

Research Bulletin on Partnerships Through Marketing: Success Stories in Get SET



info@communityliteracyofontario.ca



communityliteracyofontario.ca



(705) 733-2312



@CommunityLitOn



@CommunityLitOn

Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------|----------|
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
|---------------------|----------|

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| LITERACY AND CORRECTIONS SERVING ADULT LEARNERS AFTER CORRECTIONS | 4 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| LITERACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THE LINK BETWEEN LITERACY LEVELS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT | 6 |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| HEALTHCARE WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY ADULT LITERACY AND ACCESSING HEALTHCARE | 9 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|

| | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| CO-LOCATION WITH LIKE-MINDED PARTNERS BUILDING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS WITH BENEFITS | 12 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| SOFT SKILLS IN ADULT LITERACY THE SKILLS OF THE FUTURE FOR LEARNERS TODAY | 14 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|

| | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| CONCLUSION | 17 |
|-------------------|-----------|

PROJECT HOST: COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO

PROJECT MANAGER, RESEARCH & WRITING, GRAPHIC DESIGN:

CATHERINE TOOVEY

EDITOR: CINDY NORMAN

Introduction

As part of its 2025-2026 business plan deliverables, Community Literacy of Ontario researched innovative approaches to building partnerships using marketing strategies in Get SET programs.

To this end, these five programs have developed unique programming that serves the distinct needs of their communities across Ontario. We are pleased to share the following five success stories.

FUNDER: Ontario's Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training & Skills Development

DATE OF PUBLICATION: March 2026

This Employment Ontario program is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. The opinions expressed in this document are the opinions of Community Literacy of Ontario and do not necessarily reflect those of our funders.

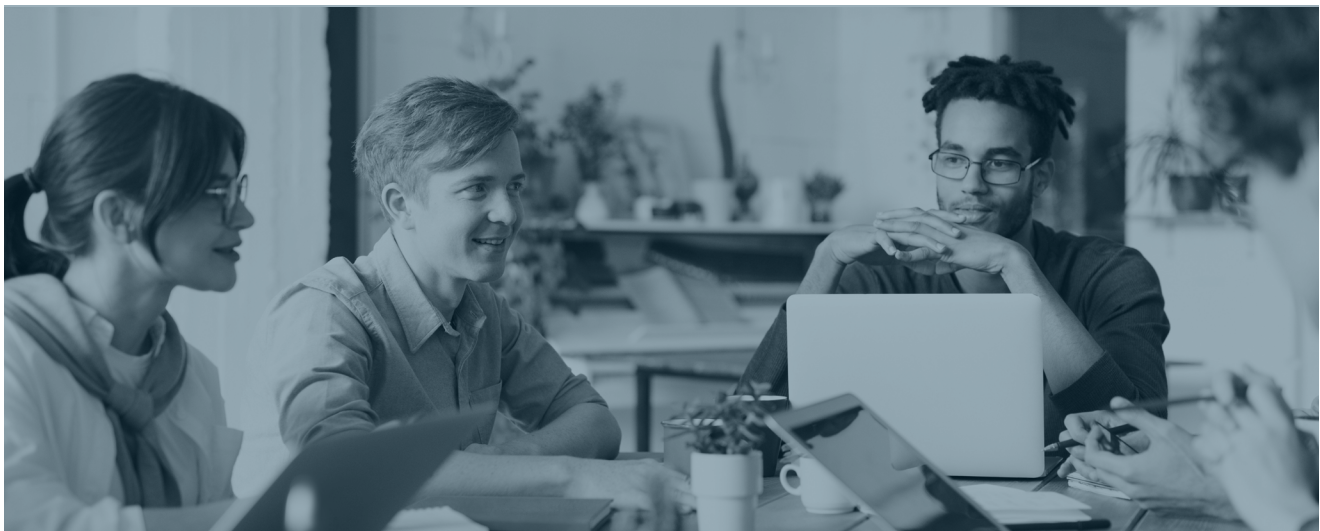


Get SET
Skills, Education and Training

Canada

EMPLOYMENT
ONTARIO

Ontario 





ADULT LITERACY AND CORRECTIONS IN ONTARIO

SERVING ADULTS WITH A CORRECTIONS HISTORY

OVERVIEW OF THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

A community-based Get SET agency developed partnerships with local justice and corrections agencies in its region to support individuals leaving incarceration and in setting goals and/or meeting mandated requirements upon release.

