

December 2019



Needs Assessment

Final Report

EXECUTIVE Summary

The Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA) builds engaged learning communities through literacy and foundational learning programs by providing supports and resources to Edmonton-based agencies. In 2019, ECALA undertook a needs assessment, conducted by AndersonDraper Consulting Inc., utilizing an asset/community-building approach to understand funding barriers for organizations and discuss innovative solutions. In addition, the project tested for alignment of data provided by adult learning organizations with relevant research, shared the data and final report with funded organizations and findings were used to inform ECALA's strategic direction and funding priorities. The needs assessment was completed through a collection of multiple lines of evidence; including focus groups, surveys, data and a review of key documents.

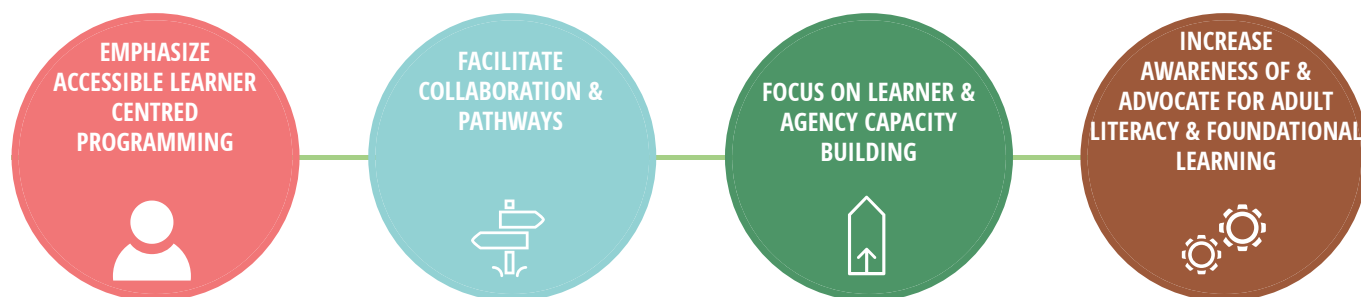
To base the needs assessment in evidence, a review of recommended documents relevant to adult literacy was conducted. In particular, the 2009 assessment of the educational programming needs of low-income adult populations commissioned by ECALA and Norquest College explored educational gaps, trends and barriers for accessing learning within the City of Edmonton, as well as best practices for working with low-income learners. The 2009 report, consistent with this needs assessment, recommended a continued emphasis on cross-ministry initiatives, improved social support structures and active inclusion of marginalized adults as well as offering a continuum of educational services, defining learning outcomes more broadly than currently are, a focus on strengthening grassroots initiatives and advocacy. Key findings from the other documents reviewed include confirmation of the importance of foundational concepts to learning and the influence of literacy and numeracy on positive outcomes, skill development, employment, social viability, health and poverty. In addition, the skills were foundational for the development of higher-level cognitive skills which have substantive impacts on health and social outcomes. The documents highlighted literacy is and should be viewed as a human right. In addition, the review identified literacy and adult learning practices in other jurisdictions that may inform the work of ECALA.

Both learners and agency staff and volunteers were engaged throughout the project. At the core of the need's assessment were a diverse set of learners who were engaged through interactive facilitated discussions and an online survey to assess the needs of the primary users of ECALA's programs, supports and resources. There were seven learner focus groups, with over 112 learner participants, in addition to 315 learners surveyed. Learners highlighted the importance of programs that provided them with improved literacy, an increased sense of belonging, enhanced job skills, improved parenting literacy and increased self-efficacy. The magnitude of the impacts identified by learners was such that they had cascading effects throughout their lives. Learners identified other areas they wanted to learn more about, specifically, reading, writing and speaking, vocabulary, grammar and spelling, learning a non-English language, employment skill development, certification, financial management, cooking and nutrition, technology skills, as well as positive parenting and child development.

EXECUTIVE Summary

Agency representatives provided key information through several facilitated conversation sessions and by completing an online survey reaching 106 agency staff and volunteers. Participants identified several priorities of adult literacy and foundational learning, most prominently being the importance of accessibility and programs being learner-centred. Agency staff identified gaps in adult learning and literacy programming around inter-generational learning, emphasizing/access to technology, flexibility and sustained funding.

Ultimately, the multiple lines of evidence helped to inform the following proposed priorities for ECALA:



The next section presents each priority along with the considerations for supporting it.

EXECUTIVE Summary

PRIORITY: Emphasize Accessible Learner Centred Programming



Focus on the whole student.
Accommodate different paces of learning.
Value learners lived experiences and culture.
Foster relationships.



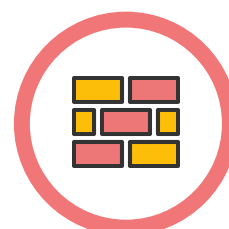
ECALA, as a funder, should be aware programs may require additional flexibility to commit to being truly learner centered, which may have funding implications (e.g., potential for multi-year agreements, potential to focus on funding fewer yet stronger, learner centered programs).



Offer workshops for front-line facilitators and partners as well as resources on the principles, application and evaluation of learner centred programming.



Request grant applicants demonstrate how their program is learner centred (offer ECALA's description based on findings from needs assessment) and ensure clear communication throughout the funding term reacting to potential learner centered changes in scope.



Demonstrate support towards reduction of accessibility barriers. Transportation, program location, timing, structure, family obligations, stigma around adult learning, learner needs, and challenges were some of the barriers noted in this report.

Considerations for Supporting this Priority

FOCUS GROUPS

As part of the learner focus groups, participants were asked about barriers to learning. Half noted challenges with accessibility (family commitments, transportation, scheduling and classroom time). A third mentioned differing levels of learner language proficiency within the same classroom posed a difficulty.

AGENCY SURVEY

54% of respondents rated "literacy is accessible to everyone" as their first priority, and 31% of respondents indicated "learner centred" as the second most important priority. When respondents were asked what makes it hard for learners to succeed, agency staff and volunteers predominately commented on external barriers such as childcare, transportation, other work or life stressors that impact success in the program.

LEARNER SURVEY

Respondents commented they experienced difficulties attending the class as a function of the location being far from where they live or work and the challenges with transportation (including public transportation and scheduling) to attend classes.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The Calgary Learns (2014) report summarizes themes around the need for instruction to become more learner-centred and holistic, and the interrelationships between the complex skills learners need (e.g., between literacy and critical thinking). The report identifies learner-centred programs, competent and well-trained staff, holistic approaches and establishing rapport with learners as best practice.

The 2009 ECALA & Norquest College report recommended programming that includes leadership & mentoring opportunities, community building, experiential & participatory learning, holistic and Indigenous pedagogies, peer learning, field experiences and job shadowing, civic education and building networks with community-based providers.

EXECUTIVE Summary

PRIORITY: Increase Awareness of & Advocate For Adult Literacy & Foundational Learning



Explore ways to expand ECALA's funding base (e.g. possible Gaming and Charity registration, collaboration with agencies on non-CALP grant funding.)



Ensure government and other stakeholders understand funding allocated to adult literacy and foundational learning is a sound investment with positive benefits. This is a collective responsibility. Agencies noted additional resources (funding and time) would be beneficial to support this priority.



Review current Edmonton advocacy networks (Edmonton Literacy Coalition, Literacy Works and City of Learners) to explore ways to collectively create awareness campaigns, fund research on updated literacy rates and to advocate for increased funding to address the demand for a highly skilled workforce in Edmonton.

Considerations for Supporting this Priority

FOCUS GROUPS

Spring Conversation participants noted the importance of making sure the government and citizens supported resources for adult literacy and were aware of emerging needs. The need to look for ways to leverage funding outside of government was also noted.

AGENCY SURVEY

When asked about what is missing from adult literacy and foundational programs, respondents talked about the lack of sustainable funds available to offer programs.

ECALA BOARD DISCUSSION

ECALA Board Members identified potential ways to expand ECALA's funding base and the importance of increasing awareness of the positive outcomes of adult literacy and foundational learning.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

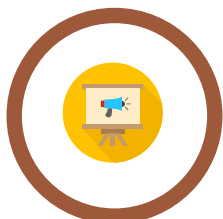
There are well-established relationships between literacy and economic, social and health outcomes. Lower literacy is associated with lower employability and professional attainment, lower health statuses, and increased likelihood of experiencing poverty. This information is important to share with stakeholders.

EXECUTIVE Summary

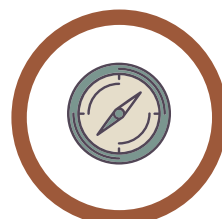
PRIORITY: Facilitate Collaboration Among Agencies & Pathways for Learners



Improve coordination within and between organizations that deliver adult education and training to support delivery of programs and services. Consider if the way funding is currently structured supports collaboration and relationship building or fosters competition.



Increase communication and utilize the ECALA website to ensure agencies and learners are aware of programs and services available to support adult learners. ECALA, in conversations with agencies, can explore innovative ways to enhance connections.



Establish pathways within courses and to other agency programs working towards a seamless learning system which allows multiple entry and exit points and reflects the individual conditions and life paths of adult learners. ECALA funded programs create pathways to improved economic & social outcomes for Edmontonians.

Considerations for Supporting this Priority

FOCUS GROUPS

In the spring and fall conversations and focus groups, some participants expressed the desire for a move away from competition towards collaboration and to stop duplicating services (though multiple services may be necessary). Some discussed the hesitation to refer participants to other agencies over concerns of losing the funding attached to the learner.

LEARNER SURVEY

When asked if they have gone to other adult learning programs at other locations, most learners noted they had not (60%) while 40% indicated they had. Respondents were asked if they can find what they want to learn next in their area. Although 45% noted they could, 16% could not find what they wanted to learn in their area and the rest (39%) responded they did not know.

ECALA BOARD DISCUSSION

ECALA Board members reflected on the importance of agencies being connected with one another as well as learners understanding their pathways from where they begin to where they can go to achieve their learning outcomes, which might not take place within the same agency.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The Nunavut Adult Learning Strategy (2009) included improved coordination, seamless learning system, focus on job skills & putting the needs of the learner first. The Increasing Learner Access Through System Alignment Report outlines recommendations, principles & guidelines to achieve greater alignment between community adult learning & post-secondary systems.

The 2009 ECALA and Norquest College report recommended service providers offer a continuum of educational services that provide support to community-based programs, move resources into the community, develop bridging/transitional programs community to institution. The report further encouraged agencies to continue collaborative initiatives among community-based organizations.

EXECUTIVE Summary

PRIORITY: Focus on Learner and Agency Capacity Building and Foundational Skills



Focus programming on areas which build learner and agency capacity and foundational skills (e.g. job skills, financial literacy, parenting, language acquisition).



The current government has a focus on economic improvement. ECALA funded programs provide low-cost opportunities for improving the economy through employment/employability, improved health & wellbeing and reduced poverty. Keeping in mind the earlier priority of learner-centred, it is important to be able to remain focused on learner goals versus only on outcomes or indicators measuring employment, post-secondary (including apprenticeships) lifelong learning goals of learners.

Considerations for Supporting this Priority

FOCUS GROUPS

In the Spring Community Conversation some participants noted the importance of community engagement, connecting with each other, learning together and the need for a shared vision. Relationship building comes first, it is a learner's right to be able to access lifelong learning.

AGENCY SURVEY

When asked about priorities for adult learning and foundational literacy, 23% of respondents (agency staff and volunteers) rated "building community capacity" as their fifth priority.

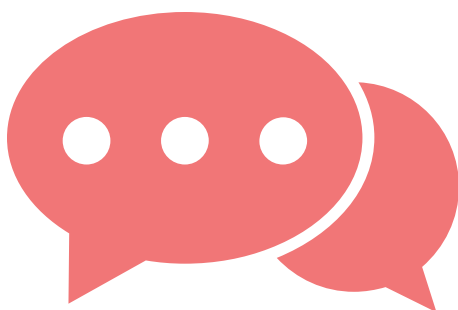
LEARNER SURVEY

When asked how learning makes a difference in their life among other reasons mentioned respondents commented on the importance of learning language skills that help them create a resume, navigate finding a job or going back to school.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The Catholic Social Services Stakeholder Forum Report (2016) found, in regard to adult education, participants identified language and literacy as barriers to employment, tight competition for employment, challenges with foreign credential recognition and lack of flexible options to allow for language training. Participants identified the need for more language and literacy training and lower level program options.

NEXT STEPS



Keep the Conversation Going

- Continue regular conversations between ECALA and funded organizations and further relationships that allow ECALA to have these conversations with learners and the front-line staff (who should have a direct voice in priority setting).
- Engage Indigenous learners and staff in a similar project.

Emphasize Collaboration

- Build shared collaborative language around what needs to be done and consider what is needed for an evaluation framework specific to Edmonton: Collective work, connected community, what does that evaluative framework look like?
- Review ECALA's funding model to be more conducive to supporting collaboration across agencies.



Finalize & Operationalize 2020-2023 Priorities

- Identify where additional work needs to be done, using these conversations and priorities as a tool.
- Engage in further discussion with Board members to finalize 2020-2023 strategic priorities and operationalize priorities.



Table of contents

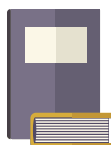
Introduction	01
Types of Data Collected	02
Limitations	03
Learner, Agency and Final Report Infographics	04
Document Review	05
Learner Survey Findings	06
Agency Staff and Volunteer Survey Findings	14
Focus Groups	22
Proposed ECALA Priorities	32
Next Steps	37
Appendix	38

Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA) builds engaged learning communities through literacy and foundational learning programs by providing supports and resources to Edmonton-based agencies. ECALA contracted AndersonDraper Consulting Inc. (Consultants) to complete a needs assessment using an asset/community-building approach. The assessment focused on learners, agency staff and volunteers. Multiple modes of data collection (focus/workgroup sessions, surveys, data & document review) were used for the purpose of triangulation (data saturation).

