

Awakening the Giant Within

Célinie Russell

**Reflections on Strategies for
Recruiting Francophone Adults
to French-Language Literacy Programs**

SUMMARY



Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes
Ottawa, Ontario

Project coordinator

Célinie Russell, Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes

Research, compilation and writing

Célinie Russell, Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes

Translation

Al Daigen

Design and layout

Nathalie Brunet-Deschamps, Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes

Printing

Ray-Tek Printing Inc.

Publisher

Coalition ontarienne de formation des adultes

235 Montreal Road, Suite 201

Ottawa, Ontario K1L 6C7

Phone: 613-842-5369

Toll-Free in Ontario: 1 800 464-0504

Fax: 613-842-5371

E-mail: coalition@coalition.on.ca

Web Site: www.coalition.on.ca

Funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the Secrétariat aux affaires intergouvernementales canadiennes.

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Awakening the Giant Within:

Reflections on Strategies for Recruiting Francophone Adults to French-Language Literacy Programs

Literacy surveys show a considerable need for literacy training among francophone adults in Ontario. Yet few adult francophones attempt to improve their literacy skills through such training; they feel neither the need nor the desire to do so. The Coalition therefore decided to investigate whether there are ways to awaken the desire for such training in those adults who might benefit from it.

Making the decision to enrol in a literacy program as an adult requires courage and strength of character; a person must tap into the giant within to find these qualities. Literacy training helps adults become stronger for themselves, for their communities, and for their families. They increase their employment opportunities. They can take charge of their own destiny. There is much to be gained by awakening the giant within.

This document is a summary of a study on strategies that French-language adult education centres in Ontario can use to awaken francophone adults' desire to enrol in literacy training. The summary presents the key elements of the study: the question that was investigated, the methodology used, the results of the literature review and field research, possible solutions, examples of best practices for increasing enrolment, and recommendations. The best practices section will be particularly useful to practitioners in the field, so it has been reproduced in its entirety. For further details on the study, please consult the complete version published in French under the title *Éveiller le lion qui dort* at the Coalition's web site (www.coalition.on.ca).

“In a democratic society, the central role of education is indisputable.”

Cornelius Castoriadis (1996), *La montée de l'insignifiance*, p. 72

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SECTION 1:

THE PROBLEM

Literacy goes beyond reading, writing, and calculating. The concept of literacy is closely tied to the ability to function in daily life, at home, in the community, at work, and as a citizen in society. Literacy can be defined as “the ability to solve problems using information gleaned from the printed word, to be an efficient independent learner and applier of technology”¹ (Willms and Murray, 2007, p. 10). For francophones in Ontario, being literate in French also strengthens their ties with the French language and culture. Four types of literacy have been defined: cultural literacy, academic literacy, community literacy, and critical literacy (Bissonnette, 2006). In this document, we use the concept of literacy skills, which implies skills in all four types of literacy.

The Canadian component of the 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey² showed that within the Ontario population age 16 and over, 25% of francophones have reading skills at level 1 (the lowest level); 57% of francophones have reading skills at level 1 or level 2, compared with 42% of anglophones (Corbeil, 2006, p. 37).

Various studies show that adults learn more effectively in their mother tongue, even when they have good skills in a second language.

The reason, simply stated, is that language models are etched into the brain in infancy and early childhood. Adults whose mother tongue is French, and especially those who received their primary-school education in French, will learn more effectively in French, because they can call on these language models to integrate new knowledge (Coalition, 2004, p. 6).

In 2007-2008, a mere 2,562 francophones in Ontario—or 1% of the francophone population—participated in learning activities at adult education centres.³ This participation rate is disturbing. But the following paradox is even more disturbing: the people who could benefit most from educational activities—less-educated adults—are the least likely to participate in them.

Why such a lack of participation? We know that people with low literacy skills participate very little in continuing education (Corbeil, 2006), and that poor readers tend to consider themselves skilled enough to function well in society and see no need for further education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007, p. 6). We must therefore find more effective methods of recruitment that take this information into account. What strategies can be used? One tactic is to stimulate the articulation of needs in the target group.

Articulation of needs is an approach in which individuals **become aware** of a need—in this case, their need for education—and then verbalize it. The complementary step is for providers to satisfy this need.

¹ Free translation

² See Corbeil, 2006. Online: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-552-m/89-552-m2006015-eng.pdf>

³ Statistics for Ontario are taken from the Management Information System of the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

SECTION 2:

THE STUDY

Purpose of the study

To discover strategies for encouraging adult francophones with poor literacy skills to articulate a need for literacy training, and strategies that education centres can use to answer that need adequately.

Research questions

1. What strategies can adult education centres use to awaken the desire for education in francophones who could benefit from training to increase their literacy skills but have not yet enrolled in French-language literacy programs?
2. What strategies can adult education centres adopt so that once these francophones articulate a need for such training, the centres can answer that need adequately?

