

Exploring the Gap between London's Immigrants and Local LBS Programs



**Report Prepared for:
Literacy Link South Central**

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Introduction

This report is one aspect of a broader Labour Market Partnership (LMP) project. The broad LMP project is researching the imbalance that exists between the demand for workers and the potential supply of workers that immigrants can fill if they have the opportunity to increase their literacy and numeracy skills, thus increasing their ability to connect to in-demand labour market opportunities. This overall project will result in an increased understanding of how to better meet the needs of immigrants when it comes to promoting, developing and delivering adult literacy programming.

The objective of this aspect of the LMP project is to share the results of what is currently a project with a local focus – with the rest of Ontario, to assist them in meeting the adult literacy needs of immigrants in their communities. This report provides the findings from a focus group held in June of 2014. This focus group was held with representatives from numerous cultural groups across the City of London to assess their knowledge and understanding of adult literacy programming and how such programming can positively impact employment. This report starts by providing some context on this topic, and then highlights key findings from the focus group and lessons learned.

The Context

Why the focus on immigrants and adult literacy programming?

Immigrants are a growing percentage of the population in London. According to Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey, London is home to 76,585 immigrants¹ and 4,555 non-permanent residents. Immigrants represent over one-fifth (21.2%) of the London population, up from 19.13% in 2006. Almost 15% (11,410) of London's immigrants are recent immigrants, arriving between 2006 and 2011. This group of recent immigrants is predominantly from Asia (46.7%) and the Americas (32.3%).

Projections of the diversity of the Canadian population (developed by Statistics Canada) indicate that by 2031, between 25% and 28% of the population could be foreign born. This same report estimates that, in 2031, 22% of the population in London will be foreign born and 11% will be visible minorities.

Literacy skills are an issue for some immigrants. A Conference Board of Canada report, "Adults with Inadequate Literacy Skills", indicates that,

"In general, immigrants, both recent and established, were much more likely than Canadian-born individuals to have inadequate literacy skills. For example, 65 per cent of recent immigrants (those arriving in Canada within the last 10 years) and 63 per cent of established immigrants (those who have lived in Canada for more than 10 years) in Quebec had inadequate literacy skills. This does not mean that these

¹ Immigrant refers to a person who is or has ever been a landed immigrant/permanent resident. This person has been granted the right to live in Canada permanently by immigration authorities. Some immigrants have resided in Canada for a number of years, while others have arrived recently. Some immigrants are Canadian citizens, while others are not. In the 2011 National Household Survey, 'Immigrants' includes immigrants who landed in Canada prior to May 10, 2011.

immigrants have poor literacy skills in their native language; however, they are performing poorly in one of Canada's official languages, either English or French."

This report also highlights the links between literacy skills and economic/employment issues. It notes that, "Inadequate literacy skills hurt individuals' potential for landing jobs and promotions and hurt the economy through missed opportunities for innovation and productivity."

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) developed a report which profiles the literacy skills of Ontario's immigrants. The main results of this report include:

- The incidence of low literacy skills is a serious problem among Ontario's immigrants
- For many immigrants the cause of low English literacy skills is inadequate knowledge of the English language
- Low literacy skills are almost as common among younger as among older immigrants
- The rate of participation of immigrants in literacy activities is similar to that of Canadian-Born. Despite their lower English literacy skills, immigrants are as active as Canadian-born in most literacy activities, such as reading books, writing letters, attending movies or plays, volunteering, or using public libraries
- There is clear evidence of the payoff of improving literacy skills among immigrants (immigrants with higher literacy skills are more likely to be working, and when working, earn higher incomes)

Many landed immigrants who have been in Canada for 15 or more years no longer see themselves as accessing English as a Second Language (ESL) programming, even though they would benefit from improving their English literacy and numeracy skills. These individuals see ESL as being for newcomers. However, they are not attending Literacy and Basic Skills programs either.