This program described several different demographics, unique needs, and goal paths for these adult learners, and the way that the Get SET program responds on an individual basis not only to assist the learners in meeting their goals but also to develop many other necessary soft and hard skills during that time.

This section excludes specific regions, program names, and identifying information to protect the privacy of individuals involved.

WHY THIS MARKETING STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

This strategy was developed in response to a need for specific, individualized programming in the community. There was no formal or existing programming in the area, but the Get SET agency was well-suited to modify its services to support the needs of these adult learners.

In the [2025 Literacy Report](#), CLO shared the following:

Correctional Service Canada (CSC) offers literacy, academic, and personal development programs to support reintegration. In 2024, 84% of offenders with education needs received a referral within 120 days of admission (up from 78% the year before), and 77% upgraded their education before first release (up from 69%).

People in prisons are three times as likely to have low literacy compared with the rest of the population, and 79% of those entering prison do not have a high school diploma.



TARGET MARKET FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

As noted, learners came from a range of demographics and referring organizations in the area. For example, youth came from the local Youth Detention Centre

where staff were able to identify struggles with reading and other indicators of low literacy levels. One staff member trained with the Get SET agency as a tutor and used its curricula and supports to work with the youth. After observing significant improvements not only in the speed at which the youth learned new skills, but also in the development of other key life skills, over twenty staff members from the centre attended Get SET training.



IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

The Get SET program in this story built strong partnerships through its board members, volunteers, and engagement in community roundtable meetings. With these relationships in place, the Get SET program was able to develop realistic service delivery approaches for adult learners re-entering the community after incarceration. Careful planning was carried out to ensure the safety of everyone involved. In many cases, the adult learner was already working with a support worker, which created the opportunity to train the support worker as a literacy volunteer. After the new volunteer practitioners completed the appropriate literacy training, not only was the individual adult learner served, but ongoing referrals were also made for other adults in similar circumstances.

CHALLENGES WITH THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

An adult male was being released from incarceration but had a history of violent crimes. Because the Get SET program had an all-female staff, served learners from the local domestic violence shelter, and other safety concerns, the program knew there had to be another way to serve this adult learner. Working with the halfway house where the adult was living, the Get SET program trained a staff member to tutor the learner and support the completion of milestones and culminating tasks remotely from the halfway house location.

The Get SET program delivered and picked up programming books and supported the administration of the CaMS and other reporting. This creative service delivery approach allowed the Get SET agency to provide programming to an adult learner in a location that was safe and comfortable for everyone involved. Because a halfway house staff member was trained through the Get SET program, there was no need to rely on the limited number of Get SET practitioners to deliver programming.



You can serve one single learner: you don't need to spend months developing and funding a one-time program.



ADULT LITERACY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

THE LINK BETWEEN LITERACY SKILLS AND DEMOCRATIC INVOLVEMENT

OVERVIEW OF THE MARKETING STRATEGY

Literacy underpins all areas of a person's life, including their feelings of participation and inclusion in government and democratic processes. This civic engagement program was developed to address this need and help adults understand and participate in elections at all levels of government. The Get SET agency in this success story identified the need for this type of programming among its existing learners and built a partnership to deliver targeted programming that was easy for learners to access.

WHY THIS MARKETING STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

In the [2025 Literacy Report](#), CLO shared the following:

Skills are strongly linked to civic engagement. Many adults with low skill levels feel disconnected from political life and find it difficult to engage with complex digital information, which is an increasing concern for modern democracies.

Literacy helps people understand how the systems and institutions around

them work. This supports social inclusion and enables full participation in society through social, civic, and political activities that contribute to the well-being of all Canadians.

When people have good media literacy skills, they can recognize disinformation and media influence, avoid manipulation, and use digital spaces safely, which supports civic engagement.



To this end, many programs understand the importance of literacy upgrading to support civic engagement. A Get SET program is then an ideal environment to start working on civic literacy, answering questions in a safe and respectful environment.