Methodology

This was an exploratory study. Our main research methods consisted of a literature review and semi-structured interviews. An advisory committee was set up to guide the study.

Our first step was to conduct a literature review of studies that deal with learner recruitment and with strategies and ideas for strategies for increasing recruitment that had been tried elsewhere in Canada. In the second step, members of the advisory committee interviewed francophone adults in Ontario who were not currently attending literacy programs to find out why they were not and what would motivate them to do so. The third step was to interview managers and literacy practitioners at French-language adult education centres in Ontario that belong to the Coalition. We also interviewed representatives of three organizations that work in adult education in Quebec.

SECTION 3:

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review uncovered 17 studies on adult education that shed light on why adults do or do not participate in education programs. This section summarizes the results of these studies, which included ABC Canada, 2002; Baran et al., 2000; Bélanger, 2004; Bélanger and Voyer, 2004; Canada Information Office, 2000; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Community Literacy Ontario, 2007; Gobeil, 2006; Lavoie et al., 2004; Long, 2004; MELS [Quebec ministry of education, recreation, and sports], 2005; Powley et al., 2005; Rowen, 1999; Sénécal, 2003; Simard, 2007; Sticht, 1997; and Xu, 2002. (See References for full bibliographic details.)

Obstacles to articulating a need for adult education

Adults face several obstacles that may prevent them from articulating a need or a desire for education. These obstacles can be summarized as follows:

- lack of interest and motivation
- very low value placed on education
- the anticipated rate of return on an adult education program does not justify the necessary effort—too few benefits for too much effort!

Events and situations that can lead adults to articulate a need for adult education

Various life events and situations can bring adults to articulate a need for education. These can be summarized as follows:

- experiencing a change in their work or personal lives
- seeing someone else succeed because of a higher education level
- being subjected to insistent outside pressure
- gradually realizing that further education would be a good idea
- calculating the benefits and drawbacks of adult education

Reasons to want further education

Adults want further education for specific reasons, which can be summarized as follows:

- to get a job or further their career
- to develop parenting skills and support their children during their school years
- to go beyond their family model and stop the perpetuation of a lack of education
- to master their language so as to achieve greater success in society and at work
- to complete the education they already have
- to satisfy prerequisites for further education

As we can see, the reasons for enrolling in an education programme are practical:

- to get a better job
- to help one's children
- to complete one's education

Responding to these needs

Once adults have articulated their need for further education, the quality of the response they receive can have a considerable impact on their motivation to go ahead and enrol in a program. One way that is known to make it easier for adults to access literacy training is the "one-stop" model, in which they can go to a single location to be evaluated, get help in clarifying their particular situations, determine their precise needs, and find the program that can best help them reach their goals.

Types of programs

Another important aspect of both articulating a desire for education and responding to that desire is the type of program offered. Some of the studies reviewed examined integrated training programs, in which training to improve reading, writing, computational, and other literacy skills is combined with technical training that leads directly to employment.

SECTION 4:

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE FIELD RESEARCH

This section presents the results of interviews conducted in the course of our field research with francophone adults who were not enrolled in any adult education programs and with managers and practitioners at adult learning centres.

Results of interviews with francophone adults not enrolled in adult education programs

The respondents would be interested in enrolling in an adult education program for the following reasons:

- the loss of their job
- a lack of work
- the chance to earn a better salary
- the desire to escape from poverty
- the opportunity to help their children

If they were to decide to enrol in an adult education program, the types of programs that would attract them are:

- occupational training
- training in parenting skills
- courses leading to the Ontario Secondary School Diploma
- training in life skills (e.g., stress management, self-esteem, anger management)
- training to improve their French (this was the answer of an immigrant respondent)

When asked about the language in which they would want to take their programs:

- three respondents said they would choose English (one because he works in English, another because he says French is too hard; one respondent did not explain their answer); and
- six would choose French.

When asked whether they were ready and willing to enrol in an adult education program, most replied that they were not:

- no, too much work
- no, the current programs do not meet my needs
- no, the services that I'm receiving are enough
- no
- yes, enrolled before, but dropped out, will begin again when the time is right
- yes

These survey results indicate that we need to rethink our approach to recruiting adult learners for adult education programs. Members of the Coalition must put more energy into their pre-enrolment activities and perhaps even alter their programs to better respond to the needs of francophone adults in Ontario.

Results of interviews with adult education centre practitioners and managers

Obstacles to adult education

The obstacles to adult education that respondents reported were similar to those found by other researchers. What is new and specific to francophones living in minority settings in Ontario is the question of language. Our respondents explained that many people question the value of taking adult education courses in French when most aspects of the labour market and many aspects of everyday life occur in English.

Reasons for enrolling in adult education

The respondents reported that the main reason adults attend their centres is to increase the possibility of finding a job or to upgrade their academic standing to qualify for other training that will lead to a job.

