



2026-2027

**ELGIN, OXFORD
AND MIDDLESEX
COUNTY**

**LITERACY
SERVICE
PLAN**

This Literacy Service Plan (LSP) was developed for the Ministry of Immigration, Labour, Training and Skills Development. Literacy Services Plans are completed annually by regional networks and are used to identify the network's catchment area's literacy needs and demand for services based on demographics, labour market information, and local intelligence.

Thank you to all of the Get SET (Skills, Education and Training) service providers and community partners who engaged in the Literacy Service Planning process, including:

- Collège Boréal
- Contact North
- Deafblind Community Services (CNIB)
- Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board,
- Employment and Training Consultants serving programs in Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties
- Fanshawe College London Downtown Campus
- Fanshawe College St. Thomas/Elgin regional campus
- Fanshawe College Woodstock/Oxford Regional Campus
- Gateway (Thames Valley District School Board)
- Haldimand-Norfolk-London Learning Centres
- Hutton House
- London Regional Employment Services
- Nokee Kwe
- Social Services/OW
- St. Patrick Adult and Continuing Education (London District Catholic School Board)
- Tillsonburg and District Multi-Service Centre
- YWCA St. Thomas Elgin

The views expressed in this publication are those of Literacy Link South Central and its programs, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province of Ontario.

This Employment Ontario project is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario.

Contents

Section 1: Community and Learner Context	4
Section 2: Literacy System Capacity and Service Gaps	8
Current strengths of Get SET service delivery	8
Current Get SET service delivery gaps	9
Duplication or overlap in services	11
Section 3: Learner Profile and Focus	13
Section 4: Collaboration and Coordination	17
Section 5: Priorities and Strategic Planning	21
Community Outreach & Awareness	21
Service Integration & Coordination	21
Short-Term Programming & Employer Connections	22
Strengthening Support for Specific Learner Groups.....	22
Additional priorities	23
Local Planning.....	23
Local Innovations	26
Potential stabilization and growth.....	29
Section 6: Reflections and Evaluation.....	31

Section 1: Community and Learner Context

The region is experiencing population growth, particularly in younger (under 24) and older (55+) age groups, which contrasts with the provincial average. We are seeing a rapidly expanding newcomer population, many of whom require language and skills training to integrate into the workforce. Job growth is particularly noted in agriculture and high-tech manufacturing, where,



for example, Millwright job postings are up 175% in the Elgin region. Key labor market trends also show growing demand for healthcare, education, skilled trades, and personal service workers, as well as a need for increased technical skills across all employment sectors.

Unemployment is rising faster than job growth however, and the region faces higher-than-average unemployment. This challenge is exacerbated in the city of London which has some of the highest poverty rates in Southwestern Ontario. As low-income households in the region increase, food insecurity has become a serious issue, impacting nearly 1 in 3 households, a rate above the provincial average. Residents in rural areas are additionally impacted by limited access to transportation and childcare, hindering their ability to access job opportunities. Impacted by often unreliable internet access, remote work (and attending online programming) are also a challenge.

The largest populations in the region facing barriers to employment and training are:

- Newcomers
- Youth (15-24)
- Older Adults (55+)
- Persons with Disabilities
- Rural Residents and Low-Income Households
- Indigenous Populations

The demand for Get SET services has continued to increase due to several factors:

1. Many **newcomers** are seeking help with communication skills, understanding credentialization, and navigating Canadian workplace culture. Skills upgrading programs are in demand to support this preparation.
2. Increasingly, **older adults** are returning to education to upskill or change careers, sometimes due to health issues or a need to transition out of more physically demanding jobs. Digital literacy and foundational skills training are key areas of focus for these learners.
3. **Youth** in the region are facing difficulty entering the job market due to a lack of work experience and soft skills. Programs are increasingly focusing on work readiness, preparing youth entry-level job opportunities, including general labour opportunities that may lead to apprenticeship. Additionally, youth impacted by pandemic shutdowns are now utilizing Get SET programs to fill in gaps in their secondary-level learning.
4. More **learners with disabilities** are seeking Get SET services, but require tailored support due to educational gaps, health-related challenges, and transportation challenges. Mental health supports are increasingly required as well.
5. While specific trends are not as pronounced, **Indigenous communities** face unique barriers related to employment and training, including cultural barriers, geographic isolation, and limited access to tailored services.

“We are seeing an increase in young adults who are just out of high school who identify as neuro diverse. This group tends to exhibit anxiety to new tasks and to change. We are using a variety of self-advocacy exercises with this group to help them build their confidence.”

Get SET program staff

Get SET services are increasingly focusing on job-specific skills, such as digital literacy, basic communication, and workplace skills, to prepare learners for the evolving job market. Many learners now view Get SET as a stepping stone to job readiness.

Several emerging needs and trends are influencing the demand for Get SET services:

1. **Focus on employment outcomes:**

Many Get SET learners are enrolling with the goal of finding work. Programs are shifting to emphasize job-specific skills, workplace communication, and sector-specific training, particularly in high-demand fields like healthcare, construction, and the skilled trades.



2. **Digital literacy:** As digital skills have become essential in the workforce, there is growing demand for digital literacy training. It has become a key factor driving learners to Get SET programs, many of whom are seeking short-term upgrading to support them with both personal tasks and job preparation.

“We are seeing an increased demand for educational supports among those who do not qualify for ESL classes and/or those whose levels do not meet our local ESL class specifications. I have an increasing number of learners in my class who are focused on improving their English language skills. These particular learners tend to require a higher level of support in class to make progress when compared to other learners.”

Get SET program staff

3. **Support for newcomers:** With high waitlists for ESL programs, reductions in funding for LINC programs, and the removal of a formal CLB level for Get SET eligibility, a significant influx of newcomers are entering our programs.

4. **Youth unemployment:** With youth unemployment high, Get SET programs are increasingly attracting younger learners focused on career readiness and apprenticeships. The demand for Get SET programs to be aware of hiring needs in their local communities has increased.