TARGET MARKET FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

This strategy was developed for use with the program's existing learners. This meant there was no additional learner recruitment, program design, or need for additional practitioners. In fact, the elections staff

brought their own expertise, allowing practitioners to take on a more facilitative role that required less time, rather than leading the programming.



IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

After building a strong relationship with local Elections Canada and Elections Ontario offices, the Get SET lead invited staff to attend the Get SET office to learn how adult literacy programs operate and about the demographics of learners they would be interacting with. The elections staff were briefed on how to work with learners, understand different literacy levels, and use clear language to communicate effectively.

The elections staff then developed accessible presentations that explained a person's rights to vote as an individual and as an employee, etc. A very popular topic was how to identify trusted news sources online and in print, including how to vet them. The elections staff also covered how to register to vote and how to identify official

elections branding in the community to locate in-person voting sites. They also explained the different ways to vote, such as advance voting, and how individuals can vote if they are not in their riding.

One Get SET program reported its efforts to support civic education and involvement by converting relevant government documents into plain language. They were sure to reference each document as a one-to-one translation.

SURPRISING OUTCOMES WITH THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

Because this program has been running these sessions and building relationships with Elections offices for many years, a surprising outcome emerged! During the COVID lockdowns, there were elections that called for the use of PPE (personal protective equipment). After the elections, Elections offices contacted the Get SET program and offered to donate the leftover masks, gloves, and other PPE. These included medical-grade sanitizers that the program could not afford otherwise and were crucial in aiding this program to continue to serve learners through the pandemic.



FUNDING CONSIDERATIONS FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

For this program, these efforts were layered on top of existing Get SET programming, with Elections staff responsible for presenting and supplying printed materials. No additional expenses were involved in this effort.

The Get SET program built relationships with local Elections Canada and Elections



Ontario offices. They planned to have representatives from the relevant office attend the program location on a regular day, with Elections staff bringing the necessary materials. Practitioners and learners reported that this was actually a fun break in their day!

This program operates at two regional libraries, offering both morning and afternoon sessions. The program schedules Elections staff to attend all sessions to ensure that all learners have the opportunity to participate.

CHALLENGES WITH THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

Many programs have expressed their fear that, as provincially funded organizations, they cannot engage in this work due to fears of being perceived as “too political.” The fact is, voting is both a right and a responsibility for eligible voters, regardless of literacy level. This also applies to other governmental programs, such as understanding the census, why one’s data is being collected, and what it is used for.

ADVICE FOR OTHER GET SET PROGRAMS

All connections are valuable. Programs are encouraged to think outside the box about how they can support other organizations in achieving shared goals. In this case, no additional funding was required, and the approach provided learners with valuable information and additional short-term programming opportunities.



We’re on the local elections offices’ radar now because so many people vote! They reach out to us!



ADULT LITERACY AND HEALTH OUTCOMES:

SERVING ADULTS WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY

OVERVIEW OF THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

Literacy levels affect all areas of an individual's life, including employment, health, civic engagement, and generational educational attainments. For over ten years, CLO has published research on the effects of literacy levels through [The Ontario Literacy and Skills Report](#) (previously Literacy Why it Matters).



Over 50% of adults in Ontario with English as a first language are at literacy level two or below on the five-level scale. This means that “While they can read simple text, they often struggle with everyday tasks such as filling out forms, following rental agreements, or understanding medication instructions.”

In the 2025 PIAAC results, the proportion of Ontarians at literacy level 2 decreased from 32% to 30%, which appears to be a positive change. However, the proportion

at level 1 or below increased from 15% to 19% over the same period. This means that the total amount of Ontarians at level 2 or below increased from 37% in 2018 to 39% in 2025.

The 19% of adults in Ontario scoring at level one or below “struggle with very serious literacy challenges, and have trouble reading even the most basic text.”

WHY THIS MARKETING STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

All Get SET programs support adult learners in navigating complex and essential government services such as the healthcare system, ODSP, OW, and more. In these systems, written directions often do not follow plain language guidelines, require additional digital skills, and depend on access to technology and WiFi which are not affordable or accessible to all Ontarians. Get SET programs have long provided welcoming locations where individuals can access support and technology to navigate these government services more equitably.