Promotion adult education

Language plays an important role in the way adult learning centres promote their services. Many francophone centres advertise in English. Their reason for doing so is simple: many of the people who could steer less-educated francophone adults to adult learning centres are anglophones. They include employers and people who work in various organizations that provide services to the public. Also, many francophone potential learners search for jobs in English-language newspapers.

Presence in the community

The respondents stressed the importance of their centres' having a strong presence in the community, which enables them to learn about local needs and be well known. A strong community presence facilitates recruitment in two ways: it allows potential learners to find out about the centre, and it enables the staff of other organizations that work with potential learners to steer people to it.

Partnerships

All of the respondents acknowledged the importance of creating partnerships with various organizations. Employment Ontario is an essential partner. Some centres have also formed partnerships with colleges in order to offer the Academic Upgrading for College Entry (ACE) program. School boards and Ontario Works are also major partners for adult learning centres. Developing integrated adult education programs requires close partnerships.

Support of adult learners

Some adult learning centres have established a one-stop intake process. Advertising guides all prospective adult learners to a single referral centre, which matches each of them with the adult learning centre and program that best meets their needs.

Types of programs

One respondent's centre has created integrated adult education programs. This solution links adult education programs, employment support programs, and the needs of unemployed adult learners.

SECTION 5: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Our research indicates that if adult education programs are to be designed around the articulation of needs, then the way adult education services are promoted and provided needs to be changed. The studies mentioned in this report propose ways of increasing participation among those who need to improve their literacy skills.

On a political level

Many stakeholders and researchers in the field of adult education are calling for the development of a provincial policy on adult education (Coalition, 2004; Gobeil, 2006).

Pre-enrolment activities

Adult education centres must pay close attention to activities they carry out in the community before people actually enrol in literacy programs. Pre-enrolment activities include providing information on literacy programs; listening carefully to the needs that adults in the local community express; providing career guidance services, intake services, referral services, and counselling and support services; creating opportunities for consultation with the adults concerned; engaging in outreach; building closer ties with the community; and promoting adult learning (Bélanger and Voyer, 2004). These activities can be undertaken in partnership with other organizations in the community.

The intake service that welcomes adult learners to an adult learning centre should also be designed carefully. An intake and support service focused on the articulation of educational needs can welcome prospective learners, help them define their need for education and develop their learning plans, provide them with guidance, and enable them to find the best resources in their community that will help them achieve their objectives. Such a service amounts to a referral and information system. Some adult education centres have already established such systems and shown how well they can work. The Centre d'aiguillage pour la formation des adultes / Referral Centre for Adult Training in Hawkesbury, in eastern Ontario, is one example of such a centre.

Promotion

Efforts to promote adult education should promote just that—in other words adult education in general, without breaking it down into components such as “literacy training” or “basic skills training.” Advertisements should avoid using derogatory expressions such as “illiterate adults.” The messages should also be written in language that is easily understood by people who are not used to reading. Television, radio, and public transit advertising are the best media for communicating messages to less-educated people (Canada Information Office, 2000).

Methods for teaching adult learners

It is essential to use teaching methods that are suited to adult learners when the programs are meant to help adults improve their literacy skills.

Types of programs

The types of adult education programs offered must be interesting to potential learners. As we stressed earlier, adults are looking for training that will be of practical use to them. Studies of literacy programs confirm the importance of matching the types of programs and their contents with the realities of adult learners' daily lives and their goals.

SECTION 6:

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES

6.1 A large-scale promotion through a partnership: Example 1

One respondent reported a large-scale promotional effort. In 2006-2007, the members of the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML), including its French-language adult education centre, Alpha Toronto, decided to carry out a large-scale promotional campaign, covering the entire city with posters in English and French promoting adult literacy and academic upgrading. Each of the MTML's members agreed to commit 10% of the regional support funds it received from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for publicizing the services of Employment Ontario. The City of Toronto contributed the services of its communications adviser at no charge; the adviser attended the MTML's meetings as a communications expert, worked with the MTML's members on the design of the poster, and arranged for the rights to use the photos included in it. The \$50,000 contributed by the MTML's members paid for the costs of printing the posters in a variety of formats. These posters were then put up around the city by municipal staff. The launch event for the posters was held at Toronto City Hall with the mayor in attendance, via the campaign's Web site.

6.2 An unusual partnership

There is an unusual partnership in the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé regions and the Magdalen Islands, in eastern Québec. The 15-year-old partnership brings together four school boards that offer adult education programs and seven community literacy organizations.

In the Lower St. Lawrence and Gaspé regions, adults can access education either through community organizations or through the school boards. The community literacy organizations and the school boards involved in the partnership work together to provide the best possible service to the learners in their area. They refer potential learners to each other, and they advertise together.