Data for London shows that of those who are attending/attended Literacy and Basic Skills programming in 2013/2014, only 3.2% of potential clients (50 of a possible 1,571) self-identified as a "newcomer" or as a "visible minority." This data suggests that there are many immigrants in London who could be accessing Literacy and Basic Skills programs who either don't know that such services exist or that think that the programming is not suitable for them.

What is the difference between literacy, ESL and ESL literacy?

When working with immigrants, there is often a grey area for practitioners in terms of whether an individual can be best served by the literacy or language system. ESL focuses on English language acquisition for those whose mother tongue is not English. This program is part of the language system.

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, compute, problem solve and use printed, written and numerical materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy enables individuals to participate fully in their community and the wider society. There is a segment of the immigrant population who are not literate in their native

language, and require some combination of ESL and literacy education. ESL literacy focuses on English language acquisition, and it also focuses on learning to read and write. An individual involved in ESL literacy is learning the language, and also learning to read and write. This program spans the literacy and language systems.

According to The Centre for Literacy, ESL literacy is a concept that is even more difficult to define than literacy, and there is more that we can learn about the learners themselves. The Centre’s report notes that there is not

“...systematic, detailed, and formalized knowledge about immigrants and refugees with low education and literacy in their own language in Canada. Overall, we do not know what literacy skills and learning strategies people bring in their own language.”

This lack of knowledge and assessments to help determine the best path for immigrants can make the decision to utilize services in the literacy or language system a murky one.

What’s happening in London?

London has a long history of working to meet the needs of immigrants. One such group that focuses on this is the London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership (LMLIP). The LMLIP is a collaborative community initiative designed to strengthen the role of the London community in serving and integrating immigrants. Since its inception in 2009, LMLIP has brought together many sectors, volunteers and immigrant communities to develop and implement a locally-driven strategic plan for the successful integration of immigrants in London and Middlesex. The work of the LMLIP is guided by a Central Council and six Sub-councils representing issues on education, employment, health and wellbeing, inclusion and civic engagement, justice and protection services, and settlement.

The London community has a concrete plan to move forward in the area of education and immigrants. In 2013, the LMLIP released a 2013-2016 Community Immigrant Strategic Plan. In this plan, the outcome, and priorities and strategic directions for the Education Sub-Council are presented (see the table below for further details). The work of this project could align with the LMLIP strategy in this area.

Education Sub-Council	
Outcome Statement	Immigrant learners at all levels (English as a Second Language, language instruction for new Canadians, elementary, secondary and post-secondary) have access to timely and appropriate programs and services.
Priorities and Strategic Directions	
Access to Education	Supports for parents, teachers and students

Based on the outcomes statement and the priorities and strategic direction of the LMLIP Education Sub-Council, there are opportunities for this group and the Literacy and Basic Skills sector to work together.

What's happening at the provincial level of government?

In 2012, the Province of Ontario announced a new immigration strategy entitled, A New Direction: Ontario's Immigration Strategy. This strategy focuses on the value of immigration for our economy. This strategy outlines three objectives:

- Attracting a skilled workforce and building a stronger economy
- Helping newcomers and their families achieve success
- Growing a globally-connected economy

A number of the targets contained in this provincial strategy align well with the work of this project. These targets are to:

- Achieve employment rates and income levels for immigrants that are in line with those of other Ontarians
- Increase employment rates of immigrants in fields that match their experience.
- Work toward a decrease in the unemployment rate of recent immigrants so that it is in line with that of other Ontarians (note: According to Statistics Canada, for Ontario immigrants of core working-age, the employment rate (75.4%) was essentially unchanged in 2011 from 2010, while the unemployment rate fell from 9.9% to 8.7%, following a decline in the number of unemployed)

Focus Group Findings

Background

In June of 2014, Literacy Link South Central held a focus group with representatives from numerous cultural groups across the City of London to assess their knowledge and understanding of adult literacy programming and how such programming can positively impact employment. Participants of this focus group were comprised of cultural community leaders, faith based leaders, adult learners, stay at home parents, service providers and other professionals. At this session, a series of nine questions were asked (see Attachment A).

