

# Building Bridges

**For Adults  
with a  
Developmental  
Disability**



**Prepared for:**

**Tri-County Literacy Network**

**Final Report**

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# Building Bridges for Adults with a Developmental Disability

(Final Report)

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## **Summary**

This pilot project brought together representatives from both literacy and developmental disabilities fields to develop a common understanding of how best to join forces to improve literacy services for people with developmental disabilities.

Phase one was used to exchange information about positive developments in each other's fields. In addition, barriers, gaps and overlaps between the two service sectors were identified.

In phase two, the focus was upon developing a shared base of knowledge regarding the preparation and supports needed to promote successful participation by people with developmental disabilities in literacy programs. To that end, a workshop based on the Literacy Preparation Project for Adults with Developmental Disabilities was offered to front-line workers.

During the final stage of the project, participants explored ways of building mutually beneficial partnerships to promote effective and efficient services to the people served by both groups while enhancing literacy.

Since adults with developmental disabilities often receive support from a multitude of agencies and people, it is crucial that everyone knows what everyone else is doing and that they work with and not against one another.

It is strongly recommended that a holistic approach and shared communication be used to ensure consistency and responsibility when supporting individuals to participate in the life of their respective communities.

The goal of promoting literacy learning for people with developmental disabilities cannot occur in isolation. The project points to the need for ongoing involvement, input, and commitment from a variety of practitioners, if this goal is to be realized.

## Key Project Information

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## Introduction

Research has made it abundantly clear that for adults with developmental disabilities, lack of literacy has a direct impact upon quality of life. Areas most directly affected include personal health, financial and employment opportunities, as well as self-esteem and peer acceptance.

Practitioners from the literacy field have identified a need to improve the appropriateness of referrals coming from agencies serving people with developmental disabilities. In turn, many service providers for people with developmental disabilities have challenged literacy programs to be as inclusive and accessible as possible. Dr. Ken Beck and Ms. Patricia Hatt (1998) have pointed out in their research that many workers feel inadequately prepared to teach basic literacy skills when working with this population.

In response to this need, a proposal was submitted by the Executive Director of the Tri-County Literacy Network and approved for implementation by the National Literacy Secretariat.

The intent of the project was two-fold. The first was to collect data from which both administrators and front line staff could make informed decisions, while the second was to plant the “seed idea” that people from both sectors needed to become more directly involved with the issues common to both fields if the changes required to serve adults with developmental disabilities were to be met.

Now that the project is completed, it is very evident that no one person can be charged with the daunting task of bringing about all the changes needed. Rather it is the responsibility of the people in the region who are most directly involved, who must in their own way “buy in” to literacy being a priority, if positive change is to actually occur.

The “Next Steps” document provides examples for practitioners in both fields of what to do to begin the process of bringing about change, by suggesting “small, workable, first steps” that have been successfully implemented elsewhere. It is hoped that these ‘seed ideas’ for promoting literacy will be used to build bridges to a more accessible and inclusive life in the community for adults with developmental disabilities.

## How this Report is Organized

This report is organized into several sections, each giving a different perspective on the “Building Bridges for Adults with a Developmental Disability Project”.

- u Part One:** focuses on the objectives of the project - the successes, challenges, results and recommendations.
  
- u Part Two:** focuses on the process, the steps recommended for successful implementation of the model, perceived benefits and pitfalls to be avoided.
  
- u Part Three:** provides follow-up to project participants by means of a document entitled “Next Steps” that contains both solutions generated by the project, as well as some garnered from existing research.
  
- u The Appendices:** include samples of the supporting documents, forms, and resources used.



## Summary of Objectives

The overall goal of the project was to enhance communication between the developmental disabilities field and the literacy field in order to provide more effective literacy services to people with developmental disabilities. To that end, the following seven objectives were developed:

- Objective One - To establish a focus group(s) in order to promote ongoing and open dialogue between the two service sectors.
- Objective Two - To promote positive partnerships between the developmental services field and the literacy field.
- Objective Three - To identify areas where resources can be shared and to develop a plan of action for doing so.
- Objective Four - To identify barriers to participation for people with developmental disabilities and to develop an action plan to address these issues.
- Objective Five - To begin to address concerns regarding the ability of literacy practitioners to work with this population.
- Objective Six - To develop a model, the method and results of which would be made available to all networks in the province.
- Objective Seven - To coordinate and provide a workshop on “Literacy Preparation for Adults with Developmental Disabilities” in order to improve and develop a common understanding of literacy preparation skills resulting in more appropriate referrals.