When adult learners in the area decide to participate in an adult education program, they sign up at the school board in their region. Then, depending on their needs, they attend their chosen program either at a school board institution or through a community literacy organization. Learners who attend a community literacy organization can write any final examination associated with their program with the school board. Often, learners who want to upgrade their skills will go to a community literacy organization, and those who wish to finish their secondary school diploma will go to a program at a school board institution. Learners may also begin studying at a community literacy organization and then continue at a school board institution. When an adult attends a program at a community literacy organization, the local school board gives this group all of the funding that the board receives for the learner from Ministère de l'Éducation, des Loisirs et du Sport (Quebec ministry of education, recreation, and sports) (on average, \$3.75 per hour).

Ghyslaine Dionne, initiator of the partnership, represents one of the school boards involved. She now provides support and training to the community literacy organizations. The training, funded by the school board, is individualized and enables practitioners to improve their teaching skills and share teaching tools and tricks of the trade.

When Ms. Dionne visits the community literacy organizations, she provides them with practical assistance and supports the learners' efforts. Her role is not to control the organizations' activities but to share ideas with them and support them. Moreover, these organizations are not officially accountable to the school board, because they are equal partners. They must, however, maintain a file on each learner for Quebec's education ministry. The file must include a copy of the learner's birth certificate, a record of the hours of adult education that he or she has taken, an enrolment form, and a learner-profile form. These requirements, though very demanding for the organizations, must be met for them to receive funding from the ministry. The organizations send these files to the school board, which then forwards the funds from the ministry.

The entire community benefits from this partnership because the school boards use their entire budget and thus manage to keep ministry funding in the community, which revitalizes the villages. The school boards have secured \$25,000 in funding for the community groups in this way. This partnership is ideal for the largely rural Lower St. Lawrence region, where school boards cannot provide services in each village. When the programs are given instead by community literacy organizations, it is often easier for adult learners to attend, making the programs more accessible while also supporting and adding life to the villages. The big winners in this partnership are adult learners and their communities.

According to Ms. Dionne, competition for clients is not really a problem, because no one can keep progressing in their learning if they are not in the right place to learn, regardless of whether that place is operated by a community group or by a school board. The real competition comes from other regions that are competing for funding from the ministry. The school boards try to obtain as much money as possible from the ministry and to redistribute this money within their service areas.

6.3 A large-scale promotion through a partnership: Example 2

The school boards and community organizations described in 6.2 decided to promote adult education by collaborating together. They launched an extensive advertising campaign three years ago. They retained an independent communications firm to conduct a market survey of adults with low literacy skills in the region. The same firm also prepared profiles of learners and key phrases for advertising and created concepts applicable to radio, newspapers, posters, and the Web. The public could hear the same message on both regional and local radio and see it in newspapers and on posters. The partnership thus orchestrated the publication of messages in larger and smaller cities, as well as in villages.

All of the advertising messages were designed to be positive, along the lines of "If you are missing these tools, adult education centres can help you make your dreams come true."

They didn't focus on the shortcomings of people with low literacy skills; instead, the advertisements showed smiling faces and very ordinary people who were contributing to their communities in various ways and realizing their dreams. Eleven organizations pooled their resources to fund a good part of this advertising campaign, which cost \$30,000. Three federal and provincial bodies also contributed: Service Canada and Quebec's Ministère de la Sécurité du revenu [ministry of income security] and Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport [ministry of education, recreation, and sports], through its Lower St. Lawrence regional office.

The campaign has produced decisive results. Two years after it was launched, several new adult learning centres had been established at various locations throughout eastern Quebec, including four in a single village.

The improved access to adult education in the region has had a positive impact, including an observable improvement in the mental health of adults in the community. The entire community benefits, from seniors to families, working-age adults, and employers. As a result of the partnership and the joint advertising campaign, the enrolment in adult education programs has doubled in three years. All of the partners benefit from working in this way because, in addition to recruiting more learners, they get great satisfaction from being able to meet adults' educational needs and go beyond the usual limitations and constraints. The supply of training has increased to meet the demand!

6.4 A one-stop access process

In the mid-1990s, the adult learning centre Le CAP (Centre d'apprentissage et de perfectionnement) in Hawkesbury, Ontario, created the Centre d'aiguillage pour la formation des adultes / Referral Centre for Adult Training. This bilingual referral centre centralizes, in one location, services for evaluating learners' skills and needs and then referring learners to organizations that can meet these needs within the community. This "one-stop" access process makes it easier to:

- identify unemployed adult learners;
- determine their skills levels;
- make connections between their skill levels and the needs of the local labour market; and
- create or adapt training programs to meet these needs.

The referral centre brings all of the community's key partners in adult education together around the same table. This approach demands an unusual degree of co-operation among adult learning centres operated by community groups, school boards, colleges, Employment Ontario, and all the other partners.