5. **Collaboration with Employment Services:** As learners increasingly upgrade in preparation for employment, Get SET programs are strengthening and maintaining relationships with employment services and community organizations to build clear pathways from training to employment.

To better meet the growing demand and address emerging needs, we would recommend the following:

- Given the growing demand for **newcomer service**, particularly for those at higher CLB levels, additional funding is needed to expand Get SET programming to support newcomers effectively.
- Increasing access to **flexible learning options** such as online programming, self-paced learning, and hybrid models, particularly for older adults and working learners who need flexibility in their schedules.
- Providing funding for Get SET programs to **work with local employers** to create workplace-based training programs, including on-site training and job-specific skills workshops. Job-specific training, particularly in high-demand sectors such as healthcare, construction, and technology, can help Get SET programs prepare learners for the evolving job market.
- Expand **outreach efforts** to rural residents, low-income households, and marginalized groups to ensure equitable access to Get SET services, addressing barriers such as transportation, childcare, and internet access. Increasing investments in digital tools and devices to support learners without access to home internet or computers would be particularly valuable.



Section 2: Literacy System Capacity and Service Gaps

Current strengths of Get SET service delivery

Get SET programs in the Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford region prioritize flexibility, individualized support, and inclusivity to meet the diverse needs of learners. Our programs offer varied schedules (day/evening, online, in-person, hybrid) to accommodate learners with work or family commitments. Tailored approaches with individualized instruction and small class sizes at in-person programs ensure learners build an in-class community and have ongoing access to one-on-one support. Get SET programs are designed to support learners with a variety of current skills and long-term goals, offering personalized curricula that focuses on individual needs. This, combined with self-paced learning allows students to progress at their own rate. This learner-centered philosophy is particularly important for adult learners who may have had a long break from education, or who have experienced educational trauma in the past.

While there are many examples of flexible, learner-centred programming in the region, we will highlight two. Nokee Kwe currently lacks space for Indigenous drop-in programming, so has adapted a teaching model where they meet urban Indigenous learners one-on-one at a variety of community locations, providing a more tailored experience for a limited number of participants. The London Learning Centre also delivers programming in community locations, offering tutoring at three different library locations.

Based on learner need, a range of wraparound services such as employment support, admission advising, and accessibility assistance are offered by Get SET programs to help learners both inside and outside the classroom. The region has established effective referral processes that connect learners with appropriate services, reducing barriers to access. Strong partnerships with local organizations, including Ontario Works (OW) and Community Living facilitate access to necessary resources. The community-based approach connects the Get SET program to underserved groups, such as rural and Indigenous populations, ensuring an inclusive learning environment. Get SET providers also collaborate with each other, improving cross-program accessibility. Several short-term, targeted programs have been developed to meet the needs of employment-focused learners and vulnerable groups, though funding limitations may impact future availability.

These strengths make Get SET programs in the region responsive, adaptable, and effective, even amid increasing funding challenges.

Current Get SET service delivery gaps

While service delivery gaps exist across the region, they vary from community to community, particularly between rural and urban environments. Several key challenges include:

Additional barriers in rural areas: Within the region, rural learners face major challenges due to limited transportation and unreliable internet access. While Get SET providers offer flexible and remote learning options, some are also addressing this gap by providing learners with gas or taxi subsidies, exploring community-based delivery (ex. teaching digital literacy in seniors' centres), or establishing temporary classrooms at rural community partner locations.

Lack of available English as a Second Language (ESL) or Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs: Some areas, including most rural areas and urban centres like Tillsonburg, lack ESL services altogether. Where they are available they often have lengthy waitlists, creating barriers for newcomers needing English language support. There is also a significant shortage of occupational and sector-specific language training for newcomers and workers with lower language skills. Basic English literacy is offered through Laubach-based Get SET programs to help address this gap. More occupational language programs, or an expansion of resources to allow for additional language focused Get SET instruction, are needed to help newcomers integrate into the workforce and improve workplace communication and safety.

“One key gap in Get SET is the lack of occupational language training for newcomers (CLB 5 and lower). Enhancing workplace-specific language education is crucial to ensure safety, enhance communication, and facilitate successful integration into the workforce. These challenges cannot be addressed without any additional funding or structured partnerships.”

Get SET program staff

Limited or reduced service due to funding: High-demand programs like the Skills Training and Upgrading Get SET program in St. Thomas face waitlists because long-term learners occupy most seats. Limited funding restricts staffing, reduces morale, and restricts program expansion. Programs are considering afternoon and drop-in classes to increase access, but ongoing funding challenges limit the ability to scale services.

The digital divide: Many learners lack digital competency and struggle to meet workplace expectations, and are often without access to devices or tech support. To address this challenge, Get SET programs integrate basic digital skills training, provide access to devices where possible, and offer one-on-one support for learners using digital tools. The need for digital skills training continues to grow across the region, and additional programming would help fill this gap.

Complex learner needs: Learners dealing with mental health challenges, disabilities, or other life barriers encounter difficulty participating consistently. Get SET providers use trauma-informed teaching and connect learners to local support services, though resources for those with significant needs remain limited.

Youth engagement: While we are seeing an increased demand, most youth ages 15–24 often do not see Get SET programs as relevant or are unaware of them, despite high local youth unemployment and need for job-readiness skills. Stronger collaboration with schools, youth employment programs, and apprenticeship pathways are being developed by Get SET programs to help youth access training earlier and transition more smoothly into the workforce.

“Few people have heard that Get SET offers free non-credit training. We have heard over the years that people wished they learned about the program earlier. Even community representatives admit that they do not know much about how Get SET can support clients.”

Get SET program staff

Program awareness: The understanding of Get SET programming continues to be an issue. Many community members and referral partners are unaware of Get SET services or misunderstand what they offer. To overcome this, programs have been doing outreach to partners, community sites like unions or senior’s centres, and employers - but have little time and no funding to support this outreach. Word-of-mouth referrals have consistently been effective, but increased marketing, outreach, and community engagement – including to underrepresented groups such as low German speakers, seniors, and rural residents – is needed.