### Objective One

*‘To establish a focus group(s) in order to promote ongoing and open dialogue between the two service sectors.’*

One of the first tasks of the project coordinator was to become familiar with the stakeholders and some of the key issues that were of concern to practitioners in the tri-county region (Windsor-Essex, Chatham-Kent, and Sarnia-Lambton). Once an individualized survey (Appendix A) of a number of the stakeholders was completed, the data collected was next used to facilitate the two focus groups.

In order to preserve confidentiality and to ensure that participants felt free to speak openly and candidly, separate focus group meetings were held with the stakeholders in the tri-county region representing both literacy and community organizations currently supporting adults with developmental disabilities. Appendix B contains a copy of visual materials used to stimulate initial discussion and explore each group’s perceptions of the other sector. The results of these discussions and the concerns raised are also summarized in the same document.

Although the actual number of people participating was low (seven from developmental services and four from literacy), there appeared to be good interaction within each focus group. However, having each group meet separately did not generate much data that could be acted upon.

A second round of information gathering that brought the participants from both service sectors together proved to be more fruitful. The purpose of this second informational exchange was to clarify the issues previously identified and to promote dialogue between the two groups by having them develop some workable solutions together. Unfortunately, the group was not able to fully explore all issues and possible solutions in the time allotted. Thus, the concept of the "Next Steps" paper was developed to provide follow-up and to suggest possible additional solutions. The "Next Steps" paper is contained in Part Three of this report.

While the focus groups provided valuable information, and did promote dialogue, hindsight suggests that greater participation may have been achieved if participants had not had to travel. Holding focus groups in each county might also have encouraged more dialogue locally. In addition, given the time limitations of the participants involved, it might also have been a better strategy had the groups been brought together at the beginning of the project rather than at the end.

## **Objective Two**

*"To promote positive partnerships between the developmental services field and the literacy field."*

The promotion of partnerships was an ongoing consideration if the project was to carry on under its own momentum. Many informal connections were made both during the focus groups and the training session. Other more formal connections, such as the one made with the faculty of the Developmental Services Worker (DSW) program at the college level, occurred later.

The workshop and training session that occurred during this project did help to foster communication by bringing the two service sectors together. As suggested previously, most of these relationships were informal. In order to establish more permanent ongoing relationships, it is recommended that interested groups review the literature. The factors that contribute to success are specifically outlined in the 1998 Ontario Ministry document entitled, "Best Practices for Adults with Developmental Disabilities", as well as the 1995 document entitled "Speaking of Equality: Making Literacy Programs Accessible to People with an Intellectual Disability" published by the Roeher Institute.

The overall impact of the sessions held was difficult to quantify, however most participants expressed an interest in future regional workshops, training, and more opportunities for networking and ongoing dialogue.

Some examples of partnerships that have been initiated and are continuing to develop include the following:

- Exploring the use of common volunteers and volunteer training.
- Initiation of a literacy component in the Developmental Services Worker program at St. Clair College.
- Where appropriate, exchange of training and educational opportunities between practitioners of literacy and advocates for the developmentally disabled.
- A relationship with the St. Clair Staff Training and Development Committee.
- Better use by both sectors of existing electronic technology (email and current websites).

### Objective Three

*“To identify areas where resources can be shared and to develop a plan of action for doing so.”*

During the focus group sessions, workshops, and interviews there were two tenets that had to be taken into account as part of any recommended solution or new directions to follow. These two tenets were:

1. The reality of limited funding and resources, i.e. no new money.
2. The existing high expectations and demands being placed on both staff and volunteers, i.e. competing priorities.

As a result, when solutions and plans were discussed, the notion of sharing resources as well as more effective use of currently available resources was a predominant theme.

In order to develop a plan of action, issues that were regionally relevant to this topic were discussed. It was noted from discussion that while resource sharing was on the minds of most front-line staff, it was a goal only sporadically attained. With the numerous services available throughout the region and the continuous transition and turnover of staff, establishing a consistent and dependable sharing of resources is at best laborious.

