



Backgrounder About Literacy Council York-Simcoe

In a small office in an ordinary commercial mall in east Newmarket, lives are being changed. Open the door to the office of Literacy Council York-Simcoe. Come on in. Friendly staff greet you. Listen to the eagerness of learners. Hear the patient, encouraging voices of tutors. The mood is one of friendly, relaxed instruction. But make no mistake. Significant progress in learning is being made. And one day, a better job, a better education, a better life will result. That's what this place is all about.

Literacy Council York-Simcoe (LCYS) is a registered non-profit charitable organization in the York-Simcoe Region of Ontario. It was founded in 1984 to improve the reading, writing and math skills of local adults no longer in school. LCYS provides free, flexible, confidential and individualized literacy training programs that are adapted to the specific needs of students. The literacy/employment upgrading programs offered are: one-to-one tutoring, small group instruction and computer-assisted upgrading. LCYS also offers an inexpensive basic computer training program and a Ready for Work soft skills training program to the entire community.

Volunteers are the backbone of LCYS. They provide support on the Board of Directors, committees, fundraising, tutoring, office help, training and special events. Volunteer tutors are trained in adult learning principles and teaching strategies to prepare them for a rewarding and challenging experience working with adult students.

LCYS serves the communities of Aurora, Bradford-West Gwillimbury, East Gwillimbury, Newmarket, and surrounding areas. Students attend the program on a voluntary basis. They are referred to LCYS through family and friends, as well as a variety of community agencies, employers and other organizations such as: Seneca College, York Region and Simcoe County School Boards, Ontario Works, Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, and a variety of other community agencies. LCYS is a member of many literacy and community based organizations in order to keep abreast of current issues and meet the literacy needs of the community.

LCYS is governed by a min of 10 member Board of Directors and employs three full-time and three part-time and a contracted staff member. The hours of operation are Monday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Friday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. The office is closed between Christmas and New Years and is closed on Fridays in July and August.

LCYS strongly believes a blend of real life applications and skill-building exercises is the most effective method for the development and delivery of literacy upgrading programs. It includes a phonics-based approach, which uses an "each one-teach one" philosophy. Dr. Frank C. Laubach, who pioneered this approach in 1930, believed literacy empowers people to improve and enrich their lives.

LCYS continues to establish and maintain communication with the public, community agencies, employers and other literacy organizations in order to promote our program in York-Simcoe.

LCYS is funded by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities, the United Way of York Region, the Trillium Foundation, The Region of York, and a number of corporations and foundations. LCYS is active in fundraising though charity bingo and other community fundraising initiative to ensure continuation of the organization and its success.

About Literacy

Literacy means different things to different people. For some, literacy means being able to function at work. For others, literacy is simply the ability to read directions on a medicine bottle. In a fast-paced world where information is often communicated through the written word, it may be difficult to believe many people don't have the skills necessary to read and write well enough to apply for a job, write a grocery list or read their children a bedtime story.

We know that 42% of Canadians lack the reading skills they need to function in today's knowledge-based economy. Adult problem-solving skills are below acceptable levels in 68.5% of our population, and 50% of Canadians need training to learn basic mathematics skills (Adult Literacy and Skills Survey 2003).

Literacy is strongly associated with life changes and well-being. Many people struggling with low literacy have issues with health, economics, employment stability, criminal activity, socialization and communication. Low literacy poses a long-term challenge to our health care system and defies easy resolution. The higher a nation's literacy skills, the more likely its population has healthier habits and lifestyles. Those with higher literacy skills tend to be more involved citizens who participate in their communities.

Literacy is also linked to economic success. Literacy levels determine the kind of jobs people find, the salaries they make and their ability to upgrade their work skills. Literacy also contributes to society's overall economic and social performance. The National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO) found that people with literacy problems earn two-thirds the income of other adults. They are twice as likely to be unemployed and receiving social assistance. Adults with low literacy skills usually have the lowest-paying, least-secure positions.

Adult students also experience many barriers to acquiring literacy skills or taking advantage of educational opportunities. According to studies done by Correctional Services of Canada, approximately 65% of people entering the prison system for the first time are not functionally literate. Those who participate in a rehabilitation program that includes a literacy-upgrading component, show a 50% reduction in re-arrests.

Low literacy is an intergenerational problem. A child's progress in school is clearly related to his or her parents' literacy. Children raised in a literate household are likely to enter Grade 1 with several thousands of hours of critical, one-to-one pre-reading experiences behind them. In contrast, children raised in low literate homes enter school without being reading ready. In order for parents to be effective role models for their children, they require developed literacy skills.

Literacy Council York-Simcoe has been changing lives for 25 years. The results of these changes affect the individuals, their families, and their communities