



**COUNCIL OF THE FEDERATION**

**GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES PROMOTING LITERACY BEST PRACTICES**

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## **COUNCIL OF THE FEDERATION**

### **GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES PROMOTING LITERACY BEST PRACTICES**

#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

It is clear that Canada's provinces and territories are repositories of innovative principles, practices and programs that reflect the very highest ideals in literacy best practices, and serve the varying needs of many different types of learners. This paper presents only a taste of the huge number of programs and services provided by professionals and volunteers through schools, post-secondary institutions, community groups, libraries and workplaces. It is evident that the jurisdictions that fund these programs and services do so with a careful eye on each of the criteria for literacy best practices, outlined in Appendix 1.

Most provinces and territories have a long-term literacy strategy or plan that seeks to assess needs, fill gaps and build partnerships to ensure all residents are successful in their community, work and family life. These strategies are informed through the collaborative work of teachers, researchers, learners, community groups, businesses and government. Many are tied to labour market strategies, but also integrate a focus on helping learners carry out their family and social roles.

Access and affordability are obviously two key factors. Most literacy programs are tuition-free, whether they are offered by a community group or by a public institution. Some provinces, like Alberta and Quebec, build in income support programs for adults who are upgrading their literacy, numeracy, life and employment skills. Multi-year funding for programs also enhances accessibility in communities.

Outreach programs help ensure access as well. Some jurisdictions list special northern literacy strategies to address the needs of learners in remote communities, along with initiatives that focus on First Nations education. Several point to programs that take literacy instruction into the corrections system and also involve inmates' families. There are special programs for seniors and for persons with disabilities, as well as literacy help lines. A number of provinces and territories are working on distance and computer-based learning initiatives. There are customized workplace programs to meet the needs of the learners, the employer and industry.

Across the country, it is evident that early childhood and family literacy are crucial to the long-term strategies of most jurisdictions. There are in-school initiatives to encourage teachers, parents and the community to work collaboratively to promote the development of strong reading and writing skills in young children. There are young reader programs, homework clubs, one-on-one summer tutoring for kids and increased time allotments for reading and mathematics instruction. Professional development is supported through special literacy education guides or handbooks, training courses for teachers and volunteers and projects to train and appoint lead teachers in reading and math in every school.

Underlying all of these programs and services is a clear demand on the part of governments for accountability. Accountability frameworks, performance management systems and delivery and outcomes guidelines ensure the strategies and initiatives are working for learners and for the community.

## INTRODUCTION

Literacy is a foundation skill that is embedded in activities in the home, school, community and workplace. There is a continuum of development ranging from learning to read through to reading to learn a variety of other skills and perspectives on life. The end of this continuum is the complex set of skills necessary for daily life, employment, citizenship, and personal advancement and enjoyment in our modern and diverse society.

The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS, 1994)<sup>1</sup> found significant literacy skill gaps in all participating countries. Of the five levels of literacy, Level 3 is regarded as the minimum level of competence to cope with the complex demands of a “knowledge society” in the twenty-first century. In Canada, it was estimated that 42 percent of adults have skills below Level 3.

At the meeting of the Council of the Federation (COF) in Vancouver, British Columbia on February 23-24, 2004, Premiers agreed to ask their education and labour market ministers to share the most successful strategies and approaches to developing higher levels of literacy in the population.

Work done in the literacy field over the last 15 years has resulted in criteria that can be applied as standards for good practice or for quality programming. Although the criteria are grounded in the reality of practice, they are also seen as attainable ideals or principles that shape that practice. A list of the high level criteria that appear to be common to many documents is attached in Appendix 1.

Today, the broad definition of literacy includes skills such as: reading text, document use, writing, oral communications, numeracy, thinking skills, computer use, working with others and continuous learning. This scope of what are considered to be defined as literacy skills across the lifespan (cradle to grave), has resulted in many different approaches to programs as jurisdictions attempt to meet the needs of specifically targeted groups of people.

For this paper, provinces and territories have provided examples of government approaches that have been particularly successful or noteworthy. The examples reflect a flavour of the multi-faceted nature of literacy practice in Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Data from IALS (2003) has not yet been released.

## NUNAVUT

In November 2003, the Government of Nunavut released a discussion document entitled *Developing a Nunavut Adult Learning Strategy*. This document attempts to establish a baseline and capture the needs, issues, gaps, barriers and opportunities for a coordinated approach to delivery of adult training and education programs. This document will be the basis of focused consultations to assist in the development of the final strategy, with clearly defined priorities and time frames.

This Adult Learning Strategy will identify and address all adult training requirements for Nunavut for the next 20 years. A key issue to be addressed within the Adult Learning Strategy will be literacy development as a lifelong process from early childhood to the elders in their roles as learners, family members and active, productive citizens.

There are a number of positive and effective initiatives currently taking place throughout Nunavut. These literacy initiatives focus in a number of key areas including:

- Enhancing literacy activities in Nunavut;
- Encouraging community organizations to be actively involved in the development and support of local literacy education;
- Improving access to literacy programs;
- Developing relevant literacy materials;
- Promoting information sharing and co-ordination among organizations;
- Increasing public awareness of literacy issues; and,
- Developing innovative approaches to literacy services at the community level.

Nunavut Arctic College offers adult basic education and literacy programs in 23 of Nunavut's 26 communities through its network of Community Learning Centres.

### ***Parents and Children Together***

The current research on Indigenous language and literacy development is reviewed and analyzed in order to develop a series of parent and child program models that communities can use to promote literacy and language development in the home. This initiative also provides communities with the promotional tools needed to increase the awareness of family literacy as a way to strengthen Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun. The work continues to support the development and delivery of literacy programs and initiatives in communities across Nunavut.

### ***Inuktitut Sanginivut***

This initiative focuses on increasing the number of Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun resources available to early childhood education centres, school, libraries and other community groups. There is also a focus on supporting the development of new parent and child literacy programs and the integration of literacy into existing programs in communities across Nunavut. The promotion of parent and child literacy programs is a way to build Inuktitut/Inuinnaqtun language and literacy skills and to promote cultural values.

