

## Foreward

This report represents a snapshot of literacy in Ontario and in England in a five-month time period from March to July 1999. During this period, the researcher interviewed practitioners in these two major regions. The purpose of the Ontario interviews was to prioritize the issues facing program coordinators and other frontline literacy practitioners. The purpose of the interviews conducted in England was to determine if the experiences of literacy practitioners in England would reveal strategies that could address the Ontario issues.

The results identify relevant strategies for practitioners in several areas and, in particular, small group program management. Literacy practitioners in England have found effective ways to use volunteers in small groups to allow instructors to assess individual progress.

The report also discusses how the experience of literacy organizers in England may assist Ontario programs both by suggesting future directions and by revealing those to avoid. Of note, their extensive experience with a comprehensive national literacy volunteer training system suggests an alternative approach to volunteer training in Ontario. While the training content may change, the system used in England permits delivery by local practitioners and is portable for the volunteers. Furthermore, it is well regarded, quality-controlled and effectively monitored. On the other hand, the report reveals great dissatisfaction with the training program for professional staff—an approach to avoid.

Issues around accreditation that were problematic for literacy practitioners and for learners are explored. For seven years, from 1992-1999, programs in England struggled to keep a focus on the learner while implementing a system which placed a premium on learners achieving a qualification. This report highlights the impact of the funding formula on services, the advantage of receiving direct funding from provincial or federal governments and the reason why a broad funding base is important to community-based organizations. To address retention of learners in Ontario programs, two studies are cited that point to some positive strategies.

This report also describes events in the broader community that created a positive climate for literacy programs in England. These events include a popular television soap opera with a literacy theme and accompanying literacy materials, a National Year of Reading with private sector involvement, and a Birmingham community partnership rewarded for their vision with funding to provide city-wide literacy services to people of all ages for a seven-year period.

A recent review of online resources in England showed that most of the National Strategy recommended in the Moser Report was implemented by 2004. The measures include a national curriculum, a national media campaign and mandatory university qualifications for adult literacy teachers. In order to provide learning opportunities for more marginalized groups, there is a commitment to increased access to mainstream funding for voluntary and community sector basic skills programming.