That being the case, the “Next Steps” document was produced in an attempt to facilitate taking those critical first steps towards solutions for common issues faced by programs in the tri-county region. It was hoped that by doing so, agencies and programs would be able to assist one another in ensuring that potential learners did not “fall through the cracks”.

It was noted that while some adults with developmental disabilities were in need of pre-literacy skills prior to entering a formal literacy program, others only required ongoing support to maintain previously acquired literacy skills. Formal literacy programs may not be the appropriate venue for skill maintenance. Regardless of who delivers the services required any solution must be flexible, innovative, financially responsible, and inclusive. Some of the suggested solutions include the following:

- The use of current community volunteer agencies and leaders to develop reading circle groups
- Recruiting volunteer tutors using students from high school, college, and other work study programs
- Providing literacy tutor training to community support volunteers

Additional suggestions are included in the “Next Steps - Solutions for Successful Shared Ownership” document found in Part Three of this report.

Based on discussion, it appears that technology and electronic media are underutilized sources of resource information. The wealth of knowledge currently available is both overwhelmingly rich and diverse. Existing discussion groups available through the AlphaPlus and the National Adult Literacy Database web sites cover various topics of interest and represent another avenue to explore when seeking solutions or a new perspective. These sites are upgraded regularly and are becoming increasingly “user-friendly”.

*- Some Internet Resources -*

*Some examples are [www.alphaplus.ca](http://www.alphaplus.ca), [www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca), [snow.utoronto.ca](http://snow.utoronto.ca), and <http://novel.nifl.gov>. As well, the use of a search engine (i.e. Yahoo, Lycos, Northern Lights, etc.) often generates unexpected new connections.*

See also Appendix F of this report for a recommended list of books and reference materials to read, many of which are available through the Tri-County Literacy Network. In addition, Appendix F lists those books and resources available through AlphaPlus.

### **Objective Four**

*“To identify barriers to participation for people with developmental disabilities and to develop an action plan to address these issues.”*

*“Literacy reduces the vulnerability for a person with developmental disabilities in his/ her community”*

*L.R., focus group participant*

The barriers to participation for people with developmental disabilities seemed to fit into two distinct categories that could be classified as local/ regional in nature or more universally prevalent. Examples of local barriers were such problems as the availability of transportation and day care, lack of program selection at appropriate times, and availability of volunteers who were able to deal with clients with developmental disabilities. As such, the solutions to these issues were usually dealt with on a local basis relevant to the specific situation.

An example of a more universally prevalent barrier is the eligibility criterion used to determine access to formal literacy programs. Here the solution is not so readily determined. The issue appears to be that the intended purpose of literacy programs is viewed differently by literacy practitioners and developmental support workers.

For the latter group, a literacy program may be both viewed and used as an opportunity for social interaction. In contrast, literacy practitioners would regard this particular use as being in direct conflict with the ministry’s mandate that literacy programs only be used to develop measurable outcomes and goals directly related to reading, writing or mathematics. As a result, developmental support workers may perceive some literacy program eligibility criteria as being exclusionary rather than inclusive in nature.

Arriving at a viable solution is further complicated by the fact that some adult learners have had prior negative school experiences. In an attempt to alleviate anxiety and generalization to new learning, many programs and agencies have been using smaller learning groups, more inclusive self-directed learning, one-on-one teaching, and age relevant material. It was also noted that some adult learners with developmental disabilities felt a sense of pride and accomplishment when programs were offered in a college setting.

Those adults with developmental disabilities who are able to participate in mainstream literacy programs should do so preferably in a non-segregated program.

The development of a specific action plan to address these concerns was proposed; however, available time and resources limited what could be accomplished. Instead, the “Next Steps” document is again used as a means to follow up with suggestions for further action.

## **Objective Five**

*“To begin to address concerns regarding the ability of literacy practitioners to work with this population.”*

Working to meet the literacy needs of adults with developmental disabilities is complicated by the need to concurrently address emotional, behavioral, and physical issues whenever these are present. Although there are a number of literacy professionals who are comfortable with, and have the training to deal with adults with developmental disabilities, there are still a vast number who do not.