[...] We think that a local adult-education network can present [its] programs more effectively through a one-stop intake process that does not make distinctions between specific service providers. In our opinion, this approach makes it easier to reach the pool of adult learners and overcome many of the barriers to their continuing their education. By taking a one-stop access approach, instead of offering education services piecemeal and trying to recruit learners for each service separately, we combine and present several education and employment-support services in a single program. We thereby give adult learners and the general public a clearer picture of what they can get from the adult education system, thus making it easier for them to take advantage of it.⁴ (Lurette, 2003, p. 43)

You can access more information on the one-stop initiative at www.cafa-rcat.on.ca/_ENmandate.htm

6.5 Integrated training programs

After establishing the Centre d'aiguillage pour la formation des adultes / Referral Centre for Adult Training, the adult learning centre Le CAP began looking for ways to make connections between the adult education programs, the existing employment support programs, and the needs of unemployed adults in the community. Establishing the referral centre had been a crucial step, as it had helped Le CAP make itself better known in adult education circles and identify potential learners, but it had not succeeded in getting potential learners to enrol in large numbers. Simply identifying potential learners was not enough: they also had to be offered training that allowed them to participate more fully in society and upgrade their skills in the workforce. Le CAP therefore decided to create integrated training programs.

⁴ Free translation

For Le CAP, integrated training programs solve the problems of recruiting adults with low literacy skills and persuading more of them to continue their education. These programs meet the obvious desire of many people with low literacy skills to find jobs or obtain school, college, or vocational diplomas that will pave their way into the job market—the first of the six major types of training demands identified by Bélanger and Voyer (2004).

Le CAP refers to its training programs as *programmes TGV (Très Grande Vitesse)*, meaning “fast track-programs.” Le CAP’s fast-track programs are occupational training programs designed for less-educated adults who want training that will quickly lead to a job. These programs have major advantages:

- their duration is predetermined;
- they rapidly lead to employment;
- they often include some form of certification or recognition;
- their literacy-training component provides instructional support for the adults throughout the occupational training process; and
- the costs of participation are minimal.

The programs are based on a close partnership in which the partners pool their human, physical, and teaching resources to offer training that includes various forms of certification, is designed for adult learners, takes their literacy levels into account, and offers them a fast track to employment.

These programs may include from two to four levels of recognition, including a literacy component, accredited academic training, local occupational training, and provincial certification for the apprenticeship program.

Le CAP partners include various organizations that provide adult education, employment integration and employability services, and income maintenance services. The funding for these programs comes from four levels of government: municipal, regional, provincial, and federal. It goes without saying that building this partnership was a long and arduous process.

The various fast-track programs currently offered by Le CAP lead to the following occupations:

- Food Service Worker
- General Office and Accounting Clerk
- Educational and Teaching Assistant
- Personal Care Assistant
- Sales Clerk
- Certified Sales Professional
- Early Childhood Educator
- Millwright
- Horticultural Technician⁵

(Lurette and Dugas, 2005)

⁵ Job titles are unofficial translations.

6.6 A partnership to offer a program leading to the OSSD

Another successful partnership was engineered, this time between two groups in Ontario: LCAML, a French-language community adult learning centre in Kirkland Lake, and the Centre d'éducation des adultes de New Liskeard, a French-language adult education centre in New Liskeard. The partnership is based on verbal agreements rather than on formal ones, but it is working very well.

Thanks to this partnership, the LCAML centre has been able to offer courses leading to the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).⁶ The ability to offer credit courses has increased the centre's enrolment considerably. The adult education centre receives the money for each person enrolled in the OSSD program. The literacy-related instruction they need is incorporated into the courses from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities curriculum that are offered by the LCAML centre. The hours spent with such learners are recorded as contact hours.

But it is the learners who benefit most from this partnership, because now they can obtain their OSSD in a setting where the teaching is adapted to their needs. The practitioners at the LCAML centre help them acquire or improve the literacy skills they need to pass the exams required for the OSSD.

In 2007, the two partners published an advertising brochure that highlighted the availability of these credit courses. The brochure was designed by computer graphics professionals, produced in English and French, and distributed to every mailbox in the region. The partners decided to advertise in both languages because many francophones will not necessarily seek information in French because it is not often readily available. Also, prospective readers of this brochure included employers with employees whose mother tongue is French; a special section of this brochure was addressed to them.

When the first adults succeeded in obtaining their OSSD through the courses at the LCAML centre, its credibility skyrocketed, and this initial success helped secure the partnership's place in the two centres' organizational cultures.

The partnership took three years to establish. It was a long haul, but well worth the effort. The objectives had been to alter the widespread perception in the community that LCAML's courses were intended for illiterate adults and to make the public understand that the courses were actually intended for adults who wanted training to acquire new skills. According to the centre's director, the partnership is now firmly established and will not vanish if there is a change in staff at one or the other of the partner centres. Indeed, a recent change in the management of the adult education centre had no impact on the partnership.

6.7 Involving adult learners in the recruitment process

A federation of community literacy organizations in Québec, the Regroupement des groupes populaires en alphabétisation du Québec, has created a kit called *Mon groupe d'alpha, c'est mon affaire!* [my literacy group is my business] that offers adult education centre managers a variety of activities for involving current adult learners in the process of recruiting new learners.

