



## **ABC CANADA LITERACY FOUNDATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2007 - 2010**

### **The persistent adult-literacy challenge**

After a year of analysis and review, it is clear that the need for an organization with ABC CANADA's fundamental mandate – to raise awareness of the adult literacy issue in this country – and with its expertise in communications, has not diminished since its inception in 1990.

Widespread low literacy among Canadian adults persists. Millions are challenged with low literacy and do not have the requisite skills to reach their full potential in the home, in the community, and in the workplace. If our citizens' literacy skills are not raised, there will be serious social and economic consequences for this country.

### **Renewed mission founded on research**

During fiscal 2007-2008, we reviewed the needs of the literacy cause, gathered the opinions of key stakeholders and re-imagined our organization. Thanks to the insights and good counsel of numerous experts in the literacy field, in business and labour, ABC CANADA restated its original purpose in a new mission statement:

**We are Canada's private-sector voice championing adult literacy.**

Stakeholders we consulted told us that ABC CANADA's long-standing affiliation with the business community is one of its key strengths. We intend to build on that strength, and the initiatives we undertake will further rally corporate support and influence. Our research also shows that the usefulness of ABC CANADA to literacy is its ability to represent the views of the private sector to government.

In order to identify and prioritize our areas of activity, we looked to statistics and to literacy and business experts for direction.

### **A renewed focus: The two groups of low literacy**

Based on findings from Statistics Canada and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), those with low literacy fall into two basic groups:

**Adults at IALLS Level 1** (lowest level of literacy, roughly corresponding up to grade 6): Representing 16.6% of the adult population, this group tends more to self-identify as needing literacy upgrading, and to use community-based literacy programs and community colleges for skills training.

**Adults at IALLS Level 2** (the higher of the two levels of low literacy, roughly corresponding from grade 7 to 11 in proficiency): Representing 25.6% of the adult population, this group is less likely to self-identify and has, for the most part, the skills required for their current job. But as technological and literacy demands at the workplace increase, their aptitude to retain their jobs, let alone move ahead, is increasingly diminished.

There are compelling reasons for addressing adults at both Level 1 and Level 2.

### **A strong role for the workplace ... and the community**

The fact that many adults at Level 1 and 2 are employed underscores the importance of the workplace as a venue to promote literacy and essential skills training. Adults at Level 2 have 'less distance to go,' compared to adults at Level 1, in being raised to Level 3, deemed the minimum level of skills to enable meeting challenges at home, in the community and in the workplace. Adults at Level 2 also represent the largest percentage of adults with low literacy. Hence, the greatest potential for a return on investment rests with Level-2 adults. ABC CANADA, then, will focus much of its attention on adults with Level 2 literacy, but not to the exclusion of adults at Level 1.

ABC CANADA will place considerable focus on raising awareness of the importance of investing in workplace literacy and essential skills, and on promoting leadership among businesses and unions to make such investments. These initiatives will largely, but not exclusively, reach adults at Level 2.

It will also create programs and communications that promote and celebrate adult learning to the general public. This will bring the issue of adult literacy more into the light of day and help to break down the acknowledged stigma of having low literacy and break down this and other barriers to people participating in literacy programs. These initiatives will largely, but not exclusively, reach adults at Level 1 who are most often served through the not-for-profit organizations and community colleges across the country that make up ABC CANADA's *Look Under LEARN* partners.

## **A vision of a new Canada**

As Canada's private-sector voice championing adult literacy, and having identified the key low-literacy groups needing skills upgrading, ABC CANADA envisions a Canada where:

- the private sector plays a leading role in the literacy development of Canadians; and
- individuals, regardless of their circumstances, are provided the opportunities to increase their literacy levels.
- governments recognize, and reflect in their programs, the economic, social and cultural benefits of our nation investing in adult literacy;

We envision ABC CANADA to be an organization that is:

- recognized as the private-sector leader promoting the literacy cause;
- valued by business, labour, government and the literacy field; and
- a model not-for-profit organization.

## **ABC CANADA's Scope of Activity**

We want the private sector, business and labour, to take their rightful place as a partner with government in implementing that change. And we want adult learners to be assisted in overcoming their barriers to upgrade their skills. We want governments, working with the private sector, to understand the literacy challenges our country faces and to create meaningful policies and programs to alleviate the problem.

How will we do that? ABC CANADA will:

- harness its key strengths in communications to increase understanding of our country's literacy challenge amongst the private sector, the public and the media;
- take a leadership role in working with business, labour and government to drive the development of policies and practices that bring meaningful change for individuals and their communities;
- convene stakeholders to support the literacy cause, refine our programs and policies and create a national community of champions for literacy.

