regard for literacy agency staff members. They valued their assistance, applauded their hard work and also worried about their futures, in light of the budget cuts affecting many government programs. Volunteers strongly believed that community literacy agencies play a critical role in aiding those who have either slipped through the cracks in the educational system, or who need literacy skills to become fully participating members of Canadian society.

Literacy tutor training was frequently reported to be a short, intense period consisting of two Saturdays and one evening. During the sixteen hours allocated, volunteer tutors were expected to learn the basics and then augment their skills as they went along. The content of training was described in the following words:



*"Training tends to cover the general stuff about literacy, the background stuff, the political philosophy."*

While some tutors felt that the initial training should provide them with more basic tutoring skills, they admitted that their time was at a premium.

Although they would have liked more initial training, it was difficult to find the time even to take the core program. Several tutors suggested that the best solution, rather than increasing the initial training program, would be to introduce periodic specialized sessions. These additional training units would give them more skills and tactics to address problem areas.

The desire for more training was confirmed by the survey. "Additional tutor training" was identified as the leading element that would improve volunteer effectiveness.

While some tutors said that they had sufficient opportunities to enhance their skills in this manner, others thought that more attention should be devoted to additional training, suggesting:

*"Say, a session a year where you learn new methods or you address certain issues."*

*"A refresher session three months down the line."*

Support from staff was critical in addressing issues that went beyond literacy training itself. For instance, situations could arise, such as problems with increased rent or family disputes, that clearly needed to be addressed by social workers. Tutors knew that they could turn to staff, who would help learners connect with the appropriate community agency. While tutors had great empathy for learners, they were relieved to know that staff would make the links with the appropriate support.

*"You have to know where to draw the line and you've got to keep focused because you don't want to get bogged down. We're not social workers. I have feelings but I can't get involved."*

Staff were also consulted when tutors encountered difficulty in getting appropriate materials, although several tutors noted that their literacy agency's library had a wealth of good books and training materials. Tutors

were pleased that more basic reading books geared to adults and to cultural groups were becoming available. They also accessed materials at the library or gradually accumulated their own print resources. Some tutors went on the Internet in order to find things that would interest their learner. One learner, for instance, was very active in environmental issues. This had prompted his tutor to become more knowledgeable by searching out the latest developments on the Internet and in print publications.

Tutors relied on staff to provide training and support whenever it was needed, although there were many references to the lack of sufficient staff. Tutors expressed a high regard for staff, but knew that they were called increasingly to do more with less funding. Consequently, many tutors believed that literacy agencies needed to be given more support by the government. Several regretted that valuable staff time now had to be devoted to fundraising and chasing money rather than focusing on other tasks.

Staff were also seen as important connectors who, as part of their monitoring role, kept in touch with tutors and learners. Tutors felt this periodic check-in was important, helping them to feel part of a larger effort and providing an opportunity to discuss specific problem areas.

## **The Tutoring Experience**

According to some focus group participants, the tutoring experience puts new tutors in totally unfamiliar territory. Novices who had had no previous teaching experience quickly realized that they were starting from ground zero. While they were armed with strategies and some basic skills, there were no set materials or patterns to follow. It was up to them and their learner to create the learning experience. From the outset, tutors realized that they had to be extremely flexible and capable of adapting to the particular needs of their learning partner.

The next challenge was to devise approaches and complementary materials that would suit the learner's needs. Each tutor had to develop a learning plan that was sensitive to the learner. While tutors understood the point of this, some wished they had been provided, as a starting point, with a learning plan that could then be shaped to the goals of the learner.



*"While the philosophy has been that you let the learner determine what their learning should be, I think there are some drawbacks to this. The training that tutors get is only two Saturdays and one evening, so at least for the first while a plan would give tutors something to work from, rather than just foraging around trying to find the learner's level."*

While training was supposed to follow the learner's goals, this approach wasn't always straightforward. In practice, tutors found that some learners had very specific goals, while others did not. Again, goals were as varied as the learners themselves. Examples of goals included being able to fill out a job application form, an application for a rental unit, or a citizenship form. One learner wanted to write his life story. However, once learners had gained confidence their goals often expanded beyond their initial limited horizons.

*"Once they get over those hurdles and get those certificates, it seems to bolster their confidence and they want to spread their wings."*

The job of the tutor was described as facilitating the learning process according to each learner's different needs. The potential range of the learners' literacy skills was described as vast. At the lowest level, learners needed help in spelling their names, while others had basic skills but were weak in spelling. Hence, there were few predictable elements in literacy tutoring. This forced tutors to adopt an extremely flexible approach, and perhaps jettison their early idea of how they would proceed. While the tutors came to value their newly learned ability to respond to the individual's needs, it often was not easy.