The first section of the kit gives current learners the chance to develop a recruitment action plan. Activities enable them to determine attendance patterns for the various organizations in the community and for future activities in the community, and they familiarize themselves with the centre's current recruitment strategy. The second section consists of group activities that teach learners how to play a front-line role in the recruitment process: the group is invited to create a tool for contacting the various stakeholders in the community and to write e-mails addressed to various community organizations. The kit also contains cards with tips for the practitioner on how to run the sessions,

⁶ Note that community education centres cannot award the Ontario Secondary School Diploma, hence the need for a partnership with an organization that can.

an activity for calculating the costs of the recruitment process, and an activity for monitoring and evaluating the results of the process.

The reading, writing, and group animation activities are designed for all levels of adult learners and hence are written in clear, simple language. The group animation activity focuses on preparing the action plan. The tips can support the practitioner in helping participants come up with ideas.

The kit also contains various recruitment ideas that have proven effective at other adult education centres. Here is a brief summary:

- radio advertisements
- round tables with potential partners
- building personal ties with representatives of other organizations in the community
- building close ties with the local employment centre
- intensive door-to-door campaigns

This recruiting method promises good results, because it is based on actively involving current learners in the recruitment process. Current learners are especially well placed to understand the benefits of adult education programs, to know other people who might benefit from such programs, and to talk with them about this subject. Literacy programs can have no better ambassadors.

6.8 A pre-enrolment activity

A training project has been developed by a Quebec literacy committee for members of organizations that come in contact with potential learners: a kit entitled *Fiers d'apprendre* [proud to learn].

The idea for the kit came from the recognition that too few adults enrol in adult literacy programs. Many less-educated adults have given up on the idea that education can be a solution to their challenges, and traditional advertising on this subject does not seem to reach them. The Beauce-Etchemin literacy committee, consisting of representatives of two community literacy groups and the Beauce-Etchemin school board, asked where people who could benefit from adult literacy programs could be found. The answer: in hospitals, at employment centres, in schools, and in other community agencies. The committee concluded that people who work in these institutions needed to be made more aware that some members of the public with whom they deal have trouble reading and writing; they also needed to be taught how to recognize these people, and to be shown how they can communicate more effectively with them in the course of their jobs. The committee also decided to create a complete training package rather than produce a document that might simply be filed away somewhere.

The *Fiers d'apprendre* kit was designed in collaboration with adults currently enrolled in adult education courses. They were consulted at every stage of the project to ensure that the concepts presented in the kit would accurately reflect reality. The kit contains a variety of tools, including a participants' workbook, videos, an instructor's manual, postcards, a quick reference guide, and some comic strips.

The training itself lasts one full day and is designed to address the identified needs: to help participants understand the day-to-day realities faced by people who have trouble reading and writing and to give participants tools that will help them communicate with these people more effectively. The training also gives the participants strategies for encouraging people who have been identified as having difficulty reading or writing to enrol in programs to improve their skills.

The practitioner's guide contains all of the information that someone from an adult education centre needs to give this training to representatives of other community organizations. The quick reference guide and postcards are intended for the training participants and are designed to get them to direct potential learners to the local adult education centre when appropriate. The kit also includes 10 comic strips illustrating various situations that people with low literacy skills may experience.

This training addresses relevant issues in a very practical fashion. It lets the participants experience what it is like to be in a situation where they cannot understand the written word. It makes them aware of the effects of their sometimes negative interactions with people who have reading and writing difficulties, and it tries to make them understand how people who have such difficulties may behave. The training uses videos and simulations to illustrate the characteristics of people who cannot read or write very well and the consequences that this limitation can have for them. Then the training focuses on how the participants can change the ways they interact with such people so as to build better relationships with them. This part of the training is very practical and specific, and the participants greatly appreciate it. The training day ends with a discussion about the advisability of raising the issue with people who have trouble reading and writing and how to do so, and an overview of the adult education services that are available locally.

In addition to developing this training program, the committee also held a round table to organize poverty-fighting efforts by several community organizations. Committee members used this opportunity to talk about the training program.

The program has been given to over 250 representatives of a large number of organizations, including all of the agents from Emploi-Québec's local employment centres in the region, as well as representatives of local community service centres (CLSCs) and job-hunting clubs, and primary school teachers. The results have been quick in coming: the adult education centres report a 30% increase in their enrolment.

Developing the kit took three years. The budget for printing the kit came from the *Initiatives Fédérales-Provinciales conjointes en matière d'Alphabétisation* [Quebec/Canada joint literacy initiatives program].

The project contains several elements worth noting: a highly targeted activity that takes place before adults enrol in education programs; partnerships with other community organizations and the opportunity to build close ties with them; and a proactive, helpful way for adult education centres to make themselves better known in their communities.