The potential exists for a mutually beneficial exchange of information and training between those who have the training and expertise in supporting people with developmental disabilities, and those whose expertise is delivering literacy training. For example, a workshop on effectively dealing with behavioral issues would be of benefit to literacy workers, as much as a workshop on teaching reading would be of benefit to developmental support workers. As a result, workshop participants offered to share information regarding upcoming training opportunities that would be of mutual interest.

In addition, one new initiative that will begin in the fall of 2000 is the inclusion of a literacy component within the framework of the Developmental Services Worker program at St. Clair College. Students graduating from this program directly support learners with developmental disabilities. Having this information when they begin their careers should result in increased awareness of the importance of literacy, in promoting both individual empowerment and community inclusion.

Furthermore, the feasibility of offering a general “orientation to literacy training” course through the Continuing Education department at St. Clair College is being investigated. Discussions have already been initiated, and will be further explored once the DSW component is implemented and evaluated.

In conclusion, it was suggested that the concern that literacy volunteers are not prepared to work with adults who have a developmental disability could be easily addressed by simply providing literacy tutor training to volunteers within the support agency. The same volunteer could then be used by both sectors. This “volunteer sharing” idea was met with a positive response.

## **Objective Six**

*“To develop a model, the method and results of which will be made available to all networks in the province.”*

This project was designed from its onset to be a model for other regions to use when addressing the issues and concerns of practitioners working with the literacy needs of persons with developmental disabilities. Although the issues and solutions may differ from region to region, the process itself is easily replicated and transferable.

Part two of this report entitled “A Model to Identify Issues, Develop Strategies, and Promote Participation” details the steps involved in recreating the process. In summary, the steps include:

1. Issue Discovery
2. Focus Group Facilitation
3. Workshop
4. Issue Clarification
5. Results and Recommendations

## Objective Seven

*“To co-ordinate and provide a workshop on ‘Literacy Preparation for Adults with Developmental Disabilities’ in order to improve and develop a common understanding of literacy preparation skills resulting in more appropriate referrals.”*

*- Representative comments from the workshop -*

*“Speakers were excellent, realistic, and very informative”*

*“group interaction was fun...”*

*“I had absolutely no previous information on literacy and found this to be an excellent experience”*

*“Anxious to attend other relevant workshops as they become available”*

Dr. Ken Beck and Ms. Patricia Hatt developed the Literacy Preparation Project for Adults with Developmental Disabilities in 1998. Their participation in the workshop was secured and planning commenced. A venue was selected and arrangements made to offer the workshop on February 23, 2000.

Participants were obtained through mailing lists from the Tri-County Literacy Network and the St. Clair Staff Training Advisory Committee. They comprised individuals from literacy programs (to facilitate the delivery of more accessible and inclusive programs), agencies for community living (as these were a primary literacy referral source), and district school boards (these were central to the transition from school to adult options). It was anticipated that there would be at least 40 respondents. Actual enrolment far exceeded expectations and was limited to 52 participants after a waiting list was created.

*- Participation -*

40% of the participants were from the literacy field and 60% of the participants were from agencies serving people with developmental disabilities.

When asked to rank the most important functions of the workshop, the participants were given a choice between education and professional development, networking and contact with others in the region, and dialogue between the literacy field and agencies. Participants ranked all three as being of equal importance. Both the actual questionnaire, as well as a summary of evaluation results is included in Appendix C.

The workshop provided an excellent opportunity for informal confirmation of the findings of the focus groups. As well, there was time on the agenda to present initial findings of the project from the interviews and focus groups to the participants.

## **Impact/ Highlights**

*“Very productive, progressive partnerships are being built with associations for Community Living” ... “I left yesterday's meeting with a great feeling. To have sat around the table with associations for community living, college representatives for the DSW program, our ministry field consultant and literacy instructors and have an open sharing of ideas on how to best enhance the literacy skills of this population was fantastic!”*

*K.H., participant and stakeholder*

It is important to reiterate the stated goal of the project, “to enhance communication between the developmental disabilities field and the literacy field resulting in more effective literacy services for people with developmental disabilities”. The project had the potential to spark a number of programs and agencies into action and to promote awareness of issues and challenges faced when planning and delivering services to adults with developmental disabilities. If each agency were to choose just one challenge (such as those outlined in the “Next Steps” document) and implement a “plan of action” for change, then the project could be considered a success.