While preparation of lessons and corresponding materials had to reflect the learning goal established by the learner, materials also had to be sensitive to the cultural needs and life experiences of the learner. Finding content-relevant material also posed some difficulty, particularly if the learner's interests were not well defined. Also, cultural and lifestyle differences added to the tutor's dilemma. For example, a few tutors described how they had labouriously prepared games and exercises and then found that these were out of step with the learner's experiential framework.

## Volunteers' Time Commitment

The survey captured data related to the monthly time commitment expended on major volunteer tasks. As previously indicated, most volunteer tutors were assisting their literacy agency in more ways than tutoring. Hence, many tutors were contributing a substantial number of hours to adult literacy education.

**Table 12: Average Hourly Volunteer Time Commitment per Month:**

<b>Task:</b>	<b>Average no. of Hours per month</b>	<b>Volunteers Listing Task as a Major Commitment (%)</b>
Tutoring	15.22	84
Organizational duties	15.43	26
Committee member	5.47	26
Board member	4.39	25
Office work	20.73	18
<b>Base: 83 respondents</b>		

The largest proportion of volunteers who completed the survey were engaged in tutoring: more than four out of five (84%) respondents were tutors. One-quarter or less reported that they engaged in other support activities, including organizational tasks, sitting on a committee or the Board, or helping with office duties. Some volunteers contributed more than one activity: for example, some tutors also held a Board position or were helping with committee work.

To shed more light on the extent of volunteers' time commitment to literacy agencies, each major task is examined below.

### Tutoring

The largest volunteer contribution reported in this study was to tutoring: only 16% of respondents were not involved in tutoring. On average, tutors spent 15.22 hours per month, though the time cited varied considerably. Just under half of tutors indicated that they spent no more than eight hours per month engaged in this task. About half of the remainder devoted nine to twelve hours to tutoring, and the remainder averaged thirteen or more hours.



On the high end, about one in ten tutors reported that they averaged twenty-five hours or more each month on tutoring.

### **Organizational Duties**

About one in four (26%) volunteers help literacy staff with organizational duties. While a few of those engaged in this important support area were spending at least twenty-five hours a month, most reported that they spent three to four hours a month.

### **Committee Membership**

On average, volunteer committee members were devoting 5.47 hours per month to this task. While the actual number of hours varied considerably, most were spending no more than four hours a month on this task.

### **Board Membership**

On average, Board members spent 4.39 hours per month engaged in these duties. However, most Board members presumably were also involved in committee work, and many were also tutors.

### **Office Work**

While this support task represents the highest average number of hours per month (20.73), it is important to remember that less than one in five (18%) volunteers were engaged in this kind of work. Also, half of those aiding in this manner reported that they spent six or less hours each month, while most of the remainder were devoting twenty-five hours or more each month. In conclusion, a small number of volunteers were devoting at least one full day a week to office duties linked with literacy program delivery.

## **Keeping Literacy Volunteers**

It would appear that the retention rate for literacy volunteers is high. On average, literacy volunteers that completed the survey had been involved with the agency for 3.71 years. This is an impressive figure that reflects the personal rewards that accrue to volunteers.

Over half (57%) had been volunteers for three years or less. Another one in five (21%) had been volunteering for four or five years, while the remainder had been committed for longer periods of time. Seven per cent had been helping out for at least ten years.

**Table 13: Length of Volunteer Involvement**

<b>Years of Involvement</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Less than one year	7
One year	19
Two years	19
Three years	12
Four years	8
Five years	11
Six years	4
Seven years	2
Eight years	4
Nine years	2
Ten or more years	7
<b>Average no. of years</b>	<b>3.71</b>
Don't know/Refused	1
<b>Base: 83 respondents</b>	

Focus group participants included both tutors who had recently joined the agency and others who had had a lengthy involvement. It appeared that the volunteers' willingness to continue developing a learning partnership was often a function of their ability to create a positive working relationship with the learner. A few focus group participants indicated that they were aware of some volunteers who had abandoned literacy agencies out of frustration and a sense of defeat. Hence, the quality of the learning partnership was of critical importance. Also, they had heard of volunteers leaving the agency after training because they had been unable to find a match quickly—in this case, the issue was timing.



## Future Volunteer Commitment

Almost eight in ten (78%) volunteers who completed the survey said that they intended to continue working in literacy agencies. Most of the remainder (19%) were unable to make a commitment one way or the other, while only 1% indicated that they would not be available in the future. Thus, most volunteers were prepared to continue devoting time and energy to community literacy agencies. These results indicate that most volunteers felt that their efforts were appreciated and that they were able to make a meaningful contribution.

However, the question of whether they would be prepared to increase their commitment received a lukewarm response. Just under half (47%) indicated that they would be willing to take on additional tasks such as record keeping, preparation of reports or ongoing assessment of students. The remaining half (52%) were not prepared to expand their involvement to include these additional duties.

Many of the focus group participants indicated that they were already at the breaking point; it was unlikely that these respondents would increase the number of hours devoted to their literacy agency.