The objectives of the project were to:

- Understand funding barriers for organizations and discuss innovative solutions to address the barriers
- Test for alignment of data shared by adult learning organizations leadership, program staff, and learners with new and relevant research
- Share the data and final report with funded organizations and the adult learning community
- Determine ECALA's strategic direction and funding priorities based on the information shared by project participants.

ECALA welcomes agencies to use the information contained in this report to inform their own work, structure or build programs and help meet learner needs.



Recommended Citation

Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (2019). ECALA Needs Assessment. Edmonton, AB: AndersonDraper Consulting Inc.

Acknowledgements

ECALA and AndersonDraper Consulting Inc. thank all those who participated in the need's assessment. Many individuals contributed to this work by participating in the discussions, the agency and learner focus groups and filling out the survey. Their time and wisdom are appreciated.

Report Organization

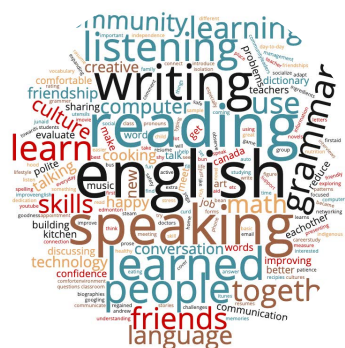
The report is organized as follows:

- An overview of data collected and limitations
- Learner, agency and final report infographics
- A summary of the document review
- Learner and agency survey findings
- Postal Code Map
- Focus group summaries
- Proposed priorities and next steps Appendices:
- Annotated Bibliography and City of Learners Agency Program



In-person Focused Discussions with Learners, Agency Staff, Volunteers and ECALA Board Members

Focus groups made use of traditional facilitation tools (small and large group discussion and flip charts) and incorporated online collaborative platforms that enable real-time recording and presentation of ideas, and captured participant responses to specific questions (polls, survey questions, brainstorming). Interactive activities to ensure participants felt comfortable were used throughout the discussions. The “Just Like Me” getting to know each other activity and word-cloud generation (using mobile devices), were a big hit with learners. As the project progressed there were several opportunities to “test” the data as priorities were emerging (e.g. ECALA’s AGM, Community conversations and Board strategic planning session). The focus group questions with agencies evolved to reflect knowledge gain and verify implications as more information was collected.



Interactive Activities

The “Just Like Me” getting to know each other activity and word-cloud generation (using mobile devices), were a big hit with learners.



Learner and Agency Staff and Volunteer Surveys

A learner survey was developed based on a similar tool created by Calgary Learns. As the tool used by Calgary Learns was well received by learners, it was felt using similar questions would be a useful way to proceed. A complimentary agency survey was also developed and hosted online. An incentive for survey completion was offered for both learner and agency staff/volunteers.



Document Review

A review and summary of other literacy projects and related research identified by ECALA helped to inform the needs assessment and priorities.

A diverse set of learners were engaged throughout the project. Participants in this Needs Assessment project were self-selected and as such may not be representative of the entire foundational adult learner and agency population. Generalizing to this population from this sample should be done with care. Unfortunately, due to the timing of the project and other constraints, the Consultants were unable to connect with Indigenous learners specifically. This gap is encouraged to be addressed in the next steps. Survey and focus group results offer a snapshot in time. The Consultants only reviewed the documents provided, excluded those over 10 years old, and did not undertake an independent literature search.

The following sections provide learner and agency infographics, followed by a summary of the document review, followed by the learner and agency survey findings and focus group synopsis.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

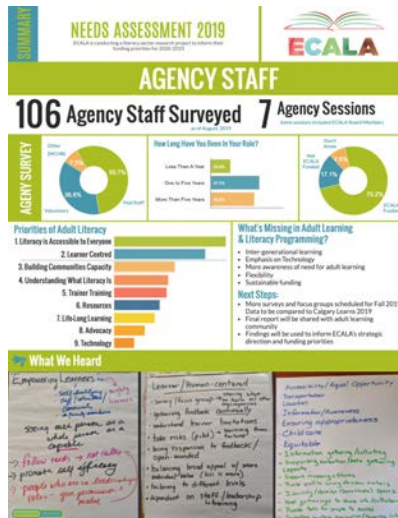
Learner, Agency & Final Report Infographics

04

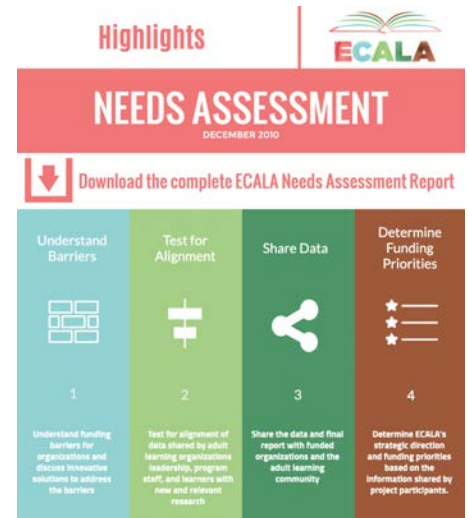
Infographics were created for the learner and agency engagement sessions and surveys, and a final infographic was created to aid in the communication of the Needs Assessment Final Report. These infographics are hosted through VISME.CO and can be embedded in the ECALA website or attached in an email. Click on the infographic below to view them online.



Learner
Infographic



Agency
Infographic



Needs Assessment
Final Report
Infographic

Throughout the project the ECALA Executive Director, staff and participants recommended documents they felt were important to consider as part of this work. See appendix A for a complete listing of documents reviewed and an annotated bibliography. The following summarizes key findings from the review. Much of the documentation outlined foundational concepts to learning and the impact of literacy and numeracy on skill development, employment, social viability, health and poverty.

The documents indicated the importance of literacy and numeracy for positive outcomes for both children and adults. Overall, documents highlighted the importance of literacy and numeracy skills as foundational for the development of higher-level cognitive skills. Subsequently, skill level has substantive impacts on health and social outcomes and is enhanced by literacy, numeracy and educational attainment. The most recent documentation focused on relevant research supporting literacy and essential skills and their linkages to both poverty reduction and as a determinant of health. Other reports were reviewed that detailed environmental scans, learning strategies in other jurisdictions and findings related to studies focused on non-academic outcomes. The highlights, supported by the review of documents, are as follows.



Key findings

- Literacy is and should be viewed as a human right.
- Literacy in children and adults is a foundational driver for skills development, employment outcomes, social outcomes, healthcare outcomes and poverty reduction outcomes.
- Some populations in Canada struggle with lower literacy more than others, specifically single parents, immigrants, Indigenous peoples and seniors. For example, immigrants score significantly lower on literacy and numeracy than Canadian-born individuals.
- There are well-established relationships between literacy and economic, social and health outcomes. Lower literacy is associated with lower employability and professional attainment, lower health status, and increased likelihood of experiencing poverty.
- Poverty is correlated with a reduction in cognitive ability as a function of the mental load required to focus on poverty-related concerns.
- Increased literacy, numeracy and educational experience are positively related to an increase in trust, volunteerism, political efficacy, engagement in community and health outcomes.
- Project-based literacy and skill funding has increased innovation but resulted in limited sustainability of programs and services.
- Outcome frameworks assessing the effectiveness of literacy programs are often too narrow in scope.
- Advancing literacy goals needs to be inclusive, engaging and transformational.
- Learner centred, holistic approaches are the most effective for low-skilled adults.
- Improving self-esteem and self-confidence are important indicators of success for literacy programs.
- Literacy benchmarks and best practices exist in other jurisdictions (Canada vs. International) and are worth examining for their articulated outcomes, indicators, goals and objectives.

More details on documents reviewed is available in the appendix. The documents were used as a source of data to help inform the priorities. The next section presents the Learner and Agency Survey Findings.

Summary

Learner respondents (n=314) provided positive feedback about the programs they attended as learners for themselves or their children. Respondents noted programs were having significant positive impacts in their lives. The challenges respondents noted were around the location of programming and length of time it takes them to get there.

The following represents findings organized by question. The number of participants who answered each particular question is provided. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding or skipped responses.

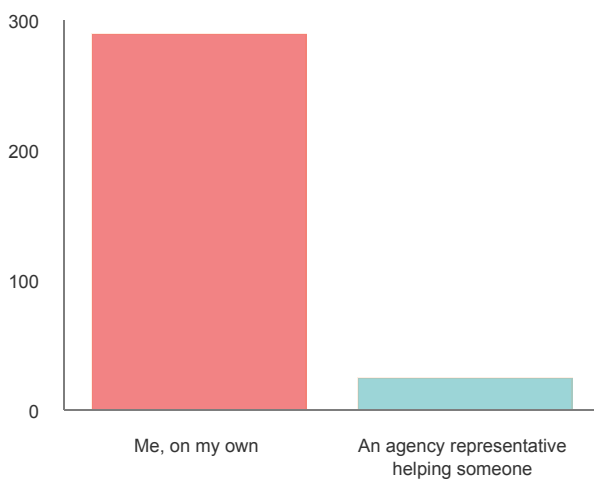
Demographic Information

Respondents were asked who was filling out the survey; 92% noted they were filling it out on their own and 8% noted an agency representative was helping a learner fill out the survey.

Generally speaking, most respondents noted they were between the ages of 35-54 (40%) or 19-34 (33%). In addition, many indicated they had a University/College or Post-Secondary Degree (43%). It is important to note the question did not ask where the degree was obtained, and it is likely respondents' post-secondary education was completed outside of Canada.

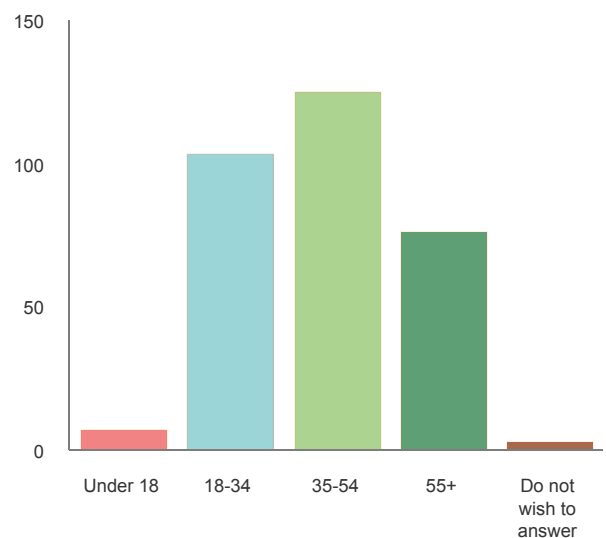
Who is filling out this survey?

n=314



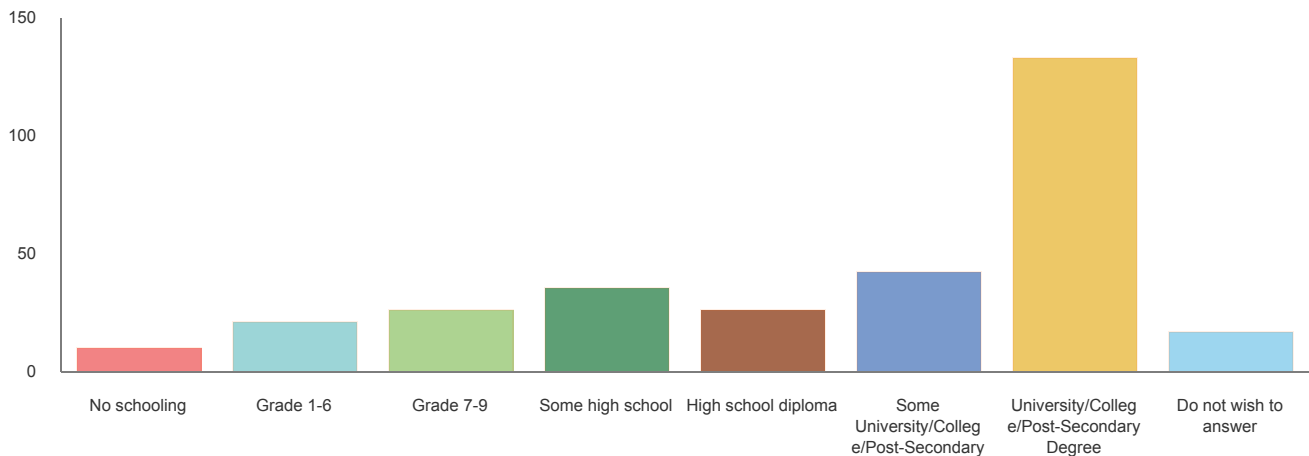
How old are you?

n=314



How far did you go in school?

n=311



Learner Information

Respondents were asked information about their experience with the learning programs they attended.

"To learn new songs and rhymes to sing with my daughter, to have my daughter socialize with other children, and to meet other mom's in my area."

