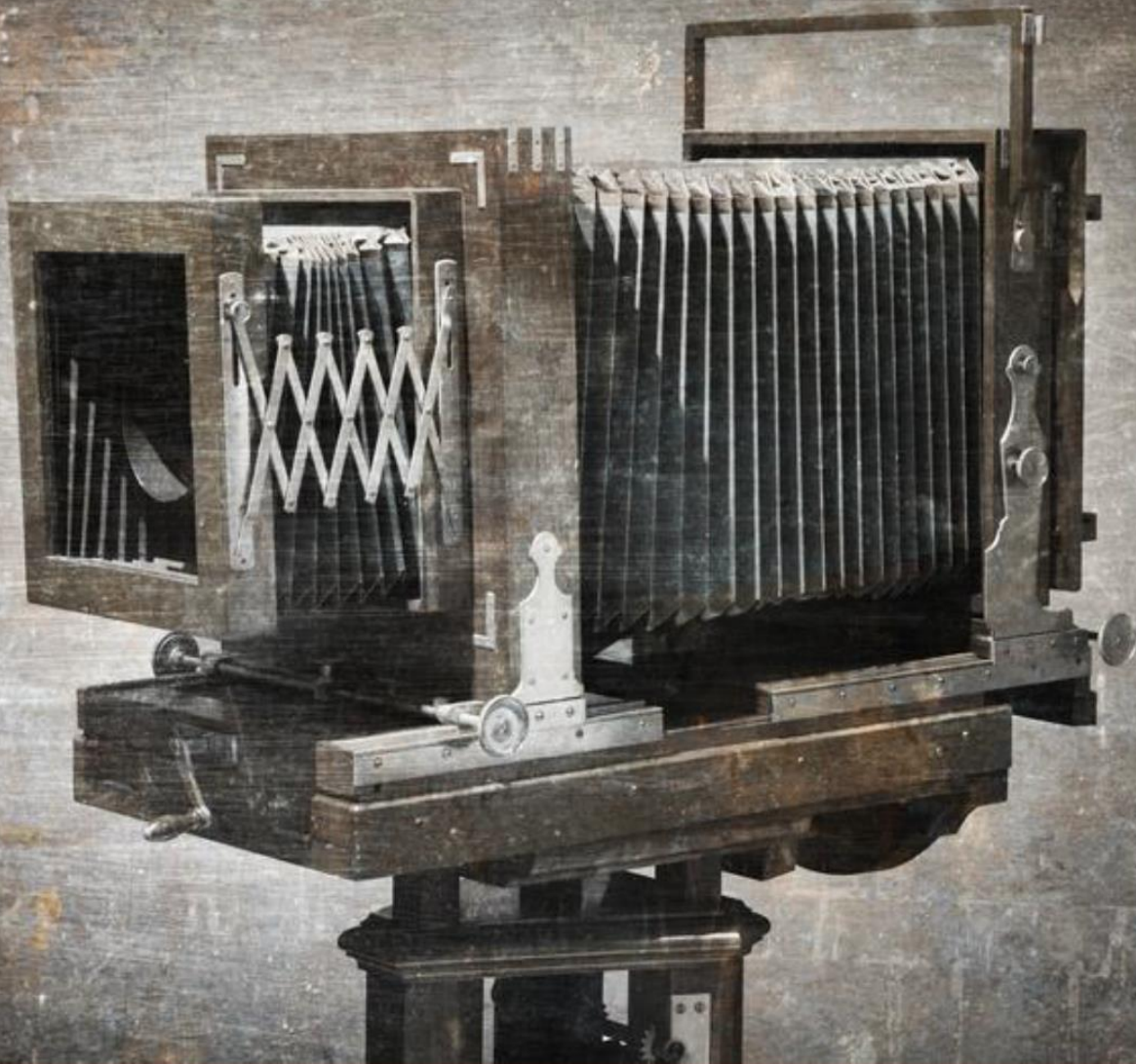


Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades



Through the Lens of Literacy and Basic Skills



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Introduction




In our report, CLO explores Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades through the lens of different Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) sectors, focusing on their universal and individual approaches for supporting learners with Apprenticeship or Skilled Trades goals.

To compile provincial approaches to this often-complex goal path, we drew from:

- the results of a provincial survey that generated 47 responses from Literacy and Basic Skills programs
- a provincial focus group with attendees from 9 LBS programs
- key informant interviews with 20 representatives from LBS programs
- key informant interviews with 6 representatives from 4 sector-specific support organizations

Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades play an important role in the Ontario economy and the province’s Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs are a valuable support mechanism. With their support, prospective Apprentices can develop the skills they need to succeed on the job, in-school classes and as they prepare to write their Certificate of Qualifications (C of Q).

This report reflects challenges, strategies, successes, and “big ideas” from across the Community-based, College and School Board sectors to increase our common understanding of how this goal path can be supported in LBS agencies. Cross-sectoral challenges and successes are unmarked, while sector-specific challenges and strategies have been identified with the following symbols:

-  = School board sector LBS programs
-  = Community-based LBS programs
-  = College sector LBS programs

Part 1: Challenges

The challenges facing the Skilled Trades sector are a frequent topic of conversation at community planning tables and remain of significant concern for the provincial government. It is clear that between pending retirements, a current shortage of certified tradespeople and low Apprenticeship completion rates, a Skilled Trades crisis is certainly upon us.

CLO asked representatives from Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs and sector support organizations to share the challenges they've encountered when working directly with learners who are, or could be, pursuing a career in the Skilled Trades. They identified barriers crossing three different areas:

- challenges faced by **learners**
- challenges faced by **programs**, and
- **systems** challenges

The first section of our report outlines the top challenges identified in each of those areas.



Learner Challenges

The most significant barrier standing in the way of learners pursuing a career in the Skilled Trades is **the need for skills upgrading** to be successful in an Apprenticeship. The greatest skill deficiencies reported by Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs across all sectors were foundational and advanced math, interpersonal and soft skills, writing, communication, and digital skills (in ranked order).



Unfortunately, this issue is exacerbated by a general lack of understanding about the actual need for these skills on the job. Literacy program staff find themselves working with learners who have **an unrealistic vision of the skills actually used in the trades**, and shared how difficult it can be to convince someone that, for example, having low math, literacy or interpersonal skills will actually be a barrier to their success.

“There’s a misconception that the trades are not “academic” or rigorous and therefore don’t require solid essential skills.”

Survey Respondent

The second most prevalent challenge mentioned by LBS programs was learner difficulty **finding employer sponsors**, either due to an actual or perceived lack of employers signing new Apprentices. This challenge is compounded by employers who are said to hire only people with previous experience in the Skilled Trades rather than those just starting out.

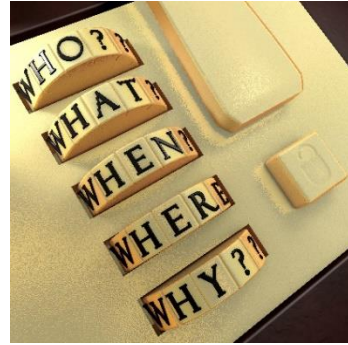
This issue has resulted in a lack of confidence in some learners, who feel that putting the time and energy into upgrading their skills to pursue an Apprenticeship won’t pay off with a job. Those with lower interpersonal or communication skills face additional challenges, as they may be unable to successfully approach employers to negotiate a sponsorship.

“Employers want candidates with some experience or education in the area.”

“Many of our learners’ lack of previous work experience.”

Survey Respondents

Many learners who would benefit from apprenticing in a Skilled Trade are **unaware of the opportunities** available. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs pointed out the number of different paths that someone could take to become a tradesperson, especially in the voluntary trades. While Apprenticeship options exist in these trades, many learners are only aware of private training institutions with large marketing budgets, or public Colleges offering trades-based programs. For reasons both financial and self-confidence related, these options often feel out of reach.



Among those who may know about the Apprenticeship system, there is a significant lack of understanding of **how to navigate it**. With multiple people and organizations involved, processes to be followed, and steps to take, many learners find themselves lost and unsure of how to reach their goals.

“There’s a lack of clarity on how to take next steps.”

“There are so many paths – it’s hard to know which to take (and almost all paths require a high degree of literacy).”