*“There are times when you are committed and meeting-ed out of your mind.”*

*“Very often the people who are tutors here are volunteers in other organizations too. They have other sorts of commitments.”*

Some participants expressed disagreement with the current government's policy of downloading important services to the volunteer sector while simultaneously cutting funding for staff and program expenses. Some participants suspected that the government was planning to use volunteers to handle tasks that belonged to the school system. Also, they did not want to take jobs away from agency support staff, nor did they want to take on record-keeping, particularly if the resulting material would be used to destabilize community literacy agencies.

They also looked at this question from the learner's perspective. Would the learners be willing to devote more time to literacy education? Most seemed to

doubt this. Many literacy students were spending four hours a week: two with their tutor and two in a group lesson. In addition, students had the extra burden of homework so asking them to spend more time was seen as unrealistic. Also, tutors were mindful that learners had to be given time to adapt to the learning process.

*"The thing, too, is when a student starts off for the first time in a setting such as this, learning is a very tiring experience. It's really hard, so they have to work up to that for at least a year."*

*"I think it's especially tough for the learners who are working fulltime. And some of them have irregular hours, and they have families, and little ones."*

## **The Hidden Economic Component Of Volunteering**

### **Tax Credits and Honoraria**

Volunteers did not attach a dollar value to their contribution; volunteerism was viewed as being outside the realm of economics. However, changes in the educational system and methods of teaching, cuts in funding, and societal change have created a climate where this issue was of some relevance.

During the course of the focus group discussions, the consultant introduced the issue of compensation and questioned whether it had a role to play in literacy tutoring. Should tutors receive an honorarium of, say, \$15 per hour? Should tutors receive a tax credit? Should tutors be reimbursed for their regular, out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the course of delivering their valuable service?

The topic of remuneration evoked strong emotions and discomfort among some respondents. It seemed that this issue was out of place in the discussion. Clearly, this response was rooted in perceptions about volunteerism. Several participants made the point firmly that they gave their time willingly, without the promise of economic gain. They were slightly indignant that this issue was introduced. Indeed, money was antithetical to their idea of volunteerism.



*"I think no—I don't think you should bring money into this thing at all. It changes attitudes and expectations, even if it's just \$15 an hour."*

*"The word volunteerism has meant work that is unpaid, and unsung really. It's something that you do almost for yourself."*

*"I think the vast majority of people who do this, do this because they believe that it makes the world a better place. You have to somehow think that "yes, I am my brother's keeper," and so you share some responsibility for how the world is, and you do something because it is important."*

*"To volunteer is to give of one's own free will, with no compensation; ergo, recognition, payment, or tax credits should not be an issue."*

According to one line of thinking about volunteerism, the introduction of a monetary incentive stripped it of its "nobility." While most participants appeared to subscribe to this perception of volunteerism, some also noted that the issue of the monetary value of the service versus its worth could not be disregarded in a milieu that places so much emphasis on money.

*"I think our society really values things through money."*

As a consequence, they feared that the important work being done in the volunteer sector was unrecognized because no monetary value had been attached to it. Further, some participants (mostly women) linked the invisible nature of volunteerism with the marginalization of women's work, because neither involve an exchange of money.

*"Women's work, we know, is hugely undervalued. They do most of the volunteer work and it's either underpaid or not paid for at all. So the vast majority of what women do in this society doesn't get seen because it's not measured in dollars."*

However reluctant some people were to link volunteerism with money, others were able to see the merits of adding an economic component, such as an honorarium or a tax credit. They suspected that an added economic incentive could provide the extra inducement required to increase the current pool of volunteers. Some of the agencies that participated in the focus groups were in great need of more Board members and tutors.

*"People don't seem to find the time and that would be an incentive for people, that "what am I doing this for?" kind of thing. It's like volunteering to charities because I'm going to get something back on the tax credits."*

*"That makes it really attractive for people who are on the borderline."*

It also had merit because the pool of available volunteers, drawn in the past largely from the ranks of homemakers, had diminished with the increasing involvement of women in the workforce. Women who were good organizers were now being paid for their skills.

The other realities that needed to be addressed were the economic pressures of modern living and the requirement for two incomes rather than one. Few families were now able to live comfortably on one wage. This boded ill for volunteerism, which flourished when women were homebound but was now expected to pick up the slack resulting from government cuts.

*"This move away from paying for services rendered is really scaring me."*

*"I think the reality is that we live in a society where money is the driving force, and you need money to live on, and there's this huge movement to put everything back into the volunteer sector. You hear about coming back into the community and looking after your own. Of course, we look after our own, but we can't do it all for free!"*

*"Women don't get any discount at Zehr's when they go to put food on the table, even though they're using these wonderful talents in managerial positions in volunteer organizations!"*

When viewed in this light, tax credits for volunteer commitment made good sense for some respondents. While others didn't necessarily endorse this approach, they felt that there should be some way of measuring the contribution that was made by volunteers, otherwise it would not be recognized.

