

Disabilities

Despite advances in technology and learning tools, people with disabilities are still being left behind on their journey towards literacy.

Disabilities affect the lives of many Canadians. One in seven Canadians over the age of fifteen has a disability. This rate is higher among Aboriginal Canadians where one in five has a disability.

Disabilities present a major obstacle to literacy. Roughly 50% of Canadians with disabilities experience literacy barriers. 20% percent of adults with disabilities have less than a grade nine education, more than double the rate for non-disabled adults.

Disabilities and low literacy rates adversely affect employment. Low income and low employment rates are a reality for individuals with disabilities and low literacy.

The best way to understand the literacy needs of people with disabilities is to listen. Listening to individuals with disabilities, as well as organizations that represent them, can help everyone to understand the relationship between literacy and disabilities.

People with disabilities are disadvantaged when accessing education, employment, housing, and other community services. There is a serious lack of public awareness about adult literacy and disabilities and many stereotypes still exist that present barriers for disabled individuals. Many mainstream literacy programs do not have the resources to accommodate people with disabilities.

What can be done?

- Support people with disabilities to voice their ideas and needs for literacy and lifelong learning.
- Disability organizations need to communicate with literacy programs in order to facilitate the necessary changes to accommodate disabled individuals.
- Develop training for staff and volunteers to learn about issues relating to literacy and disabilities and to develop strategies to reduce barriers.
- Community disability programs can incorporate clear language strategies and literacy related activities into their services.
- Adult literacy programs must equip themselves to work effectively with disabled adults, just as family literacy programs should be equipped to work with the families of disabled individuals.
- Create funding and policies that include literacy and disability programs at the federal and provincial levels.
- Work to break through any lingering stereotypes in all levels of society and foster the confidence of those affected by disabilities.