"I came to learn more English to communicate with others and get a better job"

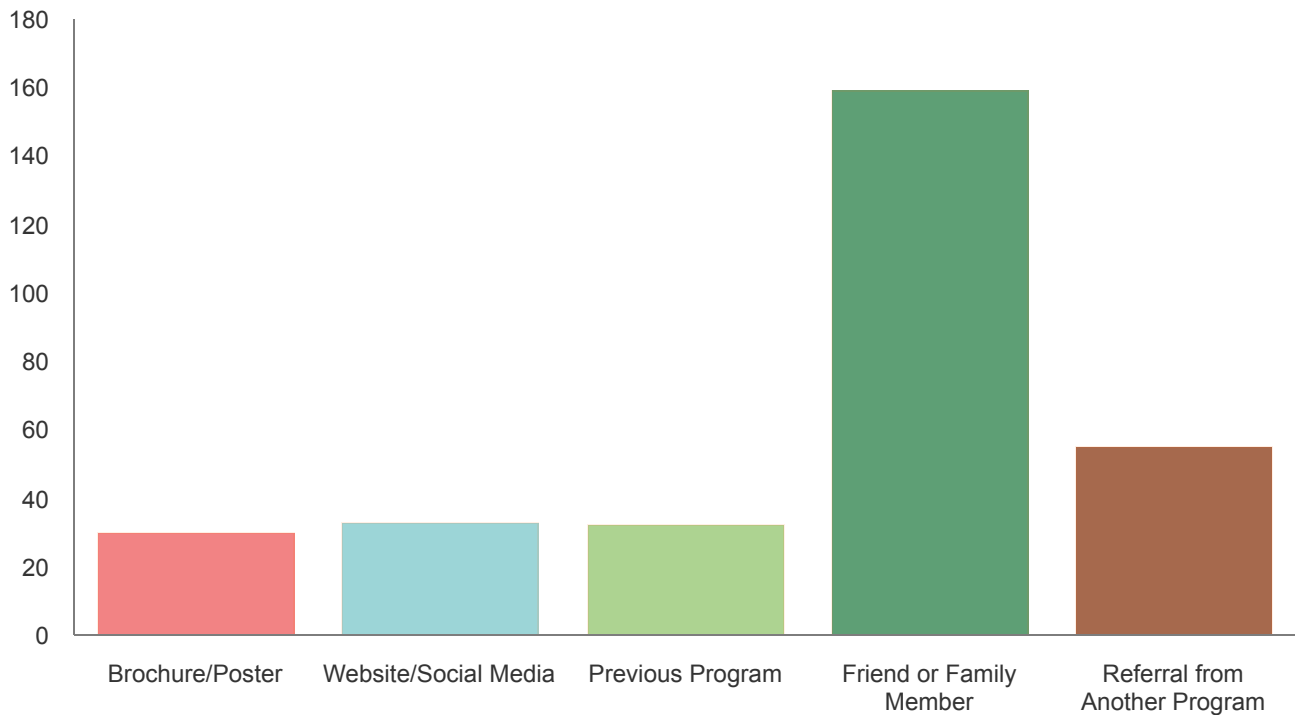
"I was referred to from another learning centre. I came for help with some of my education"

Why Did You Come to this Class or Program?

Respondents provided a range of responses when asked why they came to a class or program. Respondents noted they came to the program because they wanted to learn English, or to advance their education in English, and for employment readiness purposes. Other respondents noted they wanted to learn more about Canadian culture and social skills. A common answer was respondents who noted they came to the program to help their children learn literacy skills or to bond with their children. Other respondents noted they wanted to make friends or be part of a community.

How did you hear about the class or program? Select all that apply

n=274



Respondents were asked how they heard about the class or program. Most noted they had heard about the class through a friend or a family member (58%). For those that selected a referral from another program, they were asked to identify which programs. Respondents noted the following locations:

- Childcare
- NorQuest College
- Catholic Social Services
- Career program at Northgate mall
- The family doctor or health practitioner
- Multicultural programs
- Project Adult Literacy Society
- Bissell Centre
- Alberta Works
- Books for Babies
- Monthly calendar at the library
- Norwood
- Crisis Line
- Military Family Resource Centre
- Family Futures
- Google
- Win House

What Helps You Learn in this Class or Program?

Respondents were asked what helps them learn in the class or program they are attending. They talked about how their teachers help them learn in the class or program through the learning activities. Respondents noted specifically that having teachers who speak English as well as other languages to assist them with their learning was beneficial. Other respondents commented on how their tutor was helpful to them and assisted them in learning in the class or program. Respondents also discussed how interacting with other learners or program participants helped them to learn. Specifically, respondents talked about the importance of a community of learners and developing friendships. Respondents also commented about the use of computers or technology that helps them to learn. They shared the concept of repetition helps them to learn and hands-on experiences for their learning.

"This class helps me to talk with friends, doctors and everyone. How to listen, read, write and understand. How to use the computer, about employment and so on."

"Having the same facilitator every week we go to the program! Consistency in the songs and rhymes that are sung, help us to learn them quickly!"

"I found the discussions were helpful about how to encourage reading in the household and enjoyed hearing other parents' experiences."

"I think the continuous interaction with instructors, volunteers and students and group discussions."



What Makes it Hard for You to Learn in this Class or Program?

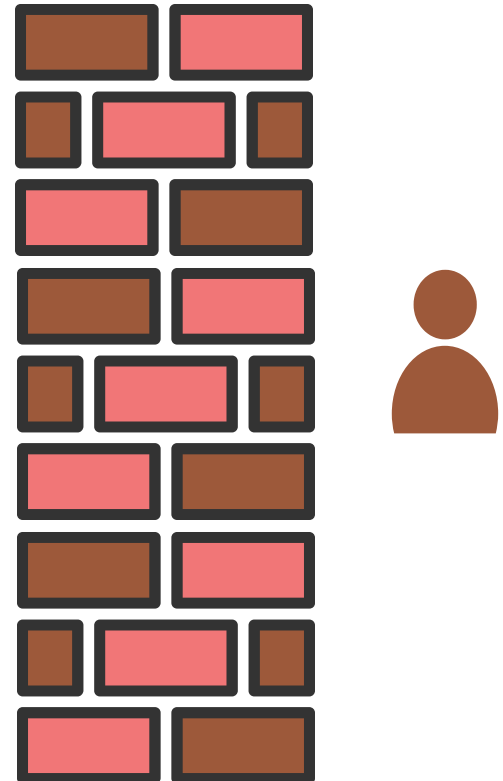
"Too many people in the small space. Large age range- hard to program for the different developmental ages."

"Distance to get there is hard via bus or most doctor appointments happened to be at the same time."

"Class can get cramped and have little room to sit in a full circle for full interaction."

"Well, English is not an easy language to learn"

"Too much noise, not being able to get the teacher's time to help me sort through any questions I might have. In this smaller class I didn't encounter these problems. I was always left with a project to work on when the teacher went to help another student and within a few minutes it was my turn for her attention..."



Respondents were asked what makes it hard for them to learn in the class or program. Respondents provided a range of fairly individual responses, but some themes emerged. They commented they experienced difficulties attending the class as a function of the location being far from where they live or work and challenges with transportation (including public transportation) to attend classes. Respondents also talked about challenges with understanding the language which added a layer of complexity to their learning experience. Some commented disabilities or memory loss made it challenging to learn in the class. Other respondents noted distractions in class like loud background noise made it a challenge to learn. Some respondents commented programs with large age ranges and developmental abilities made it challenging to learn (sometimes too hard, sometimes too easy).

How Does What You Are Learning Make a Difference in Your Life?

Respondents were asked about the difference what they are learning makes in their life. They provided fairly individualized responses, but some themes emerged.

For those that were taking courses to advance their English, respondents talked about being able to communicate more easily and gaining independence to navigate their environment with more ease as well as a feeling a greater sense of belonging. Respondents also talked about being happier because of being able to speak English and socially connect with others. Similarly, respondents talked about being able to read and write and interpret signs, communicate at the doctor and understand what people around them are saying. In addition, they commented on the importance of learning language skills that help them create a resume, navigate finding a job or going back to school. The majority of what respondents shared could be linked to developing the language that helped them to be confident and competent in their environment to navigate, make friends and obtain employment.

For those that were attending programming with their children, respondents talked about learning new songs or skills to use to help them develop and to help bond with their children. Respondents talked about building these skills and toolboxes as a parent to support their children. Respondents also talked about building social circles and connecting with other parents.

"I am happy to join class because I have a chance to talk Canadian."

"Improve my skills, to become more independent and to be more happy. To finding my way here in Canada, to solve my problems & to reach and capture my goals."

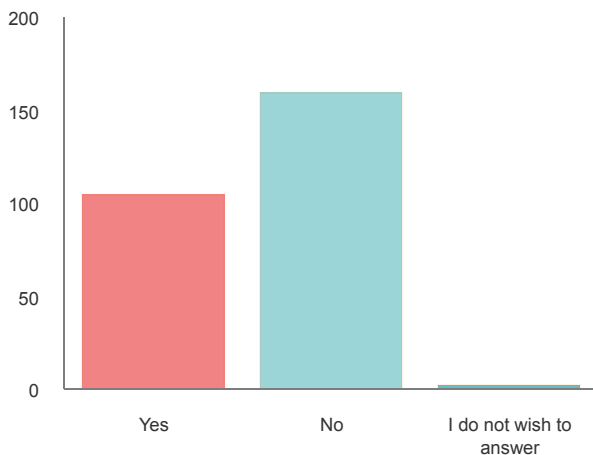
"It helps me a lot. I do all my needs in the society by myself. From calling to someone to renting a home. My only problem is speaking and listening. BIG THANK YOU from me!"

"Getting tips for early literature and life-long reading makes it easy to implement into our day to day life. I especially thought the review of age-appropriate books was helpful (ie. what to look out for baby's interest and safety). The facts about how and when children start reading were very interesting and will help us choose the right books for our child."

"It increases my knowledge or nursery rhymes, allows me to be social with my child with other adults and other infants/babies. It helps me feel more comfortable and confident when trying to stimulate my baby. As well it keeps me learning with my baby as he grows."

Have you gone to other adult learning programs at other locations?

n=265



Have You Gone to Other Adult Learning Programs at Other Locations

Respondents were asked if they have gone to other adult learning programs at other locations. Most noted they had not (60%) and 40% indicated they had.

What Would You Like to Learn Next?

Respondents were asked what they would like to learn next. Some respondents noted they wanted to learn how to read and write, others wanted to continue learning English, others wanted to learn more about Canada. Other respondents commented on wanting to learn life skills like interviewing, budgeting, typing skills and office duties. Some respondents commented on wanting to learn other songs, baby sign language, parenting strategies and how to prepare toddlers for preschool.

"I like to continue learning rhymes with my child as he grows. I also would enjoy learning more imaginary play ideas."

"I like to express myself more in English speaking. I am not satisfied with that yet, but I hope to get it."

"I would like to learn to be able to write and read very well."

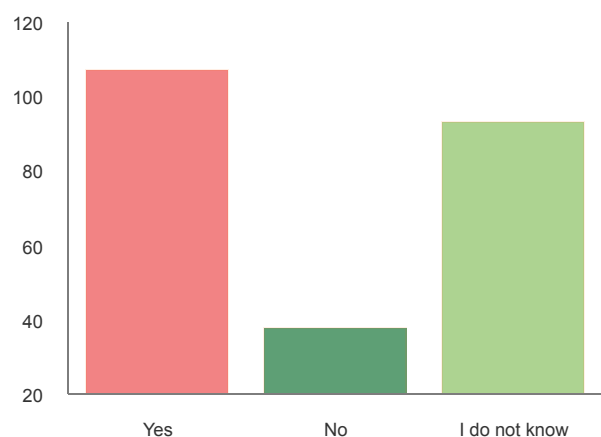
"Continue to learn new and interesting ways to read and facilitate learning at home."

Can You Find What You Want TO Learn Next in Your Area?

Respondents were asked if they can find what they want to learn next in their area. The majority noted they could (45%), where 39% did not know and 16% could not find what they wanted to learn in their area.

Can you find what you want to learn next in your area?

n=238



Please share any other comments or information about classes or programs in Edmonton that you feel is important for ECALA to know?

Respondents were asked to provide any additional comments or information. Responses were generally individual, and most were quite positive commenting on the importance of the programs, the great teachers and thankfulness for the opportunities to learn. Some respondents provided feedback that some classes were too far away from home and they wish they were longer to accommodate how long they travel to attend.

"Rhymes that Bind was a wonderful program for myself and our two young children to attend. It was flexible, so if we came late or had to leave early, it was completely acceptable. The leaders were educated, warm, and always welcoming. It is a WONDERFUL program that needs continued funding to serve the community."

"The quality of the program mostly depends on the person leading the program. The more enthusiastic, understanding, and caring the leader, and more knowledgeable, the more you can learn."

"I love this class and I enjoyed to come here because every time I come here I learned and I developed new skills and experiences."

The next section presents findings from the agency survey.