Outside of Get SET programs, adults with lower literacy skills often report difficulty accessing information and instruction they can utilize, as well as experiencing stigma and judgement when interacting with

professionals in these government-funded services.

The reported stigma or judgement can look like a learner is being blamed for their low literacy or professionals failing to recognize an adult's literacy levels.

Low literacy has a significant impact on health. Canadians with the lowest literacy levels are more than twice as likely to report poor health than those with stronger literacy skills.

- ***In Canada, adults who score at the highest numeracy levels are far more likely to report good health than those at or below Level 1. This link between numeracy and health remains strong even after accounting for individual differences.***

- ***Adults with low literacy often struggle to navigate the health system and afford preventive care. As a result, minor health issues may go untreated until they become serious and require emergency services.***

TARGET MARKET FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

CLO's [Soft Skills Factsheet \(2025\)](#) describes the ways that low literacy skills can manifest different types of barriers for adults:

Social Challenges & Stigma: Social factors strongly influence literacy participation.

Learners may:

- ***Fear stigma related to reading and writing difficulties***
- ***Hide literacy challenges from peers, instructors, or employers***
- ***Avoid asking for help even when support is available***

Understanding how adults adapt and survive with low literacy skills is key to being able to support in respectful and effective ways. Get SET practitioners understand that low literacy skills are not the direct result of a person's character or willingness to learn, but rather an outcome of a complex intersection of many life circumstances that have led to the present literacy level.

Adults with lower literacy levels report that they often experience feelings of shame and may find it difficult to ask for help or disclose that they do not fully understand written or verbal information. Many adult learners report being ignored and/or blamed by staff in healthcare settings when they are unable to complete forms or understand the written or verbal instructions.



IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

One Get SET program built a working relationship with other social services in its region and attended regular meetings with those stakeholders. All attendees were focused on serving their adult clients effectively and efficiently, but the topic of literacy levels had not yet been addressed. This Get SET program took the opportunity

to present the current state of adult literacy levels in Ontario and how it impacts service delivery for adults with varying literacy levels.

The Get SET lead asked the local hospital, “What would you like your patients to experience in the healthcare system?” The response was unanimous: patients should experience respect and be able to understand their healthcare.

The program lead shared real-world examples of what to look for when assessing a person’s literacy level and determining whether they understand the forms or verbal communication being used. The program lead shared:



An adult with lower literacy skills most often will not outright tell you that they don’t understand a form. They will instead tell you they forgot their glasses so they can’t fill it out and ask you to read it to them and fill it out on their behalf. When you encounter this, it’s crucial that you respond with respect and meet them where they are at. If your patient cannot communicate effectively with you, it is your job to ensure that you are communicating in a way that they understand.

This Get SET lead encouraged front-line medical professionals to find respectful ways to offer information, whether that be reading the forms or using plain language

to explain information in an alternate way. Most importantly, professionals were encouraged to refer individuals to Get SET programs if they may benefit from skills upgrading.

CHALLENGES WITH THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

Direct engagement with relevant stakeholders is important, as there is a lack of understanding of literacy, as well as the MLITSD-funded Get SET program and the services it offers to adults across Ontario.

ADVICE FOR OTHER GET SET PROGRAMS

LBS is the program that validates a learner’s reading and writing skills and aligns them with the OALCF. No one else is doing this. As a result, LBS programs can provide confidence that individuals understand the medical information being communicated to them.



If all of our community service organizations weren’t so siloed, we could do so much more together, both efficiently and cost effectively.



BUILDING STRONG CO-LOCATION PARTNERSHIPS:

SUCCESS STORIES BASED ON MUTUAL INTERESTS

OVERVIEW OF THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

In communities of all sizes, access to services such as skills upgrading can be limited due to transportation barriers. Co-location and sharing resources to meet the needs of adults seeking to upgrade their skills is the most effective approach. Developing partnerships to support learners in attending programming that best meets their needs in community locations that are easy to access with public transportation or in a central region has proven effective. This approach has led to an increase in people engaging in adult education opportunities for all partners at the co-location site.