32 participants attended this session and the following details a profile of the participants:

- The majority of the participants (72%) were female and 28% of the participants were male
- The majority of the participants (72%) were between the ages of 30 and 45, with 16% over the age of 45, and 12.5% between the ages of 18 and 29. Individuals under the age of 18 were not included in the focus group
- The cultures represented at the focus group included: African (28.1%), Hispanic (28.11%), Middle Eastern (25.0%) and Asian (18.8%)

Overview

The next sections of this report highlight the key findings from the focus group. Overall, the focus group findings point to the fact that knowledge of adult literacy programs is not only

low, but in some cases adult literacy is actually viewed negatively, due to the perceptions of literacy or the illiterate that immigrants experienced in their countries of origin. Key findings from the focus group include:

- Participants had a broad range of knowledge/impressions of Literacy and Essential Skills. These impressions were much broader than Literacy and Essential Skills being “reading and writing”
- Literacy programs could be made more open and welcoming to people from diverse backgrounds through increasing the level of awareness of these programs, making them more accessible, changing government rules, and reducing the amount of negative experiences (According to one participant, *“Sometimes service providers are not patient and don’t want to listen. They give a package of information and ask you to go and read”*)
- The benefits participants would like to see from literacy programs range from learning, to preparation for work, to social interaction/motivation
- The majority of participants indicated that low literacy can be a barrier to employment
- There is a need for more information about literacy programming in the London community, as many newcomers are not aware of available programs and services
- Suggestions for phrases to use to attract people to literacy programming include: “Improve Yourself,” “Come and Get Connected,” “Your Future is Ahead of You,” “It is Never Too Late,” “Better Employment for Better Life,” “Get Involved,” “Become Independent,” “You Are the Change,” “Help Us Help You,” “You Are the Master of Your Life”
- Many of the participants stated that they have not seen direct advertising about literacy



Impression of Literacy and Essential Skills

Participants in the focus group were asked to describe what their impression of Literacy and Essential Skills was before they attended the focus group. The participants had a broad range of knowledge/impressions of Literacy and Essential Skills, with only one participant noting, “Literacy is reading and writing”.

The top two responses to this question were that:

- Literacy and Essential Skills include many types of skills, including: health, financial, communication, and understanding and applying information (21.4% of responses)
- A number of feelings and emotions are tied to the concepts of Literacy and Essential Skills, including: shame, isolation, lack of self-confidence, and a preference/comfort level to speak in their own language (21.4% of responses)

“Literacy is understanding information, gathering and applying it. It also means knowing how to function in the system.”

“Some seniors feel isolated because they are illiterate and can’t be part of the community, as much as they want.”

“People feel more comfortable speaking in their own language rather than in English.”

Other responses provided to this question include:

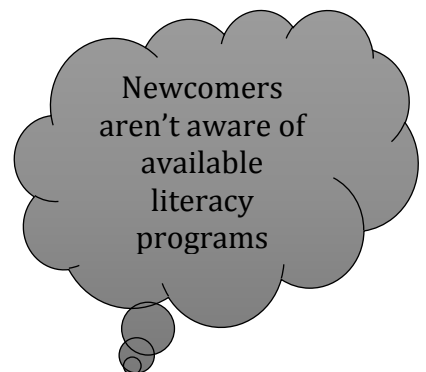
- Literacy and Essential Skills is about life skills (for example: time management, knowing what to do at a particular time - if you are sick, you go to the hospital) (14.3% of responses)
- You need to think about all of the skills you have and how transferable they are (how to sell and market your existing skills) (14.3% of responses)
- Immigrants are not aware of agencies providing literacy services and more outreach needs to be done about literacy programs where community members gather – churches, local businesses, community agencies (10.7% of responses)
- Literacy is also about knowing, understanding and adapting to Canadian culture (7.1% of responses)

Perception of Literacy Programs as Open and Welcoming to the Multicultural Community

Participants in the focus group were asked if they think literacy programs are open to and welcoming of people from diverse backgrounds, such as those not originally from Canada. Although one participant stated, “Literacy programs are for everyone”, many participants provided examples and comments that showed how literacy programs could be more open and welcoming to people from diverse backgrounds.

