



L I T E R A C Y F A C T S

Literacy, The Poor Cousin?

ArrowMight Canada
99 Fifth Avenue, Suite 22/23
Ottawa, Ontario
K1S 5K4 Canada
www.arrowmightht.ca
T: 613 232-0901
F: 613 232-8249

A report commissioned by the Movement for Canadian Literacy has found literacy funding has been intermittent at best and inadequate to maintain quality teaching staff with Community Providers' experiencing a 30% plus staffing turnover across Canada. The heavy reliance on voluntary Tutors helps cement the 'poor cousin' role of literacy provision in Canada.

Relevant Question that should be asked is: How would elementary schools and colleges fare if they had to operate with volunteer teachers, with inadequate training, curriculum and resources?

The Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) 2009 Report says Providers have to spend too much time on proposal writing and accounting to Government funders when 90% of Adults with low literacy skills do not benefit from access to scarce training dollars or support for their unfortunate plight.

The Report states three interdependent factors highlight:

1. Diminishing access to funding and resources
2. Declining capacity
3. Increasing and unsatisfied demand are converging in a 'perfect storm' brought on by an economy under stress

Several respondents in a survey across literacy provision in Canada emphasized the need of a strategic approach to facilitate the development of a Pan Canadian literacy strategy.

Prepare a clear business case for literacy and essential skills funding requirements.

Literacy practitioners acknowledge literacy levels have not changed over many years so something is not working. Respondents were in agreement that neither provincial or territorial governments have really invested in the capacity of the literacy movement to meet the current demand for quality provision of literacy and essential skills.

Respondents universally claimed there needed to be more investment into programming to revitalize the literacy field and eliminate gaps in program coverage, services, as well as, funding. “We cannot afford to continue to provide programs a mile wide and an inch thick.”

Many literacy providers claimed there appeared to be ‘no vision,’ ‘no plan’ about what to do from their provinces or territories.

The suggestion MCL could provide a gathering place for solutions and ideas to build capacity and be an advocate for change. To seek ways to encourage funding support from provinces and territories to radically change for the better the Canadian Literacy landscape to become the ‘The Vibrant Cousin’ rather than the poor cousin.

ArrowMight Canada, as a private sector initiative, has developed the ArrowMight Program as a best-practice model of a ‘Pan-Canadian approach to Literacy and Essential Skills’

Let’s be serious, Canadians know you can’t cure a deep-seated ulcer with one light cream dressing. Thirty hours free tuition cannot solve literacy deficits at Levels 1 and 2 when 600 - 800 hours of study time are required. Furthermore, the bar is rising every year as new technologies and new skills are required by employers to compete in business and manufacturing in a competitive global economy. Canada has the manpower –who lack the skills, but it also has the resource that can provide those skills. Let’s hope they can come together soon.

DR. RONGO H. WETERE, ONZM, FNZIM

Managing Director, ArrowMight Canada

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