***Inuktitut Ilinniarnirmit Sanngiktarijjuti 2004***

This initiative develops resources that will support the use of Inuktitut in schools, at the college and in the community. There is also an important role to mentor and train Inuktitut speaking staff and to support communities building capacity to deliver and sustain local Inuktitut literacy and language initiatives.

## NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

In 2000, the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories (NWT) directed the Department of Education, Culture and Employment to take the lead in the development and management of a NWT Literacy Strategy for 2001-05. The Literacy Strategy involves a full range of government programs and services that incorporates existing departmental initiatives and fills gaps in existing services for identified target groups in the adult population. It also describes a role for partnerships between government and non-government organizations. Recognizing literacy development as a lifelong process that runs deeply throughout people's lives, the comprehensive strategy addresses the needs of NWT citizens from early childhood to the senior years in their roles as learners, family members, and active, productive citizens. The Legislative Assembly voted \$2.4 million for the 2001-05 period to augment existing funding and to fill gaps in the delivery of adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) programming.

This extra investment has been allocated to the following program areas:

- ***Community-based ALBE programming through Aurora College*** to allow program delivery in each NWT community;
- ***Literacy Outreach Centre in Yellowknife*** (to support existing literacy drop-in and tutoring services for low-literacy learners);
- ***Correctional Centre Literacy*** (through the Department of Justice to enhance ALBE and career services to inmates of three correctional centres and three young offender facilities);
- ***Seniors Literacy*** (administered through a partnership committee Literacy Support for Seniors);
- ***Learning Support for Persons with Disabilities*** (administered in part by the department and in part by the NWT Council of Persons with Disabilities, to provide assistive devices, tuition, tutorial, and other services to individuals or organizations, and training for practitioners to enhance their capacity to work with disabled learners. Projects are approved by a partnership committee);
- ***Virtual Libraries*** (to equip community on-line access sites and train facilitators to assist users of the technology);
- ***Government Plain Language Services*** (to support generic and specialized (e.g. legal) plain language usage in GNWT departments, and related training. An Interdepartmental Literacy Committee meets quarterly to review departmental literacy action plans and promote literacy promotion within and across departments);
- ***Official Languages Literacy*** (to support Aboriginal language retention, enhancement, and promotion activities. French language projects are also eligible. The NWT has eight official aboriginal languages as well as English and French);
- ***Workplace Education*** (for needs assessments and wage subsidies to support work release programs to which employers contribute wages and employees contribute time outside of work);
- ***Literacy Research and Baseline Data*** (to support the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey and other research/data collection activities);
- ***Literacy Promotion***; and,



- ***Accountability*** (for the preparation of reports and evaluations on the Literacy Strategy. An evaluation framework for the strategy has been developed following the Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework approved by the federal Treasury Board.)

## YUKON TERRITORY

In 2001, the Yukon Literacy Strategy was approved with a goal of providing maximum opportunity for all Yukon people to acquire the necessary literacy skills to be successful in their community, work and personal life. The Strategy is the driving force behind the government's efforts to prepare Yukon people for current and future training and employment opportunities.

One of the initiatives arising from the Literacy Strategy is the appointment of a Literacy Action Committee, the mandate of which is:

- to respond to the literacy needs of communities and First Nations through the identification and allocation of resources;
- to coordinate and administer the funding allocated to projects that are identified, developed and implemented by community organizations;
- to study and review programs that are seen as showing positive results (such as Kwanlin Dun House of Learning) in an effort to share these successes with all Yukon communities; and,
- to work with the National Literacy Secretariat and other partners outside of the Yukon to study ways and means for best literacy practices to be made available to the communities.

The Committee comprises representatives from Yukon College, Yukon Learn (the territorial literacy coalition), the Learning Disabilities Association, Challenge Community Vocational Alternatives, Child Development Centre, Yukon Federation of Labour and Business as well as representatives from the First Nations Education Commission – the identified representative of First Nations on literacy issues. The Committee also strives to ensure that communities outside of Whitehorse are well represented.

The Yukon Government provides funding for literacy projects to be chosen and administered by the Literacy Action Committee. The committee has established funding criteria that make funds relevant and accessible for communities in order to better meet their literacy needs.

Another successful strategy has been the development of *Homework Clubs*. The Yukon's most northerly aboriginal community initiated this best practice with funding from the territorial government. A tutor is hired for 12 weeks to work by appointment in family homes (10 hours/week) to work one-on-one with students. It has become so successful that the government is now funding other communities to emulate it.

## NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

In 2000, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador released a **Strategic Literacy Plan** for the province. The Plan covers literacy for all ages and outlines strategic directions in the areas of early literacy, the formal K-12 system, and adult education/workplace literacy, as well as a new approach to planning and coordination. The Literacy office within the Department of Education is charged with the mandate of implementing this Plan in partnership with other departments, levels of government and community stakeholders.

The three goals of the provincial Strategic Literacy Plan are:

Goal 1: Literacy levels which are among the highest in Canada

Goal 2: A culture which values literacy as a desirable goal for all people

Goal 3: An integrated approach to literacy development

A **Literacy Endowment Fund** was established with contributions of \$1 million each from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Government of Canada. Interest earned on the Literacy Endowment Fund is utilized to support adult literacy initiatives.

A **Strategic Literacy Funding Committee**, chaired by the Department of Education, was established to oversee the allocation of all grants for literacy projects or programs in Newfoundland and Labrador submitted by non-profit organizations. Each year the Committee recommends over \$1.25 million in either federal or provincial literacy grants in the areas of early childhood, family, adult or workplace literacy.

Provincial **Early Childhood and Family Literacy** initiatives include the provision of grants totalling up to \$250,000 annually for the delivery of early childhood/family literacy programs throughout the province; the development and implementation of a province-wide pre-kindergarten orientation program, entitled KinderStart, aimed at parents/caregivers and their children; and a provincial assessment of Early Childhood and Family Literacy Programs in Newfoundland and Labrador to determine best practices for future grant funding.

The Department of Education has moved forward on a number of initiatives in support of its literacy agenda in the **K-12 school system**, including: increased time allotments for language arts in the primary grades from 25% to 40%; implementation of First Steps, a professional development program which provides every primary teacher with six days of training in the teaching of language arts over a three-year period; provision (in collaboration with the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation - APEF) of assessment kits for primary classroom teachers in both English and French immersion and publication (in collaboration with APEF) of literacy brochures for parents of primary children.