Realistically, the impact of the project has been to raise awareness and foster dialogue between the two service sectors. A valuable partnership and dialogue has been established with the St. Clair Staff Training and Development Committee, which will provide opportunities for future information and resource sharing within the region.

In addition, discussions have resulted in an agreement to include two (2) hours of orientation to literacy issues within the “Life Skills” course for the Developmental Services Worker (DSW) at St. Clair College in Chatham, Ontario. This is an opportunity for those students to gain valuable knowledge and apply it in their work with developmentally disabled people in the future.

## **Recommendations and Overview**

### **Recommendations**

1. To explore with Colleges at the Provincial level, the possibility of incorporating a literacy component within the core competencies of the Developmental Services Worker, and Social Service Worker programs. This would ensure that graduates of these programs enter the work force with the knowledge and skills to support clients with both pre-literacy and literacy skills.
2. That agencies supporting people with developmental disabilities and literacy programs work together to share volunteers, provide cross-training and follow up support.
3. That agencies supporting people with developmental disabilities and literacy programs share relevant common training opportunities with one another.
4. That agencies share relevant printed resources.
5. That an annual event of shared interest to both sectors be planned and carried out.
6. That local Literacy Service Planning (LSP) groups look at some of the ongoing questions that have been posed by the project, and continue to consult with stakeholders in an effort to examine the suitability of current programs, identify gaps, needs and recommend improvements.

## **Overview**

When looking back over the last nine months, it is hoped that there has been a regional increase in awareness of the issues, and a better appreciation for and sensitivity to the issues for adults with developmental disabilities.

Literacy services for adults with developmental disabilities appear to have been enhanced by the project. It is anticipated that there will be more appropriate referrals and a better understanding of pre-literacy skills. As a result of some of the initiatives taken, new practitioners will shortly receive training regarding literacy issues for adults with developmental disabilities. Furthermore, it is now felt that service providers will be better informed about the realities and needs of providing accessible, inclusive literacy programming. Agency and program delivery staff and volunteers have indicated the need for continuing dialogue between the two service sectors.



## **Phase One - Issue Discovery**

### **What was the process?**

The first task of the project coordinator was to become familiar with the stakeholders and aware of the key issues that were of concern to the tri-county region. This was accomplished through the use of personal interview, discussion, and mail-in surveys. Senior and front line staff from rural and urban settings involved in both literacy and developmental services completed the surveys. Please refer to Appendix A for the initial survey.

The information collected was then summarized into a document for use by participants during the focus group.

### **Implementation Considerations**

- Use of appropriate language. Since the project coordinator was working with both groups, it was necessary to become aware of the appropriate language/terminology used in literacy and developmental services. As an example, it was important to become familiar with non-labelling language i.e. remembering to describe people as persons first and not their disability.
- Establishing groundwork for the project. The Tri-County Literacy Network is a relatively new agency in the region, and so it was necessary to provide information to the organizations serving people with a developmental disability about the role of the Network and the goals and objectives of the project.
- Getting commitment to participate in focus groups. By meeting with potential participants individually at their convenience, it was hoped that there would be a greater commitment to participate in the focus groups.

### **How was this evaluated?**

The project was in its early stages at this point in time. At this stage, information was being gathered and there was no true basis for evaluation or comparison. Success was loosely judged on the basis of having evidence to indicate that information had been gathered from as wide a cross section of agencies as possible representing the two sectors.

### **What was learned from this phase of the project?**

From initial interviews and surveys some common concerns began to emerge. The literacy field expressed concern regarding their ability to adequately serve people with developmental disabilities while meeting the expectations of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Practitioners from the developmental services field expressed general concerns about access to mainstream literacy programs. These were but a few of the initial concerns and issues that were later fleshed out during the focus groups.

It was also learned that while there was a relatively high level of awareness and sensitivity to the issues and concerns of adults with developmental disabilities, many of the programs and agencies still felt that more could be done. At this point, the project was ready to move on to the next phase of conducting focus group sessions to clarify the issues raised.

