

Connecting

Literacy



Community

Building Community Capacity:

Focus on Adult Literacy

*Building Community Capacity:
Focus on Adult Literacy*

Handbook

Audrey Gardner

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Includes footnotes

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Robin Houston-Knopff, Project Manager led the team of literacy specialists and researchers. The CLC project was born from her vision and knowledge of the need to address adult literacy issues at the community level. The literacy specialists and researchers are deeply grateful for her caring and clear-thinking leadership. The literacy specialists were Karen Appleby, Carmen Block, Audrey Gardner, Judy Millard, and Rebecca Still. The literacy specialists were successful in increasing awareness and action to address adult literacy needs within each community.

Bill Holbrow conducted research for the project on literacy friendly changes made by organizations, and literacy specialist skills and competencies. Audrey Gardner researched prior knowledge and experience of the literacy specialists. The team used a research in practice approach, which enriched the development of the

project. Research in practice also offered insight about using a community development and capacity building approach to respond to adult literacy needs in diverse community services.

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Preface

This handbook is a resource for people interested in using community capacity building ways of working to broaden a community response to adult literacy needs.

People who will find this handbook useful include literacy practitioners and coordinators of community programs in adult and family literacy, tutors, teachers, community learning councils, and non-credit course instructors. This resource is also for service providers such as social workers, nurses, librarians, program coordinators and managers. Community groups such as non-profit boards, committees, inter-agency working groups, faith, and volunteer groups may also find this a useful resource to help them reach out and support individuals that struggle with reading, writing and numeracy.

As a reader you might use this handbook to help you make contact with community organizations and groups to talk about the experiences of individuals with limited literacy when accessing services and programs. You can use it to help build partnerships with organizations to make workplace changes to reduce literacy barriers and create literacy sensitive services. You can also learn how to support community organizations be mindful of adult literacy when planning community events such as resource fairs. We hope this handbook can help you with your work to advance adult literacy within and across your community.

The handbook is organized into three parts. Part one describes the Connecting Literacy to Community (CLC) project, particularly the work we did and the outcomes of the project. Part two offers you things to try in your own community. We describe in detail the tools and strategies we used and suggest ways that you can use them to advance adult literacy among community services. In part three we describe the research that was included in the CLC project. The appendices include outlines and worksheets that you can copy or adapt to use

within your own community. There is a list of references that we found useful for our work as literacy specialists.

A large part of our work included helping service providers learn how to write in plain language. With this in mind I have made a conscious effort to write the handbook based on principles of plain language.¹

¹ Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada. (1994). Plain Language: Clear and Simple. Ottawa: Canada Communications Group.

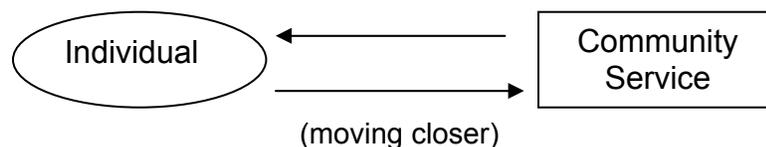
Part One-The Project

Introduction

The seeds for the Connecting Literacy to Community project (CLC) were scattered in 1999 when Robin Houston-Knopff of Bow Valley College met with service providers from a wide variety of community organizations in Calgary to talk about adult literacy needs. While some people knew about adult literacy programs, many had not considered literacy, particularly as it relates to accessing and successfully participating in community services and programs. From this initial inquiry it was clear that two issues needed to be addressed. The first issue was how to expand adult literacy programs at the community level. The second was how to increase awareness among service providers about ways to improve their programs and services to be more accessible for people with limited literacy. This knowledge formed the vision for the CLC project.

Project Framework

The CLC was a two-year project (2001-2003), located in three rural and three urban communities in central and southern Alberta, Canada. The purpose of the project was to work with communities to develop literacy awareness, promotion and support, and to improve access to and the quality of existing services and programs.



Each community had a literacy specialist who worked with people in the community (service providers, volunteers, residents, and business owners) to

ensure that words would help not hinder a person's effort to connect with services and programs.

As the CLC was an innovative project, we had to think creatively right from the start. This meant a lot of talking among the project team about our thoughts and experiences in adult literacy, community development and community capacity building. We had to look beyond the borders of the literacy field in order to connect literacy to all aspects of the community. We began our steep learning curve by engaging our communities with questions about community development, community capacity building, literacy as social practice, and facilitating organizational and social change. The project framework was constructed through this learning process as we attempted to answer the following questions:

- What are all the different ways that people use literacy in their everyday lives?
- Is literacy viewed as an accessibility issue among community organizations that do not have a literacy program?
- What is the responsibility of community services to make their reading and writing (and numeracy) material accessible for people who want to access their programs and services?
- How can we, as literacy specialists, do community development work that will contribute to community capacity and address the adult literacy needs of each of these unique communities?

We had to find what mattered to community organizations and link it to literacy. We quickly learned that accessing programs and services was an issue common to all communities. We introduced the CLC project to each community by talking about the significance of literacy when people access services and participate in community programs.

The role of the literacy specialist as a catalyst for change was central to the project framework. Learning about where adult literacy was at in each community, helping service providers and other members of the community understand the issues of adult literacy, and assisting them with their efforts to improve services and promote literacy were the activities that filled in the framework. Our learning and values about adult literacy, community development and capacity building formed how we carried out such activities. The framework of the project became visible through the process of learning from people in each of our unique communities, reading literacy research, and sharing our learning with each other as a team.

The framework was also constructed by the research components of the project. There were three focused inquiries folded into the development of the project. In the first year we researched how organizations made positive literacy changes in their services and programs. In the second year we examined the literacy specialist role to identify skills and competencies, and to explore the significance of prior knowledge and experience. Using a research in practice approach the research was carried out by the all the literacy specialists and lead by Bill Holbrow and Audrey Gardner.

The Team

The project team consisted of Robin Houston-Knopff as Project Manager, Bill Holbrow as Researcher, and Rebecca Still, Karen Appleby, Carmyn Block, Judy Millard (year one), and Audrey Gardner were the literacy specialists.

The Communities

The six communities were selected according to demographic information, which can be linked to low literacy. This includes factors such as: less than a grade nine education, low-income households, and single parent households. Three

rural communities were located in southern and central Alberta, and three urban communities where in the city of Calgary.

Community Population	
Rural	Urban*
1. Crowsnest Pass – 7,500 and Pincher Creek – 3,600	1. Bowness – 12,000
2. High River – 9,600	2. Hungtington Hills – 14,500
3. Olds – 7,500 (and Sundre – 2,250)	3. Tri-Area – 10,500 (Inglewood/Ramsay/ Victoria Park)

*City of Calgary census-1996

Other factors that were considered are existing literacy programs, or lack of existing literacy programs. The literacy specialist worked 12 hours per week in each community during the two years. In the first year we worked from October 2001 to June 2002. In the second year we worked from September 2002 until June 2003.

In each community we worked with agencies in the health, social services and education fields, and to a lesser extent private businesses such as factories and industrial plants. The types of community services we worked with were:

- Community and neighbourhood associations
- Libraries
- Youth and young adult support programs
- Women's shelters
- Parenting support programs
- Employment and career planning services
- Government benefits programs
- Aboriginal programs
- Municipal services

- Homeless shelters and services
- Food banks
- Schools – K-12 teachers and parent councils
- Addictions programs
- Recreational programs
- Subsidized housing services
- Seniors services – residential, recreational, social, and government benefits programs
- Health services- health regions and non-governmental organizations
- Business development organizations
- Private businesses – large and small

We supported individual learners in accessing existing literacy programs. We also worked indirectly with a greater number of community services, committees and groups who attended interagency meetings where we promoted literacy and the project. By the end of the project the majority of community services in each community knew about the CLC project, and many of them had become partners and participants.

Literacy Specialist Services

The services we provided in each of the six communities included:

- Adult literacy information
- Presentations on literacy awareness and plain language
- Workshops on literacy awareness and sensitivity, plain language, and clear verbal communication
- Literacy audits and action plans
- Partnerships for professional development and literacy program initiatives
- Learner referral
- Media articles

- Participation in community events, on committees and work groups.

We tracked these services by the number of on-site visits we had with the different community services (agencies, organizations, volunteer groups, and businesses). Overall, we had approximately 500 on-site visits with community services. These visits reflect the total number of times that we provided literacy specialist services in all six communities during the two-year project. We also developed 29 formal partnerships with organizations, which involved many hours of learning activities for staff members, volunteers and clients/learners. Each partnership had approximately 15 hours of direct services plus equivalent or more hours for planning, preparation and follow-up. Our services were organized into the following categories:

- Information
 - These services refer to our participation at interagency meetings and introductory meetings at organizations. We provided verbal and written information on literacy issues and local programs, and sparked interest with service providers to become involved in the CLC project.
- Workshops and presentations
 - Most of these visits were with individual organizations, where we provided workshops on literacy awareness and sensitivity, plain language, and verbal communication. We also conducted literacy audits in a workshop format, which would include an action plan. The action plan would usually include at least one of the above workshops and other follow-up requests for literacy specialist support.
- Partnerships

- The partnerships were formal relationships between the CLC project and 29 community organizations. Ten of the 29 partnerships were developed as part of the research in the first year that explored changes in community organizations from learning about literacy and ways to make services and programs literacy friendly. Nineteen partnerships were developed in year two to create adult literacy initiatives within organizations as well as professional development for staff to make positive literacy changes to their programs and services. Some examples of the partnerships in year two were: 8-week computer literacy course at a local library; staff training in literacy awareness, plain language and verbal communication at a subsidized housing organization; 6-week drivers education study circle for aboriginal youth and young adults at a youth centre.
- Media
 - The project was promoted through articles in local newspapers and newsletters, including literacy newsletters. Overall, there were approximately 10 articles generated during the project.
- Learner referral
 - We assisted clients from organizations that we worked with to connect with literacy programs in their community. Although we only identified approximately 10 referrals in our data, we learned from literacy programs in our communities that they had experienced increased inquiries about their program both from individuals and service providers.
- Other
 - This category included work that we did that contributed to community capacity building such as planning meetings for inter-agency working groups or committees for community events such

as resource fairs or family Christmas celebrations. We also helped bring organizations together to learn from each other and collaborate to reduce literacy barriers.

Further to these services, each literacy specialist conducted a community assessment of literacy assets and gaps in order to be able to help communities strengthen their literacy assets and respond to literacy needs. The results of the assessment demonstrated a common pattern among all six communities. The assessment results indicated a lack of awareness about adult literacy programs and needs among service providers, lack of accessible courses in adult basic education and GED (general equivalency diploma) preparation, and a lack of computer courses and employment/essential skills programs for people with limited literacy. We also found that the literacy needs of seniors and diverse youth were not being addressed.