With the LBS system rebranding to Get SET, now is absolutely the time for an investment in marketing and in system capacity to meet increased demand.

Duplication or overlap in services

In the past, there were instances where local programs overlapped with those offered through the local College, particularly in standalone topics. This overlap was identified and resolved through improved communication and coordination between providers. Currently, minimal or no duplication exists, as programs are generally sector-specific or tailored to different learner groups. Past overlap highlights the importance of ongoing coordination to avoid future redundancies.



External duplication exists, however. While sector-specific programming reduces overlap within the Get SET framework, some external organizations, such as Vision Loss Rehabilitation provide services that parallel Get SET offerings. Coordination with these organizations could help ensure services are complementary and that learners do not access similar services from multiple providers unnecessarily. There have also been challenges noted with organizations that have access to more well-resourced funding streams being funded to develop and deliver foundational upgrading to their clients/participants without the involvement of Get SET programs. Funding non-Get SET programs to develop and deliver this upgrading creates competition with programs offering the same service, particularly when these alternative programs provide access to job placements or participant stipends to encourage attendance.



While various community agencies serve different client groups, there is sometimes insufficient communication between service providers. This can result in learners accessing multiple services without a coordinated approach, leading to inefficiencies or unmet needs. Enhancing referral processes and information sharing between service providers would ensure learners are directed to the most appropriate resources. Specifically, Get SET programs, Employment Services, and settlement programs could collaborate more closely to provide seamless support, especially for those transitioning to the workforce. We continue to reach out to community agencies to inform them about Get SET services, and to invite them to participate in Literacy Service Planning.

2026-2027 Literacy Service Plan Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties

While funds for promotion and outreach are limited, Get SET programs do their best to share information about their services with their local communities. To reduce duplication of efforts, service providers could collaborate on a broader outreach and marketing initiative.

Joint promotion would help reach a broader audience without repeating efforts across organizations. Additionally, it would raise awareness of the range of programs available in the community. Programs serving the deafblind, Indigenous, and Francophone streams would benefit from individualized marketing tailored to the needs of their learners, however. For example, as Nokee Kwe establishes a new, permanent drop-in location, there will be a need for increased promotion and coordination with referral partners to rebuild and expand their programs.



Section 3: Learner Profile and Focus

In the Oxford, Elgin, Middlesex region, Get SET services primarily serve adults between the ages of 18 and 65, with a significant number of learners falling between 25 and 44 years old. More learners are female, though male participation is increasing. The majority of these learners have completed some or all of high school, with some having post-secondary credentials, but still needing to improve foundational reading, writing, numeracy, and digital literacy skills. A large proportion of learners are seeking to transition into employment, further education, or apprenticeships. Common “next step” goal paths include obtaining high school diplomas (or equivalent), pursuing post-secondary education, or improving employment prospects.

A closer look at local learner demographics:

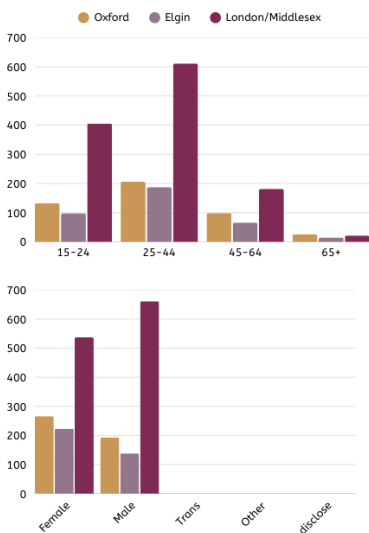
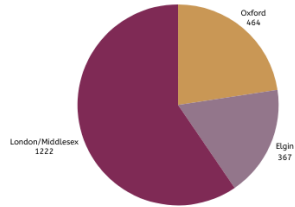
- **Age:** The largest age group in our region remained the 25 to 44 group, which grew in Elgin County but decreased in London/Middlesex and Oxford. London/Middlesex saw a 6.5% increase in learners aged 15-24 while Elgin saw a decrease of 15% in the same age group.
- **Gender:** In Oxford and Elgin Counties approximately 60% are female. In London/Middlesex there has been an increase in male learners, which now represent 55% of learners in Get SET programs.
- **Education:** This year both Middlesex and Elgin Counties saw a rise in learners with less than grade 9 and less than grade 12 education levels. The largest percentage of learners served in Oxford County had less than grade 12 or had completed Secondary education. 64% of learners across the region indicated a history of interrupted education.
- **Under-represented groups:** Elgin County served more than twice as many learners who identified as racialized, and despite serving fewer learners overall than the year before, Oxford County almost doubled the number of racialized learners they served. Elgin County and London/Middlesex both saw increases in Indigenous learners, compared to a drop provincially, which was also reflected in Oxford County.

2024-2025 Snapshot on Literacy: Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford

Source data: Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSM) for the 2024-2025 fiscal year, provided by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development.

1 Overall numbers: How many in-person learners did we serve in each region?

59.5% of learners were served in London and Middlesex County, 22.6% in Oxford County, and 17.9% in Elgin County.



2 What was the age and gender breakdown of our learners?

Trend spotting:

The 15-24 age group in our area is higher than the Provincial average (24%); London/Middlesex (33%), Oxford (29%), Elgin (27%). London/Middlesex has lower learners in the 45-64 age (15%) and 65+ (2%) than the rest of area, or Provincially (23% & 6%).

London/Middlesex is the only area serving more male than female clients.

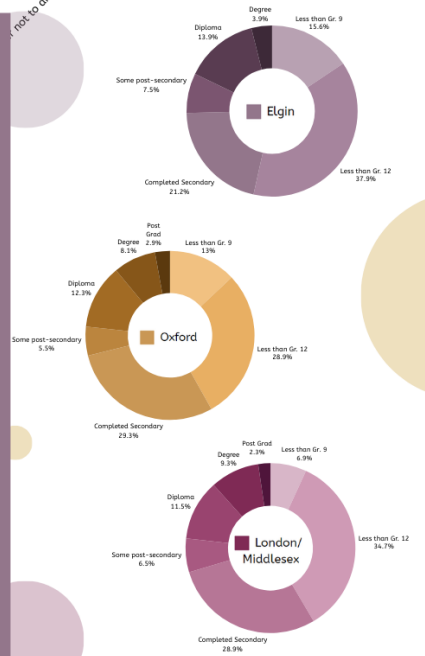
New categories were added in gender identity - Trans/Other.