## Phase Two - Focus Groups

### What was the process?

A focus group is simply a gathering of people sharing similar concerns who are brought together for a specific purpose, in this case to clarify the issues raised during the initial data gathering. In order to maintain the comfort of the participants to speak openly, the first round of focus group discussions were conducted separately. Included in the Appendix B, is a copy of the document that was produced to facilitate the focus group discussions. It asked some preliminary questions about each group and the perception they had of one another.

### Implementation Considerations

Some of the considerations worth noting were as follows:

- Ensuring that participants felt safe to express their concerns openly. By conducting a separate focus group for each sector, this was achieved. However, the trade-off was not having as much time to generate ideas and explore solutions when the two groups later met as one combined group.
- Encouraging participation from a broad representation across the region. Participation by support workers and literacy practitioners was much lower than expected. This suggests that personal contact with potential participants is critical as is clearly communicating the intent, importance, and benefits to be gained from participation in the project.
- Asking the right questions to get as broad a response as possible. Given the limited number of focus groups that were conducted, it was important to get to the heart of the matter quickly and efficiently without sacrificing participation and feedback.
- Participants' ability and/or willingness to commit to several meetings was very limited. This suggests it would have been better to bring the two groups together sooner.
- Distinguishing between feedback from administrative staff and the front line workers. The intent here was to reinforce the unique perspective of each group's concerns and issues.

### How was this evaluated?

Participation in the focus groups was much less than expected. A number of possible reasons were explored, however, these are assumptions and no firm conclusions should be drawn. Possible explanations might include the reasons listed below:

- Time of year (close to the Christmas Holidays)
- Travel to Chatham for those coming from Essex and Lambton. (time and expense)
- Need to prioritize and be selective regarding participation in such activities
- Information may not have been forwarded to appropriate person once it arrived at the agency
- The schedule was just too busy to give up the time
- Some may have felt that they had already given their opinion in the informal survey

- Some may have felt that the issues were already adequately addressed
- There was not an immediate direct impact for their program

In order to address these concerns, a few ideas were put forward:

- The need to develop a detailed marketing strategy to ensure participants understand the potential benefits of the project
- Allowing sufficient lead time between invitation and actually offering focus group
- Ensuring that invitees receive a follow up call
- Providing mileage allowance for those travelling any distance
- Holding several focus groups locally rather than one or two regionally
- Bringing the support workers and literacy workers together from the beginning in order to promote partnerships and reduce the need for additional meetings

### **What was learned from this phase of the project?**

The literacy field expressed concern in the following areas

- Their ability to adequately serve people with developmental disabilities
- Their ability to recruit and maintain volunteers who will work with people on an individual basis
- Their level of comfort in dealing with this population
- The need to develop an eligibility criterion that is inclusive
- Ensuring that progress is fairly assessed and that programs go beyond maintenance of life skills
- That literacy programming be given a higher priority by direct care staff

The concerns of practitioners from the developmental services field were as follows:

- Client's rights and confidentiality
- Ensuring access to mainstream literacy programs
- Concern that eligibility criteria would effectively exclude people with developmental disabilities

- With so many access points, it is difficult to decide which to use first
- The wide spread use of computers and technology is making access to many services increasingly difficult for people with developmental disabilities e.g. ATMs

## **Phase Three - Educational Workshop**

### **What was the process?**

Dr. Ken Beck and Ms. Patricia Hatt were approached and arrangements made to offer a workshop on “Literacy Preparation Project for Adults with Developmental Disabilities.” This workshop provided practitioners with general information regarding literacy for adults with a developmental disability, strategies and resources to move adults through the “Early Literacy Stages”, and outlined ways to identify and overcome barriers in an effort to access literacy programs. The workshop also gave practical instruction on utilizing learning outcomes and developing demonstrations for level one learners.

### **Implementation Considerations**

- Ensuring that a comprehensive list of participants by sector is generated. Such a list is necessary if seating is to be arranged to ensure that participants from each sector are represented in each small working group.
- Choosing a venue having sufficient space to support working with large groups. The response was much larger than expected; as a result, some participants had to be turned away.
- Providing opportunities for networking. This was done by using assigned seating arrangements, and by ensuring there was at least one participant at each table whose role it would be to encourage discussion.