The ways in which literacy programs could be made more open and welcoming to the multicultural community include:

- Increase the level of awareness of literacy programs (30.8% of responses)
- Provide flexibility in hours of operation (evenings and weekends), and provide supports such as child care to make literacy programs more accessible (23.1% of responses)



- Change government rules so that there are fewer restrictions for newcomers (for example: eligibility for people with work visa) (15.4% of responses)
- Reduce the amount of negative experiences in literacy programs. Make sure that service providers are patient and want to listen (15.4% of responses)

Incentive to Attend a Literacy Program

Participants in the focus group were asked what would make them or someone they know want to attend a literacy program. Although no common themes emerged from the responses provided by participants, the benefits they would like to see ranged from learning, to preparation for work, to social interaction/motivation. The responses provided include:

- To continue learning
- To prepare me for work
- Get apprenticeship
- Help me in pronunciation (speaking)
- Person to person motivation
- Be sensitive – “let’s go together”
- Social interaction More graphics on correspondence
- Create a grassroots approach
- Financial incentives for community leaders to disseminate information

Literacy as a Barrier to Employment

Participants in the focus group were asked if they thought literacy can be a barrier to employment. Although a few participants (10.8% of responses) felt that different jobs required different levels of literacy, and that literacy should be customized based on needs and demands, the majority of participants stated that low literacy can be a barrier to employment. Some of the ways that participants felt literacy is important for employment, in order of priority, include:

1. People need literacy skills to enhance their job opportunities. Literacy can help you get a job, maintain a job, and move to a better job (24.3% of responses)
2. Low literacy is a barrier to employment, as all jobs need literacy (21.6% of responses)
3. The lack of English skills is a big factor for employment. Pronunciation and accents can cause misunderstandings at the workplace, ending up being a barrier to employment (16.2% of responses)
4. Literacy is a lifetime endeavour. Skills need to be increased and developed all the time and ongoing improvement of the level of knowledge and skills for a job needs to occur (13.5% of responses)



Need for More Information about Literacy Programming

All participants in the focus group agreed that there is a need for more information about literacy programming in the London community. When asked why there is a need for more information, many of the participants (43.8%) noted that there is a lack of information about available services. People aren't aware that these services and programs exist. Some of the comments provided on this topic include:

- *"Newcomers are unfamiliar with all services. Not all countries provide similar services, so there is no expectation that there are services available."*
- *"You must ask to get help or information."*
- *"Communities need to learn/hear more about literacy. Personal connectedness is essential."*
- *"Word of mouth is not always correct or accurate, but is the one that most people rely on."*
- *"Finding who does what is hard."*

Other reasons provided by participants as to why they feel there is a need for more information about literacy programming include:

- Adjustment to a new culture is difficult and each individual experiences this differently. Having appropriate support through this transition is important (21.9% of participants)
- Silos or borders exist between service providers, resulting in little information being shared between them (18.8% of participants)
- A changing labour market means that there is a need for new skills and knowledge than in jobs held previously (15.6% of participants)
- Literacy is not a priority when newcomers first arrive in Canada. Finding work is the priority. Due to this, there is a need for later, continued or integrated support (15.6% of participants)

Attracting People to Literacy Programming

Participants in the focus group were asked what we should be telling people in the community in order to attract them to literacy programming. Some of the key messages participants thought would attract people to literacy programming, along with sample comments, include:

Key Messages	Examples of Comments from Participants
Literacy is a continuation of your previous education and an example of lifelong learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"Literacy can be a continuation of previous education"</i> ▪ <i>"Literacy should be viewed as "lifelong learning," we are constantly upgrading our skills"</i> ▪ <i>"Literacy training improves life skills"</i>
Literacy means many things. It is not just reading and writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"Literacy is not just reading and writing, there are many other competencies"</i>

Literacy Advertising

Participants were asked if they have seen any literacy advertising. Many of the participants stated that they have not seen direct advertising about literacy. What they have seen are generalized advertisements, for example: workshops advertised at the Central Library about “improving yourself”; computer workshops; conversations circles; etc. They have also seen advertisements looking for volunteers to help with literacy programs at the Central Library.