WHY THIS MARKETING STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

Co-location is not a new or unique strategy for community-based Get SET programs. In fact, many are co-located with programs that serve similar demographics, and/or offer multiple services funded by different sources. Get SET funding is not sufficient to cover rent, utilities, insurance, and the many

other costs associated with maintaining a physical location and in-person service delivery. Thus, community-based Get SET programs rely on pooling funds and resources to continue operating in their communities.



TARGET MARKET FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

This strategy does not target a specific demographic; rather, it provides a centralized location for multiple programs and services that Get SET learners would otherwise access separately.

The Get SET program in this success story partnered with their local college to serve an adult learner. As part of this partnership, monthly in-person open houses are held at the Get SET location. These sessions

are advertised to current adult learners as well as in the broader community, and attendance is strong among adults who are curious about college, but not yet ready to visit the campus. This approach has proven to provide a low-stress environment for adults to explore their continuing education options.



Once a month, a practitioner from the college conducts what they call “on the spot” assessments to determine whether a learner is ready for college or requires some Get SET upgrading before progressing to the next step.

In this instance, a learner attended the open house and shared that she is new to Canada, has no work experience, and has a goal of becoming a Walmart cashier. During the assessment, it was determined that she has low English skills as well as limited skills in her first language. To support this learner, she was referred to ESL upgrading, which she completed quickly, reaching level 6. She was then referred again to the Get SET program to work toward her employment goal.

Because of the established partnerships, including co-location and monthly open

houses, it was easy to track the learner’s progress, as she attended the same location for all activities.

During the full intake and assessment with the Get SET program, it was determined that the learner had strong soft skills and was learning very quickly. Upon further discussion, the learner chose to change her goal from being a cashier to pursuing an ECE certification.

Over the next several months, this learner completed a fast-track college program and graduated her ECE program with an average of over 80%. She continues to visit the Get SET program and reports that she is now employed with the local school board as an ECE. In all, this process took approximately four years, from the learner’s initial visit to the Get SET program to being hired by the school board. This process included many referrals, consistent follow ups, and strong relationships among all referral partners. While some programs may refer a learner elsewhere, consistent follow-up created an encouraging and accountable environment for this learner to achieve her goals and access the support she needed when she needed it.



IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

Strong partnerships are key to building a co-location strategy. As one program will need to hold the rental or ownership agreement, trust and clear contracts are essential for all other co-located programs. All parties should review financial statements to ensure each organization is financially stable and able to take on rental obligations.

The Get SET practitioner reports that, in the previous learner example, the cost of this type of programming is minimal. Efficiently referring the learner between co-located programs to support her progress made it easier to track her development and provide supports, while also helping her plan time off and transportation to a single location.



When people ask me how I got funding approvals for this, I answer: No one told me I shouldn't do this because I don't start by asking permission to serve my community. I will beg for forgiveness, but I will never ask for permission. I consult my community, assess the needs and I create programming that serves them.

CHALLENGES WITH THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

Challenges reported by the Get SET program are similar to those faced by most other community-based programs. A lack of adequate funding creates limitations in staffing, programming and more to support learners. Community-based Get SET programs largely rely on community funding and contributions, such as



fundraising drives or local United Way grants. These funding sources present several challenges: they are annual, requiring ongoing time and effort to secure each year.

When programs receive government funding, they are often perceived as “fully funded”, even when they are not. This creates additional pressure on fundraising efforts, which must communicate that core funding is insufficient to support full operations. In addition, programs must also “compete” with their fellow community organizations for limited local donations and funding. In some cases, this includes competing with their own partners and referral organizations.



THE ROLE OF SOFT SKILLS IN ADULT LITERACY

THE SKILLS OF THE FUTURE:

OVERVIEW OF THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

Soft skills interventions in adult literacy programs have been a crucial practice for the entirety of its history, but it has not been included in the OALCF, funding model, or the broader understanding of the work being done in adult literacy programs.