6.9 A partnership to offer the ACE program

The Accès/carrière/études / Academic Upgrading for College Entry (ACE) program is designed to prepare learners in Ontario to obtain jobs or enrol in college or apprenticeship programs directly, without having to complete grade 12 first. (Employers and colleges regard the ACE program as equivalent to grade 12.) ACE is offered by two francophone colleges in Ontario, Collège Boréal and La Cité collégiale, often in partnership with adult education centres. This allows learners who wish to pursue their education in their own communities to do so.

6.10 Offering language courses to the community

Since 1997, La Route du Savoir, a francophone adult education centre in Kingston, Ontario, has offered a variety of language courses (for a fee). The initiative began when anglophones in the community asked the centre to offer courses in French as a second language. Their needs were focused on oral communication, which is only an incidental aspect of the French-language instruction offered at the two local post-secondary institutions, St. Lawrence

College and Queen's University. The centre's general manager, Marc Bissonnette, therefore developed a set of conversational French courses based on six levels of learning objectives.

The first year, the centre offered the level 1 course. By adding one level each year, as well as by responding to the popular demand from the French-language and English-language communities to learn other languages and recruiting specialists to teach conversational language courses, the centre has built a reputation for effectiveness. It now offers these courses at five different levels of difficulty for anglophone adults, one course for anglophone elementary school students, and one program to assist children enrolled in French immersion programs. La Route du Savoir now also offers courses in Spanish (four levels), Italian (two levels), German (two levels), and English (one level). The enrolment for all these language courses totals more than 80 students each year.

The teachers recruited by the centre are versatile enough to give courses in English as well as in French, so the centre can offer the same course—for example, Italian—in both official languages.

At first the centre limited its workshops to groups of 10 adults. Since 2005, it has also offered private courses developed to meet the specific needs and goals of corporate and individual clients, government bodies, and employers. Each semester, La Route du Savoir finds half a dozen of these highly lucrative contracts. The centre regularly receives requests from individuals, companies, and provincial agencies that are preparing to provide services in both languages in Kingston, which was designated a bilingual city in May 2006. Because this law will take effect in 2009, La Route du Savoir is taking the opportunity to increase the number of French speakers through its courses teaching French as a second language, while also increasing its visibility by providing learners with products and services that the centre could not provide if it did not have this source of income.

The centre presents all of its courses on its own premises, in the evenings from Monday through Thursday. Sometimes it will give a private course to a group of public service employees at their workplace. Thus the centre is making maximum use of its physical facilities and realizing a large margin of profit that allows it to hire practitioners for its literacy and basic skills learners who have special needs, as well as develop programs and defray the costs of teaching materials for adults enrolled in the adult education program. This income-generating activity has solidified the La Route du Savoir's reputation as a dynamic innovator and has enabled it to grow in its community.

6.11 A bookstore

In November 2004, the Centre d'alphabétisation ALEC du Nipissing, a French-language adult education centre in Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, opened a bookstore called ÉduPlaisir in the same building. The bookstore offers a wide variety of educational books, games, music, DVDs, and software in French to the community of Nipissing and its environs.

It took more than 18 months of serious planning before the centre opened the bookstore. All of the profits from its sales are either ploughed back into inventory or given to the centre.

The centre had been looking for an innovative way to financially support its literacy skills training for some time. In 2002, the centre had the opportunity to operate a small bookstore under its roof in partnership with the bookstore owner. The experience was beneficial for the centre, but after the first year of operation it decided not to renew the partnership, among other reasons because the centre's staff considered it important for the centre to own and manage such a business itself.

In 2003, the centre received funding from two sources, Economic Partners Sudbury East/West Nipissing Inc. and the Economic Development and Employability Network of Ontario, which it used to hire a consultant to conduct a market study and prepare a five-year business plan. These two tools were of critical importance for planning the store's opening. The market study provided a very clear picture of the store's potential clientele, and the business plan

helped the centre make the important decisions about the financial investment needed to open the store. It was no easy matter to select the business model that would best serve the community's needs while posing the fewest financial risks for the centre. The consultant also provided the centre with support for the legal procedures involved in opening the store.

The centre had a small reserve fund that it used to purchase its start-up inventory. In a combination of circumstances, the store's opening coincided with the centre's move to a different building. This building proved to be more appropriate for the store as well as for the centre's literacy activities. The building owner was closing his own store on the premises, which proved a great boon for the new bookstore: not only was the location more central, but the bookstore also acquired the previous owner's fixtures, such as shelving and a sales counter, which greatly reduced the initial investment required.

The ÉduPlaisir bookstore has now been in business for four years, and the Centre ALEC reports that it is doing very well. So far, its sales figures have consistently surpassed projections. Though managing the store from day to day remains a challenge, the benefits for the centre are tremendous. But the centre is by no means taking the store's immediate success for granted: the team is working constantly to build the reputation and credibility that are essential for any business to survive. The store has many customers, and they are growing increasingly loyal. The centre expects that it will take a few years to begin reaping financial benefits from the store. Nonetheless, the new ÉduPlaisir bookstore's potential for success seems evident, and the centre is extremely careful with all activities and decisions about it.

