

Who are we missing?

ABC Life Literacy Canada 2022 Innovation Learning Lab: Session 1
April 7, 2022

Session overview

Adult learners can be difficult to reach for a wide variety of reasons, and barriers to adult learning have been changing rapidly in the recent past. In this webinar, we discussed which learners have been difficult, or even impossible, to reach via adult literacy programming and how we can work to overcome those barriers and make our learning communities more inclusive and accessible.

We asked three questions to our panelists:

1. What does it mean to “miss” a community of learners and how does this shape your definition of inclusivity?
2. What steps can organizations and practitioners take to make their programs more inclusive?
3. Is there a community your organization would like to engage with and what’s your plan of action?

Panelists

- Anastasia Gaisenok from the Pacific Immigrant Resource Society in British Columbia. This organization was the Top Winner for the 2021 *Canada Life Literacy Innovation Award* for their program entitled ‘Trauma-Informed Community English Class for Immigrant and Refugee
- Evan J Hoskins from the Sioux-Hudson Literacy Council in Ontario. This organization received an honorable mention from the *Canada Life Literacy Innovation Awards* in 2019 for their “Discover Online Integrate Information Technology” (DOI2T) program.
- Travis Mitchell from Ability Employment Corporation in Newfoundland and Labrador

Key findings

Panelists began by emphasizing the importance of constantly re-evaluating programming in order to best support learners. One step in this direction might include updating an organization’s internal terminology so as to be more inclusive, for example through the incorporation of terminology that allows space for gender diversity. Another important point panelists made was that learner’s needs are not static or homogeneous, and practitioners need to be flexible in their approach and programming so as to adapt to these changes.

The panelists also emphasized that practitioners should incorporate more trauma informed approaches when working with learners. In fact, ideally we would move towards a healing-centered approach. They highlighted that there are lots of training resources for practitioners for working with vulnerable populations (for example: consultants, pre-made courses/programs, videos on YouTube, etc).

Another key point that was raised by the panelists is that relationship building is important to reach new communities as well as prevent others from slipping through the gaps. For example, this could take the form of physically going to communities and offering programs in their spaces, which would both increase accessibility and create relationships. Relationship building also allows practitioners to gain a better understanding of learner barriers (for example intergenerational trauma and its effects on employability), which in turn allows them to build a more inclusive program.

The panelists emphasized that the language we use, the structure of our programming and the spaces we share are crucial to relationship building. For example, we may want to consider how our programming resembles school experiences, as this could be alienating for some learners. Another example could be offering 'micro credentials' rather than 'introductory' workshops, as the word 'introductory' can be uninviting for some communities, particularly when it comes to technology.

Finally, the panelists emphasized that our programs will be more inclusive if we take a holistic and systems-level approach. Learner's need to have their basic fundamental needs met (housing, food security, childcare, etc.) before they can begin the learning process. As part of the holistic approach, panelists added that literacy practitioners should participate in conversations beyond the literacy sector in their communities, and even advocate alongside policy makers, health care professionals, and others who support addressing basic human needs. By listening to the voices of our participants, we can not only make our own programs more inclusive but also bring those voices to the larger community and ensure that they are being heard and addressed. In this way, literacy practitioners can be advocates for systems-level change.

Throughout the webinar, there was a lot of audience engagement and interest in additional resources. In the chat, panelists shared their best practices on particular topics, including involving Indigenous communities in their programming and addressing the barrier of low digital literacy. Resources were shared during and after the webinar, and the post-webinar email to all registrants included resources related to trauma informed approaches and creating inclusive environments for gender diverse individuals.

This year we're hosting four Innovation Learning Labs, thanks to the support of Canada Life through the *Canada Life Literacy Innovation Award*. In each webinar we will discuss one topic that is important and relevant to the literacy field in 2022. [Watch recorded Labs and read summaries.](#)