The communities had similar assets such as family literacy programs that were being accessed by community members. Most of these programs focused on families with pre-school children. In the rural communities the adult literacy programs were more accessible than the urban communities. A very important asset was the willingness of service providers to address adult literacy needs after becoming aware of how relevant literacy is to their programs and services.

The Literacy Audit Kit

The tool that helped us successfully reach so many organizations and groups was the Literacy Audit Kit (Alberta Association for Adult Literacy, – now Literacy Alberta). We adapted the kit to be an interactive workshop for staff and volunteers. Using a consensus decision-making² approach the staff, and/or volunteers would work as a group to complete the audit and create an action plan that they could immediately implement.

² Consensus is a form of agreement based on hearing everyone's voice to make a decision that is acceptable by all participants, it is not voting. Notes on Consensus. Carlton University, Ottawa. <http://www.spcottawa.on.ca/ofsc/consensus.html>

Using parts of the Audit Kit we developed workshops on literacy awareness and sensitivity, verbal communication, and we also incorporated elements of the kit into the plain language workshop. A very effective part of the Literacy Audit Kit was the video: Literacy Matters. This video offered important information about accessibility to services. We used the video in presentations and workshops.

How we used the Audit Kit differed slightly from agency to agency, and community to community, however, the heart of the Audit Kit remained steadfast. By keeping the focus on literacy within the organization the sense of ownership and capacity to make literacy sensitive changes was maintained by service providers, managers and volunteers. In other words, agency staff and volunteers did not view adult literacy as an external issue to their work, adult literacy was viewed as a client issue and as such, service providers eagerly assumed responsibility to make their programs and services accessible to individuals who want and need them.

Timeline

The timeline presents a picture of the interdependence of our role as literacy specialists in the community and our work within the team. Our work in each community had a direct influence on our conversations, decisions and actions as a team, which in turn helped us do our work in each community. The team had six full day meetings during the two years and communicated via email and telephone. The literacy specialists worked in their communities twelve hours per week.

	Community	Team
October 2001	<p>Introduced the CLC to communities by attending interagency meetings to present information about the relationship between accessing community services and adult literacy, offered literacy specialist services, and invited organizations to participate.</p> <p>We contacted local media to produce newspaper articles on the project.</p>	<p>We began with a full day meeting that included information on the project and our roles.</p> <p>We had professional development on partnership building and how to use the Literacy Audit Kit. We also discussed the research for this year.</p>
	<p>Assessed literacy assets and needs/gaps in each community through conversations and a written survey with service providers. We developed our workplans based on these conversations and the assets and gaps findings.</p> <p>The bulk of our work was ongoing promotion of the project, sharing literacy information, facilitating workshops and literacy audits, providing presentations, bringing organizations together, supporting learner referrals, and contributing to community groups and committees.</p>	<p>We learned from each other by sharing useful tools, resources, readings, and strategies on how to introduce the project, initiate contact with agencies and groups, and how to build partnerships.</p> <p>We met again in February and discussed our experiences in the project so far, which deepened our understanding of community development and capacity building, and our role as literacy specialists.</p>
Year One	<p>We invited organizations to participate as formal partners in the research component, in which we facilitated an audit and assisted organizations with follow-through of action plans. We conducted formative and summative reviews to identify literacy positive changes in programs and services.</p>	<p>Researcher supported literacy specialist with conducting research by co-facilitating audit workshop, and modifying the audit kit to a more interactive workshop format.</p>
	<p>We finished the first year by identifying achievements of agencies and the community as a whole. Some of us gave a short presentation at interagency meeting on the literacy achievements of a community and to set the stage for the second year.</p>	<p>Submission of community reports including needs and assets, project successes and challenges. Research report was completed, and at the final team meeting we planned for year two.</p>
June 2002		

	Community	Team
September 2002	<p>We began the second year reconnecting with each community, which included continuing where we left off with some organizations, and building new relationships with other organizations. Community capacity building was happening as some service providers had become literacy champions in the community and were teaching other service providers about the relationship between literacy and services.</p> <p>We developed work plans that included a continuation of information provision, workshops and presentations, project promotion, media engagement, plus the formal partnerships planned for this year.</p>	<p>We started year two sharing how to move the project forward with the new emphasis on partnering with organizations to provide literacy services to clients with limited literacy.</p> <p>We also participated in professional development in Appreciative Inquiry and maintaining and sustaining partnerships</p>
Year Two	<p>We developed formal partnerships with organizations to provide literacy services that could be sustained by those organizations after the project was finished. Some examples of these partnerships are: a basic computer course in a library, a GED preparation course with an adult literacy program, and a Scrabble group in a senior's residence.</p> <p>Some partnerships focused more on professional development, which echoed the research component in year one. For example one partnership with a city public library involved training staff members to facilitate awareness and sensitivity workshops for customer services staff members in all library branches.</p>	<p>Because the literacy specialist role was created for this project, it was important to have structured inquiry into how we do our work.</p> <p>We decided to research the skills and competencies, and prior knowledge and experiences of literacy specialist. Researching our role also helped us develop a presentation and training workshop for literacy coordinators from across Alberta.</p>
June 2003	<p>Each literacy specialist brought the CLC project to an end in ways that sustained the work that had begun. We trained staff and volunteers to run literacy programs in their organization. We assisted services to gather resources and seek funding.</p> <p>As a thank you, some of us presented the literacy achievements of the community at interagency meetings, and sent thank you cards and letters to partners and participants.</p>	<p>We brainstormed ways to close the project at the February team meeting, such as: encourage organizations to identify sustainable strategies, thank you letters and cards, interagency presentations.</p>

Outcomes

At the completion of the CLC project positive literacy changes had indeed taken place in each community. Organizations and groups have continued to connect literacy with their work directly and indirectly. We have successfully achieved the intended results of the project:

- Six communities have a heightened awareness of and increased support for literacy.
- Clients of participating agencies are better able to access information and services in a more “literacy friendly” environment.
- Many agencies have improved their print material through plain language revision, and improved verbal communication by reducing professional jargon when speaking with clients.
- Organizations have sustained the work of the partnerships, by finding resources and building new partnerships to meet literacy needs in services.
- Linkages between agencies in each community were improved based on a common understanding of literacy, as shown by the data collected on partnerships and participation in each community.
- Literacy programs experienced an increase in referrals and inquiries.
- Publications of the project include a final report, research reports and a handbook that are available in a format useful to the literacy community and communities at large in Alberta and across Canada.

Overall, the CLC project has advanced adult literacy in six Alberta communities. Below are just two of the many successful outcomes. Two literacy specialists working in rural communities share their stories:

1. Awareness brings Change

I provided literacy specialist services to an agency that gives financial support and career counseling to its clients. A large portion of the clients have

learning barriers. I initiated the first contact because I felt it was necessary to target agencies working with people who may have literacy difficulties. I approached the head of the agency and explained the CLC project. That brief meeting resulted in an invitation to do a literacy audit. I felt the audit would be most useful for this agency because of the conversations regarding literacy awareness and literacy practices it would generate. The audit occurred during a staff meeting.

During the first part of the meeting several staff members stated that they felt they were aware of literacy and were doing everything needed to assist their clients who may have literacy difficulties. As the meeting progressed it became apparent that a large number of the staff were not fully aware of literacy barriers, even though they had initially indicated they were. Because so much was expected of them in their job, they seldom gave much consideration to clients who may be experiencing literacy difficulties.

After the literacy audit was completed I spent time with the staff exploring ways to implement literacy sensitive strategies. One of the concerns brought forward was the use of complicated forms that clients have to fill out in order to obtain services. I was able to put a scribe service in place for this agency at their request. Volunteer scribes would help clients with reading and completing forms that are required in this agency's programs. Referrals were slow at first but increased within a few months.

I made a point of dropping by this agency to see if they needed assistance from me to stay on track and focused on literacy. Several of the staff members commented that now they always consider the reading and writing ability of clients. Some staff had questions regarding behaviors that may indicate a person is having literacy problems. I attended one more staff meeting after the literacy audit to talk about the progress they were making. The scribe service is now an ongoing program for this agency through the service of another group.

Working with this agency as a literacy specialist I learned that some workers are so overwhelmed with the expectations of their job that literacy did not occur to them, however once they understood the importance of literacy, they were able to serve the clients much better.

The work I did with this agency was rewarding because change was made. Workers are now aware of behaviors that may indicate a person is having literacy difficulties, they know how to assist someone with literacy difficulties (including referral to literacy programs), and there is a scribe program available to assist with the completion of forms and assistance with reading material.

Karen has been a social worker for many years. She recruited and trained volunteers to provide the scribe service.

2. Computers for the Petrified

While attending an interagency meeting a group of us started discussing the need for simple, basic computer courses, which would allow students to move slowly through the material and provide lots of practice time in the class. I pondered on this discussion for some time and wondered how to meet this need.

There is a librarian in our community who is very proactive and interested in programs to enhance the library and community. We have worked together in the past and have a good working relationship. The library has a bank of computers for use and it seemed a logical choice to offer the course. I phoned the librarian and asked if she would be interested in offering a simple computer course. She was very keen on the idea. In fact, she was ready to discuss times and dates to offer the course. It was getting close for programming to be submitted to our community learning opportunities calendar and we wondered if we could get things organized soon enough for the calendar. The librarian said not to worry because they could do some in

house advertising and direct patrons to the course. As it turned out the details were worked out and the 8-week course was advertised in the calendar. About two weeks after the course calendar was distributed in the community, the class was full, and we began planning a second session in January.

After the first session was finished the librarian said that even the library board was impressed with the course and how it was meeting a real need in the community. They decided to waive the course fee for the next session in case it was a barrier for people taking the course. In January the course was again advertised in the community calendar, but by this time word had got out about the course and people started signing up before the calendar appeared. In a very short time the course was full and a waiting list was started. There were enough names on the waiting list to offer the course a third time.

Students felt that the repetition and the pace of the course built their confidence and skills. They left the course knowing how to use the computer. Many students felt confident enough to take some advanced computer classes. One student in the computer class registered in the adult literacy program as well as the family literacy program. The librarian and I began to discuss how to offer the course a third time, which would be in the fall. The CLC project would be finished by this time, but the library still wanted to offer the course. The librarian said they would find the money somehow to be able to offer the course again.

There are two things I feel that made this a successful partnership. One was the librarian herself. She understood the need even more than I did and was eager to offer the course. She was a definite driving force of getting the course off the ground. She set up the computers in a way that was easy for the students to use. She was willing to supply the materials we needed and was always around to assist as needed (such as when the computer was turned off accidentally and needed to have a password to get back into it). Without her assistance it would have been harder to offer the course. The

other fact is that we were meeting a need in the community. There are a lot of computer classes being offered in the community even by the library. However, the librarian often noticed the frustration that some students had in the other courses. She knew first hand the need to offer a simple course to help build confidence and basic skills.

