



EST. 1899

**United for Literacy**  
**Littératie Ensemble**



# Adult Literacy Skills for Success

National Report

2022



# Literacy is...

## ...transformational

It changes lives, families, and communities. It feeds growth, unleashes potential, and empowers people with the capability and confidence they need to realize their goals.

## ...urgent

Everyone can learn. But not everyone can access the help they need. Canada's literacy divide widens daily because so many people and communities lack adequate literacy support.

## ...dynamic

Society demands increasingly sophisticated understanding of written language to fully participate in daily life.

## ...vital

to Canada's long-term success. Solving systemic literacy challenges is key to advancing social equity and prosperity across our country.

## ...achievable

Bridging the literacy gap is something we can do. It's our most effective, achievable tool for change. Results are demonstrable at personal and systemic levels.

**LITERACY CHANGES EVERYTHING.**

# LITERACY IN CANADA

Literacy is more than the ability to read and write. It's the ability to understand and use a wide range of materials to engage fully in activities and opportunities at home, at work, and in the community. Literacy enables people to meet their goals and succeed in today's world.

According to Statistics Canada, 49% of the adult population scored below high-school literacy levels; 17% scored in the lowest level. [1] Newcomer, Indigenous, and low-income populations are disproportionately challenged by low literacy. These groups have also been more impacted by the learning, employment, and financial crises that resulted from the pandemic.



Improving literacy improves people's lives—research shows that people in Canada with higher levels of literacy, numeracy, digital technology, and problem-solving skills enjoy a better quality of life and stronger connections with their environments.

***“When I started with this group, I felt shame speaking English, and I was worried I made mistakes with words and grammar. Every time we study vocabulary, and they help me when I go to the bank or supermarket, and my English is better. Now I'm comfortable to ask them to speak slowly and repeat themselves.”***

United for Literacy Learner, REACH Multicultural Family Centre, British Columbia

# SKILLS FOR SUCCESS

Essential Skills, also understood as Basic Skills, are the skills that help people learn, work, and participate in the community.

The **nine Skills for Success** provide the foundation for learning all other skills and help people prepare for employment, workplace accomplishment, and the pursuit of further training and education.

## READING



The ability to find, understand, and use information presented through words, symbols, and images.

## COMMUNICATION



The ability to receive, understand, consider, and share information and ideas through speaking, listening, and interacting with others.

## WRITING



The ability to share information using written words, symbols, and images.

## NUMERACY



The ability to find, understand, use, and report mathematical information presented through words, numbers, symbols, and graphics.

## DIGITAL SKILLS



The ability to use digital technology and tools to find, manage, apply, create, and share information and content.

## PROBLEM SOLVING



The ability to identify, analyze, propose solutions, and make decisions to address issues, monitor success, and learn.

## COLLABORATION



The ability to contribute and support others to achieve a common goal.

## ADAPTABILITY



The ability to achieve or adjust goals and behaviours when expected or unexpected change occurs by planning, staying focused, persisting, and overcoming setbacks.

## CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION



The ability to imagine, develop, express, encourage, and apply ideas in ways that are novel, unexpected, or that challenge existing methods and norms.

# LITERACY CHANGES EVERYTHING

People with strong literacy skills are more likely to:

- Report higher levels of **resilience and self-esteem**.
- Be in **better health**. Literacy is a strong predictor of health. [2]
  - Adults with higher literacy are better equipped to follow medication instructions, comply with medical direction, and observe health and safety measures in the workplace.
- Find and maintain **employment**. People with high literacy skills enjoy a **higher earning potential** and are more likely to be **engaged and productive at work**.
  - Canadians who struggle with literacy are more than twice as likely to experience unemployment than those with higher levels. [3]
- Be **more civically engaged**. People who have a higher level of education (who also tend to have strong literacy skills) are much more likely to be civically engaged, and they are better able to **advocate for themselves and their communities**. [4]

*I used to tell people that I don't speak English. Now I try to listen, and I will say 'Pardon me?' and try to understand what they say.*

United for Literacy Learner,  
Nunavut

*In 2018, we learned how to vote. We had to figure out what riding we were in. We had to google the candidates and their platforms. We looked up who the Prime Minister of Canada is, and who was President of the United States. We ended up writing a letter to our M.P.*

United for Literacy Learner, Ontario

At the **national level**, investing in literacy will create:

- A **stronger economy**: A more adaptable and productive workforce improves the economy. Research suggests that a **one per cent increase in literacy can produce a three per cent increase in the gross domestic product (GDP)**. [5] [6]
- **Improved democracy**: Higher literacy increases Canadians' likelihood to identify the political issues that are most important to them and vote. [7]

*In this class I am learning about math, reading, writing and spelling. I ask questions about what I'm reading. We read stories and practice the difficult words... We also did budgeting, where we learned how to keep track of your money. We have also learned basic computer skills like how to use Zoom and the Whiteboard.*

United for Literacy Learner, Ontario

# OUR PROGRAMS

United for Literacy is a national charitable literacy organization. We believe that literacy is a right. We work with volunteers and community partners across Canada to help people build the skills and confidence they need to reach their potential.