Volunteers who responded to the survey felt the same ambivalence about tax credits as focus group participants. A slim majority (54%) favoured the concept, three in ten (31%) rejected it and the remaining 15% were unable to



decide. The latter response was not surprising, as many focus group respondents had never considered this issue.

The other method of providing a monetary reward for volunteers was to give honoraria. Unlike tax credits, over which there was considerable ambivalence, direct payment did not meet with widespread approval. The main objection was that it would turn the volunteer experience into a part-time job. Focus group respondents made it clear that they were not seeking this type of employment; nevertheless, they acknowledged that this might be of interest to some volunteers. However, they had difficulty attaching an hourly rate to volunteering. Some suggested that \$15 per hour would be reasonable, while others thought that the remuneration of experienced tutors should be in line with teachers' salaries, where \$30 per hour was appropriate.

Again, the results of the survey reflected the opinion registered by focus group respondents. Specifically, six in ten (60%) rejected the statement, "If I got some compensation for my efforts, I would devote more time to volunteer work." About three in ten (29%) supported this suggestion, and the remaining 11% did not know or were ambivalent.

## **Volunteers' Suggestions For Improving Literacy Agencies**

About half (49%) of the volunteers who completed the survey indicated that additional measures were required to help improve the effectiveness of volunteers. There are indications that better educated volunteers (with university or postgraduate degrees) were more likely to believe that the agency needed to be strengthened. Most of the remainder indicated that no agency enhancements were required.

**Table 14: Volunteer Suggestions for Improving the Effectiveness of Volunteers**

Suggestions	Total %
Additional Tutor Training	36
Public Awareness	20
More contact with other tutors	20
More materials	12
More assessment	12
More staff support	10
More attention to volunteer needs	10
Tutor training	7
Less government interference	5
Other	12
Nothing	2
<b>Base: 41 respondents</b>	

Topping the list was the call for more tutor training, followed by the desire to have more contact with other tutors. The focus group proceedings indicated that most of the tutors were very keen to share experiences and engage in problem solving with their peers.

One in five of those who felt that the agency needed to be adjusted suggested that literacy would benefit from more public exposure.

Although several focus group respondents were complimentary about the quality and volume of materials that were available at their agency's resource centre, a small number (12%) of those who completed the survey indicated that they would benefit from having access to more materials. According to a few focus group participants, there were insufficient resources geared to adult learners/readers and to diverse cultural groups.

A minority (12%) of volunteers indicated that the program could be improved with "more assessment."



A small number (10%) felt that literacy training would be improved with more staff involvement. 10% of respondents also suggested that “attend(ing) to volunteer needs” would be beneficial to the agency.

A handful of volunteers (5%) claimed that the literacy agency would benefit from “less government interference.” Focus group respondents shed some light on this issue, complaining that their burden had increased due to the demand from government funders for more documentation and record keeping. They seemed to feel that these extra duties were beyond the scope of their commitment.

Other suggestions included: *“encourage volunteers to get involved in areas other than tutoring,”* and *“funding for a community drop-in centre for teachers and students.”*

Following is an excerpt of the suggestions provided by volunteers who completed the survey:

*“More thorough training, refresher courses, accessibility to workshops in the evenings, greater interaction between programs for volunteers.”*

*“I would like the opportunity to meet with and learn from other literacy tutors. The “get-togethers” we currently have are more social than educational. It would be nice to know of opportunities for networking and ongoing training.”*

*“Have a monthly voluntary meeting of all volunteers for problem solving or teaching new strategies or sharing resources. (I don’t need this myself, though, and I found staff to be available if and when I needed to speak with them.)”*

*“I believe more media coverage of the many activities and accomplishments of both instructors and volunteers could bring constructive awareness.”*

*“Additional training aimed at the individual needs and requirements of the tutor.”*

*"Easier access to teaching material (problem is mainly due to my inability to get to literacy office during working hours)."*

*"If our organization had more funding, we could establish a community drop-in center, so that more of our students and tutors could meet weekly in the center. This would lead to more mutual support for one another and less isolation."*

*"Recognition as "professionals" in the work they do."*

*"Additional funding for paid organization staff, to increase their availability to volunteers."*

*"More local training in recognized disabilities. (There is) under-recognition of the program."*

*"I believe workshops that would keep tutors informed of pertinent topics would be valuable."*

*"Meet regularly with other volunteers to "sound off" and gather new ideas."*

*"More training."*

*"The vast majority of literacy volunteers are interested in tutoring only! When you start making demands on their time for non-tutoring work, you start losing their interest. I will probably not continue with a new client when my present one has finished the program. The demands put on my "spare" volunteer time by the government have gotten ridiculous. For example, Core Quality Standards should have been prepared by qualified people, then presented to the programs for study and implementation. And the people who came up with the formula for the CQS should be hung! What a mind-boggling, time-consuming mess!"*

*"Ongoing workshops to enhance adult education skills, understanding and dealing with learning disabilities."*

*"Disabilities, information sharing on games and other creative ways to make learning more enjoyable for the student and the teacher."*



In conclusion, the following perspectives on similar issues were contributed by focus group participants.