This partnership exceeded all my expectations. I had thought there might be a need in the community for such a course but I wasn't sure how it would be received. But thanks to help of the librarian we were able to offer a course that really filled a gap.

Rebecca has been an adult literacy coordinator for many years. She created the curriculum for "Computers for the Petrified".

While it is clear that the CLC project has contributed to community capacity building in six communities in central and southern Alberta, the project has also contributed to the field of adult literacy. Much interest has been garnered among literacy practitioners and researchers about how to advance adult literacy throughout and across communities. Currently in Alberta there is a strong desire to develop a professional development opportunity for literacy practitioners (and other service providers) to learn how to apply a literacy specialist approach in their own communities that will raise awareness of adult literacy and improve accessibility to all the services in the community for people with limited literacy.

Part Two-Things to Try

The Significance of Values

Trying new things can feel like going on a trip to a place that you have never been. You start to get ready by focusing on what you need to take to do the things you want to do. This was very much how we started our work in each community. We began with looking at what type of information we needed to offer, all the different ways to make contact with agencies and interagency groups, and what we needed to know about adult literacy and the communities we were entering. We focused on the practical and tangible. However, every decision we made about how to connect with our communities was influenced by our values about the work we were taking on.

We did not start the project with articulating our values about adult literacy and the communities we worked in, yet over time it became apparent that we needed to explore what we felt and thought about literacy and about community. In other words, it became clear to us how much our values influenced how we went about doing our work as literacy specialists.

As a team, we shared what we valued about adult literacy and the communities we worked (and for most of us, live) in. We agreed that being committed to our communities and being passionate about adult literacy as a social issue (rather than an individual's problem) fueled the way we connected with service providers, learners, volunteers and other members of the community. We strongly recommend that you take time to explore, reflect upon, and converse about your values about adult literacy and your community. Two questions to get you started might be:

1. What do you value about literacy and adult literacy work?

2. What do you value about the community that you work in?

Thinking about the interconnections between values and work is not just a one-time event. It is useful to periodically take time to reflect on this because things change in communities, and values shift as well.

Study, Learn, and Do - Adult Literacy focused Community Development and Capacity Building

One of our challenges as literacy specialists was trying to attach concepts of community development and community capacity building to adult literacy. A key question that we wrestled with in our effort to connect these concepts was:

How can we, as literacy specialists, do community development work that will contribute to community capacity and address the adult literacy needs of each of these unique communities?

Our efforts to find the answer to this question required us to read (STUDY) articles, books and other resources, to LEARN more about our communities, and just to dive in and DO the work.

Study – Reading and Reflecting

Along with the key tool for the project, *The Literacy Audit Kit*, we found the following publications on adult literacy, community development and capacity building very informative:

- Canada Information Office (2000). *Issues and Challenges in Communicating with Less Literate Canadians*.
- Hayden, R. & Sanders, M. (1998). *Community Service Providers as Literacy Facilitators: A Pilot Project*.

- Smythe, S. & Weinstein. (2000). *Weaving Literacy into Family and Community Life*.
- Taylor, M. (2001). *Adult Literacy Now*.
- Vasily, L. and Steele, V. (1996) *Perspectives on a Community Development Approach to Adult Literacy Education in New York State*.

Adult Literacy Now presents an emerging approach to literacy called “New Literacy Studies”³ which focuses on literacy in people’s everyday lives, and promotes the idea of literacy as social practice. Thinking about literacy beyond a skill set shifts the view from the page to the social context of everyday living.

Two other good resources are *The Community Development Handbook* and *The Partnership Handbook*, published by HRDC.

From our reading and reflection we learned that:

- The CLC project, as a whole, is a community development initiative, it was a planned process for long-term positive outcomes; it was inclusive, equitable and respectful of diversity, grounded in the experiences of those in the community and it leads to best practice.⁴
- The role of the literacy specialist is an agent for community capacity building in that our work highlighted existing strengths and abilities of people, groups and organizations, and supported them to take action that would contribute to healthy and sustainable communities; capacity involves people’s skills, knowledge, experience, motivation and leadership, and organizations and communities policies, systems, infrastructure, wellness and health, and economic and financial resources.⁵

³ Hamilton, M. (2000) Sustainable Literacies and the Ecology of Lifelong Learning.

⁴ Frank, F. Smith, A. (1999) *The Community Development Handbook*.

⁵ Frank, F. Smith, A. (1999) *The Community Development Handbook*.

As literacy specialists we shared our common understanding about doing community development and capacity building for adult literacy. We felt that it involved an awareness of the community and how it works and, with a sense of responsibility to the community, our job was to actively participate in work, events, conversations, and initiatives that focused on literacy and were good for the community.

We strongly recommend that you find some articles, books, or other references that can help you successfully land these concepts on the ground in your community.

Learn - Looking for Literacy

Knowing what literacy assets and gaps currently exist in your community is crucial to do literacy specialist work. Shortly after the CLC project began we looked for literacy in each community by doing an assessment of existing literacy programs and literacy friendly services. Our approach was supportive and informal and occurred over a two-three month period. This was not a rigorous or comprehensive needs assessment, it was more of an environmental scan.

The purpose of doing a literacy assessment is to identify local literacy providers (adult, family, and child), to find community organizations and groups who work with people with limited literacy, and to promote the idea that adult literacy is relevant to everyone in the community. A very important reason to do a literacy assets and gaps assessment is to ignite people take action.

Steps in conducting a literacy assets and gaps assessment:

1. Make a list of literacy programs. Check the yellow pages under “learn”, look through continuing education calendars, local newspapers and newsletters, and community services directories.

2. Make a list of literacy friendly organizations. These are community services that have purposefully incorporated positive literacy practices into their programs and services such as writing brochures in plain language.
3. Make a list of literacy supporters, which can include funders of and donors to literacy programs, active leaders in literacy, and local politicians or celebrities that speak out for literacy.
4. Identify demographics in your community that are linked with low literacy, such as: less than a high school diploma, less than a grade nine education, low-income household, and single parent household. Other demographics that can be related to literacy might be aboriginal and English as a second language.

Once you have identified this information, make a list of organizations that provide services to those who may be included in the above demographics. This will include community services such as social, health, education and legal services, plus cultural and recreation services that target people who are economically and educationally marginalized. Don't be surprised if this is a very long list.

5. When you have completed the above four lists (some agencies may be included in more than one list), you can reorganize them under the following headings:

- Direct Literacy Programs (see #1)
- Literacy Supporters (see #2 and #3)
- Services with clients (and/or workers) who experience literacy barriers (see #4)

6. Now that you probably have listed almost all the community services in your community, you can select a number of them to contact to learn about what they know about literacy.

7. You are now ready to design the questions you will ask to find out what service providers know about literacy, what they are doing about literacy in their organization, and what literacy programs they think are needed in the community. Some questions we asked in the CLC project were:
 - What literacy programs or initiatives do you know of in your community?
 - Who are your clients, and what literacy skills do they need in order to use your services?
 - What literacy programs or initiatives would you like to see in your community?
 - Describe how your organization might contribute to literacy programs or initiatives.

8. After you have decided upon the questions, have one or two literacy practitioners and supporters review them. We recommend that you build strong relationships with these organizations and individuals as they are your allies and they can help you with the assessment, and with promoting literacy across the community.

9. Next you need to decide how you will gather the data: will you ask in-person, over the phone, through email, and/or a written survey (see Appendix A – Assets and Gaps Survey), will you ask people in a group setting and/or individually? Will you include volunteers as well as service providers? It is good to get your allies involved in helping you plan how you will gather the information.

Hint: Plan to gather data in ways that are convenient (that will not significantly add to your workload or to the service providers), such

as hand out a written survey at interagency meetings, email or fax the survey to the mailing list of the interagency group, or if you are meeting with an organization you can ask the questions at the end of the meeting. You can also contact service providers directly on the phone. We gathered information through conversations (part of meetings and phone calls), and a written survey at interagency meetings and email.

Reminder: This is not a comprehensive assessment, you do not need to gather an extensive amount. Don't forget to include your own knowledge about where literacy is at in your community.

10. Once you have gathered all your data, compile all the responses for each question and then condense similar responses. You can organize the results under the following headings: Assets, Gaps, Suggestions to build assets (see Appendix B – Literacy Assessment).

When the assessment is done, there are a number of things you can do with this information. Some suggestions are:

- Share the results at the interagency meeting, and promote all the literacy programs in the community. This is a good opportunity to increase awareness of what programs exists and, most importantly how people can access them.
- Approach a literacy supporter to explore potential action that can be taken immediately.

In one community an identified gap was a GED (general equivalency diploma) preparation course. The local literacy program knew that there was a need, and the literacy specialist developed a formal partnership with them to meet this need. There was such a positive response to the course that the literacy program, with the help of the

literacy specialist successfully secured funding to continue to offer the course after the CLC project ended.

- Offer to facilitate workshops to organizations to increase literacy awareness among staff and volunteers.
- Bring organizations together to share resources and possibly build partnerships.

The literacy specialist brought three organizations together: two worked with people who were in conflict with the law and had low literacy, and one was a family literacy program. At the meeting they learned more about each other's programs and brainstormed ways to share resources and information and work closer together.

- Use the assessment for your program planning.

From our experience, the assessment benefited our work by spreading the word about literacy throughout the community, igniting action among service providers to learn more about adult literacy, and it helped us focus on certain areas (e.g. seniors, young adults) in our communities.

Do

Much of what we learned about community development and capacity building came from actually doing the work. Participating in interagency meetings, providing presentations and workshops, and joining planning committees for community resource fairs, are examples of doing the work.

We learned that we needed to clearly convey that we work with, not for people and organizations. Offer your services as a consultant and facilitator. It is

important to know that you are not a contractor. Working with service providers to make changes within their own organization is capacity building. We learned that building community capacity happens when we pass along our knowledge and tools. Our work was successful when we gave it away.

We also learned that an important way to build community capacity was to acknowledge the positive things people and organizations were doing instead of looking at what they were not doing.

Explaining to clients how to get to the organization by describing landmarks as well as street names is a positive literacy practice. Although many would just call this good service, it is also literacy friendly because of including non-print indicators of how to get to an agency.

We emphasized that just by providing quality client service there is already some degree of positive literacy practices in existence in their workplace. This is sometimes called a strengths-based approach, which always looks first at the things people and organizations are doing well, and builds on them.