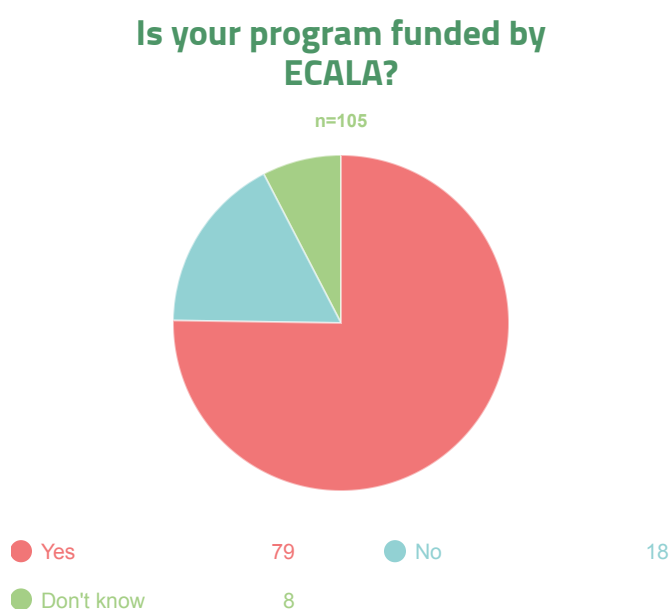
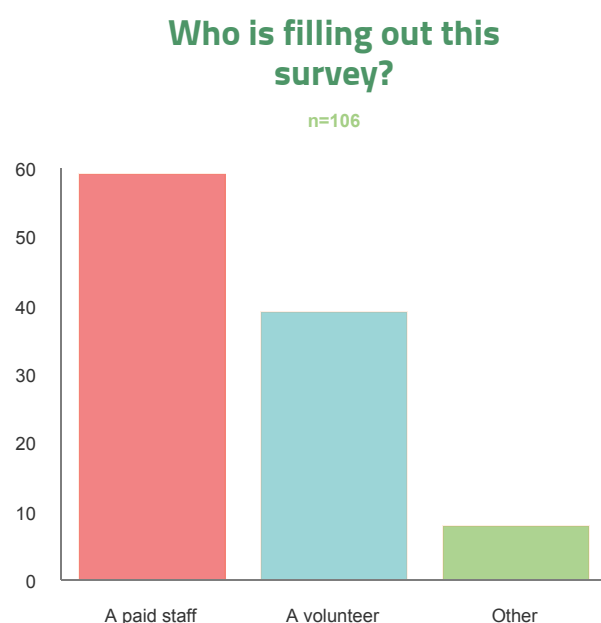
Summary

Overall, agency staff and volunteer survey respondents (n=106) provided positive feedback about programs their agency provides for learners. They identified key outcomes for participants that demonstrated the importance of literacy as a building block for success from both childhood through to adulthood. Respondents identified the importance of assisting learners in learning English and skills to navigate their environments and build social and economic capital. Respondents identified some barriers that prohibited learners from being successful, which included transportation issues, external stress, multiple commitments, language challenges and confidence. When asked what was missing in education, respondents predominately talked about digital literacy and offering accessible, barrier-free programming. The majority of respondents (75.2%) indicated their program was funded by ECALA.

The following represents findings from the survey, organized by question. The number of participants who answered each particular question is provided. Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding or skipped responses.

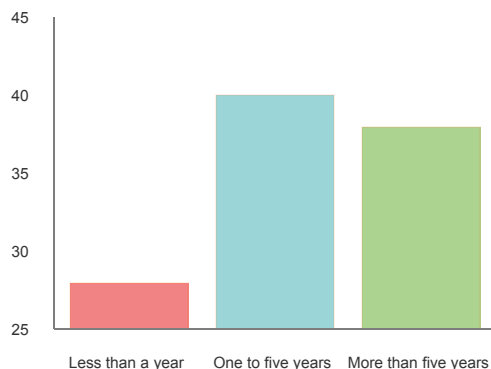
Demographic Information

Respondents were asked demographic questions to contextualize their responses. Most respondents noted they were a paid staff (56%), had been in their role for over a year (74%) and their program was funded by ECALA (75%). Respondents were asked if their program was funded by ECALA and most noted they were (75%).



How long have you been in your role?

n=106



How Long Have You Been in Your Role?

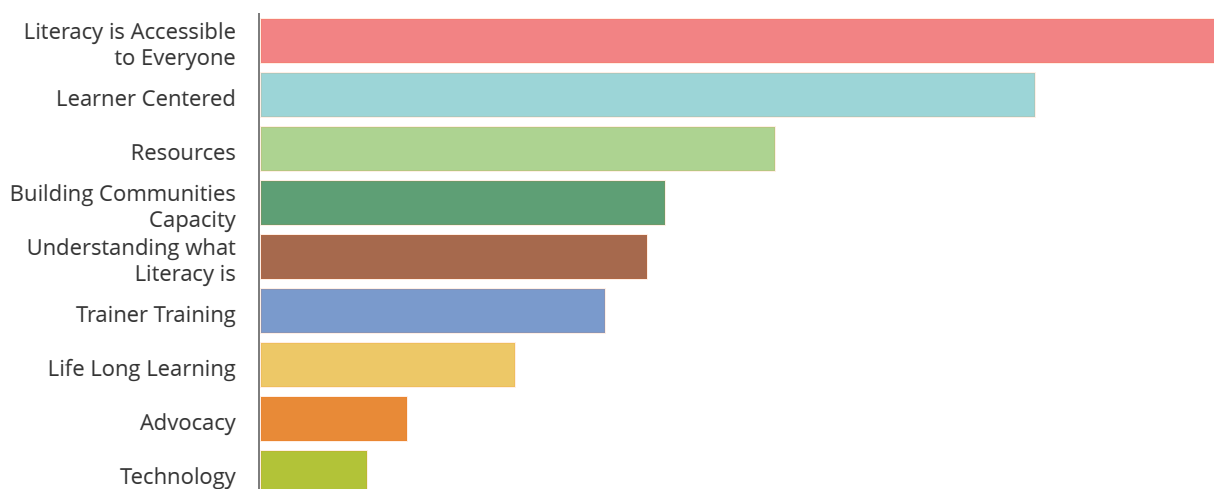
Respondents were asked about how long they have been in their role. Respondents most frequently noted one to five years (38%) followed by more than five years (36%) and less than a year (26%).

Looking at the World of Adult Literacy, Please Rank the Following Priorities Recently Identified in an ECALA Discussion Group

Respondents were asked to rank priorities recently identified in a previous ECALA discussion group (Spring Conversation). They were uniform in ranking the priority of literacy being accessible to everyone as the top priority (54% of respondents), followed by the priority of learner-centred (30%). Following that, respondents provided some diverging opinions in terms of priorities and ranking. Their overall ranking scores could be averaged into a total score that represents the importance of each priority, relative to the others. This analysis identified that after literacy accessibility and being learner-centred, the priorities of resources, building communities capacity and understanding what literacy is were identified as the next most important priorities.

Looking at the world of adult literacy, please rank the following priorities

n=89



"Engage other literacy partners and leverage resources so that other skilled people in the community can also delivery literacy programs (retired teachers, tutors etc.)."

"Methods for advancing through content as learning progresses that suit learner and encourage further progress."

"Cultural background needs to be considered and the program should be delivered by the community."

Are There Any Other Priorities That Should Be on the List Above?

After ranking the priorities, respondents were asked if there were any other priorities that should be on the list. Responses were fairly individual in nature, but some common themes emerged. Respondents identified the importance of cultural background and delivering programs by the community and bridging the learning with the organizations and programs. Respondents also talked about the accessibility of programs and the need to prioritize access and transportation. Other respondents commented on the need to also provide food and childcare to make programs accessible.

What Do You Believe Are the Main Reasons Learners Come to this Class or Program?

Respondents were asked to comment on the main reasons learners come to the class or program. Generally, responses were in two categories of learning: English as a second language course for adults and literacy programming for children and families. For English language programming, respondents commented on learners attending programming to learn or improve their English which can support employment opportunities and day-to-day life. In particular, respondents commented on learners coming to learn or improve English to obtain education or write important exams that would advance their careers. Respondents also noted learners came to the program not only to build skills but to expand their social networks and develop an enhanced sense of community.

Respondents commented on learners coming to develop confidence and to develop important literacy skills that provide the basis for navigating their environment and being successful members of their communities. Respondents commented some of the programs were attended by participants to socialize and connect with other parents and to learn from other experiences in parenting. They also discussed learners coming to support their children, develop healthy habits early and infuse literacy in their lives. Respondents also noted programming was attended because of the friendly environment and flexible schedule.

What do you believe are the main reasons learners come to this class or program?

"People come to [...] to learn, to feel successful, to feel good/confident about themselves, to better themselves and to gain important literacy and math skills. [...] is a supportive environment that helps people build relationships and to feel "part of " something wonderful."

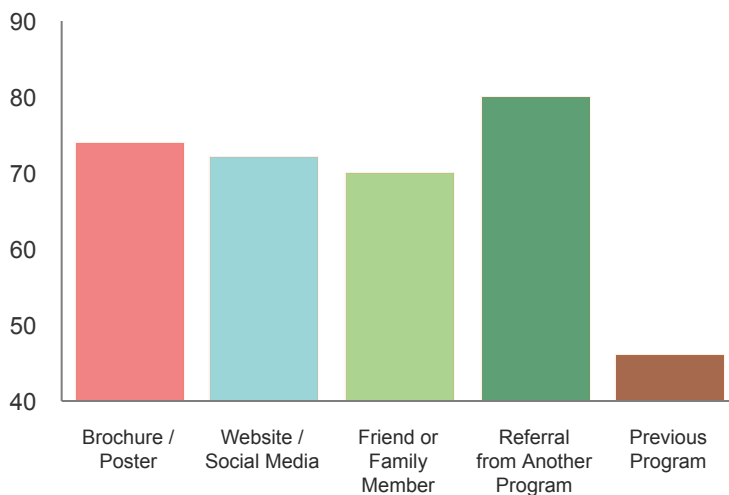
"To gain knowledge to improve their opportunities for employment, navigating supports and services, awareness of Canadian culture, desire to assist their family in their needs, creating independence/confidence/sense of community/etc."

"Because they want to move forward in their life. They recognize they need support to reach their goals which often revolve around being able to help their children with homework, read them stories, as well educational and employment goals. They need a program that is flexible because they have kids or they work, or they don't qualify for other programs."

"Learning skills and strategies for parenting and supporting children's literacy development is highly relevant and motivating for parents. Desire for community."

How does the agency promote this class or program? Select all that apply

n=94



How Does the Agency Promote the Class or Program (Select All That Apply)

Respondents were asked to indicate how their agency promotes the class or program.

Respondents noted they were promoting in multiple ways, most respondents indicating through brochures or posters (79%), website or social media (77%) or through friends and family (74%). Respondents were also asked to indicate other promotion sources and noted:

- Drop-in
- Other agencies
- Bus stop advertisements
- Volunteer fairs
- Through staff
- Word of mouth

What Helps Learners be Successful in this Class or Program or Just Generally?

Respondents were asked to comment on what helps learners be successful in the class or program, or just generally. They commented on the importance of the motivation of the learner to make them successful in the class or program. Similarly, they commented on the important role of self-esteem or confidence in facilitating learning. Respondents noted the importance of consistency in attending classes and learners using what they are learning outside of the classroom. Respondents commented on having one-to-one or small group support to assist with learning as beneficial for success. In addition, some respondents commented on the importance of resources and supports available to the learners for them to be successful.

"Showing up every week and participating and taking the time to speak English out of class as much as possible and listen too."

"Dedication and willingness on the part of the tutor and student. Also correctly identifying the goals of the student."

"Positive reinforcement and praise for their commitment to achieving their learning goals. Acknowledging how difficult the experience is - to persevere at something you are not good at and find extremely hard."

"Group learning, connections to support, safe and welcoming environment, learning skills and strategies that they can immediately implement and benefit from, match between the program and adult's learning goals."

"Barriers such as access, language, availability, learning disabilities (we are not equipped to manage), social/economics (employment, housing, food security, trauma)."

"In general - Stigma around literacy; don't put themselves first; not taking time to build relationships; guessing what their want or thinking we know what they need; expectations of quick success; barriers such as timing, transportation"

"Life is complex - things come up in life that are hard to navigate as a newcomer and/or as someone who doesn't speak English well enough to navigate bureaucracies and people get pulled down by it. We also have beginner beginners who we don't know how to support as well as we could. Better resources (that aren't aimed at children but rather are for *adults* learning English) and pedagogical supports for beginner instructors would help their students succeed better."

What makes it hard for learners to succeed in this class or program or just generally?

Respondents commented on external barriers such as childcare, transportation, other work or life stressors that impact success in the program. In some cases, they commented about the demotivation or lack of self-esteem or confidence that can impact the success of the learner. In addition, the language barriers and the expectations of each learner can create barriers for success. Some respondents noted the lack of support some learners have for attending, different cultural expectations for learning and integrating learning into their life. They also noted the stigma associated with literacy and the challenges that can pose for learner participation. Some commented on the challenges with listening that occur because of programs occurring in the evening when children or parents are tired.

How Does What You Are Teaching/Facilitating Make a Difference in a Learner's Life?

Respondents were asked how what they are teaching/facilitating makes a difference in a learner's life. They provided many key outcomes for learners. In particular, respondents talked about the employment opportunities that were available for participants that would impact their lives in fairly significant ways. Similarly, respondents talked about the increase of other opportunities like education or skill-building that allowed participants to navigate their environments and obtain opportunities. Respondents talked about developing key skills like financial literacy that help learners advance their life and save for the future. Respondents commented on the confidence created for participants in the program to achieve their goals, communicate with others in their environment and socialize and build networks. Respondents also talked about the support given to parents and children to set them up for future success in life and developing key building blocks to support them in the future.

"Every literacy skill (reading, writing, speaking and listening) and math skill gained enhances our lives in every way and in everything we do."

"The math class I tutor offers real-life skills to learners. Improving math skills creates self-efficacy in other aspects of their lives. Better employment prospects mean secure income for families and a virtuous cycle of education when parents are role models for their children."

"It is life changing. In a supportive environment, they are able to focus on improving their reading, writing and math skills so they can succeed whether it is in getting a driver's license, supporting their children, interacting with their community - so many small things we take for granted."

