

## LITERACY in Guelph & Wellington County

*This fact sheet provides information on literacy in the City of Guelph and Wellington County.*

### WHAT IS LITERACY

Traditionally, literacy has been understood as the ability to read and write. Current understandings of literacy, however, are not so simple and straightforward.



- Literacy is defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as the “context-bound continuum of reading, writing and numeracy skills, acquired and developed through processes of learning and application, in schools and in other settings appropriate to youth and adults”.<sup>1</sup>
- Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington asserts that: “Literacy is more than knowing how to read and write. People who are literate can use reading, writing, speaking, and numerical skills effectively to understand and participate in the world around them. Literacy is not a fixed skill. It needs to be exercised and challenged. Otherwise, the skill will not strengthen and may weaken.”<sup>2</sup>
- The Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey 2003, uses a scale from 1 to 5 to measure an individual’s literacy level, with 1 being the lowest level of literacy and 5 being highest level of literacy. People with literacy in Level 1 and Level 2 are commonly said to have low literacy. Level 3 is the level that experts consider to be the minimum level needed to cope with the demands of modern society. Level 3 literacy is generally the level needed to complete high school and gain entry into college.<sup>3,4</sup>

### LOCAL LITERACY FACTS

#### **Grade 10 Literacy Test**

- The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) annually assesses the literacy skills of Ontario’s grade 10 students through the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). This test

determines if students can read and write at an acceptable level to succeed in the classroom, explore career options, and prepare for a promising future.<sup>5</sup> In 2008/2009, 87% of grade 10 students in the Upper Grand District School Board and Wellington Catholic District School Board successfully completed the OSSLT. This is higher than the provincial average of 85%.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Adult Education & Literacy Levels**

- In 2006, 42% of adults (16 and older) from Waterloo Region, and the Counties of Dufferin, Simcoe, and Wellington were in the lowest two levels of literacy.<sup>7</sup> This is slightly lower than the Ontario rate of 48%.
- According to the 2006 Census, 14.8% of 25-64 year olds in Guelph and Wellington County did not have a high school certificate, diploma, or degree. In contrast, 13.6% of 25-64 year olds in Ontario did not have a high school certificate, diploma, or degree.<sup>8</sup>
- 19.8% of employed adults in Waterloo-Wellington have not completed high school.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS Training)**

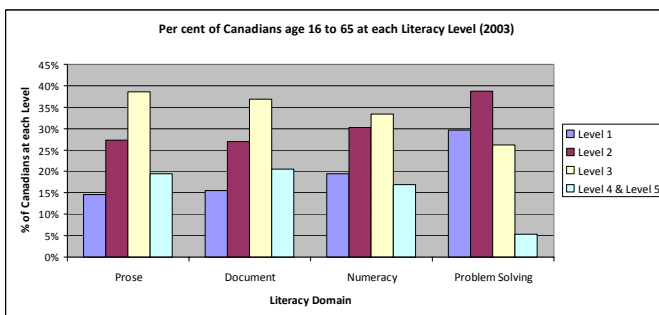
- Between April 2007 and March 2008, 2,614 adults in Waterloo-Wellington received literacy and basic skills (LBS) training. Of all LBS students, 25% were employed, 18% were receiving income support from Ontario Works, 13.5% were receiving Ontario Disability Support Program, and 10% were receiving Employment Insurance. Over 60% of adult literacy students became employed or did further education and training after leaving LBS programs.<sup>10</sup>

### LITERACY IMPLICATIONS

Low literacy has many social and economic implications for individuals and society. For example, low literacy is connected with poorer health. Adults with low literacy get sick more often, experience more accidents at work, recover from illness more slowly, receive more wrong medications, and live shorter lives. In contrast, adults

with higher literacy use fewer government supports, have lower rates of unemployment, and make more money. At a national level, adult literacy levels influence a country's economy.<sup>11</sup>

- When considering all four literacy domains used for international testing of literacy levels (prose, document, numeracy, and problem solving), 51% of Canadians between ages 16-65 score in the two lowest literacy levels, Level 1 and 2 (see Graph 1).<sup>12</sup> This means that 51% of Canadians do not have the needed literacy skills to fully participate in society.



- In a competitive, knowledge-based society such as Canada, a highly literate population is essential to success. Literacy rates impact all elements of society such as children's education, individual health, community participation, poverty levels, crime and safety, and financial prosperity. Given the widespread impact of literacy, Ontario's low literacy rates are worrisome.<sup>13</sup>

### Poverty

- Canadians with low literacy (Levels 1 and 2) are 2.5 times more likely to obtain social assistance even after adjusting for household income, education, age, and gender.<sup>14</sup>
- Many people with low literacy skills can only find work in insecure, low-paying jobs. The availability of well-paying, secure jobs for people with little formal education continues to decline. The introduction of new technologies means that higher levels of literacy are required in many workplaces.<sup>15</sup>
- The roots of low literacy and high poverty are heavily interconnected and impact numerous aspects of people's lives. Any plan to combat poverty should include a literacy lens.<sup>16</sup>

### Health

- Many people with low levels of literacy struggle with accessing, understanding, evaluating, and communicating information that can help promote, maintain, and improve their personal health and wellbeing. Across Canada, an estimated 55% of working age adults and 88% of adults over the age of 65 do not have the degree of literacy necessary to respond to their health needs.<sup>17</sup>
- On average, Canadians who are most healthy have higher literacy and numeracy skills, while those who are least healthy have the lowest literacy skills.<sup>18</sup>

### New Canadians

Literacy challenges are a reality for all groups of people in Canada, including those who have been born and educated in Canada.<sup>19</sup> New Canadians face additional challenges when they come to Canada unable to speak English or French.