Survey Respondents

The **time** it takes to both prepare for and complete an Apprenticeship drives learners away from this path, sometimes before they even begin. It can be incredibly intimidating to learn that the Apprenticeship journey in your chosen trade could take upwards of five years – and that’s after you’ve found an employer to sponsor you. For those who need to upgrade their skills before beginning the journey, the path can seem unrealistically long and overwhelming.



This challenge becomes particularly heightened by a complex **balance of responsibilities** between home and work. There are limited number of hours in the day, and for learners who are registered apprentices, attempting to work full-time, study for their in-school training, attend a literacy program for support, and live up to family responsibilities often find themselves pulled in too many directions to continue.

“Family demands prevent them planning to study in the evening while working in the day.”

“Balancing work, education and life.”

Survey Respondents

Low educational attainment combined with confusion around the actual **level of education** needed to sign as an Apprentice has also created challenges for learners. Not only does that educational requirement change from trade to trade, but the level of education prospective employer sponsors may be looking for doesn't always align with the minimum level of education required to sign an Apprenticeship contract.

The question of educational attainment becomes more complicated for immigrants with foreign high school credentials. They may genuinely believe that they meet the requirements for an Apprenticeship that needs a Grade 10 level of education or Grade 12 diploma, only to discover that they need to invest in foreign credential recognition services or to return to school to earn a certification recognized by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development.

“We find that individuals pursuing this goal path often require high school credits before they can even start to think about becoming an Apprentice. Unfortunately, many people are not made aware of the requirements (i.e., Apprenticeships requiring minimum Grade 10 or high school diploma).”

Key Informant Interview

Literacy and Basic Skills programs mentioned two less prevalent but equally compelling challenges faced by learners.

While the financial rewards of completing an Apprenticeship can be great, so too are the **financial challenges** encountered by many learners in Ontario’s Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs. The need to find paid work of any kind can easily take precedence over the long-term planning it takes to successfully navigate the Apprenticeship system, particularly for someone with urgent financial needs. For learners in smaller and more rural communities, or in areas where opportunities for work

in the Skilled Trades are on the outskirts of town, the cost of transportation becomes a barrier. Those who do pursue an Apprenticeship can face additional financial challenges with paying for books, traveling to write exams, and even relocating for work.

“Because there are currently so many job opportunities available at an entry level, learners are hesitant to commit to a longer Skilled Trades or Apprenticeship journey.”

Survey Respondent

The challenges that Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) practitioners shared demonstrate why learners can find the Apprenticeship journey incredibly demanding and how not everyone can remain resilient in the face of that kind of **stress**. For some, it’s a lack of confidence in their own ability to succeed, while others need access to support and coping techniques to manage their stress.

“If you’re working and can’t pass the Certificate of Qualification exam, it gets really intense. They are in crisis because people at the end of their Apprenticeship journey need to pass, or they can’t keep working.”

Key Informant Interview

Program Challenges

Just as learners encounter challenges that may prevent them from moving through the Apprenticeship system and onto a rewarding career in the Skilled Trades, so do the Literacy and Basic Skills programs that support them. The challenges vary, so programs in smaller or rural communities face different challenges than those in more urban settings for example, and certain challenges impact programs in only a single sector while others are felt across all sectors.

The most prevalent and over-arching challenge faced sector-wide is a **lack of learner awareness** that Literacy and Basic Skills programs can help them develop the skills that they need to be successful in the Skilled Trades. If prospective Apprentices who could benefit from adult literacy support know about LBS programming at all, it's often perceived as a place to learn how to read and write – something that most of them can already do at varying skill levels.



There is growing recognition that numeracy skills are taught in adult literacy programs, but their ability to help learners obtain the academic requirement for the trade, to help them prepare for the in-class portion of the Apprenticeship, develop strong test-taking skills, and study for Level 1, 2 or 3 tests or the Certificate of Qualification (C of Q) is largely unknown. Given the need for more people to enter the Skilled Trades, there are simply fewer adult literacy learners on the Apprenticeship goal path than one would expect.

Apprenticeship-specific marketing efforts shared by Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs included email campaigns targeting business that take on Apprentices, posters about LBS displayed at workplaces, social media campaigns, print ads, and even targeting job seekers by promoting in-demand careers in the Skilled Trades. Unfortunately, these efforts haven't resulted in a noticeable increase in Apprenticeship-curious learners approaching programs, so getting the word out remains a challenge.

"There's been nothing that brought them through my door as an Apprentice in terms of advertising / marketing."

Key Informant Interview

As pointed out by one literacy practitioner, people must already know, like and follow you on social media to get your messaging unless someone they know reposts your content or you pay for targeted advertising. It's also worth noting that given the lower literacy levels of some prospective learners, that print and other text-based advertising, while a common go-to for marketing, is less likely to be effective.

Just as there can be a lack of learner awareness about what local Literacy and Basic Skills programs are and what they offer, LBS programs themselves struggle to identify all the **local supports Apprenticeship-bound learners could access**. Their Employment Ontario partners in Employment Services are well-known. A larger challenge is found in the literacy community's knowledge of which local pre-Apprenticeship programs and Training Delivery Agencies (TDA's) their learners can access. With new Apprenticeship training programs being developed by Colleges to meet labour market needs, and no one place to access a complete list of current pre-Apprenticeship programs running in Ontario, finding programs for information sharing, partnership, and referral opportunities can be quite a challenge. LBS programs located in smaller communities further shared that not having pre-Apprenticeship programs, local college campuses, Skilled Trade unions or other TDA's in their area leaves them, and their learners, without opportunities.



Some Literacy and Basic Skills programs spoke of the staffing constraints that limit their ability to offer relevant learning opportunities to learners with an interest in the Skilled Trades. Many smaller programs **don't have literacy practitioners within their organizations with experience in the Skilled Trades** that can be drawn upon when working with learners.

Programs that consistently serve a higher number of learners on the Apprenticeship goal path have developed specialized knowledge through that experience, growing their own understanding of the trades those learners are targeting. Programs with this experience can share real-life stories of how other learners have navigated the Apprenticeship system with examples of how the skills taught in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs are used on the job.



That prior research and teaching experience isn't available within programs that infrequently serve Apprenticeship-bound learners. These programs report that they often feel their lack of experience is compounded by not having a wealth of up-to-date material about Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades available within their programs.



It has been pointed out that larger LBS programs, particularly those in the College and School Board sectors, are more likely to have pre-Apprenticeship or Apprenticeship programs within their campuses. These programs can access expert advice from people with Skilled Trades experience, and they are provided with authentic information about what's taught in Apprenticeship training and how to best help learners navigate to their next steps. This expertise is then shared with learners with Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship goals.



This in-house expertise is a service that all programs wish to offer, but without funding to pay for additional staff who themselves have a background in the Skilled Trades, or to spend on research time to develop up-to-date materials and build the capacity of their current practitioners, smaller LBS programs feel stuck.



“Typically, we have tutors who can teach one subject...so math may be their area of expertise. But if the learner needs help with technical reading, they need another tutor. It's a capacity issue.”

Key Informant Interview

Systems Challenges

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs exist within, and are impacted by, many different systems.

All Literacy and Basic Skills programs are guided by decisions made within Ontario's Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, directives specific to Employment Ontario programs, and what is happening within connected systems such as Social Services.

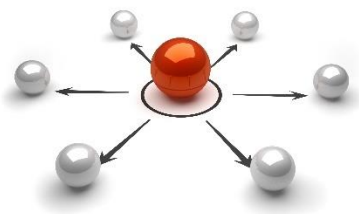


School Board sector LBS programs are affected by decisions made by Ontario's Ministry of Education, their local Board of Education, administration at the school where their programs are housed, the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU) and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).



College sector LBS programs respond to decisions made by Ontario's Ministry of Colleges and Universities, the administration and Board of Governors at the college where their programs are housed, and Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU).

When supporting prospective Apprentices, programs across all sectors react to input from their local Employment Ontario Apprenticeship office and are also impacted by the government's plan to simplify and transform the Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship system through the introduction of Skilled Trades Ontario. The requirements of local unions offering pre-Apprenticeship programs and signing Apprentices must also be taken into consideration.



Clearly there are many large intersecting systems at play, each with its own processes and priorities. Developing an awareness of each element of the systems surrounding Literacy and Basic Skills programs can be a challenge. Being aware of the ongoing changes within Ontario's Apprenticeship system, like the impact of the Building Opportunities in the Skilled Trades Act, 2021, takes further research and attention.