Over the years that adult literacy programs have been funded by the Canadian and provincial and territorial governments, there has been little focus on the soft skills. The history of measuring adult literacy rates, the development of the federal Essential Skills, the development of the Ontario provincial OALCF, and then the new federal Skills for Success can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/808106837>

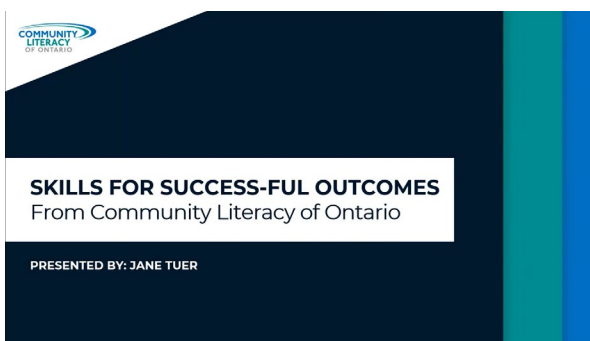
In recent years, CLO has been researching the role and importance of soft skills interventions in adult literacy programs. This

began with reports from both practitioners and adult learners who all, unanimously, reported that building confidence first and foremost lead to success in any goal path the learner was on. This first showed that just as literacy underpins all areas of life outcomes for an individual, soft skills such as confidence (though later expanded into explicit competency areas) is not just a key indicator of success in all other skills upgrading, but a necessity during all skills upgrading with adult learners.

The research emphasizes that psychoeducational programming should support, not compete with, program objectives. Get SET programs can:

- ***Align soft skill development with literacy and employment-related goals***
- ***Integrate psychoeducational programming into existing outcomes and reporting structures***
- ***Use consistent language across instruction, assessment, and learner support***
- ***Position soft skill development as part of literacy progress rather than an additional requirement***

Alignment supports clarity, efficiency, and program coherence. When psychoeducational programming is integrated, targeted, and aligned with



existing Get SET structures, it can reduce barriers to learning, support learner engagement, and strengthen literacy outcomes without adding unnecessary complexity to program delivery. (source)

WHY THIS MARKETING STRATEGY WAS DEVELOPED

This strategy was not so much developed as it is an ongoing practice that is just recently being researched and validated as part of the quality work being done in adult literacy programs.

CLO's soft skills research project began after the federal Skills for Success projects were funded through the Ontario MLITSD to align the Skills for Success with the Ontario OALCF framework, to encourage adoption of the nine skills competency areas.

CLO partnered with Trent University's Health & Emotion Research Laboratory to begin the research into quantifying and measuring soft skills interventions and their effects on success rates in adult literacy programs in Ontario.



TARGET MARKET FOR THIS MARKETING STRATEGY

All adult learners are considered the target group for soft skills intervention, because it is integral to any goal path they choose in an adult literacy program. In addition to this, it is hypothesized that any individual at any age should prioritize soft skills as part of their education. The initial literature review of soft skills in adult literacy programs shares the following about adults with lower literacy skills:

Self-Concept & Confidence: The research highlights the role of negative self-concept in literacy development. Learners may:

- ***Believe they are incapable of improving their literacy skills***
- ***Interpret past educational experiences as evidence of failure***
- ***Underestimate their ability to succeed despite effort***
- ***Avoid challenges due to low confidence***
- ***Low self-efficacy can reduce persistence and willingness to engage in new or demanding literacy tasks.***

The self-concept and low confidence described above is already established in the adult pursuing further education, unlike a young person who ideally has not experienced this feedback and internalized it as self-concept.

In an adult literacy program, it is integral to assess and upgrade the self-concept soft skills that are creating limitations for the adult in all areas of their life.

CONCLUSION

This Bulletin on Partnership and Networking Success Stories in Get SET programs was researched and written by Community Literacy of Ontario. CLO is a provincial network of community-based Get SET (Skills, Education, and Training) agencies. We are located in Midland, Ontario. You can learn more about our organization by visiting our website and by following us on our social media channels.

This Employment Ontario service is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. The opinions expressed in this bulletin are the opinions of Community Literacy of Ontario, and do not necessarily reflect those of our funders.



This project was researched and written by Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO). CLO is a provincial support organization that serves English language, community-based Get SET agencies (formerly Literacy and Basic Skills) in communities large and small across the province of Ontario.

This Employment Ontario service is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. The opinions expressed in this bulletin are the opinions of Community Literacy of Ontario, and do not necessarily reflect those of our funders.



info@communityliteracyofontario.ca



communityliteracyofontario.ca



(705) 733-2312



@CommunityLitOn



@CommunityLitOn