

# Literacy in London & Middlesex:

An Opportunity to Reach our Full Potential

LITERACY ACTION PLAN 2008 - 2010

September 2008

## From Research to Action

In December 2007, United Way of London & Middlesex and the City of London released Literacy in London & Middlesex: An Opportunity to Reach our Full Potential, a report of the current state of literacy in our community. We learned that our community is in line with the provincial literacy rates - no worse - no better. One third of our children between 8 and 14 are not meeting the expected provincial standard for reading, writing, and mathematics. One fifth of adults are functioning at the lowest level of literacy. These adults are often unable to read basic signs and instructions on a medicine label and are not prepared to participate fully in the technological workforce.

This represents a significant loss of potential – socially and economically. Our community does not want nor can it afford to leave children and adults behind. We believe that literacy is an essential building block for life-long learning, employment, health, and the well-being of people. With literacy comes power, participation, and progress. The more literate we are as individuals, the better our quality of life. The more literate our community, the more vibrant and healthy our society.

With the release of the research came a call to action: create a solution unique to London and Middlesex. A solution that would begin to cultivate literacy strategies that will ensure no one is left behind. Community partners responded with enthusiasm – and the result is this action plan – the first step of many on the path to building stronger families, a stronger economy, and a more prosperous and inclusive community.

### Literacy: Defined

Literacy in its simplest form is the ability to read, write, and use numbers. It is an essential building block for life-long learning, employment, health, and the wellbeing of people.

There are many definitions of literacy. We use the definition of literacy used by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS): the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work, and in the community – to achieve one's goals, and to develop one's knowledge and potential.

## Building a Community Response

From January to June, 2008, an Implementation Committee chaired by United Way of London & Middlesex provided expert advice and input to develop this Literacy Action Plan. Members met regularly to contribute to and review the framework for the Action Plan, test our assumptions with feedback from the community, identify potential partners, champions, and resources.

Considerable expertise exists within our community—and our goal was to build on it. We met with representatives from the Child and Youth Network, Employment Sector Council, Literacy Service Providers, Social Service Providers, Employers, Labour, government, potential sponsors and funders, and interested citizens. In all, more than 150 individuals and groups participated in the development of this action plan.

We know that literacy is complex and solutions must be long-term and strategic. We believe that this Action Plan builds a solid foundation that will contribute to sustained change in the community.

## Shared Community Leadership

The following organizations have led the development of this community plan:

Child & Youth Network  
City of London  
Employment Sector Council London Middlesex  
Literacy Link South Central  
London Public Library  
Middlesex London Health Unit  
United Way of London & Middlesex (chair)

Frontier College  
Elgin Middlesex Oxford Local Training Board  
Fanshawe College  
London District Catholic School Board  
Middlesex County Library  
Thames Valley District School Board

# Literacy Action Plan 2008-2010

## Our Vision

A community where every individual is invited, encouraged, and empowered to improve their literacy and numeracy skills, engage in life-long learning, improve their quality of life, and contribute in a meaningful way to our community.

## Working Together to Achieve Long-Term Change

Building a strong and literate community is a responsibility of all sectors in London and Middlesex. This Action Plan brings our community together to use existing expertise and seek additional resources that will make a long-term, sustainable difference in the future of our community. We believe that three inter-related strategies are key: for children and families to have the best foundation for success; for workers to be safe, productive, and protected in current and future jobs, and for all people - regardless of their abilities - to feel that improving their literacy is valued.

### CHILD & FAMILY LITERACY

A comprehensive child and family literacy strategy that involves parents, schools, and community to make literacy a way of life for all. A neighborhood demonstration project will be implemented and will be replicable in neighbourhoods across our community in future years.