Conversely, **LBS programs are not well known** within some of these systems – meaning the positive impact that they could have can be overlooked. Opportunities for partnerships and the sharing of clients aren't established, to the detriment of both those pursuing a job in the Skilled Trades and the system as a whole.

Even within the system that funds Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS), there can be a lack of program recognition. As a result, the valuable role that foundational skill building plays in preparing someone to be successful in the Skilled Trades can be overlooked. Having attended information sessions hosted by local Employment Ontario Apprenticeship offices and employment services, representatives from the field identified a lack of LBS programs on the list of support programs suggested to attendees. This is particularly challenging given the importance of strong math skills in many of the Skilled Trades, and how well-positioned LBS programs are to help prospective Apprentices develop stronger numeracy skills.

“LBS isn't offered as an option at intake into an Apprenticeship program.”

Survey Respondent

This lack of partnership opportunities can also be due to the siloed nature of some programs or projects within the system, which are encouraged to provide all services a client may need in-house. While a fulsome system of support may be available, there can be **resistance to referring clients elsewhere**, especially as confusion remains around whether clients can be shared between programs.



This has led non-LBS programs, whose main area of expertise isn't literacy, to investing time and money in the development of literacy and numeracy-focused training and upgrading workshops for their clients. This is training that could be provided free of charge by the Literacy and Basic Skills programs already funded to offer these services.

“LBS Programs should be a key part in the development of Apprenticeship training programs and should participate in the proposal process - many times we see the clients come to us because they "finish" their training but lack the academic skills in order to continue to attain their Apprenticeship. This is a big barrier that has existed for quite some time.”

Survey Respondent

The purpose of these non-LBS projects and programs is often to increase employment – to get people into the labour market as quickly as possible. From a systems' perspective, it becomes problematic when someone finding part-time, minimum wage employment after a month with a non-LBS program, appears statistically to be a bigger success than someone who works their way through Literacy and Basic Skills to upgrade their skills, earn a recognized high school credential or equivalence, and begin an apprenticing in the Skilled Trades a year later.

Part 2: Effective Strategies

Our conversations with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs and sector support organizations quickly identified several key challenges faced by Apprenticeship-bound learners, programs, and the broader system. Given the strong problem-solving skills demonstrated by literacy practitioners across the province, it's no surprise that they also shared many strategies for overcoming these challenges.

With the “continual improvement” mindset that drives so many people in the literacy field, they've also brainstormed next steps to continue strengthening the LBS system's support of Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades. Throughout the Effective Strategies section of this report, watch for this flag and the title **Big Idea from the Field** to learn more!

For Working with Learners

Literacy practitioners have developed a host of strategies to combat some of the most prevalent challenges faced by learners who are working towards a career in the Skilled Trades. As a review, the most prevalent of these barriers, as outlined in the Challenges section of this report, are:

- the need for skills upgrading before someone can be successful in the trades, and finding an employer to sponsor them
- being unaware of the many opportunities available in the Skilled Trades
- confusion around how to navigate the Apprenticeship system
- the time it takes to both prepare for and complete an Apprenticeship
- trying to balance work, school and life responsibilities
- the level of education needed to be offered an Apprenticeship contract, and required by employers
- financial challenges and the ability to remain resilient in the face of them and other stresses

In this section of our report, we will look at successful strategies for overcoming each of the previously mentioned challenges.

All Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs offer the foundational **skills upgrading** so important for success in the Skilled Trades, including writing, reading, math, digital literacy, and interpersonal skills. With the key challenges for Apprenticeship-bound learners being foundational and advanced math skills, interpersonal and soft skills, writing, communication and digital skills, programs are providing focused, targeted short-term training in many of these areas. Trades math and computer skills programs are of highest interest, as are “Exam Prep” workshops devoted to test-taking and studying strategies.

“We’re working on a math app for the Skilled Trades. It’s almost done – it’s in a testing and revision stage now. It will be free, self-guided and include assessment. If the person using it is unsure of the subject, it will link to educational resources that can help. We’re calling it the “Trades Math Practice App” and it should be available through eCampus Ontario in the new fiscal year (2022-2023).”

Key Informant Interview

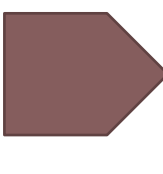
In addition to offering short-term targeted programs, literacy practitioners help prospective Apprentices upgrade their skills by offering individualized support that meets the needs of each learner. This is a key strength of the LBS system, as learners can focus specifically on the areas that they need to develop, rather than following pre-determined curriculum. This flexible, self-paced, teacher-supported learning helps learners at different levels progress towards their Skilled Trades goals.

“We offer customized one-to-one tutoring and provide extra support for those struggling. Mentoring with a tutor who has knowledge of the trades has helped. We provide learners with blended learning opportunities so they can work at their own pace.”


Survey Respondents


When discussing skills upgrading, literacy practitioners shared the common challenge that learners don't always recognize the level of foundational skills required in the Skilled Trades. Based on this misunderstanding or **unrealistic vision of the actual skills used in a trade**, they believe they can "get by" with the skills they have, and don't want to spend the time required to build those skills.

To overcome this challenge, Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs have worked hard to integrate Apprenticeship-specific materials into their programs that demonstrate how those skills will be used on the job. Naturally, they access task-based activities developed for learners on the Apprenticeship goal path, but they have also adapted other learning tasks, so that they reflect authentic situations in the Skilled Trades. Contextualized learning resources that give learners a "preview" of the trade and include real-life examples are particularly valuable, especially if they come directly from a trades-based source.



Big Idea from the Field: When you have a group of learners and several are targeting different Skilled Trades, it would be great to have a list of trades and a way to quickly access that trade's associated occupational specific curricula, short-term targeted training, resources, and websites.

 To help learners recognize the skills needed to be successful in the college portion of their Apprenticeship training, College sector LBS programs have demonstrated excellent collaboration with the instructors of Skilled Trades programs on their campuses. They shared stories of working with instructors to identify the skills needed to be successful in their classes, and even purchasing specific resources that are being used in those courses to share with learners in advance. This practice was also shared by more than one community-based LBS program.



"Colleges that deliver Apprenticeship training are a good resource if they are willing to supply a list of what they cover in their courses. I have a list from a local college Apprenticeship program that outlines all the skills and what they need to be able to do – it includes a whole list of explicit math skills. That helps learners understand why we're giving them certain activities – why they are important."

Key Informant Interview

The most common strategy for supporting learners who have trouble **finding an employer mentor** is to connect them with local Employment Services (ES) to get support with employment preparation and connections to employers in the Skilled Trades. The Employment Ontario system offers a wealth of support for learners with employment goals both in and outside of the Skilled Trades, so supporting Apprenticeship-focused learners in tandem is an excellent step.

“What we had pre-COVID that worked really well is having ES on site. Different agencies had office hours at the school rotating one day a week and that was huge... bringing the service to the learners. Intakes increased for ES, and learners received different support without having to leave the building.”

Key Informant Interview

Some Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs are taking that a step further by developing relationships directly with employers. These connections can serve multiple purposes, giving practitioners first-hand information to share with learners about the skills that these employers are looking for, and providing access to authentic workplace forms and documents that can be used in lessons. When employers are willing to visit programs to talk about their businesses, it puts learners in front of someone who could eventually become their Apprenticeship sponsors.

“There’s an employer (pre-COVID) who would even come and present about their company to “sell” their business as a place learners could work post-program. He would tell his own personal story of immigrating to Canada and not even knowing about the trade that he ended up pursuing... “

Key Informant Interview

By facilitating connections with Employment Services and employers, LBS programs help build **awareness of the opportunities** that exist in the Skilled Trades. They reinforce this message through a variety of other means such as sharing labour market information with learners that show how many jobs are available in specific Skilled Trades and what the pay levels are for those jobs. Literacy programs that have strong relationships with their local Workforce Planning Boards find that they have quick access to up-to-date labour market information to support this effort. Letting learners know about financial incentives related to Apprenticeship can also be eye-opening, as many do not recognize the additional financial support available.