A Newfoundland and Labrador **Workplace/ Workforce Learning** Committee has been established as a result of the 4<sup>th</sup> Atlantic Region Workplace/Workforce Institute held in Newfoundland and Labrador in October, 2003. The Committee has recently received funding from the National Literacy Fund to carry out research to identify best practices in workplace/workforce learning.

Provincial funding of up to \$300,000 is available annually for the delivery of **adult literacy** programs. In addition, the Department of Education and the National Literacy Secretariat are partnering to offer a two-year Adult Basic Education (ABE) Level I pilot project. Nine sites across the province will use newly revised curriculum in order to develop an improved ABE Level I delivery model. These sites will follow Best Practices criteria which include establishing and maintaining links to the community through various referral sources and community support agencies, as well as other relevant educational programs and organizations. The centres will be accountable to students, sponsoring organizations, partners, the community and funders.

The Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment partnered with The Random North Development Association to implement the project Bridging the Gap: From Education to Employment. Bridging the Gap was a client-centered approach to education and employment. The target client group was comprised of adults who did not complete high school, ABE or the GED program.

An accredited education provider (post-secondary school) designed and delivered the academic/workplace skills enhancement component based on the needs of the training participants and the six private sector business partners. Each training participant was assessed in the areas of Reading Text, Document Use and Numeracy as it related to the context of the employment partners. Participants received a combination of classroom time (employers were responsible for providing adequate onsite facilities for the classroom training) and technical/practical skill set development. All academic proponents were linked to the employment site.

## NOVA SCOTIA

In 2002, Nova Scotia launched two strategy documents which incorporate literacy as a priority. *Learning for Life* is a three-year plan which focuses on strengthening supports for student success within the public school system. This plan outlines components of a literacy strategy that identifies best practices in helping students and teachers succeed with reading, writing and math. It emphasizes that literacy is a priority at all grade levels and in all subject areas and has specific interventions at various grade levels. *Skills Nova Scotia* is a framework which serves as a labour market strategy for the province. One of its three goals focuses on developing lifelong learning systems and supports, including adult literacy and workplace education.

Examples of successful initiatives in the province include the following:

### *Early Years/Family Literacy*

Nova Scotia has been successful in partnering with the federal government and community to establish two endowment funds which provide funding support to organizations that target literacy development in the province's youngest citizens and their parents/guardians. The Family Learning Initiative Endowment Fund provides annual funding to deserving family literacy projects. Also supported through endowment funding is Read to Me!/Lis-moi une histoire - an award-winning, multi-partnered initiative which provides newborns and families at hospital sites with educational materials to promote reading.

### *Public School P-12 (Primary to Grade 12)*

The province's public school literacy strategy includes the following components:

- New literacy assessments at the elementary level and the provision of new funding to increase support for struggling readers and writers;
- Parent information booklets to engage parents in supporting their children's literacy development;
- Expansion of the early intervention Reading Recovery program which provides one-on-one specialized reading and writing support to grade one students;
- Active Young Readers/Jeunes lecteurs actifs initiatives from primary to grade 9 which provide reading resources; professional development for teachers on effective reading assessment, instruction and intervention; and increased time for reading across the curriculum; and,
- Writers in Action/Écrivains à l'oeuvre initiatives grade 4 to 6 which provide writing resources for students and teachers and professional development for teachers on effective writing assessment, instruction, and intervention.

### *Adult Learning*

Launched in 2001, the Nova Scotia School for Adult Learning (NSSAL), a coordinating initiative within the Department of Education, is an example of best practice in literacy as it embodies key elements such as financial accessibility, funding and delivery partnerships, recognition of learning and coordination/continuum of service to adult learners. Prior to 2001, the literacy service providers often operated in isolation of each other, and there were few learner transitions between programs and limited formal recognition of learning.

Through NSSAL, the Province funds community-based organizations, community colleges and school boards to offer tuition-free educational programs for eligible adults, ranging from basic literacy to high school equivalency and completion. The Nova Scotia High School Diploma for Adults, the 12 credit credential offered through the School for Adult Learning, incorporates recognition of learning principles and articulates two formerly distinct programs: the Public School Program offered by school boards, and the Adult Learning Program offered by the colleges. Previous formal learning may also be accredited if eligible through a transfer credit process and "dual crediting" is also an option.

### ***Workplace Education***

The Workplace Education Program draws its success and strength from its partnership model which encourages government, business and labour to invest in education and training, and cultivates a culture of learning within workplaces. Organizational needs assessments are conducted and programs are then customized to meet the needs of both the participants and the workplace or industry sector. The flexibility of the model allows it to respond to the needs of small to large businesses, to displaced workers, as well as to the needs of specific industry sectors. Examples of best practices in this area include a Small Business Essential Skills Initiative which focuses on the needs of the small business owner/operator and an Apprenticeship Essential Skills Initiative which helps apprentices succeed in the technical portion of their apprenticeship training. The Province has also introduced a One Journey-Work and Learn Project enabling individuals on income support to participate in a customized essential skills program to link them into employment positions with industry.

## **PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

In 1996, Prince Edward Island released the *Tough Challenges - Great Rewards: Literacy and Adult Education Strategy*. The emphasis at that time was on adult literacy. In recent years the literacy focus has expanded to include early literacy, family literacy and early intervention. There are many literacy programs and interventions that warrant attention, but the following three examples have been selected as “best practices” as they are the programs that affect the largest number of Islanders with the greatest successes.

### ***Literacy/Adult Basic Education Program***

This is a province-wide program for adult Islanders who have not completed school. The program is learner-centred and is based on criteria of affordability, accessibility, adaptability and accountability. It includes programming for International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) levels 1-3 inclusive, completion of grade 12 either by credits or through the General Education Development (GED) examinations, as well as upgrading of credits for specific post-secondary programs. The funding model is a partnership of provincial dollars and funding through the Labour Market Development Agreement. There is no charge to the learner. Government contracts with Holland College to deliver, administer and manage the program.

