



Supporting Under-Represented Groups.

FACTSHEET #1: Successes

In 2021, the Ontario Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development developed five areas of focus for the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program. One of the areas of focus is enhanced efforts to support groups who are under-represented in the labour force.

The Ministry shared these examples of under-represented groups: Indigenous persons, Newcomers to Canada, Persons with disabilities, Racialized persons, Women, and Youth. The Ministry further noted that the list of under-represented groups can vary based on the local labour market or within a specific sector.

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) conducted province-wide research in 2022/2023. While LBS programs agreed with the above examples set by the Ministry, in this research LBS programs noted that an extremely important under-represented group is people living in poverty. Other additional groups under-represented in the labour force, as identified by adult literacy programs, are older workers, people who have been incarcerated, members of the LGBTQ+ community, homeless people, and people with mental health or addictions issues.

Community Literacy of Ontario has created three factsheets on this important subject. Our **Factsheets on Supporting Under-Represented Groups** cover the following topics:

1. Successes
2. Challenges
3. Strategies

INTRODUCTION

THIS IS FACTSHEET 1

CLO shares some of the **successes** Literacy and Basic Skills programs have experienced in supporting groups under-represented in the labour force.



FOCUSING ON THE LEARNER AS AN INDIVIDUAL

LBS programs are committed to offering individualized programs that meet the specific needs of the learner. This is important for all learners, but by recognizing the exceptional needs that members of under-represented groups may bring to the table, flexible LBS programs offer unique learning opportunities that meets those needs.

“Programs are able to provide highly individualized support that suit each learner’s specific needs.”
- Focus Group Participant

This individualized attention, long a strength within the LBS system, has inspired practitioners to embed elements of language training into their programs, offer translation services, fluctuate schedules and delivery methods, and offer programming not normally embedded in LBS.

For example, newcomers have been offered relevant literacy-focused G1 drivers’ preparation or learning exercises related to Canadian culture as part of their LBS program. This strategy offers opportunities to attract new learners who are motivated by the specific offer of support, and they then find out what additional services LBS agencies have to offer that are of benefit to them.

CONSIDERING MULTIFACETED NEEDS

Intersectionality is a term used to acknowledge the complexity of the human condition – particularly as it relates to marginalized or under-represented groups. As a result of diverse backgrounds and experiences, along with both obvious and invisible identities, people may belong to multiple under-represented groups.

Understanding the impact of intersectionality, LBS staff have been able to better identify and address the unique experiences of members of under-represented communities – through activities such as appropriate referrals and seeking out learning materials that reflect the communities the learner is a part of.

No learner comes to an LBS program with only a single need, and needs that are most apparent may be helped or hindered by the learner’s other barriers or challenges. To uncover those diverse and multi-layered needs, LBS programs need additional time to devote to these learners.

PUTTING IN THE TIME

A key element of successfully supporting members of under-represented groups is having the opportunity to work with learners on a longer-term basis which allows a trusting relationship to build over time.

This element of success is challenging in an environment, set by the Ministry, of measured learner gains, expectations of steady progress and required outcomes. Community-based LBS agencies have reported particular strength in this area given the more frequent use of one-to-one and tutoring and small group style programming. This allows for greater flexibility and opportunities for trust and relationship-building. Building positive relationships pays off as learners from under-represented groups share positive feedback about the program with others.



ADOPTING A COMMUNITY APPROACH

LBS practitioners recognize the layered and complex needs that learners from under-represented groups may bring to the program.

Wrap-around supports may be required, and LBS programs aren't in a position to provide all the things that learners may need. Building relationships with other community organizations is critical. Through those relationships, LBS practitioners become familiar with appropriate referrals and recommendations to get learners the additional supports they need.

An element of relationship-building for many programs is delivering presentations and information sessions with organizations that offer wrap-around supports, and those that serve under-represented groups. As a result, the understanding of what LBS programming can do for clients is increased and a reciprocal referral system often develops. It's an opportunity to create a community of support for learners that benefits members of under-represented groups that may not learn about LBS programming otherwise.

PARTNERSHIPS AND CO-DELIVERY

LBS programs able to take the community approach to the next level and deliver programming at partner organizations have seen considerable success. Particularly effective have been opportunities for LBS practitioners to co-deliver programming with representatives from organizations that regularly serve the populations we're trying to reach at locations such as shelters, groups involved with poverty reduction, cultural communities, support services for New Canadians, etc.

“We have been trying to set up a partnership with a local women’s shelter to teach financial empowerment. They would set up bank accounts and we would teach them all about banking, credit, budgeting and more.”

- Focus Group Participant

REFLECTING THE LEARNER’S COMMUNITY

Creating targeted programming or using training materials specific to the needs of under-represented groups provides an excellent opportunity for success in Literacy and Basic Skills programs. When learners “see themselves” in the curriculum being delivered, it can spark a deeper level of interest and engagement. Learners who are not from under-represented groups benefit as well as they are exposed to different cultures, values, and experiences within the context of their literacy upgrading. It provides LBS practitioners with an opportunity to teach foundational reading, writing, communication, digital and interpersonal skills, and acceptance of diversity in the classroom.

Doing this successfully involves using, developing, or adapting learning materials that represent diverse learners both in the language used and, in the images, graphics, or other visual elements included.

TIPS FOR USING LEARNING MATERIALS THAT REFLECT UNDER-REPRESENTED GROUPS

- In your learning materials, use examples that are relevant to a variety of under-represented groups. Ensure references to people from different cultures, genders, socio-economic classes, sexualities, and abilities are included.
- Often in written text, someone’s cultural or racial background isn’t clearly identified, but even including people’s names can bring visual images to mind. Be sure to use a variety of names from different cultures in your learning materials.
- For the images you use in learning materials, pay attention to skin colour, clothing, physical appearance, age, and obvious signs of ability or disability. Use images that offer a wide variety of different people. Alternatively, avoid showing people altogether, and instead rely on visual images related to the topic.



- Avoid using language that refers to a gender binary (for example, “ladies and gentlemen”) when possible. Instead, use non-gendered group terms like people, learners, employers, and workers. When opportunities to include gender identification occur (for example, she went to the store), default to using non-gender identifying terms like “they” or “them” in their place (for example, they went to the store).
- Continually review the material you’ve used in the past or want to use in the future through this lens. As mentioned in the APA Style Guide: “long-standing cultural practice can exert a powerful influence over even the most conscientious author. Just as you have learned to check what you write for spelling, grammar, and wordiness, practice rereading your work for bias.”
- These same principles of inclusive language and images also apply to images and text used on your social media accounts and in your promotional materials.

RESOURCES TO HELP WITH DIVERSIFYING LEARNING MATERIALS

- **Diverse Imagery: Its Purpose and Importance In eLearning**
- **APA Style Guide Supplemental Material – “Guidelines for Reducing Bias”**
- **A Troubling Lack of Diversity in Educational Materials**
- **The Diversity Style Guide**



CONCLUSION

The Factsheets on Supporting Under-Represented Groups were researched and written by Community Literacy of Ontario. CLO is a provincial network of community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies. You can learn more about our organization by visiting our website and by following us on social media. To learn more, read CLO’s research report on this topic. In 2022/2023, CLO conducted province-wide research and wrote a report called **“Here to Help: Supporting Adult Learners from Underrepresented Groups in LBS Programs.”**

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