First-hand stories of becoming an Apprentice shared by people who have already started their journeys was reported as one of the most successful awareness-building opportunities. These success stories can help learners understand the opportunities available to them in a way that resonates far more than reading about them in a book or on a website and allows learners to ask questions to reinforce their understanding of their Skilled Trade journey.

“We invite graduates from our Academic Upgrading program who’ve moved on to the trades to come back and share their story with current students. For example, we provide communications and math to help students prepare to be successful in the college’s millwright program. One of those students became a Millwright, and when he found work, he was able to tell current students about it.”

Key Informant Interview

Big Idea from the Field: Trailers are going around the province offering vaccines - what about offering opportunities to experience the Skilled Trades? There’s always been power in meeting people where they are, and in hands-on experimentation. Partner with local trade unions and have a tradesperson run the Skilled Trades trailer and talk to LBS learners about their work. Let them touch the tech, then track the resulting data - see who goes into the trades after an experience like that.

Speaking with someone who’s been there is also an excellent way to help learners understand how to **navigate the complexity of the Apprenticeship system**. Some LBS programs have arranged visits from staff at their Employment Ontario Apprenticeship office, local trade unions, and Colleges delivering Apprenticeship training to explain their roles. In areas where there are collaborative Apprenticeship committees in place to promote the Skilled Trades, they’ve proven to be valuable guests as well.

Big Idea from the field: To help learners increase their understanding of Apprenticeship (without over taxing programs or having them compete for the same guests), Regional Literacy Networks could organize representatives from the trades to speak to learners from multiple programs and areas at a single online event.

“We offer workshops on the “six steps to Apprenticeship” to help people better understand the role of the sponsor / employer.”

Key Informant Interview

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) staff noted that understanding the system is easier for learners who have a clearly defined goal – who know which Skilled Trade they want to work in. With an end goal in mind, it's easier to map the paths a learner may take to get there, and who might be involved in each path. Creating that step-by-step path at the beginning of an LBS learner's journey also helps them stay focused on why they're upgrading specific skills and how the skills connect to their long-term goal.

Try to have learners articulate and plan a tangible next step with their Apprenticeship goals. Learners lose interest in upgrading for the sake of upgrading.
Survey Respondent

Big Idea from the Field: A coordinated approach would help programs and prospective Apprentices understand how to navigate the Apprenticeship and Skilled Trades system. One sector support organization suggested a systems approach with funding provided to create a map of the Apprenticeship system, to provide steps on how to navigate it, and to explain changes – all in plain language. Recognizing the complexity of the system, a web-based decision-tree style resource could be created that Apprentices and literacy program staff could use to explore the system.

It's a common belief that the first step to starting an Apprenticeship is to find an employer to sponsor you. As discussed throughout the Challenges section of this report, Literacy and Basic Skills programs recognize that it's often far from the first step, with prospective Apprentices needing to upgrade their foundational skills and earn recognized credentials first. Not every learner will be prepared to commit to **the time it takes** to complete these steps or work their way through several levels of an Apprenticeship.

While LBS has no control over Apprenticeship timelines, practitioners can help set realistic expectations of the commitments involved, and share the benefits of staying the course. Providing learners with an outline of pay scales in the Skilled Trades and how they go up with the successful completion of each level of Apprenticeship training can help them recognize the benefits of investing this time.

Some learners also have a misconception that if they find an employer offering jobs in the Skilled Trades, that employer would automatically be willing to sign an Apprenticeship contract agreeing to sponsor them. Being an employer sponsor is a big commitment and few employers are willing to make it the first step of their working relationship with a new employee. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs are helping learners understand that it's much more common a practice for employers in the Skilled Trades to hire prospective Apprentices in general labour positions first. This gives the sponsor an opportunity to see how this person works with their team, if they have the foundational skills they need, and to confirm their reliability and work ethic. While it adds to the timeline that learners may have expected, helping them understand these timelines can ensure that those who pursue the Skilled Trades are prepared for the length of the journey ahead.

“Managing expectations is part of it. You may not go right from LBS to the trade – there are lots of steps. Plus, often you get hired as a general worker first, not as an Apprentice. It’s a huge commitment for an employer to take on an Apprentice both in signing and in mentoring.”

Key Informant Interview

Trying to balance **work, school and life responsibilities** can be challenging for anyone, and LBS programs are well-suited to respond to the busy lives of many Apprentices. Programs shared the benefit of offering flexible attendance instead of requiring learners to attend a minimum number of hours per week, allowing learners to balance their evolving needs without being removed from the program. Learners can step away from their programs for a time and when they need support to improve their skills for work or prepare for an upcoming exam, they can quickly return to their LBS program for individualized help.



Programs offering evening hours provide support that's valuable for learners who work during the day, and those who have incorporated remote delivery (as most have, because of the COVID-19 pandemic) provide additional flexibility to work around learners' complex and competing priorities.

"Being able to offer online learning upgrading, study support and test-taking skills, LBS assessment and training has been a big help."

Survey Respondent

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) practitioners have long recognized that having a high school diploma or equivalent doesn't necessarily mean that your skills are at a Grade 12 level – and that not having a high school diploma doesn't mean you are unskilled. There are firm guidelines around the educational attainment required to sign an Apprenticeship contract however, and the expectations of employers may or may not align with those rules. Literacy and Basic Skills programs are well-versed at supporting learners as they work towards achieving the **levels of education** needed by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, employers, and unions.



"More employers are asking for a higher requirement than officially needed in the trades (e.g., they want their prospective Apprentice to have Grade 12 physics even though the trade says just Grade 12)."

Key Informant Interview

In addition to foundational upgrading, all LBS programs can support learners in preparing to write the General Educational Development (GED) exam. The GED exam measures proficiency in high school-level math, language arts, science, and social studies, and those who pass are awarded a certificate that is recognized for Apprenticeship registration.



School Board LBS programs have a strong understanding of the skills required to successfully navigate high school-level credit classes and can help prepare learners to transition into the credit courses they may need. Prospective Apprentices that require Grade 10 can get a transcript showing they’ve completed that level of education, and those who need their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) can continue to take the credit classes they need. Being situated in adult high schools offers LBS learners access to Guidance Counsellors who can offer Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), a process through which the school can award high school credits based on work and life experience. This can significantly reduce the number of credits needed to earn an OSSD, thereby shortening the time it may take to earn this credential, which is recognized for Apprenticeship registration and by employers, unions, and colleges.

“We connect learners interested in the Skilled Trades with co-op programs within our board. They can gain some experience in their targeted field while earning credits towards their OSSD and getting support from LBS.”

Key Informant Interview



College-based LBS programs offer both foundational upgrading and access to the Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) program that can provide a certification that’s accepted for Apprenticeship registration. Given the desire for some employers to sign Apprentices who have additional qualifications relevant to their trade, ACE courses focused on Technical Math, Apprenticeship Math and Physics can be particularly valuable. It’s recognized that there is still work to be done helping employers understand this credential, as not all recognize it as a grade 12 equivalency.

“We offer ACE Math and Apprenticeship Math, and an accelerated math stream so that strong students can get their ACE math credit more quickly. This fast-track math can benefit people with a Skilled Trades goal.”

Key Informant Interview

Big Idea from the field: To better align educational attainment with actual skills, and to improve Apprenticeship success, screening for prospective Apprentices could be required prior to signing an Apprenticeship contract.

“The academic requirements of Apprenticeship are significant – but I could have a basic-level Grade 12 from 30 years ago that satisfied the official requirements to be signed as an Apprentice, and not have the skills that correspond. This is probably one of the reasons that some employers are looking for more or won’t sign until you’ve worked for them and proven yourself.”

Key Informant Interview

It is worth noting that the need to achieve a specific educational credential before being able to sign an Apprenticeship contract can cause challenges when tracking LBS’s support of Apprenticeship through learner goal paths. While many prospective Apprentices work with LBS programs as part of their journey towards the Skilled Trades, their *next steps* are quite often related to high school completion. For this reason, our shared understanding that the number of learners on the Apprenticeship goal path represents the number of learners in an LBS program who are being supported towards Apprenticeship is not accurate.

While becoming an Apprentice can be an excellent opportunity to “earn while you learn”, the costs associated with preparing for this journey, combined with other financial obligations, can feel overwhelming. The flexible hours that Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs offer allow learners to balance work and upgrading. Program staff often make additional efforts to support learners who have **financial challenges**, in various ways such as providing bus tickets and other transportation support, or investigating what funding is available for traveling to Apprenticeship exam locations. One College-based literacy program shared how they were able to connect a learner with a paid work placement.