### **How was this evaluated?**

When asked to rank the most important functions of the workshop, the participants were given a choice between education and professional development, networking and contact with others in the region, and dialogue between the literacy field and agencies. Participants ranked all three as being of equal importance. Both the actual questionnaire, as well as a summary of evaluation results, are included in Appendix C.

### **What was learned from this phase of the project?**

The workshop provided the basis for a common understanding of literacy programs, the way that they operate, and the special challenges presented by people with developmental disabilities. It also provided opportunities to discuss ways that agencies could complement one another. There was discussion regarding how staff in support agencies could reinforce the work of the literacy program. Workshop leaders reviewed when it was appropriate for people to be referred to a literacy program and what support agencies can do to prepare an individual to participate in a literacy program. The need to work together in supporting the “whole person” was emphasized. The workshop combined with initial focus groups provided the groundwork needed to facilitate the final “Issue Clarification and Solutions” focus group.

Offering the workshop in partnership with the St. Clair Staff Training Advisory Committee was an excellent way to promote the concept of the two sectors working together. It lent credibility to the workshop and influenced the high rate of registration from agencies that support people in a multitude of ways.

## Phase Four - Issue Clarification and Solution Generation

*“Inclusive literacy programs provide an opportunity for non-developmentally challenged learners to better understand individuals with developmental disabilities, and makes them more empathetic, understanding, and hopefully more caring about others”.*  
*J.I., workshop participant*

### What was the process?

In order to start to develop the partnerships outlined in the objectives another focus group was conducted. This time both sectors were invited to participate together. The purpose of this second informational exchange was to clarify the issues previously identified and to promote dialogue between the two groups by having them develop some workable solutions together. Unfortunately, the group was not able to fully explore all issues and possible solutions in the time allotted. Instead, the “Next Steps” paper was developed and distributed as a means of following up with suggestions for action.

During the joint focus group itself, the facilitator used brainstorming sessions in small break-out groups in order to identify issues and possible solutions. The small groups shared their feedback with the larger group, and the issues were recorded. As part of this process, it is important to ensure that there is a chance to validate the issues/solutions with the group before prioritizing them. Unfortunately, on this occasion this did not take place, which did cast some doubt on the accuracy of what the facilitator had recorded.

Moreover, the group should be involved in prioritizing the issues. Once solutions are prioritized, there is also a need to ensure that they would fit within the funding and human resource limitations identified by the participants. Had time permitted, it would have been beneficial to get concrete commitments from the participants regarding which solution(s) they would have been willing to implement and to determine a timeline for doing so. An action plan could then be utilized (see Appendix D) thereby building in a follow-up procedure. In our case, due to time limitations, the facilitator in consultation with the project manager prioritized the issues, however, this was noted in the evaluations as an area that could have been improved upon.

Since one of the priorities of the project was to bring about change, a follow-up survey (Appendix E) will be sent out to participants six months after the completion of the project to determine whether any of the issues and solutions suggested have in fact been acted upon.

### Implementation Considerations

The context and essential underlying tenet(s) must be established as this provides a framework for participants to work within. The underlying tenets can be timeframes, funding limitations, political climate, legislative regulations, or others. In this project, participants stated that, in general, they felt that they attended too many meetings, and participated on too many committees. As well, they spoke of funding limitations and restrictions within their programs/agencies. Thus, the solutions had to reflect these concerns.

If the project is to be considered a success, then the groundwork must be laid that will allow the project to carry on under its own momentum. The ongoing success of this objective is still to be determined. New partnerships and alliances have been created as a result of this project. Some have been informal and difficult to measure, for example, the amount of networking that occurred during the focus groups and workshop. Other more formal results, such as the inclusion of a literacy-training component within the Developmental Services Worker program at St. Clair College were more easily determined.

## **How was this evaluated?**

Participants at the end of the workshop completed an evaluation. Most rated the workshop satisfactory to excellent in terms of the facilitator, information received, activity, time allowed, discussions and organization. Overall comments indicated that there was insufficient time to address all areas. Concern was expressed that there should have been more input from the participants and validation of their priorities.

While participation levels were better than the individual focus group discussions they still did not meet expectations. The issues/solutions workshop was held after the highly successful educational workshop. This may have played a role in improving the participation level. A confidential survey of those who chose not to attend would have been useful to truly isolate and explore the attendance issue further.