"Supporting the development of skills needed to reach their own goals. Being flexible enough to know that goals change."

"Increased feelings of confidence lead to change in behaviour and attitude towards supporting their children's learning and pursuing learning opportunities for their own benefit. Connections with other parents and other programs and supports help to integrate learners in their community and ensure all their needs are met."

"Helps people become part of a different community, have a place to make and hang out with friends. The program itself helps contribute to a rich life. Beyond that, life skills. Also validating self-worth (many students are women seniors who were not able to prioritize their own learning earlier in their time in Canada). The class also increases the expose of normative Edmonton society ppl at to people of different backgrounds, which decreases xenophobia."

What might be missing in adult learning and literacy programming?

Respondents were asked what might be missing in adult learning and literacy programming. Respondents offered some suggestions of gaps they have identified. They talked about digital or online literacy and the importance of having programs geared at developing that form of literacy. Respondents commented about gaps in programming that include expertise in cognitive challenges or disabilities and providing more varied opportunities and modalities to learn. Respondents talked about the lack of sustainable funds available to offer programs which limits their ability to advertise or meet those in need where they are. Respondents talked about first aid or CPR courses that are free or no cost for participants as a gap. Respondents commented about the importance of having accessible and available venues with parking and easy transportation options to offer programming.

"More and varied opportunities to learn are needed. Focus on targeted communities is restrictive. Widespread demand means that the program is either being offered to a few adults across more locations and times of day/week or more adults across fewer locations and offerings. While cross-promotion between agencies could serve to increase our capacity to serve the community in general, programs and services are fragmented and navigating them as facilitators, never mind as learners, is difficult."

"We are always short of money - don't have the money to advertise and get the word out. Students always say 'I wish I knew about this 5/10/20 years ago. We need to campaign aggressively to reach those in need.'"

"Practical tips to various places in Edmonton, for example, visiting Canada place or Legislative building to learn about the gov't system and how the work."

"Adult literacy is broader than improving adults reading and writing skills. Soft skills are often needed as much or more, and not just in communities with pronounced barriers to literacy. We recognize all the elements of healthy communities, the principles of adult learning, and the full range of what adults need to succeed, but at the end of the day we keep going back to the same old idea that adult learning is only worthwhile if reading and writing skills are directly improved."

"Programs for adult literacy are important and vital for all individuals who need such support so they can learn, feel successful and success in our everyday world."

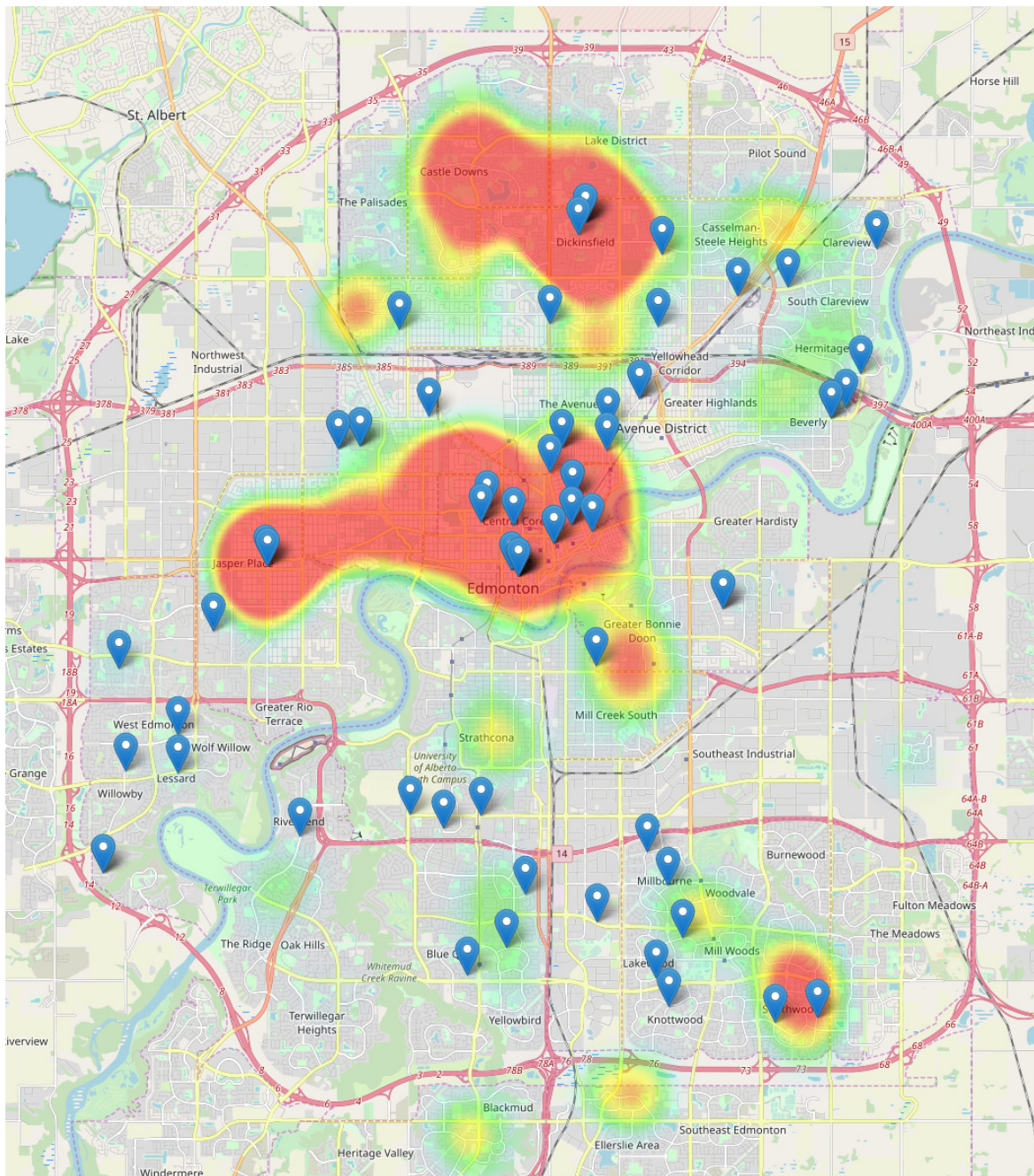
"Adult literacy is changing lives."

Do you have any other comments about adult literacy?

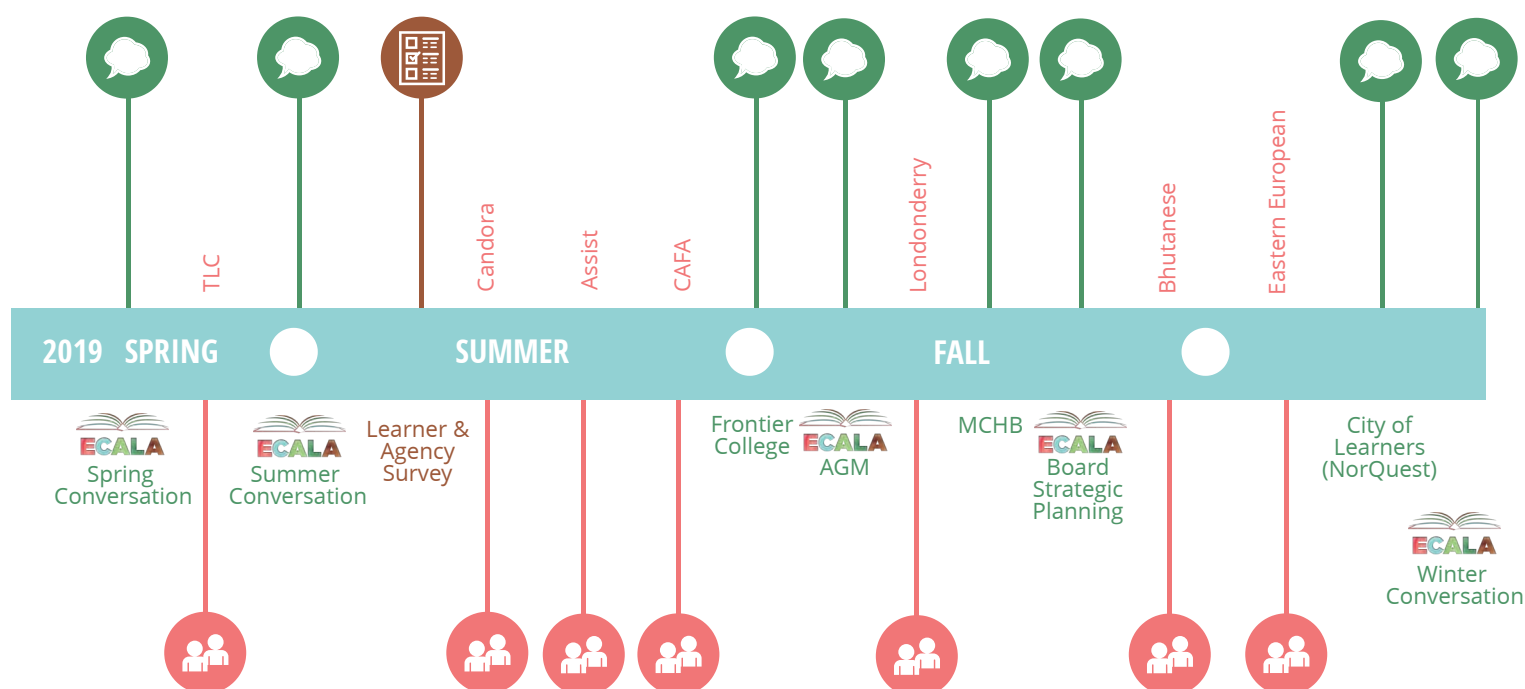
Respondents were asked if they had any other comments about adult literacy to share. Generally speaking, respondents provide positive accolades about programming that supports adult literacy and the difference it makes. Some respondents commented the work is fantastic across the organizations and those successes and programming should be shared in terms of resources and experiences.

Agency Program Location and Learner Postal Code Mapping

Learners completing the survey were asked to provide their postal code, and ECALA provided the postal code of locations used for programming (some cases programs were conducted at locations mutually agreed upon by the tutor and the learner - those programs are not included in this map). Click on the map to view it online (interactive).