Anyone who has faced financial challenges knows firsthand the **stress** these challenges can cause. Offering soft skills training on topics like resiliency is one way that Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs are trying to help, but they often take it step further by working one-on-one with learners to help them build confidence. As one survey respondent suggested, LBS practitioners are “a cheerleader until they believe in themselves.” Helping learners recognize the strength they’ve shown just by taking the first steps to return to education is a specialty of many LBS practitioners.

Some LBS programs also offer specialized programs focused on managing challenges, embedding small “mindfulness moments” into classes, and making referrals to counselling services and other programs that can help provide learners with coping mechanisms.

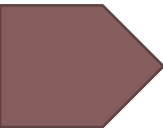
“People have goals and need to accomplish tasks, but we really look at the stability of someone’s life and how that impacts their goals. It’s everything from whether they have heat, to a place to wash their clothes. We talk a lot about maintaining stability through times of change. Running “Getting Ahead” and other life stabilization and poverty reduction initiatives provides them with a foundation that actually allows success.”

Key Informant Interview

The stress of the school-based portions of Apprenticeship training, especially as it relates to passing exams, can be significant. People who are less comfortable with traditional lecture-style or “book learning” are often drawn to the hands-on nature of the Skilled Trades and finding that they need to return to a traditional classroom can be incredibly intimidating. Offering a supportive environment to practice these in-class skills can help reduce anxiety and increase the chance of successful Apprenticeship completion.

“We offer study prep and work with people to help reduce test anxiety, which is helpful - it resonates more when you tell Apprentices that you can help them get over that last hurdle of the exam.”

Key Informant Interview



Big Idea from the Field: An effective way to support Apprentices who are struggling to pass the Certificate of Qualifications (C of Q) would be for literacy practitioners to act as readers at Ministry exams – to ensure program capacity, this would need to be recognized as a ministry-funded activity.

Apprentices who request accommodations because of comprehension or language issues, or because of a documented disability, can request a reader. The reader can be someone of their choosing, as long as that person has no knowledge of the trade. A phone interview and application are required from all readers.

“The value of having someone with LBS experience do this is so beneficial because we’re patient, and we’re skilled at rewording things so people can understand them. I would love to see the ministry connect with LBS services to provide readers when needed - they could really help people get through the exam when that’s the issue.”

Key Informant Interview

Overcoming Program Challenges

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs shared how their deliberate marketing and networking efforts, and the development of strategic partnerships, helped them overcome some of the Apprenticeship-based challenges they face. Other strategies included capitalizing on the strength of their sectors, and using their support organizations as a resource to overcome key challenges, which included:

- increasing learner awareness that Literacy and Basic Skills programs can help Apprentices develop skills they need
- growing their understanding of what supports Apprenticeship-bound learners can access
- building their in-house capacity to support learners bound for the Skilled Trades


The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) sector has long faced challenges with branding. The word “literacy” itself is part of the issue, as it’s often misinterpreted and doesn’t fully describe all of the skills someone can gain from attending an adult literacy program. Raising **learner awareness** of how LBS programs can help them achieve their Apprenticeship goals is quite a challenge.

Marketing budgets in LBS programs are low (or completely non-existent), so investing in costly marketing campaigns is out of reach for most LBS programs. Those who do invest in marketing find that the use of visual and audio advertising reaches the widest audience. Human interest stories and advertisements featured on local radio stations have seen a good response, as have short, catchy videos shared through social media.



“We are cutting industry jargon and making our advertising simple, with no text. We’ve been able to create a series of two-minute videos thanks to the work of a summer student this year.”

Key Informant Interview




Big Idea from the Field: It would be great if we had videos featuring real learners on different paths in Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades that showed learners that part of their path was upgrading at an LBS program. It would be a visual way to walk through what they could learn, hosted by someone who's done it and can speak to how it helped.

Literacy and Basic Skills programs can help prospective Apprentices develop strong skills in many ways, but that message doesn't necessarily resonate with its intended audience. Consider the challenge discussed earlier of learners who don't understand or believe the level of math skills that will be required in their chosen trade. Despite its importance, they aren't going to respond to an advertisement about a program offering to teach them math – something they don't like and don't really believe they need.

Shifting the message to focus on what the audience does think they need results in a better response. Once the learner gets in the door, literacy practitioners can begin the process of demonstrating the need for math and other foundational skills within the context of achieving the goal the learner sets out for themselves.

“What is it people need to get what they want? In many cases it's a high school credential. Sell that.”

Key Informant Interview

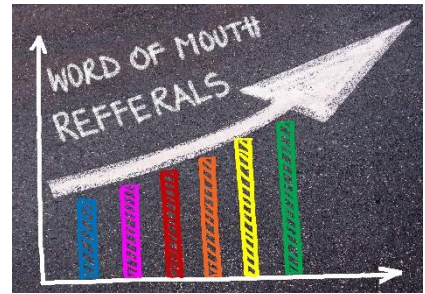


Big Idea from the Field: Instead of individual programs and institutions all working to market the value of Literacy and Basic Skills, programs would like to see a provincially funded and designed campaign with consistent messaging that uses a variety of platforms to deliver a simple message about how adult literacy programs can help Apprentices.

“You have all these small LBS agencies trying to advertise with no budget, so there's very little reach and no consistency in messaging. Money puts us in front of people that don't know we exist. We need a CBC news hour story and we're just not in a position financially to make it happen. “

Key Informant Interview

While not formal marketing, word-of-mouth promotion remains one of the largest drivers bringing learners to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs. We often think of word-of-mouth being one learner speaking to a friend or family member about their experiences, but it can be taken to another level. Literacy programs have been pursuing relationships with Apprenticeship-focused organizations in both formal and informal ways that create a larger word-of-mouth referral opportunity. They're asking: instead of trying to sell prospective Apprentices on your services, why not let the organizations they want to work with do it for you?



Through these relationships, literacy programs have established processes where all applicants for skills training or pre-Apprenticeship programs are provided flyers for the local LBS program during their intake.

“Our marketing is to places that do pre-Apprenticeship training to tell them we can help with assessments and preparing people to be successful in the trades they’re training them for. We let these training agencies know we can support their students with math upgrading and computer literacy so they can keep up with the Apprenticeship curriculum. We also tell them we can prepare people for the GED exam so they can sign up as Apprentices (since without grade 12 they can’t sign).”

Key Informant Interview

Big Idea from the Field: An effective way for Apprentices who could benefit from basic skills upgrading to discover literacy programs would be for the Ministry to establish a process where the first time an Apprentice fails the C of Q, they are referred to Literacy and Basic Skills for test prep, test-taking and study strategies, etc. Being told by the Apprenticeship Office that they can attend a free short-term targeted test preparation program to help them prepare for the C of Q would drive Apprentices to literacy programs and help with completion rates.

“With the government being so concerned about Apprenticeship completions, why not use the resources they have? We need the ministry consultants who have the Apprenticeship portfolio to make referrals to LBS when they see anyone who’s written the test and hasn’t passed.”

Key Informant Interview

Literacy programs that market to and establish a relationship with pre-Apprenticeship programs have found remarkable success, increasing the number of students they serve and helping prospective pre-Apprentices build the skills they need to be successful. Sometimes opportunities arise informally because of these relationships, through casual conversations at meetings or in the community. The true power of organizational word-of-mouth promotion can be seen through the partnerships developed because someone who runs a pre-Apprenticeship program was casually chatting with an LBS practitioner.

“He said, “I need people for my pre-Apprenticeship program.” The city was focusing on developing youth skills and there was a great connection there. Our program became the third piece as the skill building opportunity. It was a fluke conversation. But it’s about grabbing the opportunity as it happens.”

Key Informant Interview

Through conversations with pre-Apprenticeship programs, Literacy practitioners learn what challenges and issues these training programs are facing. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) staff become problem-solving partners, as they share how they can help improve success for pre-Apprentices.