Do - Making Contact – What to Consider

Where to start? Who to contact? What to say? We asked all of these questions when we began the project, and part of our puzzlement was the need to sort out exactly what our job as literacy specialist was. Thus the most important question we had to answer first was: What did we have to offer? It might be a good idea to take some time and write out what you can offer to your community. You will need to consider your resources and limits:

- Time to study what you need to learn more about to do this work (this may also include professional development opportunities)
- Time to gather resources for the different services you will offer

- Time to produce a flyer, brochure, or information card about what your services are (see Appendix C – CLC project information card)
- Time to prepare for presentations, workshops and audits
- Time to give presentations, facilitate workshops and audits, and provide other assistance to organizations, inter-agencies and community groups
- Time to support individuals to connect with literacy programs.
- Time to reflect upon, and revise your services
- Financial resources required to do any and all of the above
- Other workplace support to do any and all of the above

Remember that community development and capacity building work is quite fluid and usually without clear parameters. This means that you may not be able to identify absolutely everything you can offer the community, however it is good to identify a few things you will offer, such as:

- Literacy awareness presentations to agencies and community groups
- Workshops on literacy awareness and sensitivity, or plain language
- Audit and action planning
- Formal partnerships

With this in mind you will be as ready as we were at the start of the project, so go ahead and dive in and start talking about how you can assist service providers understand the link between adult literacy and community services.

Do – Making Contact - Interagency Meetings

Attending interagency meetings is a good place to begin introducing your services. We found it effective to begin with emphasizing that:

- What the project is about is access to community services for people with limited literacy
- Our services were free

- Organizations were probably already doing things that were literacy friendly because being literacy friendly is part of providing quality services

We presented our services as professional development opportunities for agency staff and volunteers. We distributed our business cards and project information cards to service providers. Some of us scripted how we would introduce the project to the community. We would usually get some immediate response from individuals at the meeting, and it is a good idea to get their business card before leaving the meeting.

At interagency meetings you can:

- Distribute Literacy is for Life Fact Sheets⁶ (e.g. literacy and poverty) and encourage service providers to discuss with their co-workers how they support their clients with reading and writing tasks such as filling out forms or reading program brochures
- Offer to do a presentation for organizations on what people with limited literacy experience when accessing community services and how they can reduce literacy barriers to their services
- Distribute English Express⁷ newspaper and encourage service providers to add them to the reading material in the waiting areas of their organizations
- Talk about literacy barriers in people's everyday lives, and how they can contribute to removing such barriers, by simply offering to help clients fill out forms
- Distribute Literacy Help Line of Alberta⁸ bookmarks or brochure

⁶ Movement for Canadian Literacy Fact Sheets, <http://www.literacy.ca/litand/litand.htm>

⁷ English Express is published by Alberta Learning, contact editor@englishexpress.ca

- Use the word “us” instead of “we and them” to demonstrate that all of us have a range of literacy skills, some stronger than others (e.g. reading text compared to doing calculus) and that no one has perfect literacy skills for every situation
- Relate literacy to other issues of equality and discrimination (e.g. disability, racism). This will help challenge the assumption that literacy is an individual problem, and show how it is a social issue
- Show the video “Literacy Matters” from the Literacy Audit Kit

After interagency meetings you can:

- Contact those who had expressed an interest in literacy and offer to come to their organization to discuss what services you can offer that would best serve their particular agency. We found that visiting an organization would usually result in a planned workshop or presentation for their staff. This can also be done by phone.

Follow up is very important, even if it is a thank you phone call or email to the chair of the interagency group. We found that when services providers and other members of the community began to look at literacy in their personal and work lives, they were eager to take action to make positive literacy changes.

Do – Making Contact – Cold Calls

Making cold calls was something we were not very comfortable doing in the beginning of the project, but over time they became easier. We contacted

⁸ Literacy Help Line of Alberta is a free province wide phone line for information on literacy programs in Alberta – 1-800-767-3231, see Literacy Alberta in the References for further information.

agencies that served people with limited literacy as indicated from the assets and gaps assessment.

To prepare for a cold call:

- Gather information about the agency or service such as the person's name and title of whom you want to contact, and the agency's programs and services.
- Write down what you plan to say.

Hello, I am ___ from _____ and we have initiated a professional development service for community agencies to help staff and volunteers better serve clients with limited literacy. We developed this service for community-based organizations because adults with low literacy most likely access community services such as yours, and ideally should be able to access programs and services without having difficulty with filling out forms and reading brochures.

It is often a good idea to mention what work you have done with other agencies, that the service is free (or if there is a fee), and any connection you have with agencies that they partner or collaborate with. Acknowledging relationships, such as those you have with another agency that has a connection with this agency, will convey a sense of legitimacy and relevance.

You may want to write a letter prior to making the first phone call (see Appendix D – Invitation letter).

We learned that when we contacted agencies we had to follow their pace. This meant that sometimes an organization was not ready to engage in the project and it might be months before this agency requests a workshop or presentation. Making the first contact with a spirit of openness and availability that fits the needs of the organization was an important lesson for us.

A literacy specialist contacted one organization at the beginning of the project, and had a meeting with one staff member where a plain language workshop was planned. The workshop did not happen. During the last two months of the project (almost two years later) the agency contacted the literacy specialist and requested an awareness and sensitivity workshop which lead to an audit with two more workshops (plain language and verbal communication) as part of their action plan. This was a great reminder to us to keep a spirit of openness as this was not about whether the agency was interested or not, rather it was about the readiness of the agency to commit to making long term changes in their services.

We encourage you to make contact with service providers and begin talking about literacy. Remember to leave the door open for when they are ready to reconnect with you.

Do - Presentations

We used presentations primarily to introduce the project and increase literacy awareness. Presentations often lead to providing a literacy audit and other workshops:

We emphasized the following in the presentations:

- Nearly half of Canadian and over one third of Alberta adults struggle with reading and writing.
- When it comes to adults, literacy tends to be invisible, it is overlooked in general (not seen as a social issue, no public profile) and well hidden in particular (individuals tend to cover up that they can't read or write well).
- Demystify literacy, move from "us and them" to "we". How we feel about our literacy abilities depends on the situation, such as reading

the newspaper at home compared to filling in a healthcare premium form at a government office. In one situation you may feel more relaxed or have more power.

- Understanding how literacy can be a barrier for a person wanting to access services, and how that particular agency can make simple changes to reduce literacy barriers.

Presentations were usually less than an hour in length, customized for that particular audience, and participatory. They were not lectures.

Suggested presentation outline:

- a. Introduction and hand out information card, business card, relevant Literacy Fact Sheet, etc.
- b. Participatory warm up: group requested to respond to question: “What do you know about literacy?”
- c. Present myths and facts: adult literacy statistics, description of IALS levels as a moving continuum.
- d. “Literacy Matters” video: Ask participants to think about the literacy tasks their clients have to do when they use their programs and services, and after the video ask “What stood out for you in the video?”. Other effective videos are *Literacy: The Hidden Problem*, and *Learning for Life*. (see References for information.)
- e. Participatory exercise: In pairs or small groups talk about what literacy tasks their clients are required to do to use their services (complete registration forms, read program material), and how they can make it easier for their clients to complete these tasks. Pairs share with large group.
- f. Conclusion: emphasis the importance of reducing literacy barriers within your organization and offer other services that you can provide such as workshops or a literacy audit.

Presentation tools can simply be a flip chart and felt pens, along with relevant handouts and the video. You can use prepared overheads or power-point presentations as well. Each presentation was customized for the particular audience (see Appendix E - Presentation agenda on seniors and literacy).

Do - Audit for Action

We adapted the Literacy Audit Kit to be an interactive workshop that used a consensus decision-making approach. We decided to adapt the kit from its original survey format. We felt that an interactive and consensus style workshop can engage staff and volunteers at a deeper level to commit to develop and expand positive literacy practices within their organization.

We invited, encouraged and challenged (in friendly ways) staff to have open and honest discussions and work together to come to consensus about where they thought literacy was at in their organization. Then as a group they had to create a realistic action plan which could be initiated immediately.

The Literacy Audit Kit includes a manual, video and handouts. You will need to purchase the Audit Kit from Literacy Alberta (see References). There are four areas that the audit explores, however in our experience most organizations chose three: Print Materials, Sensitivity to Literacy, and Clear Verbal Communication. The fourth area is Promotions and Publicity. You will need to schedule two hours to do the audit workshop, as it is important to have sufficient time for the group to come to consensus and to create an action plan. We recommend that you read through the Audit Kit and watch the video prior to the workshop.

Tools:

- Large post-it note pads, four different colours
- Tape, felt pens, flip chart paper

- Consensus Exercise sheets (see Appendices F, G, H, I)
- Video

We recommend that you plan the audit with staff from the agency ahead of time. This will help clarify what areas of the audit the staff would like to focus on. You can also provide a presentation to explain what the literacy audit is, benefits of doing a literacy audit, and how it will occur (see Appendix J – Literacy Audit presentation agenda, and Section 1 of the kit).

Steps to facilitate an audit workshop:

1. Introduction: What is a literacy audit and why do it? (See Appendix J – Literacy audit presentation agenda).
2. Consensus Exercise: This exercise is the heart of the audit. It is very important to encourage everyone to participate. There will be lively discussions as the group has to come to consensus on every question in all the areas that they are looking at (sensitivity to literacy; print material; clear verbal communication; promotions and publicity)

On the flip chart paper write the area at the top “Sensitivity to Literacy” and then separate the sheet into four quadrants (see Appendix K – Consensus sheet) and write the rating option in each square:

- A. This is something we are not doing
- B. We are doing this, but could make some improvements
- C. We are satisfied that we are doing this well
- D. Not applicable.

You will make one flipchart sheet per area.

Exercise Steps

- a. Hand out the “Sensitivity to Literacy” exercise sheet to each participant and ask him or her to individually rate each question (see Appendix F – Sensitivity exercise). There is no discussion at this time.
- b. When they have finished, give each person a post-it note and assign them a different question from the exercise sheet to re-write (as it is written) onto the post-it note. For example one participant will write question 1, another will write question 2, until all the questions have been re-written onto the post-it-notes. Make sure each question has the correct number.
- c. As a large group ask the participants to come to the flip chart, and bring their exercise sheets and post-it-note, and then all of them must come to consensus for each question. You may need to encourage them to share why they rated the question the way they did so that there is good discussion. When they agree the post-it note will be placed on the specific quadrant.

Note: If there are more than 8 participants in the workshop, break them into small groups and ask them to share their answers and work on consensus for each question. Someone needs to record the group answer on the handout. Then all groups, or representatives, bring their post-it notes to the flip chart and as a whole group they will work to come to consensus for each question.

