

# Strengths 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

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The many strengths of the Literacy and Basic Skills program means that agencies are well-positioned to serve adult learners facing multiple barriers to learning.

The following are key strengths of LBS agencies for supporting learners facing multiple barriers.

## Community Presence

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Community-based LBS programs have strong community connections, typically built over many years. Via partnerships developed, referrals made, fundraising activities, attendance at local events, involvement in local social service consultations and committees, participation in a variety of events, and active promotion of literacy in their communities; LBS programs are well-known and often serve as the “face of literacy” in their communities.

This presence and connection is extremely valuable for adult learners who are unaware of the many services available in the community and enables agencies to help coordinate the often numerous wrap-around supports needed to support learners.

## Continuous Intake

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Most community-based LBS programs operate on a continuous intake model so that learners are supported throughout the year. This benefits learners who can begin and maintain their learning journey at times that best suit their personal circumstances which often need to be flexed around work schedules, appointments, daycare, and other adult realities.

## Learner-Centred Environment

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Community-based LBS programs typically offer a variety of program delivery options, geared to different goal paths and levels. This includes one-to-one delivery, small group instruction, blended learning (a combination of face-to-face and digital learning), and links to e-learning (via e-Channel).

## Flexible and Adaptable

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Programs provide flexibility around time, learning styles, formats, teaching materials, all designed to work with individual learner needs. Delivery formats might include one-to-one delivery, small group and classroom instruction, blended learning and e-Channel.

Flexibility results in a less stressful learning environment for learners, who are already facing many challenges. Learners are able to learn at their own pace and therefore do not have the feeling of having to keep up with others. As well, learning materials and instructional methods are geared to the pace of each learner.

## Individualized Support

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LBS class sizes tend to be smaller, which enables more individualized support for learners. Instruction is offered based on the needs of the learner, and a variety of instructional materials are used, tailored to the unique needs, skills and goals of learners.

Every learner has a different life situation and combination of barriers that must be considered. This personalized approach allows literacy practitioners to consider these barriers (e.g., poverty, health, mental health, housing, access to technology, etc.) when planning programming.

LBS programs also respond to the unique cultural needs of learners and are inclusive and supportive of diverse populations in their communities.

## Wrap Around Support

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Learners facing multiple barriers require, or can benefit from, additional community supports. LBS program staff build relationships with, and refer learners to, other services that support the learner’s life circumstances and learning needs.

From childcare to transportation, food security to housing, many learners facing multiple barriers require additional support in conjunction with learning.

Program staff actively engage with other service providers and establish creative partnerships and community collaborations to support to learners.

## Volunteer Support

In some LBS programs, volunteer tutors support the staff by providing individualized tutoring and support to learners. Because it is highly personalized, this method is often very effective with learners with very low levels literacy skills and confidence levels.

## Welcoming Learning Environment

Program staff seek to understand and support each learner and create an environment where all feel valued, heard and respected.

Learning environments are very suited to adults who have been away from learning, who lack confidence, or might prefer a more relaxed learning environment; they are non-intimidating, but also efficient, so learners feel confident in the programs and services they will receive.

## Literacy Levels

LBS programs have extensive experience in working with learners with low levels of literacy. Intake, assessment, programming, learning materials and learning environments are all geared to people with basic literacy skills.

## Diverse Programming Options

The Literacy and Basic Skills program provides 300 delivery sites located in rural, remote and urban sites across Ontario. The program is delivered by community-based organizations, school boards, colleges and e-Channel providers.

Programs are available in English, French and American Sign Language; and unique programming is offered for Indigenous Peoples.

*“We take a comprehensive, individualized approach with our clients. People first, students second. We build trust. We do much more than just deliver programs and provide opportunities to improve skills. We look at the learner as a whole person - consider all aspects of the person, not just learning -- e.g., self-esteem, personal circumstances, employment situation, family and individual situation.”*

*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>.