“People completing the electrician pre-Apprenticeship program were frustrated finding out they needed a Grade 12 math credit for their trade - they felt like they had to work their way backward by going to Grade 12 after completing the program. I pitched the involvement of LBS as a way to increase success and decrease frustration. Now we offer a math component. If pre-Apprentices have the Grade 12 math credit it’s a refresher... and if they don’t have that credit, they still do the refresher but we let them know that they will need the Grade 12 credit and provide access to the credit program.”

Key Informant Interview

An assessment is required as part of the application process for pre-Apprenticeship programs and several Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs have taken on the role of delivering it. Literacy is embedded into the process before a prospective Apprentice even begins their training. The results of the assessment indicate whether the applicant moves into the pre-Apprenticeship program or remains with the LBS program to build their skills.

“The assessment that the pre-Apprenticeship students go through is hard - pretty in-depth measurement and fractions - and it’s really not something everyone would know. The TDA developed the assessment, but we’re the one that deliver it. If the client can’t pass the assessment, they remain with us until they’ve upgraded their skills enough to try again. If they do pass, they return to the TDA to begin training.”

Key Informant Interview

Clearly one of the most common challenges faced by people pursuing the Skilled Trades are a lack of math skills, and several literacy programs have partnered with pre-Apprenticeship programs to support this specific element of foundational upgrading.

“When the TDA accepts applicants, they are told that the Trades Math program we offer is required for them to continue. They do one to two 3-hour classes per week in the evenings (so they can work during the day) for eight weeks. If they drop out / don’t attend, then they won’t continue in the pre-Apprenticeship program.”

Key Informant Interview

Some LBS programs have developed specific preparation-style training that aligns with the Skilled Trade of their local pre-Apprenticeship program. When prospective pre-Apprenticeship students are assessed for their readiness to begin, if their skills are found lacking they are referred directly to these preparation programs. This helps the Training Delivery Agency see the value that LBS can provide and builds the skills that the future Apprenticeship candidate needs to be successful.

Big Idea from the Field: While relationships are being established with pre-Apprenticeship programs, there is more work that could be done connecting Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs directly with employers. Making those connections between employers and LBS programs better - easier - helping employers understand that there's so much benefit to having literacy programs as a resource. We'd like to develop a way to connect programs to the employers in their community so information could flow back and forth.

Several of the strategies used to overcome learner challenges have the additional benefit of helping LBS practitioners themselves gain a deeper understanding of the trades and what **supports/resources** Apprenticeship-bound learners can access.

To further enhance that understanding, multi-staffed literacy programs report that having a single employee who focuses on Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades is helpful. That person can participate in Apprenticeship-related meetings, attend webinars and summarize the key messages for others. Programs that share staff across agencies often benefit from their broadened experiences as well.



There are a lot of articles, news releases, reports and websites that focus on what's happening in Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades. When sifting through all of the available information, looking for resources produced within the adult literacy field help narrow the focus and provide helpful context. Practitioners found clear information through support organizations and Learning Networks of Ontario (LNO) efforts like Pop Up PD and the Apprenticeship Connection newsletter.

Taking advantage of local or regional expertise by joining groups focused on Apprenticeship provides programs with a "go to" person outside their own agency for questions. Participating in these groups has the added benefit of providing an opportunity to share information about the support that literacy programs offer.

While all literacy programs have staff with an expertise in adult learning, few have staff with **in-depth experience in the Skilled Trades**. Connecting with employers, Apprenticeship support networks, Apprenticeship offices and Training Delivery Agencies (TDAs) like Colleges and Unions to hear their first-hand experience has helped fill this gap. Programs that have pursued partnerships with pre-Apprenticeship programs also developed a deeper understanding of the Skilled Trades those programs support as well.



Provincial support organizations have become excellent resources for program staff who may not have first-hand experience in the Skilled Trades and who lack the time to do in-depth research to stay up to date on constant changes. Each of them shared the many ways they support their sector and encourage programs to reach out to ask about more ways they can help.

College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC) www.cscou.com

All College-based LBS programs are supported by the College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC), so they benefit from leadership, support and guidance designed for academic upgrading programs in Ontario Colleges. Through the CSC, College-based programs can access resources and professional development to help them support learners in upgrading their foundational skills for the Skilled Trades and achieving the Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) certificate to use for the purposes of registering as an Apprentice.

With support from the College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading, LBS programs have made updates to ACE courses like Apprenticeship math and technical math to better meet the needs of learners. The CSC also advocate for the recognition of the ACE program as a Grade 12 equivalent by employers the way it is recognized for the purpose of Apprenticeship registration.

The CSC frequently shares updates at regional meetings and through email about what's new in Apprenticeship. They find that the most valuable support they offer College-based LBS programs around Apprenticeship is professional development. They provide a general orientation to the Apprenticeship system in Ontario, and frequently work with their provincial literacy partners to facilitate webinars and workshops about Apprenticeship.

"People always say - Wow, I learned a lot today I didn't know about Apprenticeship."

Key Informant Interview

The College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading (CSC) has also shared valuable information about how Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs can be integrated into pre-Apprenticeship. They've advised programs to look at the success rates of students coming out of pre-Apprenticeship programs. Where are they struggling, or dropping out along the way? If they struggle academically or have trouble with the Level 1 Apprenticeship curriculum once they're done a pre-Apprenticeship program, it's an indicator that involving LBS intentionally (even just 4 weeks of refresher upgrading) can positively impact pre-Apprenticeship success rates.

Knowing that testimonials and personal stories make an impact, programs are invited to find a great story to share with their learners in the College Matters quarterly publication, which can be found at <https://www.cscou.com/college-matters-archives>. Publications like these offer a great opportunity to share success stories from your own program as well.

The Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA) <https://cesba.com>



All School Board LBS programs are supported by the Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA), which provides professional development and advocacy. Through CESBA, LBS program staff have access to a network of adult, alternative and continuing education program staff offering credit courses, language support such as English/French as a Second Language (ESL/FSL) and Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC), and literacy and academic upgrading.

CESBA offers a variety of supports for programs at 62 school boards across the province, recognizing that adult and continuing education departments are all different, flexing to meet the needs of the local community. They develop tools and resources, and while they don't report receiving a lot of requests for Apprenticeship-related resources, they look forward to meeting the needs of School Board-based LBS programs in this area.

A focus for CESBA is celebrating and promoting how collaborative the LBS community is, and continuing to engage and connect school board programs. They welcome the opportunity to interact, exchange information and develop contacts with others in the sector.

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) www.communityliteracyofontario.ca

CB Community Literacy of Ontario acts as a support resource for Ontario’s 100 Community-based literacy programs.

Through this organization, programs can access curriculum and resources, share information, attend training, and learn about initiatives impacting the entire Community-based sector. CLO offers support that considers the individualized nature of community-based programs, and they often receive requests for Apprenticeship-related resources.

“We (CLO) hear “I have a learner who’s interested in carpentry - what resources would fit with that?” or “Where can I find curriculum for hairdressing?” And support through that process - guidance through the path of getting to the Apprenticeship or Skilled Trade they want to pursue, particularly construction trades, hairdressers, and trades related to factory work.”

Key Informant Interview

There is a currently a strong government focus on Apprenticeship and Skilled Trades and it is a landscape that has seen a lot of changes. Knowing that it can be difficult to keep up with how Apprenticeship is evolving, CLO continues to conduct research (like this report), and to offer resources and training to better support Community-based programs with learners on the Apprentices / Skilled Trades journey. CLO also recognizes the value in the amazing partnerships being developed between LBS organizations and employers, Training Delivery Agencies and pre-Apprenticeship programs. They want to hear your stories and share them so literacy programs across the province can benefit.

Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO) www.laubach-on.ca

SB Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO) supports both Community-based and School Board LBS programs that offer one-to-one tutoring guided by the Laubach principle of "Each one Teach One". LLO provides training, resources and services to meet the changing needs of their members and adult literacy students across the province.

CB

They keep the literacy field updated on new initiatives through their monthly newsletter the LLO Express, and offer a variety of resources for tutors, trainers, teachers, and adult literacy students through their online bookstore.

Although LLO acts to support literacy practitioners in finding the resources they need, they do not commonly receive questions related to Apprenticeships and the Skilled Trades. Given that many learners in one-on-one tutoring programs are working at lower literacy levels, this could be because they likely have a long path ahead of them before pursuing an Apprenticeship. LLO continues to support ongoing professional development focused on Apprenticeship for literacy practitioners, and the development of curriculum resources that can be easily used by agencies with learners on the Apprenticeship goal path. To meet that need, LLO is currently developing a series of low-level readers with a focus on Skilled Trades.