### **Increased Funding**

Respondents felt that literacy agencies require additional funding in order to augment support staff. They observed that the current staff complement was overworked, and that staff had to spend too much of their valuable time raising funds. Consequently, staff time for working with tutors and learners was limited.

### **Additional Training Opportunities**

While both staff and volunteers were already stretched to the limit, many tutors recommended that more occasions for refresher courses and skill upgrading would be beneficial.

# Summary

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The findings of the *“Economic Value of Volunteers in Community Literacy Agencies”* start to explore the traditionally “invisible” realm of volunteer contributions to Ontario literacy delivery.

Volunteerism, both for tutoring work and other activities, is the backbone of community literacy agencies and therefore an essential element in the training system in Ontario. By quantifying the contribution of volunteers in economic terms, we begin to value and recognize the work and to consider the appropriate supports required to ensure a consistent, accessible and accountable system across the province.

By examining the qualitative experience of volunteering in literacy agencies we can also appreciate this unique dimension of literacy that motivates volunteer spirit and keeps people committed to the special tasks associated with literacy delivery.

These preliminary findings require careful consideration by policy makers, government funders, volunteer managers and the volunteers themselves. Through consultation and further research, we can ensure that the contribution of volunteers continues to play a strong and significant part in the delivery of literacy training in Ontario.



# Summary

The findings of the "Economic Value of Volunteerism in Community Literacy" study are presented in this summary. The study was designed to explore the "invisible" benefits of volunteerism and to provide a framework for future research.

We have shown that both for learning work and other activities, the presence of a literacy agency and therefore an essential element in the learning system in Ontario. By quantifying the contribution of volunteers in various forms, we hope to help to recognize the work and to consider the appropriate supports required to ensure a consistent, accessible and sustainable system across the province.

We examined the qualitative experience of volunteering in literacy agencies. We can also appreciate the unique dimension of literacy that provides volunteer spirit and that people committed to the social responsibility of literacy.

The preliminary findings require a careful consideration by policy makers, government bodies, volunteer managers and the volunteer themselves. Through consultation and further research, we can ensure that the contribution of volunteers continues to play a strong and significant part in the delivery of literacy training in Ontario.

# Appendix 1: Survey

## Community Literacy of Ontario Study – Volunteer Questionnaire

Here is a list of tasks that literacy volunteers do.

- 1a) Would you please check those tasks that you are involved in, and for each please indicate if it is a Major, Minor or Not Applicable to your literacy volunteer activity. Please include other tasks not listed in Other category.
- b) Now, for each task that applies to you, please indicate how much time you would spend on a monthly basis doing this task.
- c) Please add up the number of time you spend in all literacy tasks.

Task:	Major Task %	Minor Task %	Estimate Time:
Tutoring			
Board member			
Committee member			
Office work			
Organizational duties			
Fundraising			
Technical support			
Preparation time			
Record keeping			
Report writing			
Communications			
Other			

d) Total estimated hours:

2. Does your volunteer work with literacy agencies involve any out-of-pocket expenses to you, including both things that you are reimbursed for and other costs required in order to complete your volunteer commitment? If so please complete the chart below:

- a) list the type of expense



- b) how much you regularly spend on an average month for on-going expenses such as transportation
- or
- c) how much you have spent on other less regular items
- d) tick here if you are reimbursed for this expense

Expense	b. Regular Expense	c. Other Expense	Reimbursed

3a) Have you acquired any new skills as a result of the training that was provided by the literacy program?

Yes

No Go to Q. 4

3b) If Yes: Please list the skills you have acquired.

3c) Now for each skill you have listed, please indicate if where you have applied the new skill, or if it has not been applied.

4. Overall, how important would you say learning new skills is part of your volunteer activities with literacy agencies:

Very important

Somewhat important

Somewhat unimportant

Very unimportant

5a. Do you apply the skills and experience you have gained from literacy programs to the rest of your life, either in the paid workforce or in other volunteer and community things that you do?

Yes

No Go to Q.6

5b) If Yes: Please give an example.

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6. On an overall basis, how satisfied are you with your experience as a volunteer with community literacy agencies?

Very satisfied

Somewhat satisfied

Somewhat dissatisfied

Very dissatisfied

7. Here are a list of statements that some people have made, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

	Agree	Disagree
Volunteers don't get the recognition they deserve.		
I wish more people would get involved in volunteer activities.		
I feel that I have gotten as much as I have given as a volunteer.		
The changes that our country is experiencing mean that the role of volunteers is more than it used to be.		
Volunteers should get a tax credit for their efforts.		
I think that I could give more time to volunteer work than I do now.		
If I got some compensation for my efforts, I would devote more time to volunteer work.		

