

Partnerships & Connections 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

Literacy and Basic Skills organizations have consistently developed strong linkages and a variety of partnerships in their communities to best support adult learners facing multiple barriers.

These partnerships are wide and diverse and most commonly include the following.

Wrap-around Supports

LBS agencies continually engage in partnerships and establish linkages to provide wrap-around supports to adult learners. Poverty impacts many adult learners and LBS educators are involved in a wide variety of programs to help vulnerable learners meet their basic needs. People cannot learn when they are facing foundational needs such as income support and housing.

Housing

Often housing supports are complicated to understand and difficult to navigate. Accordingly, LBS organizations typically maintain current information on local housing supports for the benefit of learners. They will also link with housing support workers and share resources on critical province-wide services such as the Landlord Tenant Board and Community Legal Education Ontario.

“We used clear and consistent communication between our program and other community agencies. We work very hard at this. This facilitated partnership development, and it was easier to identify and mitigate roadblocks as quickly as possible.”

Quote from an LBS Educator

Poverty Reduction Initiatives

There is a strong link between poverty and low literacy skills. Accordingly, LBS agencies often partner with diverse community organizations who are involved in local poverty reduction initiatives. This could include involvement with local, provincial or national advocacy initiatives, municipal programming, social planning councils, or programming offered by other non-profits, such as the United Way and the YMCA.

“We strongly believe in the importance of warm handoffs between our LBS program and other service organizations whenever possible. By introducing the learner to the program or service they are being referred to, including important information such as who they will be speaking to, the location, and setting their first appointment, there is a much greater chance of the learner following through on the referral. In addition to this, clear communication between all service providers ensures that a learner doesn’t slip through the cracks.”

Quote from an LBS Educator

Disability Services and Supports

Many adult learners enrolled in LBS programming have indicated that they have a disability. This means that literacy educators must actively connect with organizations that provide support to people with disabilities.

In addition to linking with the Ontario Disability Support Program, literacy practitioners have forged partnerships with local service providers such as the March of Dimes, Brain Injury Services, Independent Living, Community Living, CNIB and more.

Healthcare Services

The impact of low literacy levels on health is a very serious issue. Canadians with the lowest levels of literacy are more than twice as likely to be in poor health compared to Canadians with higher literacy skills.

To support the healthcare needs of learners, literacy agencies connect with and refer learners to local health organizations such as their local Public Health Units, community clinics and other healthcare services and resources.

During COVID19, these linkages have been of particular importance so that accurate information about safety measures related to the pandemic could be shared with adult learners.

Childcare and Transportation

Access to childcare and transportation are key issues for many adult learners. For the most part, adult literacy programs meet these needs through Training Support funding provided by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

Legal Services

In order to support adult learners who need access to legal services, literacy agencies link with local community legal clinics and legal aid, The John Howard Society, The Elizabeth Fry Society and online legal services, such as the Community Legal Education Ontario.

Shelters

Linkages and referral partnerships are established with shelter services, including shelters for women and children fleeing domestic violence, crisis centres for mental health, and homeless shelters for youth and adults.

Mental Health Services

Mental health is a common issue that many people face, including adult learners. Literacy agencies have therefore built strong partnerships with a variety of mental health supports and programs in their area, with a key partner often being their local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. They also link with mental health outreach workers, counselling and addiction supports and services.

Food Security

LBS educators refer students to food banks, infant nutrition programs, Good Food Boxes, community gardens, Service Clubs, and other local sources of temporary food security. Some also link with service clubs or local employes to access snacks or lunches for adult learners.

Indigenous Services, Newcomer Supports and Cultural Groups

LBS agencies maintain good referral relationships with the various cultural groups and newcomer support services in their communities. Depending upon the community, this could include Native Friendship Centres, LINC and ESL programs, various cultural groups and associations, and newcomer and refugee services.

“We think outside the box, persevere, make things happen. We’re creative and compassionate. We do not try to do everything or be everything to everyone. We know our strengths and use them. We collaborate with other agencies with different strengths to provide the best of care for our learners.”

Quote from an LBS Educator

Other Adult Education Providers

Literacy and Basic Skills providers actively refer and develop partnerships with other local providers of adult education to support adult learners.

The most common partners are other LBS agencies from different LBS sectors (community-based, colleges and school boards) and LBS streams (English language, Francophone, Indigenous and Deaf literacy programming). As well, they also partner with e-Channel, Ontario's e-learning providers. LBS agencies gather at Literacy Services Planning meetings and events held by their Regional Literacy Networks and often effective partnerships are developed there as well.

Other education partners include: regular college programming, LINC / ESL, skills training programs, skilled trades and apprenticeship and more.

Employment Support

Referrals, connections and partnerships are commonplace between LBS organizations and other organizations or entities providing employment opportunities or support.

In terms of employment support, overwhelmingly, the strongest partnerships and connections are established between LBS staff and Employment Ontario's Employment Services.

Other employment partners include: employers, unions, other Federal and Provincial Government programs (i.e., Youth Job Connect program), Workforce Planning Boards, Chambers of Commerce and more.

Income Support Programs

Poverty is a reality for many people with low literacy skills. Literacy educators link closely with Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program to create partnerships to benefit adult learners; access services and information; share information about their organization; facilitate referrals to LBS programming; and build relationships with staff.

Other income support organizations that LBS educators establish links with include emergency financial supports that may be available in the community, local poverty reduction initiatives, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, Employment Insurance and COVID-related benefits.

“Through our various partnerships, we were able to access additional services for our learners. It was wonderful to see learners increase their confidence, build their skills, create new community connections and increase their resiliency to face difficult circumstances and create a better future for themselves.”

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>.