3 What level of education did our learners have?

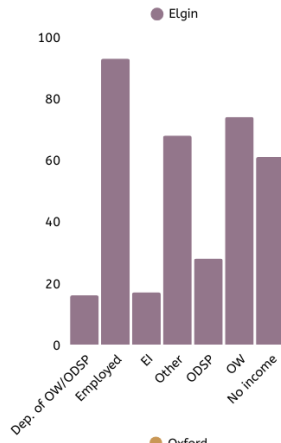
Trend Spotting:

While overall education levels are lower in our area compared to provincially, we also have higher learners in the 15-24 age group. This could account for lower numbers in completion levels of secondary school.

Both London/Middlesex and Oxford County served learners with a post-graduate degree, while Elgin County served none. The provincial average for post-graduate learners is 4%.



2024-2025 Snapshot on Literacy: Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford

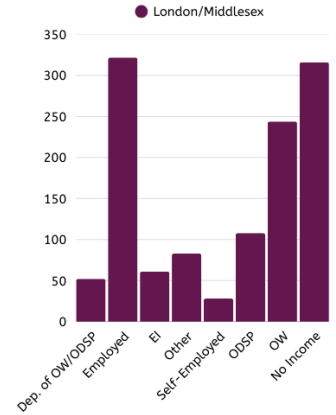
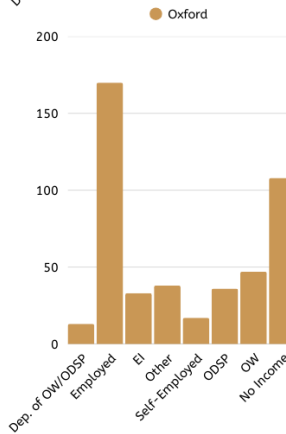


4 What was the employment status of our learners?

Trend spotting:

The largest source of income in our area was from employment, with Oxford (36.6%) above provincial (29.8%). London/Middlesex had more part-time employment.

Oxford (10%) has less people on OW compared to the area (20%) or province (17%).

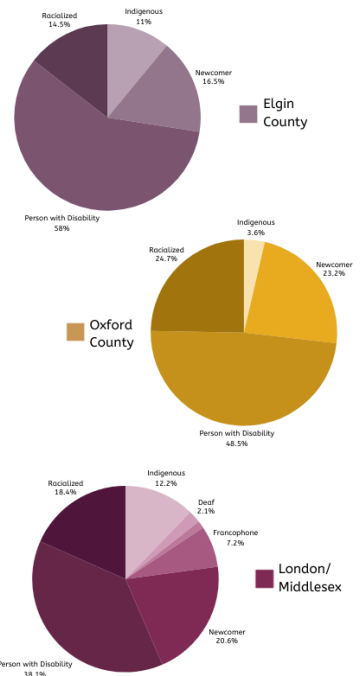


5 How did our learners self-identify?

Trend spotting:

931 (76%) of learners in London/Middlesex, 332 (72%) in Oxford County and 255 (69%) in Elgin County identified themselves as being part of a designated group.

Over half of self-identifying learners in Elgin County said they had a disability. All three of our regions serve a greater percent of learners who identify as having a disability than the provincial average (29%).



A large proportion of learners are seeking to transition into employment, further education, or apprenticeships. Common “next step” goal paths include obtaining high school diplomas (or equivalent), pursuing post-secondary education, or improving employment prospects.

Several populations could benefit from Get SET services but are currently underserved:

1. **Youth:** This group, particularly younger newcomers, struggle with mainstream high school and, if under 18, are not eligible for Get SET programs. Many have disengaged from high school due to previous negative educational experiences and will remain adrift until they are over 18 and find their way to adult education.

“We have Ukrainian refugees completing ESL that will be looking for next steps and are pursuing that community partnership.”

Get SET program staff

2. **Newcomers:** Those 18+ with very low language skills but without access to ESL/LINC could benefit from some Get SET services, particularly one-on-one tutoring programs. Additional support for practitioners related to English language learning would be useful if ESL programs remain waitlisted.

3. **People with learning disabilities:** Many people impacted by undiagnosed learning disabilities interpret themselves as being stupid or inherently bad at some subjects, so do not seek help from Get SET programs. While not all practitioners are trained in supporting LDs, the field as a whole has many resources to help both them, and their LD-impacted learners succeed.

4. **Rural Communities:** Learners in rural areas face challenges with transportation, internet access, and limited local support, hindering their ability to access Get SET services.

“The farming communities are large employers that have many newcomers hired that could benefit from Get SET.”

Get SET program staff

5. **Indigenous Communities:** While services are available, more outreach and tailored support could increase access for Indigenous learners, particularly those with interrupted education that requiring flexible, asynchronous learning.

Get SET programs in the region are highly adaptable to the diverse needs of their learners:

- Programs cater to learners who may not thrive in high-commitment, formal, classroom-based learning environments.
- Many programs offer a range of delivery options, including in-person, online, evening, or hybrid models to accommodate different schedules and learning preferences.
- Get SET services are tailored to individual learner needs, allowing for customized plans based on specific goals. This includes flexible pacing and goal setting.
- Programs continue to reach out to community organizations to provide wraparound and next-step support. For example, partnerships with agencies like LiUNA and Contact North help learners with job placement and further education.
- Learners requiring language support, credential recognition, or workplace integration receive focused assistance through partnerships with and referrals to ESL providers and settlement organizations.
- Get SET programs offer culturally relevant and flexible learning models tailored to the unique needs of Indigenous learners, often with asynchronous learning.
- For learners with disabilities, materials are adapted to meet visual and auditory needs, including large print, braille, and screen readers.
- In response to learner needs, some providers have introduced unique initiatives, such as therapy dog visits for emotional support and financial literacy programs for older adults. These activities help create a welcoming and supportive learning environment.
- Some Get SET programs have worked to arrange technology (ex. laptop loans) for learners who lack access.
- For those unable to attend in-person classes and who have access to reliable internet service and technology, online learning with continuous intake ensures accessible education.
- Local Get SET programs have shown flexibility in adjusting to external challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting to online learning and offering remote support to meet learners' needs.