#### Outcomes:

- We will be the provincial leader in child, youth, and family literacy
- By 2015, all children will be ready to learn by Grade One
- By 2010, no children will fall below the standards in reading, writing, and math
- All youth will pass the Grade 10 literacy test
- All students will graduate from high school
- All students will be engaged in their school community
- All community members will be engaged in activities that improve literacy

**Project Lead:**  
Literacy Steering Committee of the Child & Youth Network

**Timeline:**  
September 2008 - December 2010

### AWARENESS & ADVOCACY

A multi-year communications and engagement plan to change the way our community talks about and values literacy. The plan builds on existing resources, opportunities, and expertise to engage multiple audiences - parents, employers, policy makers, and others - in London and Middlesex.

#### Outcomes:

- Increased awareness that literacy is an issue in our community
- Increased attention on the importance of literacy to literacy
- Increased connectivity to activities and events related to literacy
- Engagement of community leaders, media, and funders in the development of strategies, solutions, and concrete, replicable programs
- Enhanced communication and collaboration among existing and emerging service providers
- Increased support for and awareness of literacy programs and services

**Project Lead:**  
Working group led by Literacy Link South Central

**Timeline:**  
June 2008 - June 2010

### LITERACY IN THE WORKPLACE

A workplace literacy pilot program that will work closely with a local employer to demonstrate benefit to employees and the employer. Service providers will assist the employer as we develop a local best practice to engage other employers in proactively increasing their investments in literacy in future years.

#### Outcomes:

- Increased prevention and early intervention literacy and essential skill development programming available to employees
- Improved literacy skills to support workplace productivity, employee health and safety, and employee well-being
- Increased employer investment in literacy and essential skill training
- Enhanced collaboration between employers and literacy and employment training service providers

**Project Lead:**  
Working group led by Elgin Middlesex Oxford Local Training Board

**Timeline:**  
September 2008 - December 2010

## Guiding Principles

The implementation of this plan will be guided by the following principles that emerged from our consultations with community partners:

### A Life Span Approach

Literacy is an issue that affects individuals from early childhood throughout their lives. A comprehensive approach that includes a variety of activities that appeal to children, youth, single adults, families, and seniors is required.

### Activities with Impact

Plans need to include specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-limited projects that make a difference in the lives of children, families, and seniors in our community. These projects need to be small enough to be manageable with limited resources but replicable so that we can build momentum and effect lasting change.

### Understanding, Awareness and Advocacy

Lasting change requires an underlying shift in thinking. Literacy is a social issue that, like many others, has a stigma associated with it. The general population typically believes that an individual is either literate or illiterate and there is not much in between. People may also incorrectly associate illiteracy or low literacy as indicators of intelligence. Still others 'get by' and therefore don't think they need help. A wide range of individuals with a wide range of needs must be able to 'see themselves' or their loved ones in our messaging, participating in life-long learning, and living fuller, more enriching lives as a result.

### Celebrating Success

Programs, services, and messages that celebrate success and invite individuals to envision the positive differences in their lives are much more likely to invite and encourage participation than those that do not.

### Building on Existing Strengths

We must build on existing program and marketing strengths to maximize limited resources to make meaningful and lasting change in our community.

### Multiple Partners/Points of Access

A successful, community-wide approach will recognize and celebrate individual differences, involve many cross-sectoral partners, and ensure that regardless of the door through which an individual enters, s/he will receive the supports and services required to be successful.

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## Our Commitment

A significant success of our work to date has been the increased partnerships between different sectors and service providers. Beginning in September 2008, a Literacy Advisory Committee will monitor the effective implementation of this plan.

### We will:

- Monitor the outcomes of Action Plan initiatives
- Provide leadership and expertise regarding outcome measurement
- Identify and address emerging trends, opportunities, and issues related to literacy in London and Middlesex
- Confirm key messages based on consultations and existing tools
- Identify champions, key partners, open doors, opportunities, and strategies to enhance literacy in London and Middlesex
- Engage with policy makers and funders to leverage influence and resources to support Action Plan implementation and other projects

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## For More Information

For more information, please contact any of our partners or United Way of London & Middlesex at 519-438-1721.