6.12 Family literacy programs

Eleven adult education centres that are members of the Coalition offer family literacy programs. Family literacy programs are designed to meet the needs of parents who want to improve their abilities as their child's first educator. Family literacy is about "developing stronger relationships between parents and their children and supporting parents in their own learning process. It is about building stronger families and healthy communities" (Masny, 2008, p. 79).

A family literacy program helps develop a closer relationship between the child and the significant adult in the child's life. The programs delivered by centres that participated in research conducted by the Coalition (Masny, 2008) included a component on parenting skills. The parents said that this aspect of their program was very informative. They also indicated that they were very satisfied with the support they received to help their child to read, write, and do his homework (ibid.).

Research has shown that family literacy programs produce good results. For francophones in Ontario, family literacy programs have helped establish a network for socializing in French while keeping families informed about the francophone community and giving them the opportunity to use the services offered in French in their city or region. The results also show that adults participating in francophone family literacy programs change their ways of using French: families living in a bilingual setting reported that they were speaking French more often both at home and in the community, and all of the adults tried to participate in more cultural activities in French (ibid.).

This is yet another example of the diverse services adult education centres offer.

SECTION 7: RECOMMENDATIONS

Adult education policy

The provincial government should adopt an adult education policy that promotes lifelong learning.

Funding for adult education centres

The provincial government should provide adult education centres with a flexible, varied funding structure that enables them to conduct pre-enrolment activities in their communities, and gives them more flexibility so they can adapt the training and programs they offer to adults' actual needs.

Promotion

Adult education centres should intensify their promotional campaigns to inform the public about the variety of free services they offer, and encourage members of the community to take advantage of their resources (e.g., computer workstations, bookstores, etc.) and their programs. These campaigns should be conducted in both French and English.

Types of programs

Adult education centres should offer integrated training programs that lead quickly to employment. These programs should include a component that prepares francophone learners to work in environments where English predominates.

One-stop access

Adult education centres should create one-stop access systems, similar to the model used by the Centre d'aiguillage pour la formation des adultes / Referral Centre for Adult Training in Hawkesbury.

Toolkit

The Coalition should create and distribute to all adult education centres an information kit, in French and English, about the problem of low literacy skills in French-speaking Ontario. The centres' managers can use this kit to raise awareness, both within the community at large and among members of various organizations that come in contact with potential literacy learners. Such a kit could help the staff of these organizations communicate more effectively with clients who have low literacy skills and encourage them to think of ways of referring such clients, when appropriate, to the adult education centre in their communities.

SECTION 8:

CONCLUSION

In today's knowledge-based society, the level of literacy needed to function effectively is high, not only for economic reasons but also for social reasons such as citizenship, health, and personal growth. Everyone agrees that the literacy skills of Ontario's francophones have to be improved. However, few francophone Ontarians whose literacy skills need improvement actually enrol in literacy programs. The methods used to date to recruit learners have not always yielded the hoped-for results.

One way to overcome this lack of participation is to focus on prompting potential learners to recognize and articulate their need for increased literacy. Are there ways to awaken the desire to take literacy training?

A literature review identified several obstacles to participation in adult education programs: a lack of interest in adult education, a very low value placed on education, and a belief that the expected payback from adult education does not justify the effort it requires.

We also found that the reasons adults participate in adult education programs boil down to a desire to improve their living conditions, and that the greatest demands for adult education are made for practical reasons, such as to obtain a better job or to help one's children.

A literature search identified the one-stop access approach and integrated training programs as two possible ways of overcoming obstacles to participation in adult education and providing the types of training that are in greatest demand.

Our field research confirmed the obstacles to participation, reasons for participation, and programs adults want that were identified in the literature review. The new findings that emerged from our field research had to do with the issue of language.

Language, education, and assistance in articulating educational needs in French-speaking Ontario

The issue of language arose in this study on several occasions.

Our interviews with francophone adults who are not enrolled in adult education programs and with managers and practitioners at francophone adult education centres revealed that many francophone potential learners are not interested in attending adult education programs taught in French. Centres could overcome this obstacle by giving their programs in French but using authentic examples of English documents that learners may encounter in the workplace to teach them how to deal with such documents, or by offering most programming in French but having a component of English as a second language..

Francophone adult education centres are very conscious of this issue of language. Many promote their services in English and have established partnerships with English-speaking individuals and organizations.

Awakening the giant within: pre-enrolment activities

Almost all adult education centres engage in a variety of activities that precede and encourage enrolment in their programs—that is, activities that stimulate the desire for further education in the local adult francophone population. Section 6 of this report is full of examples of best practices in this regard. We hope that these examples will inspire you to continue your efforts to stir the desire for education—to awaken the giant within francophone adults in your community.

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