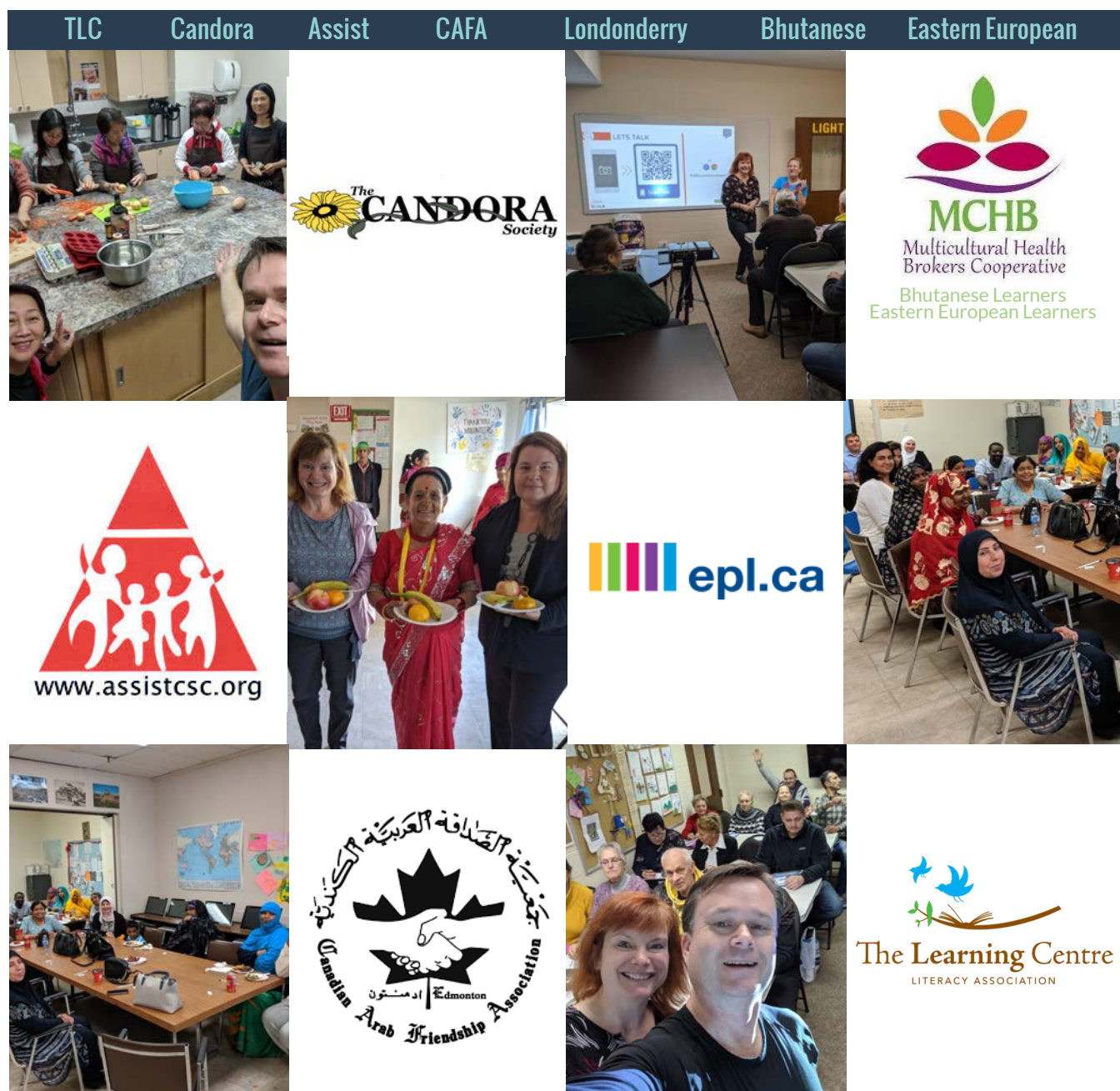


ENGAGEMENT TIMELINE



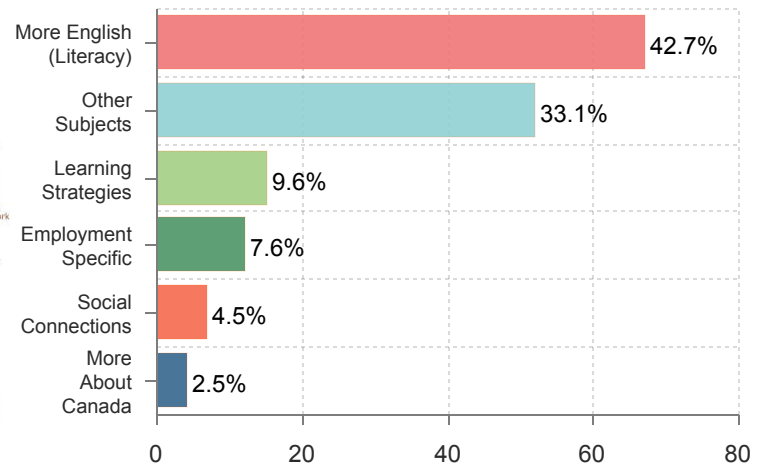
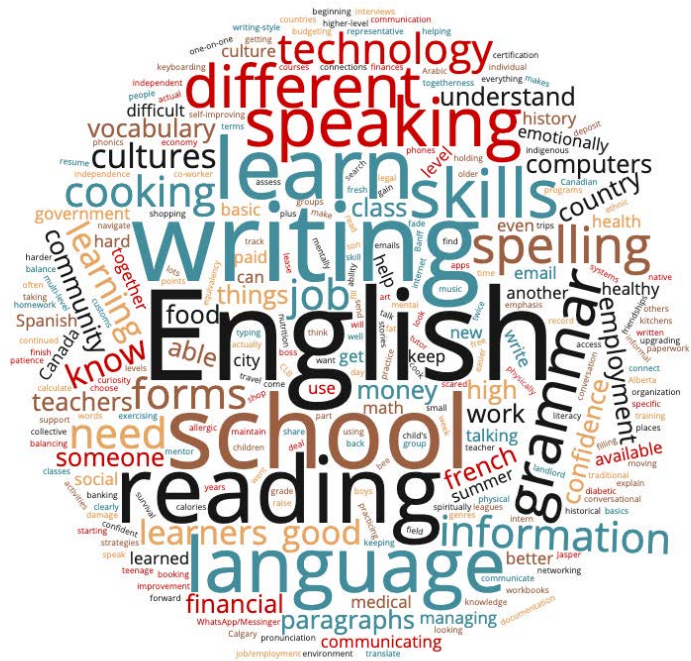
Learner Focus Groups

AndersonDraper Consulting Inc. engaged with over 110 adult learners across seven focus groups in the summer and fall of 2019. As participants in the focus groups were all adult learners, many of whom not proficient in English, the template for the focus group sessions was structured to use plain, simple and direct language. The sessions began with an ice-breaker activity appropriate to the language level of the learners that was enjoyable and put the participants at ease with the facilitators.



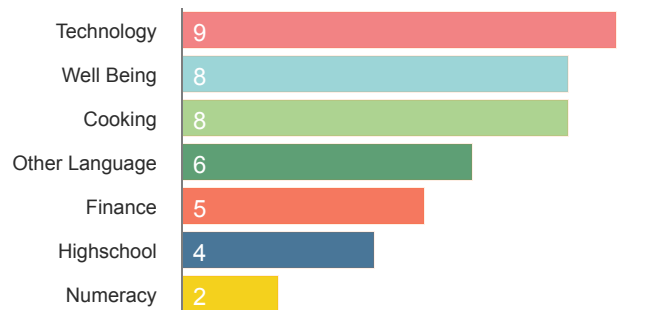
What do you Need to Learn Next?

Participants were asked “What do you Need to Learn Next?” and given the opportunity to use their cellphones to respond or to call out their answers. Responses of the learners were provided back to them in real-time in the form of a word cloud and participants were excited to see their contributions to the discussion. Responses across all seven focus groups were combined to generate the following word cloud:



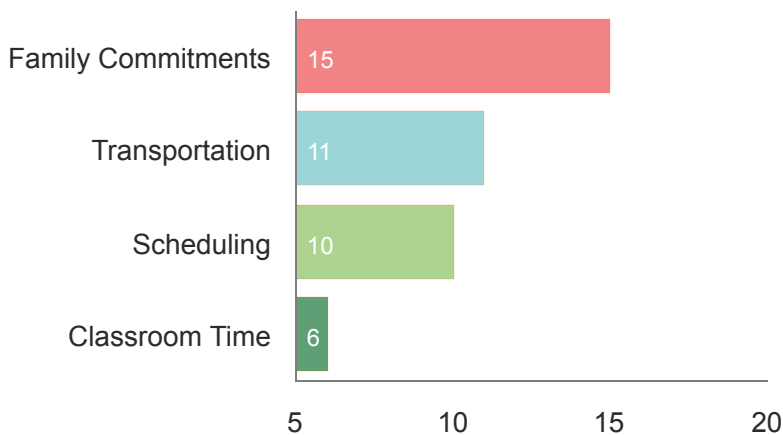
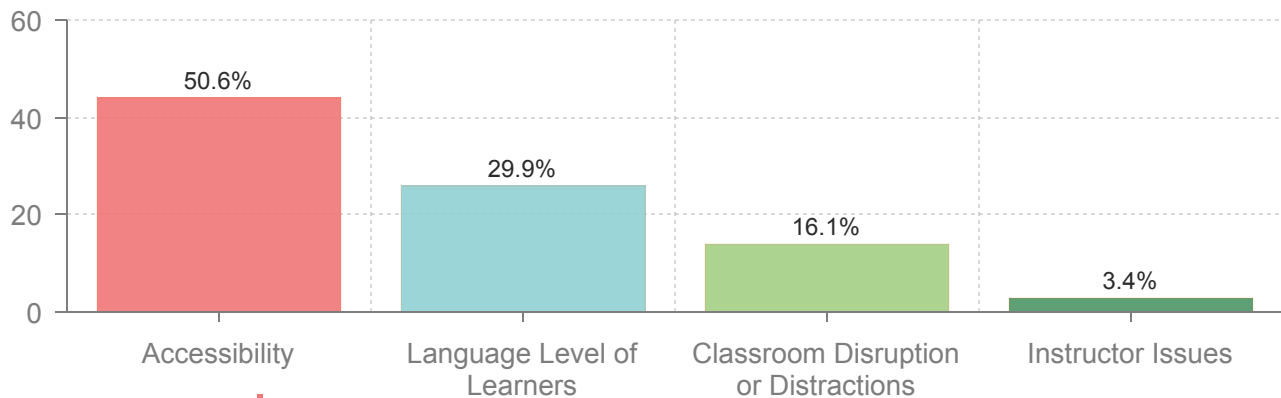
Other Subjects

The 159 responses to this question were split across 6 categories: More English (foundational literacy), Other Subjects, Learning Strategies, Employment Specific skills, Social Connections and Information about Canada. The breakdown of “other subjects” included technology (n=9), cooking (n=8), other languages (n=6), wellbeing (n=8), finances (n=5), high school completion (n=4) and numeracy (n=2).



What are the Barriers?

Participants were asked to work in groups and answer the following question: “Some people don’t or can’t come here to learn. Can you tell us why?” Their answers were collected and displayed in a mind mapping software program (MindNode) and a discussion was facilitated based on their answers. Responses from the seven focus groups were combined and themed resulting in the following breakdown:



Half of the barriers discussed can be categorized as “accessibility” related, including transportation, scheduling and classroom time as well as learners’ family commitments that impede their ability to engage in the learning process. Learners’ language level represented just under a third of the barriers, followed by classroom disruptions or distractions and a small number of instructor issues.

Agency Staff and Volunteer Focus Groups

AndersonDraper Consulting Inc. engaged with 86 (estimated) agency representatives across seven focus groups in the summer and fall of 2019. Participants were asked the following question: "What difference do literacy and foundational learning programs for adults make?" and their responses were used to generate a word cloud (in real-time).

Spring/Summer Conversation Frontier College AGM MCHB Board Planning City of Learners

What We Heard

The image displays three handwritten notes from focus groups, each on a separate piece of paper. The first note, titled "Empowering Learners," lists ways to empower learners (self-identifying, staff/volunteers, community, family members) and emphasizes seeing each person as a whole, capable individual. It also mentions following needs over rules, promoting self-efficacy, and recognizing people in leadership roles. The second note, titled "Learner/Human-centered," lists various practices like survey/focus groups, gathering feedback, understanding learner limitations, taking risks, being responsive to feedback, balancing broad appeal with individual value, tailoring to different levels, and being dependent on staff/leadership training. The third note, titled "Accessibility/Equal Opportunity," lists various barriers and supports such as transportation, location, information/awareness, ensuring appropriateness, child care, equitable information gathering, supporting evaluation/data gathering capacity, support mapping efforts, raising profile among decision-makers, identity/developing spaces, host gatherings to share info/collaborate, providing tools for people to access, and supporting system navigation/supported referrals. Each note has a small Anderson Draper logo in the bottom left corner.

Empowering Learners

- self-identifying
- staff/volunteers
- community
- family members

mighty learners

seeing each person as a whole person as a capable

→ follow needs → not rules

→ promote self efficacy

→ people who are in leadership roles - give permission + model

Learner/Human-centered

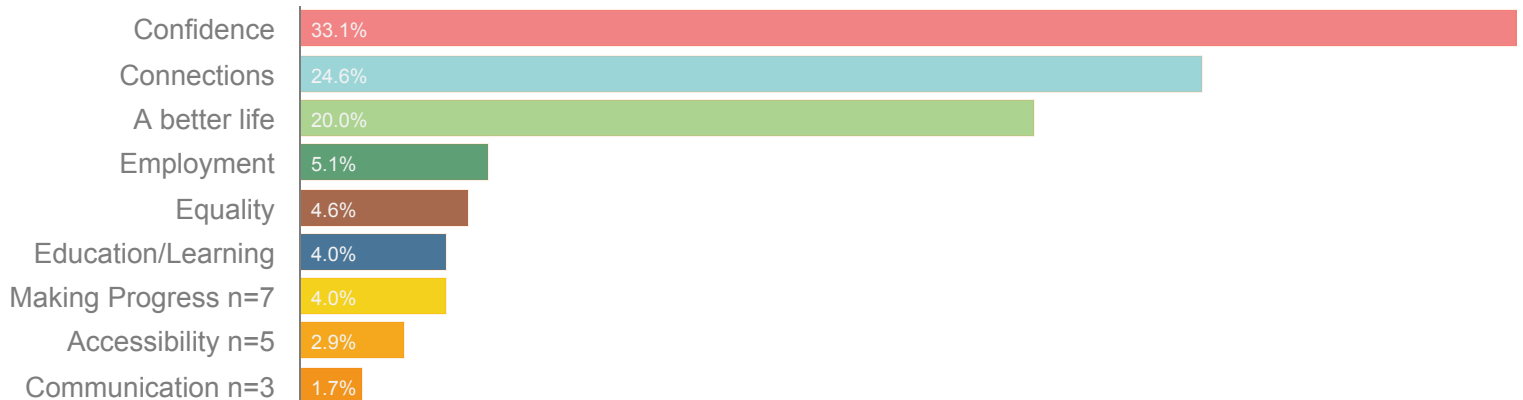
- survey / focus group → sharing what we learn w/ other orgs/agencies
- gathering feedback continually
- understand learner limitations
- take risks (pilot) → learning from failure
- being responsive to feedback / open-minded
- balancing broad appeal w/ more individual value (less is more)
- tailoring to different levels
- dependent on staff / leadership → training

Accessibility/Equal Opportunity

- Transportation
- Location
- Information/Awareness
- Ensuring appropriateness
- Child care
- Equitable
- Information gathering/collating
- Supporting evaluation/data gathering capacity
- Support mapping efforts
- Raise profile among decision-makers
- Identity/develop (sometimes) spaces
- Host gatherings to share info/collaborate
- Provide tools for people to access
- Supporting system navigation/supported referrals

What difference do literacy and foundational learning programs for adults make?

The 175 responses to this question were split across 9 categories: Confidence & Empowerment, Connections & Relationships, A Better Life, Employment, Equality, Education & Learning, Making Progress, Accessibility, and Communication.