Section 4: Collaboration and Coordination

Over the past year, a variety of coordination activities were implemented across the Elgin, Oxford and Middlesex County region to improve learner access to Get SET programs and enhance service delivery. These efforts focused on streamlining referral systems, expanding outreach, and fostering strong partnerships with community organizations and EO partners. Coordination activities include:



- Collaborative efforts with ES, OW, newcomer services, and community agencies led to the development of referral protocols and shared marketing materials, which streamlined client movement, enabling efficient referrals to Get SET programs.
- Regular planning sessions and case conferences with partners, such as ES, were held in some communities to discuss best practices, labor market needs, and learner supports. For example, ongoing collaboration at Goodwill Employment Services and Fanshawe College's Community Employment Services ensured potential learners were identified and supported in accessing Get SET upgrading.
- Across the region, outreach efforts were made to increase awareness of Get SET programs. Activities included outreach at the Tillsonburg Mall, social media summer events, career fairs, and initiatives such as Tech Connect, which targeted rural libraries and senior centers, increasing referrals from ES.
- Get SET partnered with LiUNA to offer a math booster program for pre-apprenticeship learners. Additionally, a partnership with Fanshawe College's Corporate Training Solutions provided essential skills support for pre-apprenticeship training.
- In one community, Lunch and Learn sessions were hosted with partners, updating them on Get SET services and identifying opportunities for improved coordination.



2026-2027 Literacy Service Plan Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties

- Get SET organized joint outreach events and workshops with settlement agencies, employment services, and other literacy providers, targeting newcomers, youth, and unemployed adults to improve access and support.
- Programs also welcomed representatives from local agencies into Get SET, allowing for collaboration and cross-sharing of information and resources.
- Training and information sessions were offered at community events, such as Lake Joe (an accessible camp serving the deafblind community).
- Collaboration with agencies like LUSO and the Cross-Cultural Learner Centre facilitated effective cross-referrals and the exploration of new workshop opportunities for newcomers.
- Public education sessions informed other agencies and staff about Get SET services, and in one community an easy-to-use online referral link was created to streamline referrals.

“The school applied for therapy dog visits from St. John Ambulance. Two therapy dogs (a labrador and a chihuahua) were in our Open Learning Environment on the first floor. The dogs cuddled with any students interested in emotional support under the watchful eye of St. John Ambulance supervisors/trainers. Learners in the Get SET program really enjoyed this experience... These are small activities, but they show that staff are thinking about exposing students to a diverse range of support services.”

Get SET program staff

These coordination efforts have led to stronger partnerships, improved referral systems, and better visibility for Get SET services.



2026-2027 Literacy Service Plan Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties

Get SET services have developed new partnerships with various organizations and EO partners including:

- In Oxford County, a partnership with Community Employment Services, OW, ODSP, and apprenticeship stakeholders was developed to connect learners with job placements, skills training, and employment opportunities. These partnerships included shared referrals and resources to ensure smooth transitions for learners.
- Across the region Get SET works closely with Oxford County Local Immigration Partnership and YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin to provide language support, information about credential recognition, and workplace integration for newcomers.
- Partnerships with libraries in St. Thomas and Aylmer allowed Get SET programs to offer on-site tech support and align class schedules, ensuring learners have access to necessary resources and technical assistance.
- Partnerships with addiction and mental health services, pregnancy centers, women’s shelters, housing services, and local health teams help address learner barriers to education and employment.
- Collaboration with organizations like the Chamber of Commerce, Multi-Service Centre, and the Elgin Oxford Middlesex Workforce Planning and Development Board strengthens community ties and enhances access to labour market information.
- Get SET maintains strong relationships with local employers and apprenticeship stakeholders, including unions, ensuring that the program aligns with the needs of the job market and prepares learners for the workforce.
- New partnerships with St. Joseph’s Hospital and Oneida Health Centre further expand support options, offering learners health and wellness resources in addition to educational services.



Collaboration has led to several key achievements:

- Coordinated efforts with EO, OW, settlement agencies, and apprenticeship organizations have enhanced referral systems, boosting general awareness of Get SET programs. Improved referral pathways have streamlined access to services, allowing learners to quickly connect with necessary resources and eliminate service duplication. This has resulted in increased participation, particularly among newcomers.
- Through a partnership with Biigajiisakaan (Indigenous mental Health), several urban Indigenous learners were referred to the local Indigenous stream Get SET program, and a further partnership with Childreach provided a location for them to run drop-in programming.
- Partnerships with employers and unions like LiUNA have led to the development of targeted workshops and training programs focused on workplace literacy, aligning Get SET curriculum with local job market demands and improving employment outcomes for learners.
- Collaborative efforts have fostered trust between agencies, enabling confidence to rely on Get SET services for skills upgrading and employment preparation their staff may not have the capacity to handle. This has strengthened relationships and improved service delivery.
- Pathway mapping with regional networks like Literacy Link South Central has ensured that learners can smoothly transition from Get SET programs to post-secondary education, apprenticeships, or employment services, facilitating long-term success.

“We have managed to maintain a program without a dedicated space for 13 months. It has been very challenging. Our four-month partnership with Childreach has restored some stability to the program which will allow us to get close to most of our targets this year.

Fortunately, we are in negotiations for a permanent space now, and we anticipate that will be able to return to more conventional operations soon.”

Get SET program staff

Through collaboration, Get SET has consistently met learner targets, developed new programs, and built valuable connections that drive successful learner outcomes.