- d Repeat the above steps (a., b., and c.) for all the other areas (see Appendices G,H,I). Have one flip chart sheet for each area. Tape these sheets side by side once the group has come to consensus for all of the questions in each area.

At this point the group has completed rating where they think their agency is at in regards to each of the areas. The quadrants A and B will be the focus for the next part of the workshop which is grouping similar questions on the post-it-notes in all of the areas and moving them to the action plan. You must record where the group places each post-it note for each area.

Depending on the energy of the group you can suggest a short break at this point or move directly into creating the action plan. There is a lot of standing and moving around, and it is important to keep the energy lively and the group focused.

3. Creating the Action Plan: The action plan will be created as the group physically moves only those post-it-notes that they want to take action on from the flip chart sheets titled Print Materials, Sensitivity to Literacy, Clear Verbal Communication, and Publicity and Promotions to blank flip chart sheets titled Action Planning sheet (see Appendix L – Action Planning sheet).

This will be done by participants grouping similar questions that have been rated A (something we are not doing) or B (something we are doing but can make improvements) in all of the above four areas. When the questions are grouped you can help participants restate them as a goal with a time line and strategies (see Appendix M – Audit Action Plan, see The Literacy Action Plan section for examples of how to write goals and strategies).

Note: You will not write the goals and strategies in such detail on the Action Planning sheet, but probably just enough to identify their intentions.

Steps to making the Action Plan:

- a. Tape two blank flip chart sheets beside each other and write “Action Plan” at the top. Ask the group to look at the questions on the post-it-notes for each area and:

- i. Decide which ones they want take action on. (They should be the questions on the post-it notes in the A and B quadrants).
 - ii. Group similar questions from all the areas sheets (sensitivity, print materials, clear verbal communication, promotions and publicity) and ask the participants to decide what they can take action on immediately (place those post-it notes in the short term goals column) or the long term (place those post-it notes in the longer term goals column) on the Action Planning sheet (see appendix L).
 - iii. Help them name those grouped questions as a goal. Ask what are these grouped questions about (e.g. re-writing print material, reception area)? Write the words the participants use beside the grouped post-it notes.
- b. Once the grouped post-it notes are placed on the Action Planning sheets (don't worry if this is a bit messy with clumps of post-it notes stuck here and there on these sheets) you can invite the participants to sit down (they will have been standing for quite some time by now).
 - c. You are now ready to facilitate the writing of the action plan. There may be leaders among the group that are already making the plan and you can support them by scribing the ideas and strategies. The first thing is to organize the clumps of post-it note and get the participants to be more specific and state them as a goal and strategies (e.g. Goal: Rewrite print materials used by clients in plain language; Strategies: Staff will receive plain language training). Sometimes clumps will have to be split if there are two needs or issues lumped together.
 - d. Depending on the group the actual writing of the plan on flip chart may take the form of a list and action strategies, or it may be a chart with

headings of goal, strategies, whom and by when. It is good to try and have as detailed a plan as possible.

- e. When the participants have completed the action plan, ask for one or two volunteers who will commit to typing the plan and following up with everyone to get things going. You can offer help type up the action plan, which can make the plan more comprehensive (see Appendix M – Audit Action plan).

Congratulate the group for their effort. You can support their action plan by offering to come back and facilitate a workshop on plain language or verbal communication (if these are identified goals or strategies). From our experience in the CLC project, an audit leads to future work with that agency.

Do - Workshops

The workshops that we offered to service providers and businesses were: literacy sensitivity and awareness, plain language, and clear verbal communication. They were usually two hours long, but can effectively be facilitated in less time.

In all of the workshops we emphasized the following:

- That, most likely, literacy friendly practices already exist in their workplace.
- That the participants know their clients and workplace best, and as such the purpose of the workshop is to learn about adult literacy as it relates to their workplace, and to learn how to build-in and strengthen positive literacy practices in their service and program delivery.

- Some ways to build-in and strengthen literacy friendly practices:

- Being mindful of literacy when planning and evaluating programs and services
- Providing a literacy program
- Creating literacy-focused policies for service delivery, staff learning opportunities, and/or writing program materials.
- Professional development in plain language skills and communication skills

In the CLC project the most popular workshops were literacy awareness and sensitivity, and plain language. Other than the plain language workshop, the outlines below were designed for agencies that had not done an audit.

Facilitating the workshop:

You will need:

- Consensus exercise sheets (see Appendices F, G, H, I)
- Flip chart paper and felts to record participants responses to questions and discussion highlights, consensus exercise, and strategies
- Video
- Agenda (see Appendices N,O,P)
- Relevant literacy fact sheet
- Other resources (see Making Contact –Interagency Meetings for ideas)

1. Literacy Awareness and Sensitivity workshop

- a. Introduction and hand out information card, business card, agenda (see Appendix N – Awareness and sensitivity workshop agenda), relevant literacy fact sheet, etc.
- b. Participatory discussion: group requested to respond to question: “What do you Know about Literacy?” Add myths and facts, adult

literacy statistics, description of IALS levels as a moving continuum to this discussion.

- c. Video: Literacy Matters - Before viewing the video ask the group:
“While watching the video think about the literacy tasks you require of you clients?” After the video ask ” What stood out for you in the video?” Other effective videos are *Literacy: The Hidden Problem*, and *Learning for Life* (See References for information.).
- d. Consensus exercise: Distribute Literacy Sensitivity exercise sheet and ask participants to answer individually, then as a group come to consensus for each question. (See Appendix F – Sensitivity Exercise).

Note: If there are more than 8 participants in the workshop, break them into small groups and ask them to share their answers and work on consensus for each question. Someone needs to record the group answer on the handout. Then all groups will work together to come to consensus.
- e. Strategies to reduce literacy barriers: In small groups or a large group have the participants brainstorm strategies to improve services and reduce literacy barriers on flip chart paper. Small groups will share their strategies and ideas with the large group.
- f. Conclusion: Ask the group to identify at least two strategies that they can take action on immediately.

Note: If this workshop is part of an action plan from a literacy audit and the workshop participants also participated in the audit, replace the consensus exercise and strategies to reduce literacy barriers with the following:

- Formative review (basically a check-in of how things are progressing) of the action plan to identify what activities and changes that have occurred since the audit (see Appendix Q – Formative review questions). Facilitate a discussion of challenges they have encountered as they implemented the action plan, and brainstorm strategies to address these challenges. Ask a participant to attach these to the action plan. Celebrate successes, and support literacy champions within the agency.
- Optional: Question and answer period about local literacy programs including explanation of referral procedure, assessment, basic education terms and concepts (learner, GED, learner-centered, one-one tutoring etc). You can bring workbooks and other tools, student writing, and provide a list of literacy contacts. The goal is to increase their capacity to refer people to literacy programs.

2. Plain Language workshop

Prior to the workshop, have the group decide what print material(s) will be revised in the workshop. You can also include the video “Literacy Matters”.

- a. Introduction and hand out information card, business card, agenda (see Appendix O – Plain language workshop agenda) relevant literacy fact sheet, etc.
- b. Participatory discussion: group requested to respond to questions: “What is plain language” and “Why is plain language important?” (See Appendix R – Plain Language.)
- c. Present components of Plain Language (See Appendix S – Plain Language Components.)

- d. Print Material Revision: As a group (or in small groups if there are more than 8 participants), have the participants begin to revise the document.
 - e. Conclusion: Encourage the participants to continue working on the document, and offer to help them review it when a draft is complete.
3. Clear Verbal Communication workshop
- a. Introduction and hand out information card, business card, agenda (see Appendix P – Clear verbal communication workshop agenda), relevant literacy fact sheet, etc.
 - b. Participatory discussion: group requested to respond to questions: “What do you Know about Literacy?” and/or “How is literacy connected with verbal/oral communication?” Add myths and facts, adult literacy statistics, description of IALS levels as a moving continuum to this discussion.
 - c. Video: Literacy Matters - Before viewing the video ask the group: “ While watching the video think about the literacy tasks you require of you clients?” After the video ask ” What stood out for you in the video?” Other effective videos are *Literacy: The Hidden Problem*, and *Learning for Life*. (See References for information.)
 - d. Consensus exercise: Distribute exercise sheet and ask participants to answer individually, then as a group, come to consensus for each question. (See Appendix H – Clear Verbal Communication.)

Note: If there are more than 8 participants in the workshop, break them into small groups and ask them to share their answers and work on consensus for each question. Someone needs to record

the group answer on the handout. Then all groups will work together to come to consensus.

- e. Strategies to improve clear verbal communication: In small groups or a large group have the participants brainstorm strategies to improve services and reduce literacy barriers on flip chart paper, then have the group share their strategies.
- f. Conclusion: Ask the group to identify at least two strategies that they can take action on immediately.

Note: If participants had previously done a literacy audit and the consensus exercise for clear verbal communication was included in the audit replace the consensus exercise with the following:

- Formative review (basically a check-in of how things are progressing) of the action plan to identify what activities and changes that have occurred since the audit (see Appendix Q – Formative review questions). Facilitate a discussion of challenges they have encountered as they implemented the action plan, and brainstorm strategies to address these challenges. Ask a participant to attach these to the action plan. Celebrate successes, and support literacy champions within the agency.
- Optional: Question and answer period about local literacy programs including explanation of referral procedure, assessment, basic education terms and concepts (learner, GED, learner-centered, one-one tutoring etc). You can bring workbooks and other tools, student writing, and provide a list of literacy contacts. The goal is to increase their capacity to refer people to literacy programs.

It is important to customize each workshop to meet the particular needs of that organization (see Appendix T- Customizing Workshops). Customizing is an

approach to workshop design that seriously considers ownership, responsibility and intended outcomes. We recommend that you meet with staff prior to the workshop to learn how to prepare the workshop to best suit their agency.

Do – Partnerships and Sustainability

Partnerships are integral to sustaining positive literacy practices in organizations and communities. Partnerships are relationships based on a mutual understanding of the purpose of the partnership. They require care, commitment and clarity. We had formal and informal partnerships in the CLC project. The formal partnerships were outlined in writing (see Appendix U – Partnership letter), and the informal partnerships tended to be ongoing working relationships with a number of organizations such as the local adult literacy program, and interagency work groups.

Informal partnerships:

- Are ongoing, fluid and flexible
- Can be led by allies and literacy champions in the community
- Are cooperative, sharing resources and supporting client referrals
- Happen in response to a community need
- Can lead to a formal partnership, which is fixed in purpose and time
- Can sustain the work by providing ongoing support to maintain literacy positive changes, and even build on them

One literacy specialist partnered with a service provider, who is a literacy champion, to co-facilitate a literacy sensitivity and awareness workshop for other service providers from different organizations.