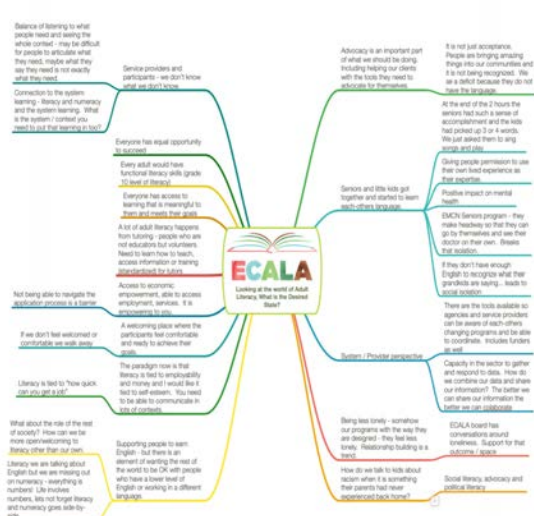


Spring and Summer Conversations

In June and July of 2019, ECALA hosted Spring and Summer Conversation sessions with agency representatives. Both sessions asked participants the following question: "Looking at the world of Adult Literacy, what is the desired state?" Responses were captured with mind-mapping software (MindNode). Click the map to view on myMindnode.com



Spring Conversation



Summer Conversation

Frontier College Session Summary

The following represents a summary of the discussion at the Frontier College seminar on Literacy and Civic Engagement held on September 17, 2019. The discussion was to inform the needs assessment project and aligned well with furthering the City of Edmonton's (2010) City of Learners Initiative White Paper. Eight participants joined and contributed to the discussion in person. Participants were asked three questions and had a small group and then larger group discussions. The following represents both a summary and information provided on flip charts.

What difference do literacy and foundational learning programs for adults make?

Participants were asked what difference literacy and foundational learning programs for adults make and commented on literacy being a building block for other life skills. In particular, participants talked about the increase in confidence and competence that literacy and foundational learning programs bring to an adult's life. The programs can also help adults feel a sense of belonging and involvement in their community that allows them to connect with others. Participants discussed the research that links literacy with improved mental and physical health outcomes and assists adults with economic opportunities. Participants also discussed the decreased shame or stigma with low literacy that programs assist adults in overcoming by developing skills and literacy. The following are high-level notes provided by participants on a flip chart documented by the facilitator.

- Confidence
- Competence
- Sense of belonging
- Involvement
- Ability to teach/connect
- Improves health (mental and physical)
- Economic opportunities
- Decreased shame or stigma
- Language
- Self-determination

What Types of Activity are Currently Happening to Support Literacy and Civic Discourse?

Participants discussed many programs and activities at their small groups and focused on not naming specific programs but describing the intent of the program and activity. Participants discussed activities that provide accessible conversations with learners that help them develop relevant goals and may involve one-on-one tutoring or the exchange of learning for a mutual benefit. Participants talked about programs where parents attend to help their children's literacy and subsequently parents also develop skills and a sense of community. Other activities identified were ESL courses, community kitchens, faith-based groups, student supports, reading camps and schools. Participants talked about how important it was to have access to quality, inclusive education that has diverse representation to help build a sense of identity and support adult learners.

The following are high-level notes provided by participants on a flip chart documented by the facilitator:

- Accessible conversations
- Relevant goals and content programs
- One-on-one tutoring
- Learning and exchange for mutual benefit
- Parents come to help their children's literacy and language
- Sense of community through groups
- ESL courses
- Community kitchen
- Settlement and Integration Programs
- Faith-based groups
- Student supports
- Politicians shape civic engagement
- Reading camps
- Build a sense of identity
- Value cultural identity and pride Schools Quality, inclusive education
- Shaping how citizenship is seenDiverse representation

What Should Learners be Learning to Support Literacy and Civic Discourse?

In general, participants were adamant learners need to develop essential skills to help them navigate their community. Through this process, they can begin to learn what resources are available, their rights as immigrants or new Canadians, how the systems work and how to ask for help when they need it. Much discussion centred on the importance of learners developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills and being able to demonstrate those skills, using English, in their day-to-day life.

Participants also commented on the life skill development, specifically around technology and how to access the internet. The cost of internet was noted as a barrier to access as was security and safety. All of which will help learner's ability to be engaged and informed in regard to matters of a civic nature.

The following are high level notes provided by participants on a flip chart documented by the facilitator:

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Essential skills related to soft skills | • Sense of ownership |
| • What resources are available | • Day to day living (e.g., bus pass, how does the system work, life skills) |
| • Their rights | • Technology (e.g., connection, internet costs and access, social media, security) |
| • How the systems work | |
| • Critical thinking/problem solving | |
| • How to ask for help | |

The final section of the report outlines ECALA's proposed priorities informed by the evidence collected throughout the needs assessment.

PRIORITY: Emphasize Accessible Learner Centred Programming



Focus on the whole student.
Accommodate different paces of learning.
Value learners lived experiences and culture.
Foster relationships.



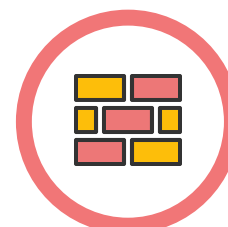
ECALA, as a funder, should be aware programs may require additional flexibility to commit to being truly learner centered, which may have funding implications (e.g., potential for multi-year agreements, potential to focus on funding fewer yet stronger, learner centered programs).



Offer workshops for front-line facilitators and partners as well as resources on the principles, application and evaluation of learner centred programming.



Request grant applicants demonstrate how their program is learner centred (offer ECALA's description based on findings from needs assessment) and ensure clear communication throughout the funding term reacting to potential learner centered changes in scope.



Demonstrate support towards reduction of accessibility barriers. Transportation, program location, timing, structure, family obligations, stigma around adult learning, learner needs, and challenges were some of the barriers noted in this report.

Considerations for Supporting this Priority

FOCUS GROUPS

As part of the learner focus groups, participants were asked about barriers to learning. Half noted challenges with accessibility (family commitments, transportation, scheduling and classroom time). A third mentioned differing levels of learner language proficiency within the same classroom posed a difficulty.

AGENCY SURVEY

54% of respondents rated "literacy is accessible to everyone" as their first priority, and 31% of respondents indicated "learner centred" as the second most important priority.

When asked what makes it hard for learners to succeed, agency staff and volunteers commented on external barriers such as childcare, transportation, other work or life stressors that impact success in the program.

LEARNER SURVEY

Respondents commented they experienced difficulties attending the class as a function of the location being far from where they live or work and the challenges with transportation (including public transportation and scheduling) to attend classes.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The Calgary Learns report summarizes themes around the need for instruction to become more learner-centred and holistic, and the interrelationships between the complex skills learners need (e.g., between literacy and critical thinking). The report identifies learner-centred programs, competent and well-trained staff, holistic approaches and establishing rapport with learners as best practice.

The 2009 ECALA & Norquest College report recommended programming that includes leadership & mentoring opportunities, community building, experiential & participatory learning, holistic and Indigenous pedagogies, peer learning, field experiences and job shadowing, civic education and building networks with community-based providers.

PRIORITY: Increase Awareness of & Advocate For Adult Literacy & Foundational Learning



Explore ways to expand ECALA's funding base (e.g. possible Gaming and Charity Registration, collaboration with agencies on non-CALP grant funding.)



Ensure government and other stakeholders understand funding allocated to adult literacy and foundational learning is a sound investment with positive benefits. This is a collective responsibility. Agencies noted additional resources (funding and time) would be beneficial to support this priority.



Review current Edmonton advocacy networks (Edmonton Literacy Coalition, Literacy Works and City of Learners) to explore ways to collectively create awareness campaigns, fund research on updated literacy rates and to advocate for increased funding to address the demand for a highly skilled workforce in Edmonton.

Considerations for Supporting this Priority

FOCUS GROUPS

Spring Conversation participants noted the importance of making sure the government and citizens supported resources for adult literacy and were aware of emerging needs. The need to look for ways to leverage funding outside of government was also noted.

AGENCY SURVEY

When asked about what is missing from adult literacy and foundational programs, respondents talked about the lack of sustainable funds available to offer programs.

ECALA BOARD DISCUSSION

ECALA Board Members identified potential ways to expand ECALA's funding base and the importance of increasing awareness of the positive outcomes of adult literacy and foundational learning.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

There are well-established relationships between literacy and economic, social and health outcomes. Lower literacy is associated with lower employability and professional attainment, lower health statuses, and increased likelihood of experiencing poverty.

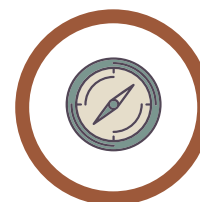
PRIORITY: Facilitate Collaboration Among Agencies & Pathways for Learners



Improve **coordination** within and between organizations that deliver adult education and training to support delivery of programs and services. Consider if the way funding is currently structured supports collaboration and relationship building or fosters competition.

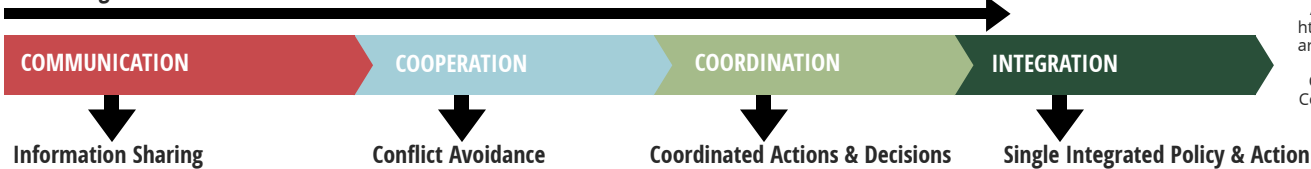


Increase **communication** and utilize the ECALA website to ensure agencies and learners are aware of programs and services available to support adult learners. ECALA, in conversations with agencies, can explore innovative ways to enhance connections.



Establish pathways within courses and to other agency programs working towards a seamless learning system which allows multiple entry and exit points and reflects the individual conditions and life paths of adult learners. ECALA funded programs create pathways to improved economic & social outcomes for Edmontonians.

Increasing Collaboration



Adapted from
https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Collaboration-Continuum_fig3_322328623

Considerations for Supporting this Priority

FOCUS GROUPS

In the spring and fall conversations and focus groups, some participants expressed the desire for a move away from competition towards collaboration and to stop duplicating services (though multiple services may be necessary). Some discussed the hesitation to refer participants to other agencies over concerns of losing the funding attached to the learner.

LEARNER SURVEY

When asked if they have gone to other adult learning programs at other locations, most learners noted they had not (60%) while 40% indicated they had. Respondents were asked if they can find what they want to learn next in their area. Although 45% noted they could, 16% could not find what they wanted to learn in their area and the rest (39%) responded they did not know.

ECALA BOARD DISCUSSION

ECALA Board members reflected on the importance of agencies being connected with one another as well as learners understanding their pathways from where they begin to where they can go to achieve their learning outcomes, which might not take place within the same agency.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The Nunavut Adult Learning Strategy (2009) included improved coordination, seamless learning system, focus on job skills & putting the needs of the learner first. The Increasing Learner Access Through System Alignment Report outlines recommendations, principles & guidelines to achieve greater alignment between community adult learning & post-secondary systems.

The 2009 ECALA and Norquest College report recommended service providers offer a continuum of educational services that provide support to community-based programs, move resources into the community, develop bridging/transitional programs community to institution. The report further encouraged agencies to Continue collaborative initiatives among community-based organizations.

PRIORITY: Focus on Learner and Agency Capacity Building and Foundational Skills



Focus programming on areas which build learner and agency capacity and foundational skills (e.g. job skills, financial literacy, parenting, language acquisition).



The current government has a focus on economic improvement. ECALA funded programs provide low-cost opportunities for improving the economy through employment/employability, improved health & wellbeing and reduced poverty. Keeping in mind the earlier priority of learner centred, it is important to be able to remain focused on learner goals versus only on outcomes or indicators measuring employment, post-secondary (including apprenticeships) lifelong learning goals of learners.

Considerations for Supporting this Priority

FOCUS GROUPS

In the Spring Community Conversation some participants noted the importance of community engagement, connecting with each other, learning together and the need for a shared vision. Relationship building comes first, it is a learner's right to be able to access lifelong learning.

AGENCY SURVEY

When asked about priorities for adult learning and foundational literacy, 23% of respondents (agency staff and volunteers) rated "building community capacity" as their fifth priority.

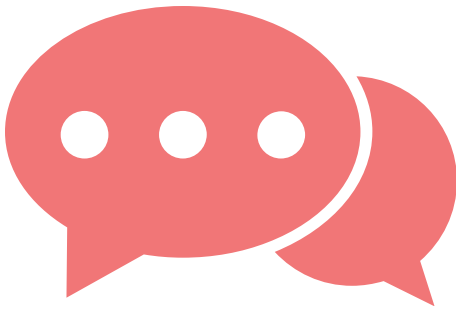
LEARNER SURVEY

When asked how learning makes a difference in their life among other reasons mentioned respondents commented on the importance of learning language skills that help them create a resume, navigate finding a job or going back to school.

DOCUMENT REVIEW

The Catholic Social Services Stakeholder Forum Report (2016) found, in regard to adult education, participants identified language and literacy as barriers to employment, tight competition for employment, challenges with foreign credential recognition and lack of flexible options to allow for language training. Participants identified the need for more language and literacy training and lower level program options.

NEXT STEPS



Keep the Conversation Going

- Continue regular conversations between ECALA and funded organizations and further relationships that allow ECALA to have these conversations with learners and the front-line staff (who should have a direct voice in priority setting).
- Engage Indigenous learners and staff in a similar project as their voice was missing from this project.

Emphasize Collaboration

- Build shared collaborative language around what needs to be done and consider what is needed for an evaluation framework specific to Edmonton: Collective work, connected community, what does that evaluative framework look like?
- Review ECALA's funding model to be more conducive to supporting collaboration across agencies.