Section 5: Priorities and Strategic Planning

With input from our front-line programs across the Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford region we've identified 4 key priorities and 2 additional focuses for the region.

Community Outreach & Awareness

- Increasing awareness of Get SET programs in **rural areas**, particularly within farming communities around Tillsonburg, is a key priority. This involves targeted outreach to reach underserved populations, including newcomers and workers in agriculture who may benefit from literacy and numeracy upgrading.
- Engaging **younger learners**, particularly those just leaving secondary school or who were impacted by disrupted learning during COVID. This would involve outreach to schools, employment programs, and youth services to raise awareness of Get SET opportunities.
- Leveraging **testimonials** and **case studies** to promote Get SET programs, as well as forming partnerships with local community centers and businesses to help spread the word and attract more learners.

Service Integration & Coordination

- **Expanding partnerships** with settlement agencies, ESL providers, and other newcomer services to share information and discuss more integrated programming. Integrating Get SET with other community services will improve service delivery and better meet the needs of learners, especially newcomers.
- Restoring and strengthening **referral pathways** is a priority. Collaboration with EO, Social Assistance programs, and community organizations will support smoother transitions for learners between different services and programs.
- Enhancing connections between Get SET, credit programs, and post-secondary institutions will create **smoother transitions** for learners pursuing higher education and training, including dual pathways with learners participating in both credit and Get SET programs simultaneously.

Short-Term Programming & Employer Connections

- As funding permits, developing **short-term, targeted programs** based on community needs is a priority, particularly in areas like financial literacy and computer skills. These programs can capture more learners who may not require long-term commitments but still need essential skills.
- In areas like Aylmer, there is a need to foster stronger connections between Get SET providers and **local employers** to offer customized training programs that meet the needs of the workforce. This could include upskilling programs for employees or tailored literacy support in the workplace.
- Keeping up with **local labour market** developments and providing **apprenticeship** information to learners is also a key priority. There is a need to connect Get SET programs with local apprenticeship opportunities, particularly in trades where skills training is in high demand.

Strengthening Support for Specific Learner Groups

- Finding strategies to better serve learners in **rural areas**, particularly those with limited access to transportation and technology remains a focus. This includes providing more **flexible delivery** methods (e.g., online learning with in-person support) and working with local community organizations to offer support.
- Strengthening support for learners with **learning disabilities** or other special needs is crucial. This includes providing access to facilitator training about LDs, and offering personalized, flexible learning approaches with appropriate accommodations made for learners with specific barriers to success.
- Building stronger connections with **Indigenous communities** and working closely with Indigenous leaders and organizations. This includes providing support for Indigenous Get SET programs to ensure they can continue to offer culturally sensitive programming leading to learner success.

Additional priorities

- **Advocate for Additional Funding:** Advocating for more funding to meet the growing demand for Get SET services, particularly as many learners need long-term support, is crucial. Additional resources will be needed to hire more instructors and expand service delivery to meet the needs of an increasing learner population.
- **Building Capacity in the Community:** Ensuring that all partners in the literacy ecosystem have the capacity to support learners is essential. This includes providing professional development for staff, strengthening community partnerships, and ensuring that all services are adequately resourced to meet the demand.

Local Planning

To effectively address what we've identified as learner needs and potential gaps in service, we're looking at taking a range of actions. Some are focused on research or training, and many involve community collaboration and partnership. It's noteworthy that to effectively address service gaps, particularly as they relate to the availability of Get SET services, additional funding investments are crucial.

1. Enhance Instructor Training for Disabilities and Special Needs



- Provide additional training for instructors to better support learners with disabilities, including learning disabilities and mental health challenges.
- Partner with community service providers to develop specialized supports for learners with learning disabilities and mental health challenges
- Introduce assistive technology to support learners' diverse needs.

2. Expand and Improve Online Learning Resources and Technology Access

- Increase access to online learning resources, ensuring they are engaging, user-friendly, and accessible for rural communities and those with limited technological access.
- Increase digital literacy training for learners, ensuring they are equipped with essential skills for employment and further education.
- Provide access to necessary technology, if funding is available

3. Respond to Growing Demand in High-Traffic Areas

- Recognize and address the sustained increase in demand for Get SET services in areas like St. Thomas, especially after noticing a surge in enrollment from spring 2025.
- Explore solutions to accommodate more learners, such as offering additional class sessions, evening shifts, or using community-based locations for instruction. Additional funding would be required to accomplish these goals.
- Evaluate the possibility of hiring additional instructors or volunteers to meet this growing demand, while working within budget constraints.



4. Increase Support for Underserved Populations

- Expand outreach efforts to rural communities, older adults, and other underserved groups.
- Partner with settlement agencies to create bridging programs that support newcomers.
- Work on developing specialized programs and/or curricula that appeals to and meets the needs of youth.

5. Expand Marketing Strategies Beyond Digital Platforms

- Diversify marketing strategies to reach a wider audience, including those who are less engaged with social media. As with other actions, additional funding would be required to meet certain marketing goals.
- Build strong partnerships with local organizations and leverage word-of-mouth to promote Get SET services in communities.

6. Foster Collaboration and Partnership Development

- Continue to build and deepen relationships with local agencies, employers, and community organizations to share resources and coordinate services.
- Regularly engage with community groups and stakeholders to introduce Get SET services and identify new opportunities for collaboration.

7. Address Resource Limitations

- Resource limitations remain a significant challenge. Budget constraints limit the ability to expand the program's capacity, such as hiring additional instructors or covering travel costs for learners who need physical support. The aim is to continue developing innovative solutions, like itinerant teaching models or virtual services, to overcome barriers.
- Collaborate with local libraries, employment services, and senior centers to provide learners with access to digital tools, in-person support, or community spaces for learning.

8. Address Transportation and Digital Connectivity



- Continue to explore affordable transportation solutions and research low-cost solutions for rural and remote learners without internet access.
- Provide support for learners progressing from one program to another, looking for creative solutions so they can access necessary digital tools and a stable internet connection even as they transition from Get SET to other programs.