8. How long have you been volunteering in literacy agencies? \_\_\_\_\_

9a. In addition to the training and support that you have received, are there any other things that could be done to help improve the effectiveness of volunteers?

Yes

No      Go to Q.10

9b. If Yes: Please describe what could be done.



10. Are you willing to take on additional volunteer responsibilities e.g record keeping, preparation of reports, or ongoing assessment of students?

Yes

No

11. Do you intend to continue volunteering in literacy agencies?

Yes, definitely

Maybe, not sure

No

12a. What, if anything, do you like about volunteering with literacy agencies?

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12b. And what, if anything, do you dislike about volunteering with literacy programs?

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13. Could anything be done to improve your role as a volunteer with literacy programs? Please give us your suggestions.

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In order to help us classify the data would you please provide the following information.

A. Are you:                      Female                      Male

B. Your age:

Under 21

21 - 30

31 - 40

41 - 50

51 - 60

61 - 70

Over 70 years

C. Level of education completed to date:

Some highschool

Highschool

Some university or technical college

University or technical college

Post graduate studies/degree

**Thank you very much for your assistance!**





# Appendix 2: Data Tables

## Community Literacy of Ontario – Tally of Volunteer Survey Results

1a) Would you please check those tasks that you are involved in, and for each please indicate if it is a *Major*, *Minor* or *Not Applicable* to your literacy volunteer activity. Please include other tasks not listed in *Other* category.

Base: 83	Major Task %	Minor Task %	Not Applicable %
Tutoring	82	2	16
Board member	23	2	75
Committee member	11	16	74
Office work	10	8	82
Organizational duties	10	17	74
Fundraising	10	13	77
Technical support	4	5	92
Preparation time	30	33	37
Record keeping	8	37	54
Report writing	10	27	64
Communications	13	22	65
Other	13	6	-
Don't know/Refused	4	-	-

1b) Now, for each task that applies to you, please indicate how much time you would spend on a monthly basis doing this task.

Base: 83	Tutoring %	Board Member %	Committee Member %
3 to 4 hours	7	15	12
5 to 6 hours	8	4	2
7 to 8 hours	22	2	-
9 to 10 hours	10	-	5
11 to 12 hours	11	1	-
13 to 24 hours	10	-	1
25 hours or more	8	-	-
Average hours	15.22	4.39	5.47



<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Office Work %</b>	<b>Organizational%</b>
3 to 4 hours	4	10
5 to 6 hours	4	2
7 to 8 hours	-	-
9 to 10 hours	1	1
11 to 12 hours	-	-
13 to 24 hours	1	1
25 hours or more	4	2
Average hours	20.73	15.43
Not applicable	82	74

c) Please add up the amount of time you spend in all literacy tasks.

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
4 hours or less	12
5 to 6 hours	11
7 to 8 hours	5
9 to 10 hours	10
11 to 12 hours	6
13 to 18 hours	19
19 to 24 hours	8
25 to 40 hours	13
More than 40 hours	15
Average	30.04

2. Does your volunteer work with literacy agencies involve any out-of-pocket expenses to you, including both things that you are reimbursed for and other costs required in order to complete your volunteer commitment? If so please complete the chart below:

Expense	Total %	Regular Expense \$	Less Regular Expense \$	Reimbursed %
Have out-of-pocket expenses	74			
No out-of-pocket expenses	26			
Transportation Expenses	29			1
Mean amount		20.72	2.00	
Car/mileage/gas	13			2
Mean amount		44.38	8.33	
Travel/bus fare	12			4
Mean amount		55.89	-	
Meals/food/coffee	8 2			
Mean amount		5.17	10.00	
Phone/long distance	7			2
Mean amount	1 7	21.25	-	
Resource materials/supplies	6			2
Mean amount		19.00	15.50	
Parking	5			-
Photocopying/computer printing	5			-
Tracking material	5			-
Books	4			-
Materials/supplies	5			-
Pens/pencils	2			-
Special activities	2			-
Student supplies	2			-
Office expense/supplies	2			-
Paper	2			-
Registration fees	2			-



3a) Have you acquired any new skills as a result of the training that was provided by the literacy program?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Yes	68
No	32

3b) If Yes: Please list the skills you have acquired.