Formal partnerships:

- Are more organized than informal partnerships
- Are flexible and fluid, but have a fixed time-line
- Have a partnership letter
- Contribute to community capacity building as organizations promote themselves as a literacy friendly agency to the public, other community services and funders

One literacy specialist developed a partnership with the literacy program to offer a GED (general equivalency diploma) preparation course. Together they gathered the resources (volunteer teacher and tutors, course material, classroom, etc) and piloted the course. The pilot was so successful the literacy program secured funding to be able to offer the course long term.

Steps to developing formal partnerships:

1. Working relationships and connections can lead to partnerships. Along with your working relationships, we recommend that you refer to the literacy assets and gaps assessment sections to help you determine potential partners to meet identified needs or gaps.
2. Clarify your understanding and vision of the partnership. You can do this for both informal and formal partnerships. With informal partnerships answering the questions below may occur after a partnership has begun. Answering these questions in conversation with your partners is an effective method to clarify your purpose and responsibilities. With formal partnerships it is important to do this first.
 - What is the need or gap this partnership will meet?

- How will this be done so that the work or changes can be sustained?
 - Who should be involved and what will be the responsibilities of each partner?
 - What tangible resources are required, and where can they be found?
 - What is the time-line?
 - How will we measure or evaluate the results or outcomes of the partnership?
3. Follow the steps in the Making Contact section, to initiate a conversation about developing a partnership with one or more community service.
 4. Once all the stakeholders have agreed to develop a partnership to address the identified gap or need, and all partners have identified the details of who will be responsible for what, then create a letter (see Appendix U – Partnership letter) that will document the basis of the partnership.
 5. Working in partnership is based on mutual understanding, respect, commitment and flexibility. You will rely on these as the partnership evolves and new information or unforeseen changes come into play.

Maintaining a partnership will require all to:

- Contact each other regularly, which is easy to do when work is happening, but harder when there is a period of time of little work. We recommend that you continue to keep contact with a spirit of openness at these times.
- When miscommunications and misunderstandings happen (and they will) talk about them.

- Plan a checkpoint meeting to assess the progress and process, and adjust your plan as needed. You can use the formative review questions (see Appendix Q) to help brainstorm more specific questions to help you assess the progress and process of your partnership.
- Once the partnership is underway you will need to initiate ways to sustain the work. This can be done by:
 - Identifying funding sources
 - Writing proposals
 - Training service providers and volunteers
 - Creating or purchasing materials
 - Promoting the initiative to other organizations and future stakeholders
- Document the progress and process of the partnership.

6. Ending a partnership requires planning. Plan to celebrate successes. Plan to sustain the initiative by passing along knowledge, materials and information, by seeking funding sources, and by supporting the transition phase. Plan to document the partnership. Plan to write thank you letters to the partners and participants.

Unlike corporate partnerships, community based partnerships must contribute to building community capacity. Skills important in partnerships are communication, assessment, organizational, leadership, proposal writing and problem solving.⁹

It is helpful for all partners to talk about how sharing these skills will contribute to the success of the process and outcomes of the partnership.

⁹ Frank, F. and Smith, A. *The Partnership Handbook*. HRDC.

Part Three-Research in Practice

Research in practice was inherent in the CLC project because it was experimental. We needed to learn about what kinds of changes were happening in the community because of the work we were doing. We needed to learn about what is important to be able to do the work of a literacy specialist.

Three investigations occurred during the project. In year one we researched what kind of changes occurred in ten organizations from participating in the project. Each organization did a literacy audit and implemented their action plan with the help of the literacy specialist.

In the second year we explored the role of the literacy specialist. Investigating the role of the literacy specialist involved two different inquiries. One identified skills and competencies for the role of the literacy specialist. The other investigation explored the prior knowledge and experience of the literacy specialists, plus the importance of learning while doing literacy specialist work.

Having structured research was extremely helpful as it acted as a benchmark for our work. It offered a way to measure change, and a way for sorting out the immense amount of information we were gathering. We collected information on the community as a whole, on individual agencies and groups, on networks and interagency groups, on individual learners, on literature, and on local media. Structured research helped us to organize this information to be able to best serve each of the unique communities.

In addition to the structured research we used a research in practice approach to plan our work. We did a lot of reflection and questioning about how we were:

- Offering literacy specialist services
- Assessing the community

- Deciding what information to gather
- Deciding how to use this information
- Understanding community development, capacity building, and literacy as social practice
- Planning to do the work
- Doing the work
- Evaluating the process and progress of the project

Our approach to doing research in practice was lead by the practical needs of the project. We engaged in critical reflection for both the structured research, as well as all the other responsibilities of our role as literacy specialists. At every team meeting there was planned time to discuss how our work was unfolding. True to research in practice we were learning the art of integrating information, knowledge and action to be able to best serve those we were working with.

Reports on the three research studies are available from Bow Valley College. Please see reference page for ordering information.

Appendices

The appendices include examples of our work in the CLC project. You are welcome to copy and adapt them to suit your community's efforts to advance adult literacy.

CLC Report: Literacy Assets and Gaps

“Community Name”

Assets	Gaps	Suggestions to build assets
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Literacy programs in elementary schools - Library: Children and youth literacy program (Story Time, Time for Two, Homework Club); ESL conversational English; tutoring for adults; Library card fee waived if required. - ESL pre employment program - ESL parenting program - Inclusion of literacy for planning seniors needs assessment - Willingness and openness to learn and work collaboratively to promote literacy and reduce barriers to services - Family literacy program at a learning centre - Language centre-ESL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ESL adult family and youth programs - Literacy programs for adults (one-one and group), youth and children - Seniors literacy needs are unknown - Long term solutions for ongoing awareness - Barriers to respond to opportunities to increase literacy awareness and accessibility (not enough time or difficulty organizing staff and volunteers to be able to participate in the project) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer space for literacy and language programs - Literacy programs for adults (one-one and group), youth and children - Refer clients to literacy programs - Promote literacy and plain language with our partners (agencies) - Include literacy in the seniors needs assessment - Community needs assessment survey results identified literacy as an issue needing address

Method of gathering information on literacy assets and gaps

Learning about the literacy assets and gaps in “community name” occurred through relationship building conversations with agencies and groups and distribution of a questionnaire.

- **Relationship building**

Participating agencies: community resource centre, library, municipal neighbourhood services, family literacy program, family support service, and seniors service.

Contacted services: local church programs, child and family services, community kitchen program, youth support program, thrift store, daycare, interagency group for children. The contact with these services included introduction to the project and provision of information on literacy issues and local programs/resources.

Interagency: Communication with the co-chair, plain language presentation to interagency members, promoting and informing about literacy and accessibility at meetings.

- **Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was distributed to interagency members at the March and April meetings. A total of 7 questionnaires were completed, six service providers and one community resident responded.

Literacy Specialist’s Comments

The interagency is in the process of analyzing a community needs assessment, and at this point literacy has been identified as an area of need, however the interagency still has to develop an action plan. I will participate in meetings for the development of the action plan to champion opportunities for value-added literacy programming.

Outside Panel

**Connecting Literacy
to Community**

Almost 48% of Canadians have difficulty dealing with printed materials

They may not be able to read and understand a classified ad, find the date on a deposit slip or figure out instructions on a medicine bottle.
Source: Movement for Canadian Literacy, June 2001

Literacy

"The ability to understand and use printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential."

Comments from community partners:

"We made some changes in our last brochure to make it easier to read. There has been an increase in the number of people signing up for our courses. Also the staff is more aware of literacy issues."
Rural community resource centre

"We are more user-friendly after the literacy awareness workshops. I think we are conveying a safer and friendlier tone because we have had clients ask for help with forms and disclose that they can't read well."
Urban information and referral centre

"We are planning to do literacy awareness at our fundraising event this fall."
Urban community resource centre



Inside Panel

Do you know people who have difficulty reading, writing or working with basic numbers?

The literacy specialist in your community can help!

Connecting Literacy to Community is working to increase literacy awareness and help individuals gain successful access to information and services. Your community has many existing literacy assets. The literacy specialist will provide services to enhance these assets.

Agencies, services and businesses learn how to effectively help those with literacy challenges. Consider having a specialist consult with you about positive literacy practices.

The National Literacy Secretariat and Bow Valley College are working together to improve access to information and programs for individuals with literacy challenges. Connecting Literacy to Community is a community development project with partners in six Alberta communities. A literacy specialist working in your community will promote literacy awareness and literacy accessible services.

This two-part project will be completed in June 2003.

Services

The literacy specialist in your community is a professional who can assist you to facilitate:

- Workshops on literacy awareness and plain language
- Literacy audits and action plans for agencies, services and businesses
- Referrals for individuals looking for programs
- Partnerships to develop programs for individuals with literacy barriers (example: family literacy, computer literacy, upgrading, scribe service, employability skill development)
- Community awareness events promoting literacy

Your community partners and literacy specialists are:

Calgary
Audrey Gardner
410-1502
Crownsnest Pass/Pincher Creek
Karen Appleby
563-3814
High River
Carmyn Block
652-5090
Olds
Rebecca Still
556-3045

Research Consultant
Bill Holbrow
the Holbrow group Inc
Project Manager
Robin Houston-Knapff
410-1507

Dear

I would like to invite you and the -----to participate in a literacy awareness project.

“Nearly half of adult Canadians have some problem with reading and writing” (International Adult Literacy Survey, 1995). Bow Valley College and the National Literacy Secretariat are partners with six communities in Southern Alberta in a project called “Connecting Literacy to Community”. This project includes literacy awareness, outreach, education, and an assessment of community literacy assets. Another important aspect of our project is a research component to provide relevant data and information. Two organizations in each community will be part of the project’s formal research.

-----, the literacy specialist in your community, our research consultant and I would like to work with you to assess your organization’s literacy assets and suggest improvements. This will help your organization better serve those with literacy needs. We can do this in one of two ways: working with you to assess your print material, or helping you assess the communication techniques your staff uses. A result of this partnership will be that those with literacy barriers will have easier access to information and services in your community.

I will contact you in about a week to answer any questions you might have and arrange a brief meeting with you, ----- and myself. Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Robin Houston-Knopff
Coordinator, Community Programs
Academic Foundations

Literacy Awareness

Agency Name

February 20, 2003

- What do you know about Literacy?
- Myths and Facts
- Reducing Literacy Barriers for Seniors

Local Information

Literacy Help Line 1-800-767-3231

Calgary Seniors' Literacy Project 290-5756 or 262-2006

Information and Research

Roberts, P. & Fawcett, G. (1998). *At Risk: A Socio-economic Analysis of Health and Literacy Among Seniors*. Ottawa, Ontario: Ministry of Industry

Movement for Canadian Literacy "Literacy Facts" <http://www.literacy.ca/litand/litan.htm>

Canada Information Office (CIO). (2000). *Issues and Challenges in Communicating with Less Literate Canadians*, Final Report. Ottawa. Call # JL 87 187.