Finalize & Operationalize 2020-2023 Priorities

- Identify where additional work needs to be done, using these conversations and priorities as a tool.
- Engage in further discussion with Board members to finalize 2020-2023 strategic priorities and operationalize priorities.



1. Frontier College. (2019). Literacy and Essential Skills as a Poverty Reduction Strategy: A National Research Report.

This recent report highlights the relevant research that supports literacy and essential skills as they relate to poverty reduction. The report highlights 11 key research findings and provides 11 recommendations that support governments recognizing literacy as a policy priority and as a basic human right. The research findings note: the well-established relationship between literacy skills and experience of poverty, single-access points reduce challenges in navigating poverty reduction programs, strong partnerships between literacy and poverty reduction programs can improve access to needed services, project-based funding has increased innovation but resulted in limited sustainability, knowledge sharing among essential skill providers and awareness-raising for the public is critical, learner-centred approaches are the most effective for low-skilled adults, contextualizing learner goals are most effective in facilitating transitions to employment, awareness and accessibility to programs is the most significant challenge to stakeholders, improving self-esteem and self-confidence are important indicators of success for literacy programs and outcomes frameworks are often too narrow in scope.

2. Frontier College. (2019). Discussion Paper: Literacy and Health.

This discussion paper succinctly highlights the linkages between literacy and health. In particular, evidence supporting the linkages is supplied in a user-friendly way. The paper notes that literacy is a determinant of health and that people with low literacy levels are much more likely to experience poor health. The report outlines the stigma related to low literacy and challenges navigating the health system as a result. The paper notes that strong literacy skills help people communicate with healthcare practitioners, navigate health and medical systems, make informed treatment decisions, seek out preventative options, effectively manage chronic disease, properly use medications and participate in public dialogue. The paper notes that Canada's universal healthcare system does not benefit everyone equally and systematic barriers to literacy and health care are linked and disproportionately affect some Canadian populations such as Indigenous peoples, immigrants, people with disabilities, single parents and seniors.

3. Saskatchewan Literacy Network. (2014). The Circle of Learning: Saskatchewan Adult Literacy Benchmark Levels 1 & 2. Retrieved from www.sk.literacy.ca.

This paper built upon findings from the evaluation of the Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Saskatchewan that recommended the development of a set of adult literacy benchmarks. The report details revisions to the Circle of Learning Saskatchewan Adult Literacy Benchmarks Levels 1 & 2, utilizing the Medicine Wheel and the teachings shared by Elders and advisors as inspiration. The report outlines the topics of Continuous Learning and Working with Others; Communications; Computer Use & Digital Technology; and, Numeracy and provides introductions, benchmarks and learning outcomes and example checklists. Comprehensive report with clearly identified outcomes and checklists for implementation. Both strategic and operational information is provided in the report suitable for implementation.

4. NWT Literacy Council. (2009). *Storying Progress: Documenting Non-Academic Outcomes Among Aboriginal Adults in the NWT*.

This report details a study examining non-academic outcomes among current and former Aboriginal adult learners in three programs in the NWT. The paper discusses the gap that exists in current literature that notes that Aboriginal learners perform well below non-Aboriginal populations in school attainment and tests of adult literacy; however, anecdotally these learners achieve other outcomes beyond scholastic achievement and literacy that are not captured in extant research. The study interviewed 57 learners and their instructors to understand their oral narrative around their learning. The study identified that learners perceived achievements in improved personal skills (confidence, self-esteem, independent, voice, commitment, life and work); new practical skills for everyday life; relationship building; and improved readiness for further education and employment (e.g., communication skills). In addition to detailing the findings of the study, the paper also suggests principles that can be used to document non-academic outcomes and possible indicators for implementation.

5. Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2017). *Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families*. <http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu>

This document outlines three design principles that help to guide and improve outcomes for children and families based on the science of brain development. The outcomes include supporting responsive relationships for children and adults; strengthening core life skills; and, reducing sources of stress in the lives of children and families. The authors describe the principles and argue that they do not operate in isolation, rather, they interact and reinforce each other. The back section of the document contains other resources that are organized to the themes of the document.

6. Canada West Foundation. (2018). *Literacy Lost: Canada's Basic Skills Shortfall*.

This report highlights the loss of literacy among Canadian workers. In particular, younger generations have more education and subsequently higher literacy skills, but those skills decline through age as a function of lack of use. In addition, many Canadians experience skill mismatch with their employment, having higher or lower skills than their jobs demand. Improvement in literacy skills would result in a 3% increase in GDP or \$54 billion per year. In order to solve Canada's literacy problem, the report details strategies such as: improving the literacy skills of graduates of K-12 and post-secondary, embedding literacy in all workforce education; stopping skills loss in some workers through employers, and understanding the skills needed by Canadian Employers.

7. Calgary Learns. (2014). Foundational Learning Needs for Adult Calgarians. Calgary: Calgary Learns.

This report details a needs assessment completed in Calgary, Alberta by Calgary Learns to inform their work and the work of other organizations to better serve learners. The report provides basic information about the Calgary context before detailing the needs assessment which included community consultation, stakeholder interviews, learner interviews, organizational round tables and a literature review. The report highlights trends and challenges and some discussion of promising practices. The report summarizes themes around the need for instruction to become more learner-centred and holistic, the interrelationships between the complex skills learners need (e.g., between literacy and critical thinking), the stigma associated in the environment that can create barriers for learning, and funding and resourcing foundational learning is challenging. Best practices that emerged through the needs assessment included key themes around learner-centred programs, competent and well-trained staff, holistic approaches and establishing rapport with learners.

8. Community Adult Learning Task Team. (2010). Increasing Learner Access Through System Alignment: Final Report of the Community Adult Learning Task Team. Calgary.

This report details the findings from the Community Adult Learning Task Team which held six meetings and meetings with small discussion groups to discuss concepts and proposed guidelines. The report outlines recommendations including principles and guidelines to achieve greater alignment between the community adult learning and post-secondary systems. The principles identified focus on learner-centric learning, equitable access, respect, positive relationships, effective collaboration and purposeful communication. The report highlights some recommendations and suggested partnership opportunities.

9. Mani, A., Mullainathan, S., Shafir, E., & Zhao, J. (2013). Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function. *Science*, 341, 976-980.

This research paper tests hypotheses that cognitive function is impaired as a function of poverty. Two experiments are provided with significant data demonstrating that poverty does reduce cognitive capacity because of how consuming poverty-related concerns are, which leave room for other tasks. The paper does, in the discussion section, talk about implications for policy.

10. Aurora College, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment & NWT Literacy Council. (2004). Best Practices in Action: Tools for Community-Based Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programs.

This report provides a summary of adult literacy and education in the NWT and describes best practices for the NWT. The report provides self-assessment checklists for implementation, resources of practical ideas to support best practices and exemplars of best practices in NWT programs. The report provides lots of assessment checklist forms for us.

11. Northwest Territories Literacy Council. (2013). NWT Workforce/Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills Review.

This final report on the NWT workforce and workplace literacy and essential skills review is an environmental scan of past workforce and workplace literacy and essential skills activities. The current activities and possible models for the future for NWT are also outlined. The scan utilizes evidence from a literature review, interviews with 33 key informants as well as three focus groups with 36 participants. The scan identified success factors and approaches for workplace essential skills programming including: government incentives and infrastructure support; employer commitment and support; worker/learner commitment and buy-in; collaboration and partnerships; program planning and design; contextualized and worker-centred learning; workforce and workplace literacy and essential skills instructors; and, measurement of program outcomes and return on expectations. The report also discusses conditions for initiatives to be successful in the workforce.

12. . Arriagada, P., & Hango, D. (2016). Literacy and numeracy among off-reserve First Nations people and Métis: Do higher skill levels improve labour market outcomes? Statistics Canada: Insights on Canadian Society, 75-006-X, 1-14.

This document examines literacy and numeracy skills of off-reserve First Nations and Metis adults. The study examines the idea that those with higher cognitive skills have greater labour force participation and earnings. Overall, off reserve-First Nations and Metis have lower literacy and numeracy scores than non-aboriginal adults. Within this population, higher levels of education were associated with higher literacy and numeracy scores. Individuals with a higher literacy score were more likely to be employed than those with lower literacy scores and were just as likely as non-aboriginal counterparts to work in a professional occupation. The results highlight the importance of having access to a greater number of books and being enrolled in education in developing higher skill levels and subsequently higher probability of employment.

13. Government of Canada. (2017). Skills Proficiency of Immigrants in Canada: Findings from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Toronto: Government of Canada.

This document details the findings from the PIAAC household survey of Canadian adults aged 16 to 65. The survey assesses key cognitive and workplace skills needed for society and the global economy and is comparable to international contexts. Literacy and numeracy provide the foundation for development of higher cognitive skills and are assessed through PIAAC through a background questionnaire, assessment of skills and module on the use of skills. Immigrants in Canada constitute up to 20% of the total population and this key demographic was compared to the Canadian-born population. Results indicated that immigrants show lower proficiency scores in literacy and numeracy when tested in English or French in all domains. Both recent immigrants and established immigrants have similar scores and the scores are higher for immigrants with higher educational attainment. Those immigrants from "Western Countries" have higher proficiency scores. Low scoring among immigrants can impact the economic and social integration of immigrants into society and limit access to programs and services.

14. Government of Canada. (2017). The Health and Social Dimensions of Adult Skills in Canada: Findings from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). Toronto: Government of Canada.

This document details the findings from the PIAAC household survey of Canadian adults aged 16 to 65. The survey assesses key cognitive and workplace skills needed for society and the global economy and is comparable to international contexts. Key findings include that health and social outcomes are unevenly distributed within Canada. Those with poorer health and social outcomes have less education and may be unemployed. For all groups, positive health and social outcomes increases with skill level. Those with stronger literacy and numeracy skills are more likely to report positive health, trust, volunteering and political efficacy. Rising educational attainment is associated with increasing health and social outcomes, but not as strongly as skills are. The Indigenous population is more likely to report poorer outcomes, but skills may narrow some gaps. Immigrants outcomes vary according to their length of residence in Canada.

15. Saltmarsh, J., Janke, E. M., & Clayton, P. H. (2015). Transforming higher education through and for democratic civic engagement: A model for change. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 122-127.

This article considers the future of service learning and community engagement (SLCE) in the context of higher education campuses and offers a model to help guide the process of inquiry. In particular, the authors comment on the importance of moving towards an institutional transformation that is deep, pervasive and integrated. In particular, campus infrastructure should be cross-institution and remove silos in order to catalyze change. A focus on diversity and inclusion for engagement should also be considered. To create a desirable forum, the engaged campus defines and views itself as part of the community in a multi-stakeholder, multi-directional system for creating knowledge, policy and practice.

16. Government of Canada. (2018). Evaluation of Literacy and Essential Skills. Employment and Social Development Canada: Government of Canada.

This evaluation report examines the relevance and performance of the Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) activities that were launched following the PIAAC survey to improve literacy and essential skills for Canadians. It covers years 2011-12 and 2015-16. Results indicated a continued need for literacy and essential skills programming in Canada, particularly by the federal government. Overall effectiveness evidence is limited as a function of existing but not systematic performance information. The adult learning programs have achieved results but delays in continued funding and decisions have impacted their success.

17. Catholic Social Services. (2016). Summary: Edmonton Syrian Refugees Stakeholder Forum. Edmonton: Catholic Social Services.

This summary outlines the results of the stakeholder forum held in Edmonton in June of 2016 with Syrian Refugees. In regard to adult education, participants identified language and literacy as barriers to employment, tight competition for employment, challenges with foreign credential recognition and lack of flexible options to allow for language training. Participants identified the need for more language and literacy training, lower level program options, flexible scheduling for employers and options to facilitate language training in the workplace.

18. City of Edmonton. (2010). Edmonton City of Learners Initiative White Paper. Edmonton: City of Edmonton.

This white paper outlines the Learning City Initiative as a call to action to mobilize resources to enrich lifelong learning in the city of Edmonton for personal growth, social cohesion and prosperity. The paper outlines four identified priority goals for the city (early learning; literacy; health and learning; fostering lifelong learning) and discusses how to best implement community learning strategies.

19. Government of Nunavut. (2009). Nunavut Adult Learning Strategy.

This report outlines the strategy for adult learning in Nunavut. The report goes through the vision for adult learning, profiles of adult learners and adult learning in Nunavut, goals and objectives as well as accountability and implementation strategies. The report outlines a summary of the goals and objectives on page 8 and 9 that provide information on how other jurisdictions view the strategic implementation of adult learning. Each of the objectives is aligned with recommended actions for implementation.

20. Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association & Norquest College (2009). Beyond Barriers: Maximizing Access to Learning for Marginalized Adults in the City of Edmonton. University of Alberta.

This report documents a project conducted by a research team from the University of Alberta under contract to the Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association (ECALA) and NorQuest College. The project undertook an assessment of the educational programming needs of low-income adult populations, looking particularly at the educational gaps, trends and barriers for accessing learning within the City of Edmonton, as well as best practices for working with low-income learners. The research team undertook a literature review, held six focus groups reaching a total of 39 people representing 29 agencies as well as administering a survey. They found marginalized adults face unequal access to learning opportunities and a web of intersecting barriers. Marginalized learners require small, nurturing environments. As such, community-based organizations are optimally suited to serve them. A series of recommendations for policy makers, service providers and programs as well as areas for further research are suggested as part of the document.

APPENDIX B

City of Learners Program Map

(click for live version)

43