Local Innovations

Several initiatives are planned to continue the enhancement of Get SET services, with a focus on digital learning strategies, new delivery models, and community partnerships. These innovations aim to enhance accessibility, flexibility, and overall learner support.

1. Online Learning Resources and Delivery

- Expansion of Get SET online resources, with a focus on increasing virtual offerings. The goal is to increase access to learning among those in remote areas and those with scheduling challenges. **Timeline:** An online conversation circle will be launched in January to provide space for learners to practice English.
- Continue to offer virtual delivery options for learners who require flexibility or are in areas with limited access to in-person classes. **Timeline:** Ongoing.
- Introduce new blended learning models for ESL and academic upgrading programs, combining in-person classes with homework activities to ensure flexibility. The goal is to provide a more comprehensive and flexible learning experience that caters to a wider range of learner needs. **Timeline:** Not identified.

2. Curriculum and Learning Module Improvements

- Continue to improve and update existing learning modules to ensure they meet the needs of learners, with the goal of ensuring curriculum evolves to respond to changes in learner demographics and goals. We will also develop new curriculum as needed to keep up with emerging demands, with a focus on digital literacy, financial literacy, and other key skill areas. **Timeline:** Ongoing.

3. Community-Based Collaborations

- Building relationships with local employers in Aylmer with the goal of integrating Get SET support in the workplace. **Timeline:** Initial connections with Aylmer employers expected in the New Year.
- Explore collaboration with a local seniors' home in Aylmer to provide tech support on a twice a year cycle. The goal is to strengthen community engagement and broaden the scope of Get SET services to underserved populations, such as seniors. **Timeline:** Ongoing.

4. Financial Literacy and Specialized Workshops

- Launch a Financial Literacy program for Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP) clients. This program is being advertised through the LEAP network and is being targeted at larger social assistance groups. The goal is to improve learners' financial literacy skills, providing them with essential knowledge to navigate both personal and professional challenges. **Timeline:** Immediately.
- Future: After-school computer workshops are planned to provide additional support for learners in acquiring digital skills. The goal is to help learners build confidence in their digital skills so they can compete in an increasingly technology-driven world. **Timeline:** Not identified.

5. Mature Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition

- Mature Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (MPLAR) has been available for learners attending School Board Stream Get SET programs since 2013. Demand is high, so with the goal of helping learners gain recognition for their prior learning experiences and facilitating smoother transitions into further education or employment, one program is seeking a Get SET instructor with an Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) qualification. Until funding is secured for this role, the timeline remains undefined.



7. Indigenous Education and Community Engagement

- One program will open an Indigenous classroom in Chippewa to bring the Get SET program into the community. The goal is to enhance access to Get SET services for Indigenous populations and foster a deeper connection with the community. **Timeline:** Immediately.
- An Indigenous program that has been operating without a permanent location is working to confirm a new permanent location. Aside from regaining stability, the goal is to provide a consistent home for Indigenous Get SET learners in London and to restore cultural workshops that honour the perspectives and experiences of their learners. **Timeline:** If successful, the new drop-in centre should open in April.

8. Career Destination Program

- One Get SET program will be offering the Career Destination Program, which helps learners set and achieve employment goals by improving their literacy and numeracy skills. The goal is to strengthen connections between literacy services and the workforce, ensuring learners gain the skills they need to secure meaningful employment. **Timeline:** Immediate.

9. Targeted Marketing and Community Engagement

- Implement targeted marketing strategies to raise awareness of available Get SET programs, including using testimonials and case studies to highlight success stories. The goal is to broaden the reach of Get SET programs, particularly in underserved populations, and ensure that more individuals are aware of opportunities for upgrading. **Timeline:** Ongoing.
- Expand partnerships with community centers and businesses. The goal is to increase program visibility and build stronger local networks. **Timeline:** Ongoing.

10. Promotion of Postsecondary Pathways

- College-based Get SET programs will promote pathways from Get SET programs to postsecondary education. The goal is to provide clear and accessible pathways for learners who wish to continue their education or gain specialized training after completing Get SET programs. **Timeline:** Ongoing.



It is worth noting that there is little room for large-scale innovation due to ongoing funding limitations, with services operating under a "status quo" funding model for the past nine years. The goal is to make small but impactful improvements with available resources, with an emphasis on maintaining the quality of existing programs.

Potential stabilization and growth

If much-needed additional funding were available, several initiatives could be implemented to not only halt the current reality of reduced program hours and potential closures, but to expand and improve Get SET services. Main priorities would be increasing access, improving programming, and enhancing staffing capacity. Here is a summary of how funding could be utilized:

- Get SET programs would purchase subscriptions for **online literacy tools** to enhance remote and digital learning for learners.
- Much needed **resources**, including books and learning aids, would be purchased to support learners with a diverse set of learning needs.
- **Short-term literacy programs** focusing on communication, safety, and workplace orientation would be offered. They would be tailored to newcomers, particularly those with lower Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) levels.
- A combined ESL and Get SET approach could be investigated. If successful, this **collaborative program** would provide culturally relevant literacy and language training for newcomers to enhance their integration into the workforce and community.
- Programs would **hire part-time instructors** to run short-term courses aimed at offering focused skills upgrading in a narrow focus area while meeting annual headcount goals. This would free up existing staff to focus on long-term learners.
- **Extra hours** would be provided for current staff, who could then support employer relationship development and expanding the Get SET learner base. This would increase staffing capacity to reduce waitlists and enhance outreach efforts, particularly to new learner groups.
- Additional **front-line instructors would be hired**, including one with OCT certification to lead after-school programs and MPLAR classes. Hiring additional instructors and support staff would reduce wait times and make services more accessible, especially in rural areas.
- **Service hours would be expanded**, especially in areas with high demand. This expansion would require adding hours for instructors, providing additional devices, books, and learning materials (mentioned in other bullet points).