- Approximately 832,000 immigrants in Ontario do not read and write well in English or French.<sup>20</sup>
- The average literacy proficiency of immigrants is significantly lower than the Canadian-born population. Over 60% of recent and established immigrants have low literacy (Levels 1 and 2).<sup>21</sup>
- Immigrants who speak English or French as their mother tongue score higher on literacy tests in Canada than immigrants whose first language is not English or French.<sup>22</sup>
- Canadian immigrants with low literacy (Levels 1 and 2) are roughly 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed compared to Canadian born individuals with medium to high levels of literacy.<sup>23</sup>

### Employment

- In Ontario, over 65% of people with low literacy are of working age (26-55).<sup>24</sup>
- Canadians with low literacy skills are about 2 times more likely to be unemployed for 6 or more months than those with higher skills.<sup>25</sup>
- Young adults with low literacy (Levels 1 and 2) tend to be unemployed longer than young adults with higher literacy (Levels 3, 4 and 5) and are less likely to exit unemployment.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (2005). *Education for All: Literacy for Life*. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001416/141639e.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Prepared by: Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington in collaboration with the Waterloo and Wellington Literacy Service Planning Committees (2008). *Waterloo-Wellington Literacy Service Plan for 2009-2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.projectread.ca/pdf/LiteracyServicePlanReport2009.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Canadian Council on Learning. Retrieved from [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/cclflash/proseliteracy/map\\_help\\_e4.html](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/cclflash/proseliteracy/map_help_e4.html)

<sup>5</sup> Ontario Ministry of Education (2010). *School Board Progress Reports*. Retrieved from <Http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/bpr/boardindicator.asp>: retrieved June 6, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Education Quality and Accountability Office (2009). *School Board Report: First Time Eligible Students. Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, April 2009. Upper Grand District School Board (66117)*. Retrieved from [https://eqaoweb.eqao.com/pbs/DownloadPublic.aspx?RptType=5&\\_Mident=66117&RptLang=E&\\_BatchID=1&\\_ApplySuppression=1&\\_OrgType=B](https://eqaoweb.eqao.com/pbs/DownloadPublic.aspx?RptType=5&_Mident=66117&RptLang=E&_BatchID=1&_ApplySuppression=1&_OrgType=B)

<sup>7</sup> Canadian Council on Learning (2010). Prose Literacy. Retrieved from [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/cclflash/proseliteracy/map\\_provinces\\_e.html](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/cclflash/proseliteracy/map_provinces_e.html)

<sup>8</sup> Statistics Canada (2006). Community Profiles: Wellington County. Retrieved from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-591/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3523&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=Wellington&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=>

<sup>9</sup> Prepared by: Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington in collaboration with the Waterloo and Wellington Literacy Service Planning Committees (2008). *Waterloo-Wellington Literacy Service Plan for 2009-2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.projectread.ca/pdf/LiteracyServicePlanReport2009.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Prepared by: Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington in collaboration with the Waterloo and Wellington Literacy Service Planning Committees (2008). *Waterloo-Wellington Literacy Service Plan for 2009-2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.projectread.ca/pdf/LiteracyServicePlanReport2009.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Canadian Council on Learning (n.d.). *Reading the Future: Planning to Meet Canada's Future Literacy Needs*. Retrieved from <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/ReadingFuture/LiteracyReadingFutureFactSheetE.PDF>

<sup>12</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ontario Literacy Coalition (2010). *Literacy Rates and Statistics*. Retrieved from <http://www.on.literacy.ca/literacy101/stats>

<sup>14</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Ontario Literacy Coalition (n.d.). *Literacy Impacts: Poverty*. Retrieved from [http://www.on.literacy.ca/themes/olc/pdfs/Literacy\\_Impacts\\_Poverty.pdf](http://www.on.literacy.ca/themes/olc/pdfs/Literacy_Impacts_Poverty.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Ontario Literacy Coalition (n.d.). *Literacy Impacts: Poverty*. Retrieved from [http://www.on.literacy.ca/themes/olc/pdfs/Literacy\\_Impacts\\_Poverty.pdf](http://www.on.literacy.ca/themes/olc/pdfs/Literacy_Impacts_Poverty.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Ontario Literacy Coalition (2010). *Literacy Impacts: Health*. Retrieved from [http://www.on.literacy.ca/themes/olc/pdfs/Literacy\\_Impacts\\_Health.pdf](http://www.on.literacy.ca/themes/olc/pdfs/Literacy_Impacts_Health.pdf) retrieved June 6, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> Personal Correspondence with Mira Clarke, Executive Director of Action Read Community Literacy Centre, October 22, 2010.

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<sup>20</sup> Ontario Literacy Coalition (2010). *Literacy Impacts: New Canadians*. Retrieved from [http://www.on.literacy.ca/themes/olc/pdfs/Literacy\\_Impacts\\_New\\_Canadians.pdf](http://www.on.literacy.ca/themes/olc/pdfs/Literacy_Impacts_New_Canadians.pdf) retrieved June 6, 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Ontario Literacy Coalition (2010). *Literacy Rates and Statistics*. Retrieved from <http://www.on.literacy.ca/literacy101/stats>

<sup>25</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Statistics Canada & Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2005). *Learning a Living: First Results of the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*. OECD Publishing; Ottawa & Paris. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-603-x/2005001/pdf/4200878-eng.pdf>