For Strengthening the System

To raise **awareness of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)** and recognition for the valuable role that foundational skill building plays, **networking became a winning strategy**. LBS programs are by their nature, collaborative. It can be challenging existing within large systems where not every department, organization, service provider, or ministry seeks out collaboration, but literacy programs and support organizations shared strategies they've been using to raise awareness of LBS and the important work these programs do.



SB Sometimes awareness and relationship-building must happen close to home. School Boards and Colleges may have many departments or campuses, and given that LBS is often a small department, other staff may not know about the LBS program.

C

Programs have established cross-departmental relationships within these large organizations by networking with their colleagues, asking about their work, sharing what LBS does, and looking for where their interests or goals align.

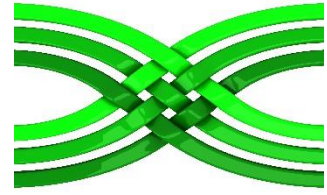
Moving from conversations to class visits between departments and campuses brings this strategy to the next level. It's easier to visualize what a literacy program does if you can see it for yourself, and the reverse is true too. Bringing LBS learners to visit other programs, particularly those related to the Skilled Trades, can open new doors for them as well.

As internal understanding and referrals grow, learners benefit too. They find out about programs and services they may want to explore, and can see their next steps may be just down the hall. When Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) is recognized as an internal support and students are struggling in other programs at the same location, they don't feel they are being sent somewhere else but simply accessing internal support. It's a great way to reduce stigma.

"It's about intentionality - bring people into the LBS classroom so they can see what happens there. Not just prospective learners – everyone. Bring in industry people. Let them see it to learn about it. Site visits are powerful."

Key Informant Interview

Creating or participating in external networking groups can take this practice from within a single organization and expand it to an entire community. Many LBS organizations participate in their local Literacy Service Planning table along with poverty reduction, life stabilization, and Apprenticeship-related committees. They are always watching for the ways literacy intersects with other social and employment issues and can speak to them directly with related organizations.



“We’re in constant communication amongst all agencies within the city, supporting one another. We created a MicroHUB committee where all ES and LBS providers come together to discuss needs/concerns/observations that are present in our city.”

Survey Respondent

Recognizing that there can be a vast network of systems that impact each sector, connecting with others outside the immediate program or community can also lead to excellent opportunities to raise awareness. Literacy and Basic Skills programs that share information about their work at a broader level through one-on-one meetings, presentations, or articles in journals or newsletters can reach decision makers and communicators who can spread the word.

“We’ve been reaching out to the guidance department at the Board so they know that LBS can support incoming students with their Apprenticeship related goals. We’ve also met with the head of student success, and the representative who oversees the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). These contacts allow trickle-down messaging to be delivered to all school board locations as a result.”

Key Informant Interview

A strategic plan for connecting to people and organizations across the systems that impact Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) takes time and effort – not something everyone feels they have. Regional Literacy Networks and support organizations can play an excellent role in these efforts, especially on a provincial scale. Each year as part of their collaborative business planning processes, these organizations consider how they can work together on cross-sector research, reports and professional development opportunities. This provides an excellent opportunity for representatives from different sectors to explain the systems that impact them, and learn about others.



Increasing the understanding of what Literacy and Basic Skills is and how foundational skill building can help Apprentices achieve their goals may not be enough to ensure a constant flow of **referrals**. The registration issues that set some programs up to be in competition with each other or want to keep clients “in house” may not be easily overcome. However, Literacy and Basic Skills programs that have established relationships allowing them to explain the value they bring to others in the system often demonstrate stronger referral relationships.

Capitalizing on the Strength of Your Sector

Each Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) sector within Ontario has unique strengths, and through our conversations with programs and support organizations across all sectors, we learned some specific ways those strengths can be capitalized on to support prospective Apprentices.

The College Sector



College Sector LBS programs, as part of large institutions that have significant organizational capacity, may have access to resources that other smaller LBS programs do not. Since colleges have entire marketing departments and strategies to attract students, College Sector LBS programs benefit from that brand recognition as well.

“There’s something about coming to a post-secondary institution that gives it cache for some people - for some, it makes it feel more “valid” educationally.”

Survey Respondent

Colleges often deliver Apprenticeship training and hire people with experience in the Skilled Trades to deliver programming, which in turn allows learners in the college’s Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs access to expertise. Having people extremely experienced in their Skilled Trade field delivering programs on the same sites as LBS can provide opportunities for learners to visit those Skilled Trades programs, ask questions, and plan their next steps.

Learners in College Sector LBS programs also get access to the college’s support services. They in essence become students at the college whether they plan to move on to college-level programming or not. That provides them access to student services, learning and accessibility supports, library services, academic advising, and other resources. These are valuable in-house wraparound supports.

The School Board Sector

SB School Board Sector LBS programs benefit from being part of a multi-faceted adult education system with a focus on the various paths to achieving an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD). This gives them a unique ability to co-support learners in LBS as they are progressing through high school credit and co-op programs. Having resources available within their schools, like guidance counsellors who can assess transcripts and perform Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), can make the learner’s journey seem even more achievable.

“Having access to PLAR within the school means a learner’s time to achieve the credential wanted by their employer/sponsor or union can be short, especially if they can work on them regularly and with LBS support.”

Survey Respondent

It also gives learners new options, as some boards partner with local colleges to offer Adult Dual Credit classes that award not only high school credits but credits towards college-level courses. This can allow LBS learners an opportunity to try something at a college level that builds their confidence to pursue further post-secondary education.

Many adult high schools offer a variety of career-focused courses in Apprenticeship trades such as hair styling or chef. These courses, along with programs that prepare students for careers in Personal Support Work or other needed sectors, often earn high school credits as well.

“The co-op department at the school board can also connect with the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). For any Apprenticeship trade programs, we can register them for OYAP and the 200 hours for co-op counts towards their required hours.”

Key Informant Interview

The Community-Based Sector

CB Community-based Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs are often independent of large institutions, giving them the freedom to make decisions and respond to community needs quickly. Being in the unique position of not being associated with a school board or college, Community-based LBS programs have developed an understanding of each educational path that a learner may choose to follow including the General Educational Development (GED) certificate, the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), and Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) certificate. This, combined with their ability to offer individualized and often one-one-one support contextualized to the learner’s Apprenticeship goal, is a powerful combination.

“One of the greatest benefits of having community-based LBS support Apprentices is our ability to identify and focus on individual skills gaps and cater programming to their personal learning style. Though many learners might have strong aptitudes in their area of Apprenticeship, they often lack specific essential skills that make the transition to stream-lined formalized education difficult. LBS is able to build these essential skills while directly relating them to their use in Apprenticeship.”

Survey Respondent

Community-Based programs are often the first stop for someone with lower literacy skills, those who may need more one-on-one or small group attention, or who feel intimidated by walking in the door of a large institution like an adult high school or college-based program. As a result, community-based programs have developed a unique set of skills and often support learners with complex needs, lower literacy skills and negative associations with education.

“A number of our learners are coping with extra challenges, including learning challenges, or adapting to living in Ontario, or as children of non-English speaking immigrants. We offer small groups (maximum of eight students) with our staff instructors, and or one-to-one classes with our volunteer tutors. This enables us to focus on the individual challenges, assisting the learner in finding strategies that work.”

Key Informant Interview

To overcome these complex challenges, community-based programs offer a very people-centric approach to their relationship with learners, offering the “gentle touch” and encouragement learners need to begin what can often be a long and intimidating journey. This often means the relationship between a community-based LBS practitioner and their learners is longer – seldom does someone drop into a community-based program for a “quick fix” and then move on to their next steps.

“From my perspective the most important thing needed is an environment that is safe and conducive to learning. Community-based programs can maintain small class sizes and create a safe environment for learners to come to.”

Key Informant Interview

Success Stories

As mentioned by the sector support organizations we spoke to, there is incredible power in hearing stories from those who have upgraded their skills, successfully navigated the Apprenticeship system and began a rewarding career in the Skilled Trades.

Learn more about the determination of prospective Apprentices in adult literacy programs, and the innovative and inspiring work being done within Literacy and Basic Skills by reading some of the success stories shared with us during the development of this report.