2026-2027 Literacy Service Plan Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties

- **Additional classrooms** would be opened in underserved areas of our region - those identified as needing more Get SET services. This would make programs more accessible to learners who may otherwise struggle to attend.
- Investments would be made in **technology and devices**, especially for learners who lack access to resources at home.
- **Outreach efforts** to hidden or underserved learner groups would increase, reaching youth, seniors, and rural residents through expanded marketing and community engagement.
- **Partnerships** with local employers would be developed, and with funding for additional staff would allow Get SET programs to offer on-site upgrading programs for employees, particularly those in sectors with high literacy needs.
- Get SET **programming could expand** to meet the growing demand, ensuring that more learners have access to timely and effective educational support.
- **Specialized support** would be offered for learners with unique needs, such as those with disabilities or mental health challenges, through targeted programs and partnerships with community service providers.
- Support for **learner transportation** would be provided, helping learners from rural areas access training in larger cities or service hubs. This would eliminate transportation barriers for rural learners to ensure they can attend classes and receive the support they need.
- Lost items damaged in flooding would be **replaced**, and outdated materials would be **updated**. This would ensure that urban Indigenous learners have access to the most current and effective tools available.
- Office equipment would be **updated** to streamline administrative tasks and improve the overall efficiency of Get SET services.

By strategically allocating additional funding across these areas, Get SET programs would be able to meet the growing demand for services, expand access to underserved populations, and enhance the overall quality of educational support for learners across the region. These efforts would address key barriers such as wait times, accessibility, and the need for culturally relevant, flexible programming tailored to the diverse needs of the learner population.

Section 6: Reflections and Evaluation

The Literacy Service Planning and Coordination process provided an opportunity for program-to-program sharing, and for us to broaden our service planning network to include new input. This led to several valuable insights, including:

1. The shift to **personalized, one-on-one instruction** has replaced group class formats in several locations. This change is driven by learner needs – the recognition that many Get SET learners benefit more from tailored instruction that meets their specific needs.
2. The **regional network’s collaborations** with organizations such as LRES (London Regional Employment Services – the regional Service System Manager) and their apprenticeship projects are enhancing the network and providing more opportunities for learners. These partnerships help ensure learners are referred to the most appropriate programs, which improves outcomes and reduces service duplication. Those connections help communication and are rewarding, but also help to meet the diverse needs of learners and increase the impact of programs improving overall learner engagement.
3. There is good **regional insight** into the varying needs and trends across different communities. This awareness helps programs tailor their offerings to meet the specific needs of their local populations.
4. A key takeaway from the process is the importance of **adaptability**. Flexibility in service delivery, particularly through hybrid and online learning options, has proven essential to meeting the diverse needs of learners. As needs evolve, services must be able to adjust to ensure learners have access to the support they require.
5. **Proactive outreach** to youth and newcomers was highlighted as essential for breaking down barriers before they arise. Early intervention leads to smoother transitions into learning and employment, reducing potential barriers.
6. **Regular evaluations** of program strengths and areas for improvement continue to yield valuable insights. These reflections lead to innovations and minor adjustments that can make a significant difference in the long run.

“I liked the agency sharing of information about programming. It is always interesting to hear about what others are doing and the challenges that they also face, and sometimes the trends they identify are things I am seeing also.”

Get SET program staff

Several elements have been successful:

1. Shifting to **blended and online learning options** allowed learners to continue their training despite challenges such as transportation or health concerns. This flexibility increased access and engagement for learners who may have otherwise been excluded.

2. Enhancements in the **referral system** have streamlined the process, making it easier for learners to access multiple services without having to go through redundant intake processes.



3. **Personalized coaching and support** have been instrumental in helping learners stay motivated and meet their goals. Learners now receive workbooks for both in-class and at-home use, allowing for continuous learning and reinforcing material.
4. **Strong partnerships** with EO, settlement agencies, and local community groups have helped provide comprehensive support for learners, ensuring they receive education, as well as access to other critical services.



5. **New initiatives**, such as the opening of a classroom in the indigenous community and evening classes in Aylmer and St. Thomas, have improved accessibility for learners in different geographical areas.

6. The **exchange of experiences and advice** between Get SET programs has been beneficial. Hearing about the challenges and successes of other programs provides valuable learning opportunities and often sparks innovative ideas for one's own program.

2026-2027 Literacy Service Plan Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties

Despite an overall successful Literacy Service Planning and Coordination process, there are several areas that Get SET programs believe could be improved upon:

1. There is a desire to return to **local (single county) LSP meetings**, as well as larger tri-county regional ones. These would allow for more in-depth collaboration between local programs, providing opportunities to learn about the nuances of specific programs, making it easier to facilitate referrals, build community-based solutions, and foster stronger partnerships.
2. **Increased engagement** from Ministry representatives during meetings would be beneficial, especially if they take questions and remain engaged throughout discussions.
3. Increasing **guest speaker presentations** and sharing innovative initiatives. For example, the previous “A Day in the Life of an Ontario Works Caseworker” presentation. These sessions helped to better understand the workflow and timelines involved in delivering social services, generated productive conversations, and facilitated better collaboration.



Finally, as a result of coming together in LSP meetings, programs identified several trends impacting learners across the Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford County region:

1. There is a growing need for increased access to **mental health services** and specialized learning supports, particularly for learners facing complex challenges. Expanding access to these supports would help ensure that all learners have the resources they need to succeed.
2. There is a need to further **expand digital literacy training** and increase **access to technology**, especially for older learners and those in rural areas. Many learners face significant barriers to engaging with online or blended learning formats due to a lack of technological resources.
3. While progress has been made, there is still room for improvement in terms of ensuring **referrals** are made in a timely and coordinated manner. Effective communication between service providers is essential to avoid delays that could hinder learners' progress.
4. There is a call for more targeted **outreach to underserved groups**, such as youth, people with disabilities, and other marginalized populations. These groups often face unique barriers that require tailored approaches and solutions to support their learning journeys effectively.

If you have any questions about this Literacy Service Plan, please contact Literacy Link South Central at literacylink@llsc.on.ca or 519-681-7307.