



## PUBLIC REPORT

“Literacy and Basic English Program”

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Prepared by Calgary Immigrant Educational Society

The *Literacy and Basic English program*, which started as a pilot project in 2005, addresses the identified need for adult English literacy instruction in Forest Lawn and surrounding communities. It is designed to enhance the socio-economic well being of adult immigrants who are marginalized and close to the poverty level because of their extremely limited language skills. Most of these immigrants, both men and women, fall under low-income or working poor category. Our target group consists of adult immigrants, both men and women, who are non-literate in English language, or had CLB Literacy Assessment done at ILVARC and received pre-benchmark scores on their tests. Some of them had no prior schooling experience before joining this program while others had just a few years of education in their home countries. Some of them were non-literate in their first languages, too. Even those who possessed a limited knowledge of their own alphabet struggled to recognize and understand English alphabet. Consequently, these adult learners required extra instruction that concentrates on recognizing and understanding the formation of the English alphabet.

Many adults who come from remote villages and small towns in underdeveloped countries like Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Pakistan, India and other Middle Eastern countries usually experience substantial frustration and setbacks because they did not have any formal education or basic language education in their native languages. The objectives of *Literacy and Basic English* program are to:

- ♦ address the identified need for adult English literacy instruction in the Forest Lawn and its surrounding communities;
- ♦ provide financially - barriered adults with the essential foundation of English at no cost;
- ♦ enhance self-esteem and confidence of clients and their families as they acquire pre-basic language skills;
- ♦ increase the interest and potential for further ESL education; and
- ♦ increase community awareness and understanding through newly acquired relationships with English-speaking Calgarians.

There were a total of 10 intakes for all afternoon and evening classes. 100 students registered for the program and eighty-five of them completed 100 hours of classroom instruction. All classes were held Monday through Thursday for 2.5 hours each day. Colombians, Vietnamese and Sudanese were three biggest groups. Fifteen students did not complete the course. Ten dropped out of the class because of jobs; three because of relocation and two for pregnancy. Some of the students would have passed had they completed the class. These adult learners had far more responsibilities, which unfortunately occasionally interfered with their studies. When the

students had doctor appointments, they learned to inform the instructors and gave proper notice. Sometimes when their children were sick, female students couldn't come to school because of it. Nevertheless, attendance was reasonably high. Most of them came early and reviewed their work.

We implemented a combination of directional, responsive, manipulative and communicative teaching approaches to this program to help the students establish foundation and skills needed to learn the English language. Therefore, the curriculum was first created in 2005 based on existing Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners handbook created by Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks. It includes evaluation components and activities that teach reading readiness, speaking, listening as well as other basic literacy skills. Some of the topics covered were: upper-and lower-case letters, phonics, numbers to 100, familiar objects in the classroom, days, months, years, family, common community signs and symbols, basic colors/shapes, commonly used verbs, use of who, what, when, and where, use of subject pronouns, etc.

Instructors did an excellent job following the curriculum as well as making necessary adjustments according students' needs and levels in each session. The introduction of new words in limited numbers with plenty of opportunities to interact with them provided adult learners with a solid understanding of meaning and concepts. Also, they created encouraging, safe and positive learning environments so that the students felt comfortable answering questions without being afraid of making mistakes. A hands-on learning technique also allowed the students to practice what they learned with the support of visual aids such as flashcards as well as printed handouts, worksheets and activities. We also purchased quite a few interactive games such as Bananagrams which is a functional and practical game for reviewing vocabulary. There are 144 letter tiles inside the zippered banana pouch and the students can create their own words individually or in pairs. They found it useful while reviewing vocabulary they learned before. They were thrilled and excited when they spelled certain words correctly. We also bought alphabet and sound puzzles to review letters and sounds. WORDO is a variation of the ever-popular BINGO game. Each set contains 12 two-sided activity boards which allow the students to create their own BINGO grids. The students loved it and didn't even realize that they were practicing reading and writing words.

Participant was able to demonstrate significant improvement daily. The participants who had consistent attendance and demonstrated individual efforts succeeded in the following areas:

- ♦ making short conversations in English e.g. greetings, giving personal information, etc.;
- ♦ recognizing the English language alphabet, common community signs and symbols;
- ♦ write short sentences;
- ♦ recognizing simple words such as books and car;
- ♦ understanding the usages of subject pronouns and question words (who, what, when, where) and the ability to use them correctly;
- ♦ recognizing basic items in the English language, such as food, clothing, transportation, body parts, colours, numerals, etc;
- ♦ recognizing and being able to express the days of the week, as well as the months and years;

- ♦ enrolling in further ESL programs such as Drop-In ESL or LINC; and
- ♦ obtaining foundations and basic essentials for further English language training.

Their motivation and regular attendance were two biggest reasons of their improvement. The instructors commented that everyone was eager to learn and gave 100% class participation. Bi-weekly quizzes, midterm and final tests indicated that most of the students successfully learned the lessons taught. An older Sudanese lady now can print her name, address, answer personal questions orally, and recognize basic words in print. It was an enormous step for her. She was very happy coming to class everyday. Her instructor, the manager and her classmates were extremely proud of her. Furthermore, every student was eager to know which class he/she would go after the completion of the program. 75% of the participants passed and moved onto higher program such as *LINC*.

Also, due to language and education barriers, these students lacked self-esteem or confident. The program also focuses on improving their self-esteem and confidence when speaking the English language. The students had better confidence as they language skills grew gradually. They felt good about themselves when they could exchange simple greetings with the manager, other staff at CIES or the instructors on a daily basis after just a few weeks of the lessons. Moreover, one of the counselors at ILVARC commented that it is extremely useful and the clients she referred to us were extremely satisfied with their learning.

All in all, this program addresses the pre-basic ESL literacy needs of both women and men in the Forest Lawn and surrounding areas. Most of the participants encountered multiple barriers, with language skills being the biggest obstacle in improving their life qualities in Canada. This program presents an opportunity for them to be educated and a starting point for their learning journey. Besides, given the fact that it has been considerably a great success since the inception of this program, and a huge demand for ESL literacy classes, we plan to offer a total of fifteen classes, at no cost, in the upcoming year to serve the non-literate residents residing in Forest Lawn and surrounding communities. We will also continue to seek into the possibilities of enrolling future participants to our *LINC* level 1 or pre-basic level of the *Drop-In ESL* program at our Society or other institutions. Therefore, the participants could continue their journey of English language education, which no doubt will assist them integrating into Canadian society and allow them to contribute to the communities.