### ***Workplace Education PEI (WEDPEI)***

This partnership of business, labour, government and community ensures learning opportunities in the workplace and for the workforce. WEDPEI has a well developed process that includes a project team for each workplace/workforce program, includes organizational and individual needs assessments, contextualized curriculum and is learner-centred. For three consecutive years, WEDPEI has seen three of the companies for which it has developed programs receive awards for excellence in workplace literacy programs from the Conference Board of Canada.

The companies are: Durabelt Inc. which manufactures conveyor belts and markets them globally; Diversified Metal Engineering, a manufacturer and global marketer of micro-breweries; and Royal Star Fisheries, a fish processing plant.

### ***Summer Tutoring Program for Kids***

This program is a province-wide partnership of the provincial government, Human Resources Skills Development, the PEI Literacy Alliance (provincial literacy coalition), the Provincial Library System and school boards that provides one-on-one literacy activities for over 600 elementary school children once a week during July and August. The children are identified within their schools as children with literacy challenges that may place them at risk if they do not have access to literacy activities during the summer period. The tutors are post-secondary students, many of whom are in the B.Ed. program. The Summer Career Placement Program of HRSD and funding from the PEI Department of Education cover the wages for the tutors. The program is offered in community libraries and, in a few cases, in schools where libraries are limited by space.

## **NEW BRUNSWICK**

On April 1, 2004, government consolidated responsibility for adult literacy within the Department of Training and Employment Development. Literacy is recognized as a bedrock economic program in which the province must invest to ensure its competitiveness and ability to move forward both economically and socially. Adult literacy will be a fundamental element in the forthcoming Adult and Lifelong Learning policy statement of the Quality Learning Agenda, a cornerstone of the province's ten year Prosperity Plan announced in 2002. New Brunswick sees literacy as a life-long process: a continuum of learning and skill acquisition. New Brunswick's goal is to cultivate and support systems and resources, which provide a range of accessible literacy services so that every citizen has an opportunity to achieve an optimal level of personal literacy skill.

### ***ADULT LITERACY***

New Brunswick's community-based adult literacy initiative, a winner of UNESCO's International Literacy Prize and other national awards, features the following best practices:

- Quality assurance is attained through province-wide use of a uniform model and program standards. The Community Academic Services or CASP model is flexible enough to meet diverse community and learner needs. Training services are co-ordinated provincially and curriculum and standardized testing in both English and in French are available province-wide. The model provides a recognized continuum of learning from one-on-one tutoring to community literacy classes to post-secondary institutions. Dedicated paid instructors assure quality instruction for learners;
- Accessibility is assured through continuous entry for learners to programs in both official languages. Some offer a bilingual format. An annual average of 167 programs in 140 communities around the province operate throughout the year;
- Affordability is key. Adult literacy training available free of charge to all learners.
- Adaptability to address diverse needs is assured through learner-paced instruction that meets a range of learner objectives from improving employability, to pursuing further training, to meeting personal learning goals. Those with special learning needs are also accommodated. The flexibility of the CASP model accommodates scheduling that complements seasonal employment patterns and other community needs;
- Community context assures inclusion. Decisions regarding administration, hiring, scheduling, program length, etc. are made at the community level. The needs of Anglophone, Francophone and First Nations communities are accommodated as are those of the clientele of specific organizations such as John Howard, low-income housing, single parents, special needs learners, seniors and youth; and,
- Participation by all stakeholders assures appropriate training. All provincial organizations with an adult literacy mandate have a voice in developing the provincial strategy through the Minister's advisory group, Provincial Partners in Literacy. Literacy councils, other non-profit organizations and adult learners are involved at the local level in organizing classes.
- Partnerships maximize resources and assure ownership by all. CASP is funded and delivered by partners in the public, voluntary and private sectors both at the provincial and the community level.



### ***K-12 LITERACY***

As part of the Quality Learning Agenda, there is a focus on early literacy initiatives. Reading is the basic foundation for further learning. Students who cannot read are disadvantaged in their overall learning and at risk for eventually dropping out of school. To ensure all children can read at an appropriate level by the end of grade 2, a comprehensive literacy program aimed at K-2 is being introduced. This will be followed by further initiatives that will be developed for Grades 3-12. All children requiring an individual intervention program during Grade 3 will be provided with one. Specific actions will include:

- Implementing new standards for Grade 2 literacy achievement in reading and writing;
- Establishing procedures to ensure that by January of their kindergarten year, students requiring reading intervention are identified by their teachers;
- Administering a new reading assessment administered to students at the end of Grade 2;
- Designing intervention programs for all students who do not meet the Grade 2 literacy standard;
- Adding 500 new teaching positions over four years with the first 125 focused entirely on early literacy from K-2. A number of these positions in the francophone sector will be focused on students whose parents are “ayant droit” and need to improve their linguistic skills to enable them to master French; and,
- Providing all public school students with a public library card and information about the resources, services and programs available at their public library.

### ***EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT LITERACY***

The Born to Read/Le goût de lire program supports and promotes young children's early language development. This innovative early literacy initiative distributes kits - in both official languages - to all parents of newborns throughout the province. Kits contain infant and preschool level children's books, information for parents about the benefits of reading and other early language development activities. Partners include various government departments, the Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick, and community organizations such as the IODE, Dames-d'Acadie, and Conseil d'alphabétisation.

Talk With Me/Parle-moi, a pilot program offered in the regions of Saint John, Bathurst and the Acadian Peninsula is designed to help parents and caregivers of preschool children who have, or are at risk of having speech, language and learning disorders. The community-based program focuses on the prevention of language problems and the important role of parents and caregivers in a child's early language development. Based on the positive response to these pilots, work has begun on the implementation of this innovative program across the province.

## QUÉBEC

In Québec, literacy services are provided by the Adult Education Centres operated by school boards and are designed to enable adults:

- (1) to access other learning services, if necessary;
- (2) to improve their skills in different areas of learning; and,
- (3) to carry out their family and social roles.

Literacy services are provided on the same basis as other educational services and are generally available from August to June. Some school boards may also provide individualized services during the summer; adult learners are offered continuous entry and flexible schedules to fit their individual needs.

Adults registered in literacy training may also receive various services, such as orientation and referral services, educational support, and auxiliary services. Literacy services may be offered in either official language, French or English. A prescribed study program called *Guide de formation sur mesure en alphabétisation* (Individualized Literacy Education Guide) is offered by the school boards. It includes learning objectives arranged by discipline and examples of practical situations.