Again, in terms of further tips about advertising literacy programs, participants noted:

- They would like to see literacy advertisements specific to a particular group, for example if they are targeting seniors, the messaging should clearly say “seniors and literacy”
- The difference between ESL and literacy should be clearly stated in the advertisement, for a better understanding of the difference between the two programs
- Give literacy a snappy tagline
- Emphasize employment

Places where advertisements would be seen are:

- In newspapers such as: London Free Press, Metro, cultural community newspapers, Latino newspapers
- Household connections through community associations
- Grocery stores, food banks, shelters, Salvation Army
- Places of worship
- Walk in clinics, and hospitals
- CBC radio
- On a bus
- Malls
- Settlement agencies i.e. LUSO, Cross Cultural Learner Centre
- Cultural organizations
- Service Canada
- Internet
- Teachers, Library, Colleges and Universities

They would like to hear recommendations about literacy programs from their neighbours, and friends. Generally, the human factor is very important

Lessons Learned

A number of key lessons were learned from the focus group, including ideas for how and where to market adult literacy programming. Some of the key lessons learned include:

- If we hope to serve the needs of immigrants, as an adult literacy system, we cannot and should not operate in isolation. We need to be connecting with London’s social services, employment services and with the London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership

– not *after* we have held discussions with London’s immigrants on adult literacy, but *while* we are doing so

- All four systems – adult literacy, ESL and settlement supports, employment, and social services have a vested interest in learning more about the literacy and employment needs of London’s immigrants
- A connection with the Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Development Board is critical to ensure we have up-to-date and emerging information on labour market trends and which sectors of jobs are/will be in demand
- The human factor/personal connection is important to the immigrant population

Moving Forward

In addition to this report, this new LMP project’s objectives are:

- To work closely with other community groups and systems – employment, social services, City of London, London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership Education and Employment Sub-Committees, and the Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning Board – to gather best practices, share research results, gather input and information, and strategize and plan
- To hold focus groups and interviews with members of the immigrant community and with immigrant community leaders to:
 - Dig more deeply into factors that affect their participation in adult literacy programs (perception and understanding of adult literacy/types of programs held/locations and timing of program, etc.)
 - Gather information about types of employment that immigrants are interested in/skilled in and that are in demand, that adult literacy providers can build literacy and numeracy programming around
- To work with adult literacy providers in London/Middlesex via the London/Middlesex Literacy Service Planning Group to discuss the results of the project and its implications for literacy delivery and program design. Develop an Implementation Plan and an Evaluation Framework for new programming
- To develop a project report that details findings and recommendations and to share this information with local adult literacy and employment groups, the London & Middlesex Local Immigration Partnership and more broadly provincially, and to host two webinars that will be open to adult literacy and employment programs across the province – to further promote the project learnings.

Attachment A

Literacy Link South Central JCP 2014 Focus Group Questions Marketing and Outreach

1. Before today, did you think of Literacy and Essential Skills the way they were described to us earlier? If you had a different impression, what was it?
2. Do you think that literacy programs are open to (and welcoming of) people from diverse backgrounds, such as those not originally from Canada?
3. What would make you or someone you know want to attend a Literacy program? What benefits would you need to see?
4. Do you think literacy can be a barrier to employment?
5. Is there a need for more information about literacy programming in our community? Why/why not?
6. How can we best attract people in the community to Literacy programming?
7. What should we be telling people about Literacy?
8. Have you seen any literacy advertising? Where would you see them?
9. Where would you go or who would you talk to for advice on education, jobs, and community services?

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