

Effective Strategies for Serving Adult Learners Facing Multiple Barriers

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Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs have long served adult learners facing multiple barriers to learning. These barriers and vulnerabilities include poverty, education levels, disabilities, lack of social supports, limited access to information, employment status, poor health conditions and more.

Supporting adult learners facing multiple barriers has long been a top priority and keen focus of literacy educators. In response, Community Literacy of Ontario has researched and created five factsheets to create awareness and share strategies and resources to help support vulnerable learners in LBS programs.

CLO's Supporting LBS Learners Facing Multiple Barriers Factsheets cover the following topics:

- 1. Effective Strategies**
- 2. Barriers to Learning**
- 3. Strengths of the LBS Program**
- 4. Partnerships & Connections**
- 5. Helpful Resources**



Introduction

Effective strategies are an important part of supporting adult learners with multiple barriers in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs. These strategies illustrate the importance and proven success of supporting multi-barriered learners with more than just literacy programming. A personalized approach that accounts for other areas of the learner's life, that includes creating a highly supportive learning environment and sharing information and making proactive referrals to other community supports, is also key to successfully supporting learners facing multiple barriers.

Many of the strategies link to activities, supports and programming that occur within Literacy and Basic Skills programs. These strategies are critical to effectively serving and retaining adult learners facing multiple barriers and helping them to meet their goals.

CLO conducted research and wrote a report released in March 2021 called Support LBS Learners Facing Multiple Barriers. Visit that report for more strategies and ideas on this important topic. www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Promotion-on-Website.pdf

Intake, Assessment and Learner Plan Development

Forty percent of literacy educators surveyed in CLO's report noted that conducting intake and needs assessments effectively for learners facing multiple barriers is an important strategy. This includes conducting a relaxed but in depth Initial Interview to discover goals, interests, needs, and possible barriers.

When barriers are identified, staff can then make referrals to supports and programs in the community. With a thorough intake and continuous check in's, staff can create a highly individualized learner plan that is based on the specific needs, goals, barriers and life situation of the learner with realistic expectations of outcomes and timelines.

“We have a flexible, adaptable, learner-centred approach in all of our programs. We work at the learner's pace and very much take into account the learner's individual circumstances.”

Quote from an LBS Educator

Wraparound Supports

Linking adult learners facing multiple barriers with wraparound supports in the community has been identified as an extremely important strategy by LBS agencies and in CLO's report: Supporting LBS Learners Facing Multiple Barriers.

Wraparound supports address all areas of the learner's life which can impact their ability to attend and succeed with their studies. This can start during intake by conducting an in-depth assessment to learn about the various needs of each learner in order to provide access and referrals to community supports. This often requires that staff are trained on available community services and online services available to learners, and to also hold regular check-ins with learners to see if their needs are being met and if their needs have changed.

LBS programs typically develop strong linkages with local social service providers, service clubs, community organizations and employers in order to best support adult learners.

Practical Programming and Learning Materials

Literacy educators identified using practical programming and highly relevant learning materials as an effective strategy to support adult learners facing multiple barriers in CLO's report: Supporting LBS Learners Facing Multiple Barriers. Practical programming is unique to each learner and can

include using customized learning resources that cater to a variety of learning styles, goal paths and levels. Using occupational curricula and other materials directly linked to the jobs learners are interested in or running short, specific, targeted programs based on learner interests and goals.

As well, offering practical LBS programming that raises the learner's self-confidence, like financial literacy training, digital skills training, and other soft skills training. Organizations can also liaise with other organizations to help

the learner on their goal path, such as referring to an appropriate educational provider to complete high school or attain their GED, connecting with volunteer opportunities, or connecting with certificate programming such as safe food handling or customer service.

Diverse Program Delivery Opportunities

Offering diverse program delivery opportunities to adult learners facing multiple barriers was a beneficial strategy identified by over half of the LBS organizations surveyed in CLO's report: Supporting LBS Learners Facing Multiple Barriers.

This includes offering lessons in both small groups, classroom and one-to-one learning environments as well as blended learning and digital learning delivery, including using platforms ZOOM, Google Classroom, and Facebook Live. Programs also refer learners to e-Channel for diverse e-learning opportunities. This can also impactful educational materials, online videos and engaging learning websites such as GCF LearnFree, BBC SkillWise and more.

“We work closely with the student to help them discover the goal path that is best for them and determine what is needed to get there.”

Quote from an LBS Educator

Supportive Learning Environments

Creating highly supportive learning environments for adult learners facing multiple barriers is a very common and very effective strategy in LBS programs. A supportive learning environment includes ensuring that the literacy centre is a safe and welcoming space for all, and ensuring that the classroom is an inclusive and respectful place, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, or ability.

In addition, a supportive learning environment is learner-centered and is flexible to the learner's needs and learning style. This can include flexible hours, and continuous intake to respect each learner's schedule and commitments.

The classroom can offer diverse learning opportunities (in person, one-to-one instruction, blended learning, digital). Programs also hold regular one-on-one meetings to discuss progress, offer support and adjust learner goals and ensure that methods of instruction are most beneficial.

“We make the effort to now our community partners and how they can help our learners. And we take the time to meet with them and build relationship so we truly understand their services and that they understand the needs of our learners.”

Quote from an LBS Educator

Conclusion

The Supporting LBS Learners Facing Multiple Barriers Factsheets were research and written by Community Literacy of Ontario. CLO is a provincial network of community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies. We are located in Barrie, Ontario. You can learn more about our organization by visiting our website and by following us on Facebook and Twitter.

CLO hopes that our factsheets capture the effective strategies, unique strengths, innovative partnerships and helpful resources developed by Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs to support the courageous adult learners who engage in learning despite the many barriers they face.

To learn more, read our full report: [Supporting LBS Learners Facing Multiple Barriers](#).

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Our factsheets can be freely downloaded from CLO's website at: <https://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca>.