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Teaching skills	54
Literacy/Numeracy/Spelling skills	43
Planning/Problem-solving Skills	38
Applied to volunteer activities	32
Listening Skills	29
Job/Work Related skills	25
People/Life skills	20
Computer skills	18
Volunteer skills	11
Marketing skills	11
Applied to work	5
Applied to home/family	5
Other	18
Nothing	16
Don't know/refused	9

4. Overall, how important would you say learning new skills is part of your volunteer activities with literacy agencies:

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Net: Very/Somewhat important	89
Very important	61
Somewhat important	28
Net: Somewhat/Very unimportant	5
Somewhat unimportant	5
Very unimportant	-
Don't know/refused	6

- 5a. Do you apply the skills and experience you have gained from literacy agencies to the rest of your life, either in the paid workforce or in other volunteer and community things that you do?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Yes	68
No	32
Don't Know/Refused	2

- 5b) If Yes: Please give an example.

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Applying skills to home/work	28
Improved communication skills	19
Understanding other people's needs	19
Personal growth	14
Skills for grammar, editing, writing, etc.	13
Applying skills to other volunteer activities	11
Promotion of literacy agencies	8
Helps with job hunting 6 Improved listening skills	5
Helping others	3
Ability to explain more clearly	3
Educating others about disability	2
Other	3
Nothing	6

6. On an overall basis, how satisfied are you with your experience as a volunteer with community literacy agencies?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Net: Very/Somewhat satisfied	99
Very satisfied	75
Somewhat satisfied	24
Somewhat dissatisfied	-
Very dissatisfied	-
Don't know/refuse	1



7. Here are a list of statements that some people have made. Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Agree</b> %	<b>Disagree</b> %	<b>Don't know</b> %
Volunteers don't get the recognition they deserve.	28	68	5
I wish more people would get involved in volunteer activities.	92	4	4
I feel that I have gotten as much as I have given as a volunteer.	92	6	2
The changes that our country is experiencing mean that the role of volunteers is more than it used to be.	93	6	1
Volunteers should get a tax credit for their efforts.	54	31	15
If I got some compensation for my efforts, I would devote more time to volunteer work.	29	60	11
I think that I could give more time to volunteer work than I do now.	19	72	8

8. How long have you been volunteering in literacy agencies?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total</b> %
Less than one year	7
One year	19
Two years	19
Three years	12
Four years	8
Five years	11
Six years	4
Seven years	2
Eight years	4
Nine years	2
Ten or more years	7
<b>Average no. of years</b>	<b>3.71</b>
Don't know/Refused	1

9a. In addition to the training and support that you have received, are there any other things that could be done to help improve the effectiveness of volunteers?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Yes	49
No	47
Don't Know/Refused	4

9b. If Yes: Please describe what could be done.

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Additional Tutor Training	43
Public Awareness	20
More contact with other tutors	20
More materials	12
More assessment	12
More staff support	10
Attend to volunteer needs	10
Less government interference	5
Other	12
Nothing	2

10. Are you willing to take on additional volunteer responsibilities e.g. record keeping, preparation of reports, or ongoing assessment of students?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Yes	47
No	52
Don't Know/Refused	1



11. Do you intend to continue volunteering in literacy agencies?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Yes, definitely	47
No	52
Don't Know/Refused	4

12a. What, if anything, do you like about volunteering with literacy agencies?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Positive impact on student's self-esteem	29
Satisfaction/Growth	27
Developing friendships	23
Learn new skills	23
Helping other help themselves	10
Giving to the community	8
Work at own pace	7
Challenges of teaching adults	6
Exposure to new lifestyles	5
Other	8
Nothing	4

12b. And what, if anything, do you dislike about volunteering with literacy programs?

<b>Base: 83</b>	<b>Total %</b>
Teacher frustrations	13
Lack of student commitment	8
Government bureaucracy	6
Lack of staff support/supervision/too busy staff	6
Time pressures (teachers)	6
Government cutbacks/lack of social services	4
Fund raising	1
Lack of students	1
Others	2
Nothing	55

13. Could anything be done to improve your role as a volunteer with literacy agencies? Please give us your suggestions.

<b>Base: 83</b>		<b>Total %</b>
Training skills/updating		15
More information/materials/tools of the trade		8
More matching/networking		8
More government recognition		8
More staff support		4
Other volunteer supports		2
More recognition		2
Less bureaucracy		2
More student accountability		1
Other		7
Nothing		51

#### **BASIC DATA:**

<b>Number of Respondents: 83</b>		<b>Total%</b>
<b>GENDER</b>		
Female		81
Male		18
Refused		1
<b>AGE</b>		
Under 21		4
21 to 30		10
31 to 40		24
41 to 50		28
51 to 60		22
62 to 70		7
Over 70 years		5
Refused		1
<b>LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED TO DATE:</b>		
Some high school		6
High school		19
Some university or community college		22
University or community college		36
Postgraduate studies/degree		16
Refused		1





# Appendix 3: Discussion Guide – Focus Groups

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of preparing a discussion guide is to list the topics that should be included in the course of the focus groups. The exact wording of the questions and/or statements and the order to the topics may vary, depending on the conversational flow and the context of the particular session.