The scope of ABC CANADA's activities – encompassing communications, driving policy change and convening stakeholders – informs a new program mix for us. With the emphasis on adult literacy, under the key target areas of the workplace and the community, former child-centred programs have been eliminated, existing programs that have a strong adult component remain, and new programs are planned.

## ADULT LITERACY

<b>S C O P E</b>	<b>Workplace</b>	<b>Community</b>	
	<b>Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canadian CEO/ Training Matters insert (showcases leadership in workplace literacy development)</li> <li>• Business-to-Business Promotion Campaign (raises awareness, promotes action)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look under LEARN (raise public awareness and drive potential learners to literacy organizations in their community)</li> <li>• Quick Reads book project (provide useful tools for adult literacy acquisition and raise awareness of adult-literacy issue)</li> <li>• Family Literacy Day (raise public awareness of importance of families reading and learning together, and of the literacy benefits to parents and caregivers)</li> </ul>
	<b>Advocacy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace Funding (work with government)</li> <li>• Private-Sector Champions (build and leverage business support)</li> </ul>	
<b>Convenor</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace Literacy Stakeholders (convening to tap expertise, share information, drive policy and ensure due diligence in research)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PGIs (raise funds for literacy community and raise public and private-sector awareness of adult literacy issue)</li> </ul>	

## **Strategic Goals and Objectives, 2007-2010**

### **1. COMMUNICATIONS: Increase understanding of the importance of adult literacy amongst individuals, the public, and the media.**

#### Objectives:

- Private sector – Increase understanding of the literacy cause by 50%
- Public - Increase public understanding by 100% (1.5 million Canadians see literacy as a very serious problem to 3 million—Ipsos Reid 1999)
- Learners - Increase calls on LEARN Lines by 20%
- Media - Increase media pieces on adult literacy by 30%

### **2. WORKPLACE: Increase understanding of the importance of literacy in the workplace and the role employers, unions can play**

#### Objectives:

- Increase knowledge and understanding in targeted sectors by 25%

### **3. ADVOCACY: Increase government understanding and investment in adult literacy policy and programs**

#### Objectives:

- Create policy recommendations for targeted provincial and federal politicians and policy makers
- Connect with federal and/or provincial politicians and policy makers five times per year
- Hold two policy consultations

### **4. CONVENING: Engage literacy stakeholders in dialogue, knowledge exchange and resource development**

#### Objectives:

- Host two national consultations each year
- Increase sponsorship revenues for PGIs by 10%
- Increase participation by literacy field on all committees

### **5. EFFECTIVENESS: Increase ABC CANADA's organizational effectiveness**

#### Objectives:

- Develop and approve strategic plan to make vision a reality
- Increase the efficacy of the board and volunteers by creating and approving new governance policy, including committee structure and PGI governance
- Develop short and long term revenue strategy to stabilize operating funding (\$400,000) and increase fundraising revenues (by 20% by year 3)
- Develop human resources plan to suit goals

By 2010, ABC CANADA will have:

- developed a core group of business and labour leaders as champions of adult literacy
- become the 'go to' organization for governments
- increased understanding of the importance of investing in workplace literacy and essential skills training
- positioned the adult literacy cause
- created a sense of urgency
- established ABC CANADA as a model not-for-profit organization

... and laid the foundation for future success in influencing attitudes and creating action for meaningful change in policies and practices.

### **The timing is right**

We are returning to an adult literacy focus at a time when the country seems to be turning its attention to labour issues. Manufacturing is on the decline; skills shortages in other sectors are a reality. Concerns about Canadian productivity and competitiveness consume economists, governments and business leaders.

We offer a solution.

“We will require, from a larger and larger percentage of our workforce, the ability to engage in relatively complicated analytical and cognitive tasks. So it’s not that we’re going to need more geniuses, but the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile is going to have to be better educated than they are now.” – Malcolm Gladwell, October 1, 2007, quoted in *The Globe and Mail*

“Raising literacy skills could also create thousands of new jobs, lower unemployment and significantly raise personal income – all of which could play a big role in combating poverty... The private sector must play a role, given how much it has to gain from improved outcomes.” – TD Financial Group, September 12, 2007

### **Thank you**

ABC CANADA extends a warm thank you to the many individuals and organizations that have given so generously their time and expertise over the past year. Your input and your insights were fundamental in our organization understanding how we could best align our strengths, and develop new initiatives, to achieve meaningful results in support of adult literacy in Canada.

*Approved by the ABC CANADA Literacy Foundation Board of Directors,  
October 3, 2007.*