We follow the Student-Centered Individualized Learning philosophy, meaning that people are active in deciding what they want to learn. In 2022, **more than 2,500 adults participated in one of our 85 Literacy and Basic Skills programs** across Canada.



On their self-determined goals, all our learners said that our program helped them progress (or achieve) their learning goals and taught them skills that will help them achieve their life goal(s).

Program participants work to increase their essential skills, complete their high school education, find sustainable employment, enter post-secondary education, and engage more in their communities. Using adult-learning principles, United for Literacy instructors and tutors provide a supportive environment that helps participants build their foundational skills and confidence to become self-directed, lifelong learners.

We offer one-to-one tutoring and small group learning environments, both online and in person. Our learner-centered programs are tailored to individual learners' skills, interests, experience, culture, and goals.

## **Community and Classroom-Based Programs**

These programs are designed to help older youth and adults improve their foundational literacy skills and build their confidence as learners to help them reach their full potential. These programs are offered in community spaces such as libraries, colleges, community organizations, Indigenous training organizations, social service and employment agencies, correctional facilities, and select United for Literacy offices.

## **Workplace and Workforce Development Programs**

Workplace programs are offered in direct partnership with employers, normally at the job site during working hours, facilitating accessibility for learners and employer engagement. Workforce development programs are delivered almost exclusively in partner locations by dedicated Instructor-Coordination who work with learners while managing program partnerships. A major focus of these programs is to prepare people from communities that are underrepresented in the labour market to reengage in education, training, and employment opportunities.

# OUR IMPACT

United for Literacy knows that bridging the literacy gap is something we can do. Our programs are an effective, practical way to change lives, and we work hard to document those changes at personal and program-wide levels. We do this by surveying learners, volunteers, and partners. We also ask people to tell us in their own words how our programs have made a difference for them.

Evaluating the impact of our adult programs is an important part of program design and planning. To better understand the outcomes of our programs in 2022, we surveyed our learners. Here's what we heard:

- Most of our adult learners **improved their reading (99%), writing (95%), or math (96%)** skills after participating in our programs.
- **98%** of our adult learners reported **improvements in their document use** (e.g., ability to complete surveys, forms, surveys, job applications, etc.).
- **96%** of our adult learners said their **use of technology improved** after participating in our programs.

“

***It was great to have...a tutor! He helped me a lot! I am working towards passing an exam, so I have to learn how to read passages and answer questions. I have some trouble with comprehension. It is challenging for me. [My tutor] helps me with this. He is patient and always on time. When I tell him my needs, he listens and helps me.***

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United for Literacy Learner, Québec

“

***I am so grateful to have M.'s (United for Literacy volunteer) English classes. I have made a lot of progress and continue to do so, and it is so important to speak English in Canada!***

***M. is a competent, respectful and deeply human teacher. I can't thank her enough.***

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United for Literacy Learner, Manitoba

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***I've been in Canada for 9 years and this program is so hopeful for me. Every day we learn something new. It's not enough to sit at home and study, having the conversation helps us learn. The program has helped me with everything, my communication skills, when we take transit, it helped me to be in my community and learn more about what goes on around us. Wherever I go I practice what we've studied.***

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United for Literacy Learner, British Columbia

# REFERENCES

1 Statistics Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Council of Ministers of Education. "Skills in Canada – First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)." 2013.

2 World Health Organization. "Health Literacy, the Solid Facts." 2013.

3 Statistics Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, and Council of Ministers of Education. "Skills in Canada – First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)." 2013.

4 Public Health Agency of Canada. "The Health and Social Dimensions of Adult Skills in Canada: Findings from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)." 2017.

5 Schwerdt, G., Wiederhold, S., & Murray, T. S. "Literacy and Growth: New Evidence from PIAAC." 2018.

6 ABC Life Literacy Canada. "1 in 6 cannot pass basic literacy tests: The economic impact of Canadians' literacy skills." 2022.

7 Public Health Agency of Canada. "The Health and Social Dimensions of Adult Skills in Canada: Findings from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)." 2017.



# Learning together. Learning for all.



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