## **Moderator's Introductory Comments**

Briefly, describe the purpose and scope of the study. The study is being conducted to examine the contribution that volunteers make from a variety of perspectives, including economic, social and personal. Participants will be assured that all comments are confidential and that the identity of participants will not be revealed in the final report or in the survey results. Participants are encouraged to introduce ideas or topics that they feel are relevant to the discussion. Interaction between group members and idea-sharing are encouraged.

## **Opening the Discussion**

Participants will be asked to introduce themselves by providing a brief description of their current volunteer tasks.

## **Volunteering**

What prompted involvement, initially, with the literacy agency? Participants should briefly describe how their volunteer commitment came about and when they began. Was it their first volunteer experience or not? Has it lived up to their initial expectations? Did participants receive sufficient training and preparation? Do they feel that they have had adequate support from paid staff?



### **\*Scope of Volunteer Commitment**

Participants should describe what they do as volunteers for their agency. What does this entail? Is it one, or more than one task, that they have? If appropriate, break down tasks into major and minor components. Has the "job" evolved beyond their initial commitment, and if so, what are the additional responsibilities that they have assumed?

### **\*List of Tasks**

Ask participants to make an itemized list of all things they do to help the program. Perhaps it would be easier if participants thought of this exercise as though they were writing a job description. Encourage them to put everything down, not just the major things. Are there things they do on an irregular basis in addition to the list of standard items? For instance, do they do any preparatory work at home? Are there follow-up tasks? Ask participants to review the list and make sure they have not forgotten anything. If new tasks are added, note which types of things tend to get forgotten. Discuss the list and share ideas about the top-of-the-mind tasks versus the less obvious, forgotten elements of their volunteer commitment.

### **\*Total Estimated Time**

Ask participants to estimate their total volunteer time commitment. Ask respondents to make a weekly or monthly time estimate for each task that they previously listed. Make sure that participants include travel time and the time they take to make arrangements if others are filling in at home or elsewhere for them while they are volunteering.

Was it easy to assign a time value to their volunteer commitment or not? Had they previously calculated this? Are they surprised by the total amount of time that they spend volunteering? Has it changed how participants feel about their involvement now that they have looked at volunteering from this perspective?

### **\*Out-of-pocket Expenses**

Ask participants to re-examine the task list and determine if they spent any money to support or enable their volunteer activities. Encourage participants to dig deep and think carefully about this issue. Expenses should be

considered in two categories: reimbursed and non-reimbursed costs. How much have they spent annually in each category?

### **Rewards and Disincentives**

Ask participants what they basically get out of volunteering for literacy agencies. Encourage participants to think about both the immediate and the long-term rewards they receive from volunteering. Are there any tangible rewards, for example, have they learned new skills or extended their social or professional networks? What new skills, if any, have they acquired and what impact would/did this have on their paid job or other community involvement?

Is it a plus to have their volunteer assignment on their resume? Or has this commitment benefitted participants primarily in intangible "feel good" ways? Do they or should they receive recognition for their efforts? What types of recognition would participants ideally like to receive?

Do they ever consider their volunteer commitment from an economic perspective - in terms of what they "give" to the community and in terms of what they "receive"? Does money have anything to do with volunteerism? Should this situation change, for instance, should volunteers be given tax credits representing 10-15% of the staffing costs of their volunteer position?

Do board members have concerns over liability insurance issues? How has this been addressed in their organization, if at all? Also, is "Good Samaritan" legislation needed?

Also, encourage respondents to consider the elements that may be difficult or less rewarding. In sum, would they say that the experience is more, the same or less than they anticipated when they first got involved with this volunteer assignment? If they had to do it over again, would they offer their time to this program? Or, if they could what would they do to redefine their commitment? Would they change their role or time commitment?

### **Role of Volunteerism**

What impact, if any, does the dramatic changes occurring in government, business and economic spheres, have on volunteerism? Given this context, have its importance and role changed? Has the image or public perception of



volunteerism kept up with reality, based on reactions they receive from friends and neighbours? Should more or less people be involved in volunteering?

What changes would they like to see, in terms of what volunteers do and how they are organized? Should the provincial government be more responsive to the needs of the volunteer sector?

Are they encouraged or discouraged by the changes that they see to volunteerism currently? What impact, if any, does this have on their interest in further involvement? Will they contribute more, the same, or less time in the future? Discuss type and extent of involvement envisaged. What, if anything, would induce them to provide more of their time? Is this request seen to be reasonable or not? Does it have an impact on how they feel about their volunteer activities?

### **Summary Discussion**

Ask respondents to review task and time list and revise if appropriate. Have they had any further thoughts on what direction they would like volunteerism for literacy training take in the near future? What could be done to improve their contribution? In summary, has it been a rewarding experience?

### **Questionnaire**

Distribute questionnaire for completion.

Thank respondents for their valuable assistance.

\* indicates central issues

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