People in Quebec may also gain literacy skills through independent literacy community action groups whose aims are essentially the same as those of the school boards, although through approaches that may differ. These groups now come under the jurisdiction of the *Programme d'action communautaire sur le terrain de l'éducation* (PACTE), a *Ministère de l'Éducation* funding program. In addition to providing literacy training, the different activities offered by these organizations seek to encourage students to stay in school or encourage dropouts to re-enter the workforce, as well as to provide continuing education, and research and development. Independent literacy community action groups manage their services in a variety of ways. They may also enter into service agreements with various public organizations in their community to provide auxiliary services in different areas, such as parenting skills development, employability assistance for adults with a low level of education, and homework assistance services.

A number of other tools are available to teachers in both networks and are aimed particularly at developing literacy skills in low income families.

In May 2002, the Quebec Government launched the *Politique gouvernementale d'éducation des adultes et de formation continue* (Adult Education and Continuing Studies Policy), along with a five-year action plan. This policy confirms Quebec's desire to be a leader in the field of continuing education and to reiterate its commitment to "ensuring literacy and basic education rights". The policy is a major tool in helping Quebec's network of adult literacy and education organizations to improve basic education levels of Quebecers over the age of 16 years.

Finally, the National Literacy Program of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), applied in Quebec under the name *Initiatives fédérales-provinciales*

*conjointes en matière d'alphabétisation* (Joint Federal and Provincial Literacy Initiatives), represents a major source for the development of best practices, not only for school boards and independent community-based literacy organizations, but also at the provincial level.

The initiatives focusing on literacy undertaken by the Quebec *Ministère de l'Éducation* (MEQ) as part of its literacy action plan include:

- A provincial promotional campaign aimed at increasing the visibility of literacy services;
- Support for Info-Alpha, an information and referral telephone line managed by the *Fondation pour l'alphabétisation* (Literacy Foundation);
- A new financial assistance program for literacy organizations involved in preventing students from dropping out of school and working with youth dropouts to encourage them to return to academic studies or re-enter the workforce;
- Professional development sessions for front-line personnel of school boards, independent literacy community action groups and local employment centres (LECs), focusing on assistance services for people with little schooling;
- The continuation, for four years, of the Assistance Program for Emergent Literacy in Disadvantaged Communities. The program funds projects that aim to raise family awareness of the importance of literacy. In particular, these projects include services to encourage parents to discover the joy of reading with their children and to incorporate this activity into their family life. This program is provided in partnership with other departments, including the *Ministère de la Culture et des Communications*, the *Ministère de l'Emploi, de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille* and the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*;
- The MEQ has created the *Programme École, famille et communauté : réussir ensemble* (School, Family and Community Program : Succeeding Together) in collaboration with the *Ministère de la Culture et des Communications*, the *Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*, the *Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale et de la Famille*, the *Conseil de la famille et de l'enfance* and the school boards concerned. This pilot program will be set up in ten school regions that socioeconomic indicators show to be disadvantaged; and,
- Partnerships have been established with other organizations to implement plain language initiatives.

## ONTARIO

### **Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities – Adult Literacy Initiatives**

In Ontario, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), through the Literacy and Basic Skills Program, is responsible for funding and supporting quality adult literacy services. The goal-directed, learner-centred Program helps Anglophone, Francophone, Aboriginal and Deaf learners improve their literacy and numeracy skills related to their goals of employment, further training and independence. Successful literacy initiatives include:

#### ***Computer-Based Learning/AlphaRoute***

*Tools for a New Beginning: A Strategy for Computer-Based Learning in Literacy* (Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. September, 2000) lays out an approach to implementing and supporting a computer-based model for the delivery of literacy services in Ontario to complement existing literacy delivery.

The strategy focuses on the role of new technologies in the training of Ontario adults for the jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Integration of technology in literacy programming has resulted in more efficient use of resources, particularly in the area of practitioner training and communication; and has allowed for the development of innovative practice through a web-based literacy and numeracy learning tool for the use of literacy delivery agencies and learners called AlphaRoute. Four agencies are currently piloting AlphaRoute for distance delivery, with the assistance of AlphaPlus Centre. It is also being piloted in British Columbia, Newfoundland and the Northwest Territories.

#### ***Literacy Research***

The overall purpose of the research strategy, *Setting the agenda: The Ontario literacy research strategy* (Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. August, 2000), developed with the assistance of an MTCU established work group, is to promote high quality research that will inform adult literacy practice and policy in Ontario.

#### ***Accountability***

To ensure quality delivery of literacy services across Ontario, MTCU has developed program quality guidelines, a standard contract, annual business planning process, and a monitoring and reporting process for the Literacy and Basic Skills Program. Each stakeholder contracts with MTCU for a three-year period, subject to annual review, to provide services that support the development and delivery of quality literacy and numeracy programming, and services such as practitioner training, curriculum development, marketing and outreach. Agency reports to MTCU include information on learner goals, level of literacy at entrance and exit, and number of learners going on to further education and training.

MTCU is also implementing a performance management system for all government-funded deliverers of literacy. The process involves setting standards for success in the areas of effectiveness, efficiency and customer satisfaction. The standards will be benchmarked to the highest performing literacy and numeracy systems in the world.

## **Ministry of Education – Supporting Student Success in Elementary/Secondary Education**

In Ontario, the Ministry of Education (EDU) supports literacy for students in the public education system. Successful literacy initiatives include:

### ***New Education Foundations Program***

The “Education Foundations” program supports more elementary students each year in reaching high levels in reading, writing, and mathematics. The new program includes: intensive teacher development and on-going support; smaller class sizes in JK to Grade 3; focused curriculum with daily emphasis on literacy and numeracy; targeted supports through turnaround teams and innovation funds; and expert co-ordination by a provincial Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. Progress will be measured to ensure that by 2008, 75 per cent of Grade 6 students reach the provincial standard (Level 3 on a scale of 1 to 4) on province-wide tests – up from slightly over half that are reaching this marker today.

