








Literacy and Poverty

Canada's low literacy rate is a symptom of deep and widespread social inequality created, in large part, by poverty.

-  **Low literacy, poverty and exclusion are all part of the same problem.**
People from poor families as well as the long-term unemployed, seniors, native people, prisoners, people with disabilities, and racial and cultural minorities all have lower rates of literacy and higher rates of poverty. They have fewer choices in jobs, education, housing and other things we need to have full lives. Poverty and low literacy form a cycle that is difficult to break.
-  **Children from poor and disadvantaged families are at risk of low literacy.**
According to a 2003 Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada by Campaign 2000, even in the year 2001, almost one in six children in Canada still lived in poverty. These children are often not well served by the school system where they are likely to be labeled and placed in classes where less is expected of them and less may be offered. Their parents may not have the information, confidence, or skills to challenge the school system for help. Many poor children either drop out of high school or graduate without being fully literate.
-  **People with literacy problems have only 2/3 the income of other adults.**
Inequalities in literacy contribute to inequalities in income, occupational status and access to certain labour markets. Individuals with level 1 (the lowest) literacy skills make \$28,000 less than those with level 4/5 (the highest) literacy level. People with lower literacy are twice as likely to be unemployed as other adults. They are also many times more likely to receive social assistance. If they do have jobs, these jobs are likely to be the lowest-paid, most insecure and least attractive. The better paying, secure jobs that used to exist for undereducated people are rapidly disappearing.
-  **Many barriers keep adults with low incomes out of literacy and job training programs.** Only a small fraction (estimated at 5 - 10%) of eligible adults has ever enrolled in a literacy or upgrading program and among those who do enroll, drop out rates are high. The main barriers cited are lack of support for child care, transportation, and attendant care for disabled persons, long working hours, family needs, poor health, discouragement and lack of confidence - not to mention programs that just don't fit their needs. Also poorer adults often don't have the literacy skills they need to get into job training programs.

Suggested *Literacy and Poverty* Resources

- ✓ **Canadian Council for Social Development (CCSD)** produces research and publications on many social issues including poverty. In 2001, they released a position paper entitled, *Defining and Re-defining Poverty: a CCSD perspective*. Contact CCSD at tel: 613-236-8977, email: council@ccsd.ca or online at www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2001/povertyp.htm
- ✓ **Family Service Association in Toronto** prepares the annual National Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada and was involved in the Campaign 2000 to end child poverty. They aim to increase public awareness of the levels and consequences of child/family poverty by publishing research on the indicators of child poverty and developing public education resources. Visit them online at www.campaign2000.ca/rc
-  **National Anti-Poverty Organization (NAPO)** researched and prepared *Literacy and Poverty: A View from the Inside*. NAPO has affiliates in many areas across the country. Contact them to find out about your local contacts as well as current national initiatives at tel: 789-0096 or 1-800-810-1076 or find out more online at www.napo-onap.ca
-  **Overcoming Poverty: promoting literacy in children from low-income families** by Julia O'Sullivan and Mark L. Howe. 1999
-  **The Value of Words: literacy and economic security in Canada** by Vivian Shalla and Grant Shellenberg. 1998
- ✓ **Statistics Canada** monitors and researches a number of different indicators of poverty, education, literacy, income, and other social indicators. There are reports such as *The Value of Words: Literacy and Economic Security in Canada (1998)* and *Literacy Skills of Canadian Youth (1997)* and many others. For these and more check the website at www.statcan.ca

 - indicates an item that is in Literacy BC's collection. Visit the collection on-line at <http://www2.literacy.bc.ca/catalogue/>

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