STORY 1

We worked with a guy who had lied on his resume to get a job, saying he had completed high school. He worked at a garage changing tires and had a lot of practical skills in the trades, but now he wanted to become a full mechanic and knew he would need to prove his education. He wanted to work towards either Grade 10 or Grade 12 but could only come in twice a week. He transitioned through LBS, then did independent study for credit with support from LBS, navigating all the work required and earned the credential he needed. The teacher even went to his workplace to let him know - he was crying, his boss was crying... and he went on to earn more money right away. It made such a difference.

STORY 2

If employers get to know you, word-of-mouth referrals are incredible. We had two employers of heavy-duty auto mechanics who came to us for support, and we were able to help some of their Apprentices with their test taking and reading comprehension skills so they could pass the Certificate of Qualifications (C of Q). The word-of-mouth promotion was amazing. Employers would give their staff time off to come to the program for support.

STORY 3

One of our learners came to us needing 4 credits to graduate high school. We supported him to prepare for that, after which he took a culinary program at college. Then he came back to our program to get support with preparing to apply for work, and when he was successful, he cooked for a year in the Northwest Territories. He returned and started working in a better job at a local restaurant, and his sister came to us for support with completing her high school too. When she's done, their plan is to open a restaurant together.

STORY 4

A lot of our success stories come from helping people get their Grade 12 diploma - one guy who we supported with upgrading his skills so he could complete his high school went on to get his welding certificate and was suddenly making 80K a year!

STORY 5

We worked with a learner who had been homeschooled and didn't have a diploma, but he was very smart and knew what he wanted to do in terms of the Skilled Trades. Because we have a good relationship with the school board, we had seen their prep material for Junior Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) and were able to supplement it to not only help him build the skills to pass the test, but also to develop the skills needed for Grade 11 and 12 level material. He wrote the Junior PLAR successfully and was able to complete a co-op placement to earn more credits. We then helped him prep for Senior PLAR. He wrote and successfully passed Senior PLAR, then completed his last 4 credits and is now successfully employed as an Apprentice woodworker.

STORY 6

We worked with an electrical Apprentice who had been working in the field for 15 years and he had written the Certificate of Qualification (C of Q) exam 3 times and failed. He brought a CD or DVD of prep questions and we used it to help him prepare. That's when we realized that it wasn't that he didn't know what he was doing - he couldn't determine what the question was actually asking him. What he really needed was test prep, so we broke the questions down so that he could figure out what the actual "ask" was... and he would know the answer. After working with us to prepare, he wrote again and passed.

STORY 7

We helped one learner in his 50s prepare for truck driving because he had to have a proof of Grade 10. He was very down on himself and struggled with math, but we worked with him for close to a year, By the end he was able to earn Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) credits through the school board, demonstrate that he had Grade 10, and complete his truck driver training. He was successful and knowing how the program could help him he also came back to upgrade his computer skills.

STORY 8

A learner came to us about 5 years ago and he had been working in construction for over 20 years. He left school at 16 and was now in his 40s. He was working in construction in the solar installation field and came to us because he'd been fired by his boss the day before. They wanted to sign him up as an Apprentice and couldn't since he didn't have Grade 12. He came and he was driven to succeed, probably in part by his anger at being let go without being given a chance to get the credential he needed. He upgraded, got his General Educational Development (GED) certificate, and then signed up as an Apprentice with another company. He even bought a gift for the LBS instructor when he got his GED certificate... It shows people: you can be an expert in the field - be able to teach others how to do the job, and you still can't sign up to be an Apprentice without that Grade 12 equivalent.

Resources

One common theme in conversations with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs supporting prospective Apprentices is their commitment to finding resources that can support their learners' goal paths. Human resources are a piece of the picture, particularly for organizations that have developed internal or external partnerships with representatives of the Skilled Trades. The connections, access to authentic documents and course outlines, and shared first-hand knowledge are invaluable to both practitioners and learners.

Programs also shared a wealth of in-house activities and curricula, and dozens of books and online resources they rely on. While this report isn't intended to share an annotated list of every resource used to support learners with goals related to the Skilled Trades, we will share 8 of the most commonly recommended resources (and a bonus tip!).

Occupational Curricula

Literacy Link Eastern Ontario's essential skills occupational curriculum helps learners develop key skills in several Apprenticeship-related careers, including food processing, landscaping, printing machine operator, Skilled Trades helper and more.

Find it at: www.lleo.ca/resources.html

LBS Resource Forum

Community Literacy of Ontario's and Laubach Literacy Ontario's Literacy Resources and Discussion Forum includes an annotated resource library for Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies broken down by goal path.

Find it at: <https://lbsresourcesandforum.contactnorth.ca/>

Apprenticeship / Skilled Trades Resource Guide

Community Literacy of Ontario's compendium of resources includes information and links to 50 of the most popular resources LBS practitioners shared for supporting adult learners on the Apprenticeship goal path.

Find it at: <http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wpcontent/uploads/Apprenticeship-Skilled-Trades-Resources-Guide-March-2021Final.pdf>

Measure Up!

Skill Plan supports the construction industry in BC, and their online Measure Up! tool gives learners an opportunity to practice reading text, document use, and numeracy skills.

Find it at: <http://www.skillplan.ca/measure-up/>

Measurement and Calculation for the Trades

Skill Plan's workbook "Measurement and Calculation for the Trades" helps construction Apprentices to prepare for technical training by reviewing the required numeracy skills including using whole numbers, decimals, fractions, ratio/proportion, percent, measurement & conversions, perimeter, area, volume, and right-angle triangles.

Find it at: <https://www.skillplan.ca/measurement-and-calculation-for-the-trades/>

Apprenticeship Live Binder

Literacy Link South Central developed the Live Binder website to house Apprenticeship information and resources for literacy practitioners. It's goal is to provide instructors with information and resources that build their capacity to work with students who have an Apprenticeship as a career goal.

Find it at: <http://www.livebinders.com/play/play?id=1955776>

Supporting Apprenticeship Completions: Exam Preparation Resources for the Certificate of Qualification Writer

This resource from the Mid North Network offers contextualized Certification of Qualification (C of Q) preparation for the following trades: electrician, industrial mechanic millwright, plumber, general carpenter and automotive service technician. The final products include a consolidated guide, an annotated bibliography identifying availability and best practice use of existing resources; a comprehensive exam readiness guide and contextualized workbook for the Certificate of Qualification exam writer; and the resources are translated into French.

Find it at: <https://northernliteracynetworks.ca/supporting-apprenticeship-completions-exam-preparation-resources-for-the-certificate-of-qualification-writer/>

Skilled Trades and Apprenticeship Resources for LBS

This website from QUILL Learning Network links to adult literacy resources and projects across the province that focus specifically on helping learners prepare for a career in the Skilled Trades.

Find it at: <https://sites.google.com/view/apprenticeship-resources/general-information-and-resources>

Bonus Resource: Western Campus Resources in North Vancouver, BC is a supplier of value-priced used textbooks and new novels for Canadian schools. Literacy practitioners mentioned them as an excellent resource for older or out-of-print learning materials.

Find it at: www.WesternCampus.ca

Conclusion

Across all sectors, Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs and support organizations recognize the challenges faced by learners, programs, and our intersecting systems. We are innovative problem-solvers driven to work toward solutions, and Community Literacy of Ontario is proud to have shared some of those solutions and “big ideas” with you in this report.

The impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic will be felt for quite some time, and is resulting in significant shifts and vacancies in the labour market. There are jobs to be filled – jobs that require strong foundational reading, writing, math, communication and technical skills. There is clearly an important role to be played by Literacy and Basic Skills organizations. We have so much to offer when it comes to supporting and guiding job seekers so they can be successful in the Skilled Trades.

We are excited by the successes already demonstrated by the LBS field, and encourage others to use them as inspiration to help overcome their own Apprenticeship challenges. Consider a new marketing technique, pursue a new partnership opportunity, or try a new resource – and don’t forget to share your successes with others so we can all learn and grow!

With the need for Skilled Tradespeople growing across Ontario there is more work to be done, and collaboration between all sectors will continue to be important. By working together and learning from each other, we can strengthen the entire Literacy and Basic Skills systems ability to respond to and support Apprenticeship and the Skilled Trades.