Using the reports of two Expert Panels, the ministry has developed an intensive professional development program for Lead Teachers in reading and in math in every elementary school (Kindergarten to Grade 3), and Teachers’ Guides on effective instruction. During 2003/04, approximately 8,000 lead teachers and 4,000 principals participated in the program. The ministry has published, *A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading – Kindergarten to Grade 3*, to support on-going professional development. A similar program and Teachers’ Guides for Lead Teachers in Grades 4 – 6 is under development in 2004/05.

### **Assisting Struggling Schools**

The Government intends to reduce the gap between the highest and lowest performing students. The number of struggling schools that receive extra support from turnaround teams will increase to 100 this year. Teams of experienced teachers, administrators, and literacy experts will provide direct intervention and support to: develop individualized school improvement plans; ensure effective use of lead literacy teachers; and target skills training for teachers and principals in these schools.

### **Grades 7 to 12**

Ontario has also identified literacy success for struggling students in Grades 7 – 12 as a provincial priority. An Expert Panel on Students At Risk in Ontario reviewed research and effective practices in the spring and summer of 2003; its report, *Think Literacy Success, Grades 7 – 12*, recommended a focus on literacy in all schools and classrooms, data collection to track struggling students, board-wide action plans and training for all teachers and administrators working with adolescents. An accompanying teacher resource document entitled *Think Literacy Cross-Curricular Approaches, Grades 7 – 12*, was developed by lead educators in the field and widely distributed.

## **MANITOBA**

Manitoba has developed a number of initiatives and policies and strategies to address the literacy/essential skills needs of its citizens. Examples of successful literacy initiatives include:

### ***Manitoba Certificate in Literacy and Learning Curriculum Framework***

Community-based organizations provide learner-centred tuition free literacy and numeracy programming for adults and families. The *Manitoba Certificate in Literacy and Learning - Stages 1-3* curriculum framework is aligned with the workplace Essential Skills complexity levels, as well as the provincial K-Senior 4 Curriculum, enabling literacy learners to achieve the skills needed for work, home and community participation. Learners completing the Stage 3 Certificate are eligible for two credits toward the Mature Student Diploma.

### ***Mature Student Diploma***

Manitoba's Mature Student Diploma (MSD) assists adults in completing their secondary schooling with the completion of eight credits, four at the Senior 4 (Grade 12) level, including the required Senior 4 English Language Arts and Mathematics and four additional Senior 1-4 credits (Grade 9–12).

### ***Adult Learning Centres Act***

Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) provide tuition-free education programming, enabling adults to complete secondary schooling or to obtain necessary prerequisites to pursue further education and employment opportunities. *The Adult Learning Centres Act* and *General Regulation*, which took effect July 1, 2003, provide a legislated registration and governance framework for ALCs. ALCs may be operated by a not-for-profit corporation, a correctional facility, a First Nation band council, by a union, or by an educational institution.

### ***Workplace Education Manitoba Steering Committee (WEMSC)***

Workplace literacy and essential skills initiatives have been under the guidance of WEMSC since 1991. WESMC is a five-person committee of labour, business and government members coordinated by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Training (MAET) responsible for raising awareness and building partnerships, developing customized program models, tools and materials, researching and sharing information, and building a community of practice.

### ***Essential Skills Policy Framework***

Manitoba has developed an Essential Skills Policy Framework to guide the coordination and integration of literacy and essential skills throughout its adult education system, including linkages among Adult Literacy Programs, ALCs, workplace education, Apprenticeship, Employment Centres, and related services. The framework emphasizes the development of articulated pathways that take a learner successfully from low literacy and essential skills levels to successful employment.

### ***Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Policy Framework (PLAR)***

In 2001, Manitoba released *A New Policy Framework for PLAR*. The Framework objectives include lifelong learning paths for adults, which reduce duplication and recognize formal and informal learning. For example, high school credits can be awarded for literacy work through a PLAR review of a learner's literacy portfolio.

### ***Northern Development Strategy (NDS)***

The NDS is Manitoba's long-term plan to develop human and natural resources in northern Manitoba. The education-related objectives recognize that a skilled and educated workforce is the foundation of a strong self-reliant community. The strategy includes education initiatives to enable Northerners to achieve the pre-requisite literacy and essential skills and credentials to access to post-secondary, training, accreditation and employment opportunities.

### ***Aboriginal Education Action Plan (AEAP)***

The Aboriginal Education Action Plan (AEAP) for 2004-2007 expands the strategic agendas of Manitoba's two education departments: Advanced Education and Training and Education, Citizenship and Youth, with specific attention to Aboriginal learning and employment preparation. The departments collaborate with other departments and education and community organizations to address shared goals for Aboriginal citizens: increased participation in adult literacy and essential skills programming, improved high school completion rates, increased access to and completion of post-secondary education, and entry and participation in the labour market.

### ***Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents***

Launched in March 2004 Building Student Success with Aboriginal Parents (BSSAP) is a three year initiative designed to assist schools in their efforts to develop partnerships with Aboriginal parents and communities. BSSAP activities will increase Aboriginal students' literacy and numeracy skills and improve high school graduation rates.

### ***Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI)***

The ECDI provides grants to assist school divisions in their efforts to provide intersectoral services for pre-schoolers to increase readiness for school entry, in response to local needs and priorities, and in partnership with parents, the community and Healthy Child Manitoba. Approximately 62% of the ECDI projects include a literacy focus, such as Mother Goose and Rock and Read programming.

### ***Early Literacy Intervention Initiative***

Early literacy intervention programming is designed to help students in Grade 1 who require assistance with reading and writing. The department provides funding to school divisions to facilitate implementation of appropriate programming (both internally and externally developed) as well as Reading Recovery™.

## **SASKATCHEWAN**

The *Saskatchewan Training Strategy* (1997) introduced a new approach to the funding, organization and delivery of literacy and basic education in Saskatchewan that included: access to tuition-free literacy and basic education programs through the province's publicly funded adult and post-secondary education system; and access to income support (provincial training allowance) based on individual needs assessment, including supports for childcare and transportation. A Basic Education Evaluation, conducted in 1999, made 17 recommendations for improvements, one of which called for a provincial literacy strategy.