Sensitivity to Literacy Exercise

Please respond to the following 9 statements by writing in the letter (A, B, C, or D) that most accurately describe your organization today.

- A. This is something we are not doing
- B. We are doing this, but could make some improvements
- C. We are satisfied that we are doing this well
- D. Not applicable.

-
1. We ask all clients whether they need help filling out forms.
 2. Staff, volunteers, audiotapes, and/or videotapes are available to help clients fill out our organization's forms.
 3. We accommodate clients who may want or need to bring friends or spokespersons to their meetings with our staff.
 4. We offer all clients the same help to avoid drawing attention to literacy problems through special and potentially embarrassing treatment.
 5. We have identified what a client must know and the literacy skills a client must have in order to make use of our services.
For example:
 - Does a client need to be able to read, write, and speak well in order to use our services?
 - Does a client need to know things about the law before we can help them?
 - Does a client need to know that a completed written referral is necessary before coming to our organization?
 6. We regularly ask our clients for feedback about the quality and effectiveness of our services.
 7. All staff who have direct contact with clients are aware that certain behaviors may indicate that the client could have literacy problems.
 8. Our staff has received awareness and sensitivity training about literacy and literacy issues.
 9. Our staff knows about the literacy resources in our community. If asked, they could tell a client where to get help to improve their literacy skills.

(Adapted from The Literacy Audit Kit)

Print Materials Exercise

Please respond to the following 10 statements by writing in the letter (A,B,C,or D) that most accurately describes your organization today.

- A. This is something we are not doing
 - B. We are doing this, but could make some improvements
 - C. We are satisfied that we are doing this well
 - D. Not applicable.
-

1. Our print materials are easy for adults with low literacy skills to read.
2. All the forms we use in our organization are easy for everyone to read and understand.
3. Our print materials are written in simple and clear language. We avoid using technical jargon and scientific terms in the materials we prepare for the general public.
4. Print materials are designed with lots of white space to provide relief from the print.
5. We use graphics and illustrations in our print materials.
6. If appropriate, our print materials are available in other languages.
7. We regularly review our print materials, including forms, to check how easy they are to read.
8. We consult with people outside the organization for feedback on written materials we prepare for the general public.
9. Our organization has guidelines for limiting the level of reading difficulty of our printed materials.
10. Our staff has received training in how to prepare materials in plain language.

(Adapted from The Literacy Audit Kit)

Verbal Communication Exercise

Please respond to the following 9 statements by writing in the letter (A,B,C,or D) that most accurately describes your organization today.

- A. This is something we are not doing
 - B. We are doing this, but could make some improvements
 - C. We are satisfied that we are doing this well
 - D. Not applicable.
-

1. We have audio and/or videotapes clients can use to help them review and remember the information we give them.
2. We avoid organizational jargon when we communicate with clients.
3. We have identified the jargon that is specific to our organization or service we provide, and have developed an easy way to explain these words to our clients.
4. We give verbal information to clients in a way that is adapted to their needs.
5. We schedule appointments so that clients have enough time to ask questions or can take extra time to understand the information we give them.
6. When we work with clients, we continually check that they have understood the information we give them.
7. We have been trained to recognize non-verbal cues that may indicate a person is not understanding what is being said.
8. We adjust the pace at which we talk and the vocabulary we use when we work with people for whom English is a second language.
9. All our staff has received training on clear verbal communication techniques such as:
 - how to effectively organize the information given to clients
 - how to communicate using simple language
 - how to check for understanding

(Adapted from The Literacy Audit Kit)

Promotions and Publicity Exercise

Please respond to the following 9 statements by writing in the letter (A,B,C,or D) that most accurately describes your organization today.

- A. This is something we are not doing
 - B. We are doing this, but could make some improvements
 - C. We are satisfied that we are doing this well
 - D. Not applicable.
-

1. Our organization's logo or symbol illustrates the eservice we provide in the community.
2. Our phone number is easy for everyone to find on all our promotional material
3. When we give directions for finding our organization, we refer to familiar landmarks and bus stops.
4. Our organization's name and symbol are clearly displayed on the building.
5. Clear signs and symbols direct people from the front door of the building to our offices.
6. The reception area is clearly marked and easy to find.
7. The atmosphere in our reception area is friendly. People feel they can ask for help without embarrassment.
8. The reception area at our office provides some privacy if clients need to discuss confidential information.
9. The walls and bulletin boards in our reception area are not covered with a whole lot of printed notices. Its' easy for anyone to pick out the important information on them.
10. We make sure that we display our pamphlets and educational brochures in a way that makes it easy for people to find the information they need or want.
11. Our organization uses a variety of ways to advertise its services. Radio, TV, video and electronic media, as well as printed material.
12. We are confident that we promote our organization in ways that allow adults with low literacy skills to learn about our programs and services.

(Adapted from The Literacy Audit Kit)

Literacy Audit Presentation

Agency Name

February 1, 2002

- What is a literacy audit?
- Why do a literacy audit?
- How to do the literacy audit?

Presenter's notes

What is a literacy audit?

A literacy audit is

- A way to raise awareness and provide information about literacy to staff and volunteers
- A tool that can be used to suggest and reaffirm good practices in service delivery
- A systematic way for an organization to identify possible barriers in its delivery of services and programs for adults with low literacy
- A way to show that meeting the literacy needs of clients is everyone's responsibility

A literacy audit is not

- An instrument to test literacy skills of clients
- A tool to label people as "illiterate"
- A way to evaluate job performance of staff
- A quick fix solution – it is the starting point for an organization to address long term and ongoing literacy issues

Why do a literacy audit?

- 48 % of Canadians have difficulty dealing with print material
- Learning how to reduce literacy barriers for your clients can help them use your services better
- Literacy is important as it impacts individuals everyday lives, (economically, socially, legally, health, personally)

How to do the literacy audit?

1. Contact a literacy specialist for facilitation of the process. Involve staff, volunteers and board of directors
2. Conduct the literacy audit – describe the workshop and consensus model – explain what will happen in the workshop
3. Make an action plan including indicators, and Take Action

(Adapted from the Literacy Audit Kit)

Consensus Sheet (flip chart)

(Area title – Sensitivity to Literacy, etc.)

A. This is something we are not doing	b. We are doing this, but could make some improvements
C. We are satisfied that we are doing this well	D. Not applicable

(Adapted from The Literacy Audit Kit)

Action Planning Sheet – flip chart

Short-Term Goals (6 – 12 Months)	Long-Term Goals (13 – 36 Months)

(Adapted from The Literacy Audit Kit)

Agency Name
Literacy Audit and Action Plan
Report
February 2002

Community organizations provide a variety of important services to a wide range of clients. These agencies often give people information that can help them achieve their goals, increase their knowledge, and develop their potential.

However, if the agency's clients have literacy problems, they may not be able to benefit fully from the agency's information and services. Further, the agency may have barriers that make it difficult for people with low literacy skills to use its services successfully. Such barriers, according to The Literacy Audit Kit, developed by the Adult Association for Adult Literacy, can be grouped in four areas: a) promotion and publicity, b) print materials, c) clear verbal communication, and d) sensitivity to literacy.

The Connecting Literacy to Community Project (CLCP) is intended to improve literacy outreach and awareness in particular Alberta communities. Through partnerships with select agencies and service providers in each community, CLCP literacy specialists:

- act as a catalyst for literacy awareness,
- investigate literacy needs, and
- consult on improving print materials or verbal communications.

These activities are intended to help the agencies minimize or remove barriers, and better meet the needs of their clientele with low literacy skills.

The Literacy Audit Workshop

The Executive Director of the Agency in consultation with the CLCP Literacy Specialist decided to examine qualities of the Agency's print materials.

At a CLCP workshop participants identified literacy assets and needs using an exercise, which was adapted from The Literacy Audit Kit. The workshop was intended to offer the staff an opportunity to comment on the Agency's success in meeting the literacy needs of its clients. A plan was developed, to address needs, using a strategic planning model.

Specifically, the workshop helped participants to:

- Identify the Agency's sensitivity to literacy. These are the standard practices used to address the literacy needs of clients.
- Identify and clarify print material qualities. These are the general literacy qualities of brochures, forms, and posters.
- Begin to develop a plan to address any needs, and increase the Agency's literacy capabilities.

The Literacy Audit has four Categories to classify the qualities noted in the Barrier Groups. The Categories are:

- A. This is something we are not doing. If the organization is not doing it, is it something that should be considered?

- B. We are doing this, but could make some improvements. Where and how do people feel the organization could improve the way it does things?
- C. We are satisfied that we are doing this well.
- D. Not applicable. Which statements don't apply to the organization? Why?

Using these Categories, participants reviewed the Agency's sensitivity to literacy and print materials.

The Literacy Action Plan

The Literacy Action Plan is a map. It represents a course of action that will help the Agency to:

- change,
- remove literacy barriers, and
- better serve its clients.

The Plan is comprised of specific goals and strategies. The goals describe the Agency's management, staff and volunteers plan to enhance and provide their products and services. The goals describe the primary changes in literacy that the Agency is striving to achieve. A strategy is a manageable "step" which, when completed along with other strategies, leads to accomplishing a goal. Strategies specify the "how", "when" and "what" that will need to be accomplished in order to achieve each goal.

The workshop participants identified three (3) short-term goals, and strategies, as well as three (3) long-term goals. Accomplishing the short-term goals will help to increase the quality of the Agency's print materials, and its sensitivity to literacy.

Short-Term Goals (1 – 12 Months)

1. Client Assistance:

- Ask clients if they need help filling out forms.
- Have staff, volunteers, audiotapes, and/or videotapes available to help clients fill out forms.
- Offer clients help in a way that avoids drawing attention to literacy problems.
- Regularly ask clients for feedback about the quality and effectiveness of services.

Strategies:

- At a staff meeting go through registration form and highlight how to assist clients fill it in – Audrey attend
- Get fact sheet on literacy, tip sheets on plain language and verbal communication, and websites from Audrey
- Get posters on literacy.

2. Redevelopment of Materials:

- Our print materials including forms:
- are written in simple and clear language
- avoid the use of technical jargon
- are designed with lots of white space
- use graphics and illustrations
- are easy for adults with low literacy skills to read and understand

Strategies:

Workshop on plain language revision of the newsletter for the Agency coordinators and newsletter volunteer

3. Staff Training:

- Enhance awareness and sensitivity about:
- behaviors may indicate that the client could have literacy problems
- literacy and literacy issues
- the literacy resources in our community
- Consult with people outside the Agency for feedback on written materials we prepare for the general public.
- Preparing materials in plain language.