In 2001, the Department of Learning established a Provincial Literacy Steering Committee to oversee the development of such a strategy. The proposed strategy, recommended for 2005/06 implementation, includes a vision, goals and action plan that is intended to set the direction for the Government of Saskatchewan and its partners in the provision of literacy programs and services for the next five years. The four goals for the strategy are:

- Literacy opportunities are available and reflect the social, cultural and economic diversity of individuals, families, communities, and workplaces;
- The province and its partners support high quality, sustainable literacy services;
- Aboriginal communities will have the capacity to plan, develop and implement Aboriginal literacy programs and services to meet individual, family and community needs; and,
- The province and its partners promote and communicate the value of literacy and lifelong learning.

Included in the Provincial Literacy Strategy are several key components and best practices that address the diversified learning needs of the province.

### ***Basic Education Redesign***

In 2001, a Basic Education Task Team was established to develop and implement a curriculum renewal process for redesign of Basic Education programs for adults. Key developments include: 1) identification of a proposed framework, (consisting of 4 levels, and content for credit programs); and 2) the development of Levels 1 and 2 Benchmarks (literacy levels). Both emphasize the importance of assessment and placement services.

### ***The Family Literacy Initiative***

This initiative provides \$300K annually to support a provincial network of family literacy programs and services, as well as funding to the Saskatchewan Literacy Network for infrastructure support (promotion, training, resources, and networking) for services.

### ***Aboriginal Literacy***

The Provincial Aboriginal Literacy Steering Committee has developed a strategic plan to work with governments and Aboriginal communities to develop and deliver Aboriginal literacy initiatives. This work will proceed under the auspices of the Executive Director and the Board of the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network, incorporated in 2003.

### ***Workplace Literacy***



Provincial funding to the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour (SFL) supports delivery of its Workers' Education and Skilled Training Program in unionized workplaces. The SFL is also working with the Saskatchewan Labour Force Development Board to develop a Workplace Essential Skills Strategy that includes *targeted capacity-building* for First Nations and Metis people, immigrants, workers in transition, industry sectors facing skills shortages and community-based organizations working with under-employed individuals.

### ***Literacy in the Francophone Community***

Saskatchewan Learning provides funding annually to Service francoskois de formation aux adultes to facilitate the provision of adult literacy programs and services to francophone families and communities in Saskatchewan.

### ***Northern Literacy Strategy***

This strategy, which has nine key elements, was developed by Northlands College in 2001. It involves building partnerships with Northern Health, Northern Lights School Division and Lac La Ronge Indian Band to develop community infrastructure and increase the capacity for delivery of literacy programs and services in the north. Distance education will be used to expand literacy delivery in northern communities.

### ***Justice Literacy Initiative: Keys to Family Literacy***

The Pine Grove Correctional Centre in Prince Albert with support from the National Literacy Secretariat and Correctional Services Canada is developing a provincial Justice Literacy Strategy with input from the education, justice and corrections sectors.

### ***Seniors' Literacy***

Since 1997, the University of Regina Seniors' Education Centre has been addressing the literacy learning needs of older adults through its *Second Chance for Seniors Literacy Program*, including peer tutoring with older learners and tutor training; community based group literacy activities; and public education about older adult literacy issues.

The Provincial Literacy Strategy is linked to other sector initiatives:

### ***KIDSFIRST Initiative***

KidsFirst is a provincial early childhood development initiative that focuses on the healthy growth and development of children. Directed at communities where the need is greatest, parents and families have access to a network of community-based programs and services with enhanced supports (i.e., pre-natal assessments, parent education, home visits, counselling, transportation, early learning opportunities for children, literacy).

### ***SCHOOL<sup>PLUS</sup>***

School<sup>Plus</sup> is a K-12 initiative that describes a new conceptualization of schools as centres of learning, support and community for the children and families they serve. It more actively involves family and community members, to help provide all children and young people with the supports they need for healthy development and learning success.

## ALBERTA

*Today's Opportunities, Tomorrow's Promise*, the Government of Alberta's strategic plan released in March 2004, identified *leading in learning* as one of the four pillars for the province to maximize its potential. Leading in learning strategies include:

- Investing in the learning system to assist Albertans in their desire to have their children succeed and to ensure that the province benefits from its human potential;
- Ensuring accessibility, quality and affordability of the basic education system;
- Promoting the importance of lifelong learning as the necessary way for each Albertan to maximize his or her potential to the benefit of all Albertans; and,
- Helping Albertans get the work and life skills they need to achieve their aspirations.

Examples of successful literacy strategies include:

### ***K-12 Initiatives***

- Early Literacy Initiative: This initiative is designed to support the development of early literacy programs by school authorities. It is aimed at students enrolled in kindergarten, grades 1 and 2, in public, private and charter schools who are experiencing difficulty in reading;
- Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI): AISI provides additional funding to school authorities to focus on improving student learning and performance by encouraging teachers, parents and the community to work collaboratively to introduce innovative and creative initiatives. The overwhelming areas of project interest have been literacy and mathematics accounting for 39.4% public projects and 26.2% of private projects; and,
- Aboriginal Initiatives: Since 2003, new funding has been directed towards increasing the quantity and quality of First Nations, Metis and Inuit curriculum, language, learning and teaching resources.

### ***Community-Based Initiatives***

- Parent-Child Literacy Strategy: This strategy focuses on approaches integrating adult literacy instruction and early oral language and emergent literacy development for children from birth to age six for economically and socially disadvantaged families. Over 6,000 parents and 6,000 preschool children benefit each year from family literacy programs. Work is underway to develop a distinct Aboriginal family literacy component that is expected to begin in the fall of 2004;
- Adult Basic Literacy: Eighty-three Community Adult Learning Councils and 73 volunteer tutor adult literacy programs respond to local adult literacy needs through community-based non-credit part-time programs throughout Alberta. In 2002, these organizations served a total of 6,142 adult learners. A priority of this program is to increase access to adult basic literacy and adult ESL programs in Alberta's smaller communities;
- English Express: *English Express* is a topical tabloid-size newspaper for adults who are learning to read English. It features English language articles at three reading levels (approximately grades 2-4). It is produced eight times a year and 53,000 copies are

distributed free to adult literacy and adult English as a second Language (ESL) programs, and public libraries across Alberta; and,

- Adult ESL Literacy: Each year, 2 to 4 innovative Adult ESL literacy projects are funded to research, develop appropriate learner/teacher curriculum and materials, provide innovative models of instruction and share the results of these initiatives to the ESL delivery sector to help improve instruction in adult ESL literacy.