Strategies:

- Half-day workshop on verbal communication for Agency staff (during spring break). Invite “Parents As Teachers” staff to share their learning from the workshop they had on verbal communication. Focus on the similarities and differences between literacy and ESL
- Half day workshop on plain language for all staff (during spring break).

Long-Term Goals (13 – 36 Months)

1. We regularly review our print materials, including forms, to check how easy they are to read.
2. Our organization has guidelines for limiting the level of reading difficulty of our printed materials.
3. Our staff has received training in how to prepare materials in plain language.

Additional Strategies

The Literacy Audit Kit provides useful suggestions that could be utilized by the Agency’s as strategies to accomplish the literacy goals.

General Strategies

- Give a copy of the plan to the Board, and solicit board support for the literacy initiative.
- Determine how literacy issues relate to both the Agency’s Mission, and the way management, staff and volunteers perform their respective tasks to accomplish the Mission.
- Ensure that the literacy needs of clients are considered when you develop new programs and services.
- Develop brochures, posters, etc. with input from the community and clients.
- Pretest new or revised brochures with advisory committees and/or students in a literacy program.

Operational Strategies

- Take time to prepare, and organize information in a logical sequence.
- Use plain language, as well as appropriate and varied vocabulary.
- Paraphrase what a person has said to increase understanding.
- Ask questions and clarify information in an appropriate way in order to enhance understanding.

- Involve a literacy professional in the training.
- Have staff discuss ways to respectfully offer assistance to a client who may have literacy difficulties.

Implementation and Follow-up of the Plan

Implementation of the Agency's plan should begin as soon as possible with one of the short-term goals. The Literacy Specialist will contact the Agency by telephone in 4 – 6 weeks. Formal follow-up on the project, with a site visit, will take place in May 2002.

Workshop – Literacy Awareness and Sensitivity

Agency name

February 12, 2003

Agenda

Introductions

Awareness

What do you know about Literacy?

Video: Literacy Matters

Exercise: Sensitivity to Literacy

Strategies to reduce literacy barriers

Literacy Information and Resources:

- ❑ Literacy Help Line: 1-800-767-3231
- ❑ Bow Valley College Literacy Programs: 410-1525
- ❑ Literacy Alberta: 410-6990
- ❑ National Adult Literacy Database <http://www.nald.ca/index.htm>

Plain Language Workshop

Agency Name

October 8, 2003

What is plain language?

Why use plain language

How to write in plain language

Print Material Practice

Information on Plain Language:

Plain language dictionary

<http://www.techcommunicators.com/diction.html>

Plain language explained

<http://www.web.net/~plain/PlainTrain/IntroducingPlainLanguage.html>

Successful Communication: Literacy and You (2003) Communication Canada

Plain Language Clear and Simple (1996). Ottawa. Human Resources Development Canada

Verbal Communication Workshop

Agency name (this was for an agency that worked with families)

Friday, March 21, 2002,

Introductions

What do you know about literacy?

How is literacy connected with verbal communication?

Video - Literacy Matters

Consensus Exercise

Clear verbal communication strategies

Local Help

- Literacy Help Line 1-800-767-3231
Literacy Alberta Fact Sheets website
Adult Literacy www.literacy-alberta.ca
- Literacy and Parenting Skills 410-1501
(LAPS) lmackenzie@bowvalleycollege.ca
Bow Valley College ecairns@bowvalleycollege.ca
- Individual Tutoring 410-1525
Bow Valley College cmccullough@bowvalleycollege.ca

Information

Canada Information Office (2000). *Issues and Challenges in Communicating with Less Literate Canadians*.

Connecting Literacy to Community

Formative Review

Name of Participating Agency:

Date:

1. What steps has your Agency taken to implement your short-term goals or strategies?

2. What do you see as outcomes from these?

3. What difficulties are you experiencing incorporating the short-term goals into your Agency's professional practice?

Literacy Specialist Comments:

Plain Language (notes for presentation and workshop)

What is Plain Language?

Questions: What do you think Plain Language is?

Why do we use such complicated language? (professional jargon, exclusive, to sound smart)

Plain Language

- is an approach to communication
- is an attitude toward readers
- delivers a message
- is a process
- is not simple language or condescending

Benefits of Plain Language

Question: Why do you think it is important to use plain language?

Plain Language

- reaches people who can not read well or who don't have time to read well
- helps all readers understand information
- avoids misunderstandings and errors

saves time, because it gets the job done well the first time.

(Adapted from Bow Valley College. (1997). Plain Language Writing Workshop at the Victoria Learning and Technology Centre. Calgary, Alberta)

How to write in Plain Language

1. Consider the reader

- Who is the document for?
- Why are you writing it?
- What do you want the reader to do?
- Be aware of cultural and language factors, and social and economic barriers

2. Organize information logically

- Organize the content so the most important information is first
- Present information in a logical order that is easy to understand
- One idea per paragraph
- Consistent presentation of the information

3. Write simply

- Uses clear and effective sentences, try to use less than 25 words per sentence
- Use familiar, everyday words
- Subject-verb-object
- Speak directly to the reader, use person to person: “I” and “you”
- Choose one way to describe something and be consistent

4. Concise words and phrases

- Avoid redundant words such as absolutely essential – just use essential
- Define jargon and difficult words
- Use acronyms with care, and spell them out

5. Layout and design

- White space should be at least 20% per page
- Minimum font size is 12 point
- Use only one or two fonts (text and title)
- Use relevant graphics and photos
- Use vertical lists, bold, and bullets carefully
- Avoid watermarks and light font on dark background
- Left justification
- Avoid words and sentences all in uppercase

(Adapted from Bow Valley College. (1997). Plain Language Writing Workshop at the Victoria Learning and Technology Centre. Calgary, Alberta)

The Customizing Process

Customizing is an approach to workshop design that seriously considers ownership, responsibility and intended outcome.

Planning	Facilitating	Follow Up
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The path toward the workshop can vary with each agency or group, it may be short or very long - A face to face meeting to start planning is most effective, ask about: - The work of the agency – who are their clients and what are their main issues. Show the link to literacy - How staff like to learn - When and how many staff will attend (on work time or lunch time) - Key message about the outcome of the workshop: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve client/customer services as staff will know more about literacy and will be more sensitive to literacy issues - Identified literacy friendly practices already in place and generate strategies to strengthen them - Offer written information (ie. a general workshop outline) - Offer to do a short presentation on literacy and what a workshop could look like for their staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be self sufficient with supplies - Always bring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Helpline bookmarks - Business cards, project/ program brochure - Gifts/freebies (used books for waiting rooms, family literacy day posters, English Express, etc.) - The first five minutes – be ready to change your plans - Introductions - Walk through package - Warm up activity (quiz or reading) - Large group discussion “What do you know about literacy?” - Video: Literacy Matters - Lit Audit-Awareness and Sensitivity consensus exercise (small groups) - Strategies building exercise (small groups) - Closure: Referral to literacy program, invite volunteers; summarize achievements of group; state follow up/what next if applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Timing is important, but does not always mean immediately after the workshop, be aware of the organization’s pace - Thank you via phone or email - Follow up might include providing information, writing workshop report, and/or planning next steps - Reflective documentation for your records - Connecting at other community meetings and events
	-	

November 6, 2002

Agency name
Address
Pincher Creek, AB.

Dear _____:

Connecting Literacy to Community is a Bow Valley College project funded in partnership with the National Literacy Secretariat. One of the goals of this project is to help communities better serve clients who may have difficulty accessing service in the community due to literacy issues. This project benefits communities by:

- ◆ Helping your organization to create a literacy friendly environment with literacy programming
- ◆ Assisting the client to better access your services

To meet these objectives the *Connecting Literacy to Community* project and Bow Valley College would like to form a partnership with the (agency or program name) between October 2002 and March 2003. Bow Valley College and your community Literacy Specialist, Karen Appleby, agree to:

- ◆ Provide workshops to assist with literacy needs
- ◆ Assist users of the program with literacy needs

The _____ (agency or program name) agrees to:

- ◆ Provide space for the workshops
- ◆ Inform users of the program of the times of the workshops

Another objective of the project is to help (agency or program name) build the capacity to continue to provide a service similar to the one described above after the project ends in June 2003. To accomplish this the partnership will:

- ◆ Provide a volunteer through the (agency or program name) to attend workshops during January 2003
- ◆ Provide a volunteer through the (agency or program name) to take over duties of the Literacy Specialist in March 2003

Thank you for your partnership with the *Connecting Literacy to Community* project and Bow Valley College.

Sincerely,

Robin Houston-Knopff
Coordinator, Community Programs

Karen Appleby, Literacy Specialist _____ Date: _____
(name and agency) _____ Date: _____

References

Connecting Literacy to Community project reports

- Final Project Report
- Building Community Capacity: Literacy Audits and Strategic Planning
- Literacy Specialists: Competencies and Practices
- Literacy Specialists: Prior Knowledge and Experience

Resources and Tools

Literacy Alberta, 302 - 1300 8th Street SW, Calgary, AB. T2R 1B7

Phone: 403-410-6990, www.literacy-alberta.ca

(Note: Literacy Alberta was formed on April 1, 2003, when Literacy Coordinators of Alberta (LCA) and Alberta Association for Adult Literacy (AAAL) officially amalgamated)

- The Literacy Audit Kit (published by AAAL)
- Literacy Fact sheets
- Literacy Tip sheet
- Literacy Help Line of Alberta
- Video: *Learning for Life* (published by LCA)

Alberta Learning, English Express, Box #38028, Capilano, Edmonton, AB
T6A 3Y3

Phone: 1-877-440-3722, subscriptions@englishexpress.ca

- English Express newspaper

Federated Women's Institute of Canada, box 209, 359 Blue Lake Rd. St George,
Ont. N0E 1N0.

Phone: 519-448-3873, fwic@bellnet.ca

- Video: *Literacy: The Hidden Problem* (Consumer Association of Canada. 1998)

Movement for Canadian Literacy, 180 Metcalfe St., Suite 300. Ottawa,
ON. K2P 1P5

Phone: 613-563-2464

<http://www.literacy.ca/litand/litan.htm>

- Literacy Fact Sheets

Literature

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- Hayden, R. & Sanders, M. (1998). Community Service Providers as Literacy Facilitators: A Pilot Project. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 44, 135-148. Available at http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/pat/135_148/page135.htm
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Vasily, L. and Steele, V. (1996) *Perspectives on a Community Development Approach to Adult Literacy Education in New York State*. New York. Cornell University. Available at <http://www/litcommunity.org/article4.html>