#### ***Public Post-Secondary Institutions***

- Twelve public colleges and one private university college offer various levels of adult literacy, numeracy, employment preparation skills, and academic upgrading programs;
- The Inmate Education Program provides funding to post-secondary institutions to deliver literacy, numeracy, social skill development, employability skills, academic upgrading, and skill training programs to adult offenders, within the Alberta correctional system; and,
- The Community Consortia Program enables post-secondary institutions to provide regional delivery of credit programming. Literacy, employability skills, and academic upgrading accounts for about one-quarter of the total programming.

#### ***Literacy for Employment***

- The Skills Development Program provides grants to students who qualify in the following programs: academic upgrading, English as a Second Language, literacy, numeracy, life skills and short-term skills training; and,
- 80 certified private providers who offer various levels of adult literacy, numeracy, employment preparation skills, and academic upgrading programs to publicly funded learners.

## **BRITISH COLUMBIA**

The 2004 Throne Speech announced the Government of British Columbia's plans to launch a major new initiative to address literacy, including the creation of a Premier's Advisory Panel on Literacy to assess British Columbians' most urgent needs in literacy and recommend actions for improvement.

### ***School District System – Early Years and School-Aged Programs***

British Columbia is committed to bringing out the best in student achievement. In addition to strong curriculum and regular assessment programs, a number of strategies support students' achievement in literacy. School Recognition Awards support evidence-based initiatives that improve achievement in literacy. Rural community initiatives encourage communities to become involved with literacy programs, support staff development and new approaches to student learning. *The Community LINK Program* is an initiative to help school districts provide nutrition and other supports to improve the educational performance of vulnerable students. Reading 44 is a program developed by academics and school districts to ensure cost-effective early intervention and treatment for students with reading difficulties.

Provincial Performance Standards are used to assess and report on student learning in reading, writing, numeracy and social responsibility for grades 1 – 10. Publications and curriculum are designed to help teachers, parents and students understand the content and learning expectations through clear examples of expected learning outcomes. British Columbia assesses the literacy levels of all students at grades 4 and 7. This data enable schools, districts and the province to improve literacy outcomes over time.

### ***Programs at Public Post-Secondary Institutions***

Eighteen public colleges and university colleges offer Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs at their main and satellite campuses. Fifteen of those institutions offer courses at the literacy level. The BC Open University and BC Campus offer ABE courses, including literacy level, by distance education.

- **Financial Assistance:** ABE programs at British Columbia's public post-secondary institutions are available tuition-free for adults who have not graduated from secondary school. This policy is also extended to English as a Second Language literacy learners. Providing courses at the literacy level tuition free assists learners who are facing multiple barriers. Financial assistance is also available for fee payers in need.
- **Teaching Excellence:** Highly qualified instructors help contribute to the stability of the field and to creativity, and British Columbia curriculum and learning materials have found their way across Canada. Many colleges are involved in community outreach work and support literacy volunteers.
- **Articulation:** In British Columbia all ABE courses (including literacy level) are articulated within the system, making for ease of transfer for students who move between institutions. In addition, there are built-in bridging or laddering processes from ABE courses to other academic, business, trades and technology courses. Prior learning

and recognition assessments offer credit to students for adult work experience that matches secondary school curriculum.

### ***Adult Literacy Cost-Shared Program***

This federal-provincial literacy funding partnership has brought many enhancements to community-based literacy delivery including:

- Regional Literacy Coordination in ten non-urban regions has been funded since 1994. The most successful growth resulting from this coordination has been in the Columbia Basin where the work in bringing together 19 rural communities was recognized with a national award in 2002;
- Development of many new family literacy initiatives and other community-based projects;
- Development of electronic networking and conferencing capability to connect literacy researchers and practitioners across the country and world-wide; and
- Development of a research in practice – RiPal-BC – movement that has grown steadily since 1998 and links with developments in other provinces.

In 2004/05, the Province’s contribution has been doubled to \$1.4 million, which will lead to the enhancement and strengthening of adult literacy programs and services across the province.

### ***Adult Programs in School Districts***

British Columbia school districts also support improved literacy levels for adults. Their programs include:

- Tuition-free courses leading to graduation for any resident of British Columbia who does not have secondary school graduation;
- Varied classroom-based instructional styles, computer-based delivery systems and paper-based and electronic distance instruction; and,
- Credit to students for adult work experience that matches secondary school curriculum through support of prior learning and recognition assessment.

British Columbia’s post-secondary and school district systems share a common credential, the British Columbia Adult Graduation Diploma. This enables students to take courses from both systems and apply them toward the same credential.

### ***Corrections Education***

All provincial correctional centres are partnered with school districts to offer adult graduation programs as well as GED preparation and onsite GED testing services to enhance literacy levels among inmates.

In the coming months, British Columbia will be initiating a new program, “Literacy Now!” to encourage communities to develop and implement literacy enhancement programs.

## APPENDIX 1

### Part A. – Best Practices Criteria

Note: The criteria listed below appear to be the most common ones that emerge when literacy practitioners have consulted and discussed “good practice” for literacy programs. Some summary indicators have been added to give flavour of program practice.

- **Accessibility** – location easy to reach and to enter, safe, appropriate scheduling
- **Affordability** – tuition-free, financial assistance, book supply or depository
- **Accountability** – to all involved in program, results relate to program objectives
- **Adaptability** – flexible in changing needs and conditions, innovator
- **Appropriateness** – of instructional ratios, approaches and materials for learners
- **Awareness** – of learners’ needs, of referral and community services, promotion
- **Bridging arrangements** – knowledge of other programs and sensitive referrals
- **Community context** – different cultures situated within locale, community relations
- **Participation** – involve learners in other program activities and volunteers and staff
- **Partnerships** – collaboration with other community and business partners etc
- **Replicability** – awareness of any adaptations that may be required; start small
- **Resources** – physical, financial, instructional and human- adequate for need
- **Respect** – for individuals, for diverse cultures, language, race and religion etc
- **Staff Training** – appropriate training and experience for the job for paid staff and volunteers