## **What was learned from this phase of the project?**

The stated goal of the project was "to enhance communication between the developmental disabilities field and the literacy field resulting in more effective literacy services for people with developmental disabilities". The greatest potential impact of the project was to motivate a number of programs and agencies into action and to create an awareness of the issues and challenges which each sector faces when planning and delivering services to adults with developmental disabilities. If each agency would implement just one challenge (such as those outlined in the "Next Steps" document), the project could be considered a success. For those interested, a sample worksheet that will assist in the preparation of an action plan has been included in Appendix D. Plus, a summary of the key steps that assist a successful outcome appears in chart form at the end of this section.

To be more realistic, the impact of the project has been to raise awareness and to foster dialogue between the two service sectors. By conducting personal interviews, facilitating focus groups, and offering workshops, the level of awareness of literacy issues for adults with developmental disabilities has risen. Regionally, the need for ongoing dialogue between the two service sectors has been brought into clearer focus for many agencies.

## **Phase Five – Final Results and Recommendations**

There is much work left to be done if the overall goals are to be met. Individual people will need to take the initiative to keep the momentum going, in addition to which, there must also be shared ownership of the larger issues and concerns raised. Commitment by participants of the Local Planning and Coordination Groups, and their responsibility to include stakeholders in literacy service planning will ensure that the door remains open to dialogue.

Looking back over the last nine months, gains appear to have been made in regional awareness, as well as appreciation for, and sensitivity to, the issues faced by adults with developmental disabilities. We encourage you to adopt and adapt this type of model in your own region. The results are worth the effort.

## Chart Summary of Key Steps

Phase	Key Steps
1. Issue Discovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish the purpose and reason(s) for proceeding with a project of this nature.</li> <li>• Become aware of the key contacts within the region.</li> <li>• Make personal contact with program administrators, providing information about the project goals and objectives.</li> <li>• Utilize this opportunity to gather issues by sector.</li> <li>• Market the project and benefits of participation in focus groups.</li> <li>• Use a random polling/ informal sampling of the issues with some of the key staff/volunteers. Utilize this opportunity to gather issues by type of position held, i.e. administrator, support worker, literacy practitioner.</li> <li>• Evaluate effectiveness of informal sampling and personal meetings.</li> <li>• Prepare for the focus groups by developing questions and a format for focus groups</li> </ul>
2. Focus Group(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide the most effective method of bringing people together (regionally, locally, by sector, or combined).</li> <li>• Facilitate focus groups to further establish key issues.</li> <li>• Compile and summarize initial key findings.</li> <li>• Evaluate effectiveness of focus groups and make recommendations for further development.</li> </ul>
3. Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine possible co-sponsors of a workshop and meet with them to explore the possibility of partnership.</li> <li>• Arrange workshop/speakers on the topic of providing literacy training and support to adults with a developmental disability.</li> <li>• Arrange location for the workshop.</li> <li>• Market workshop to both literacy and developmental service agencies.</li> <li>• Offer a workshop for participants to come together to network and dialogue.</li> <li>• Evaluate effectiveness of workshop.</li> </ul>
4. Issue Clarification, Solutions, and Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate joint brainstorming session to clarify issues, develop solutions and promote partnerships.</li> <li>• Validate the issues before prioritizing.</li> <li>• Ensure participants prioritize the issues.</li> <li>• Summarize and present the issues and allow for solutions to be generated.</li> <li>• Decide on means to reach target audience to achieve most “buy-in” and commitment to the solutions by participants.</li> <li>• Provide a follow-up procedure to ensure that action is being taken and a timeline to monitor progress.</li> <li>• Evaluate effectiveness of Issue Clarification and Solution session.</li> <li>• Summarize findings and make final recommendations.</li> </ul>

## **Introduction**

The “Next Steps” document contains many suggestions to address some of the key issues that were identified through your participation in surveys, workshops, focus groups, and discussion sessions.

In suggesting starting points, it attempts to take into account the financial realities and funding limitations that we all work within, as well as the idea of trying to do more with less time and fewer resources.

What follows, is a summary of those issues and suggested solutions. We hope they are valuable and relevant to you, your agency, staff, and volunteers.



## Establishing and Maintaining Alliances

Issue	Regional Discussion	Best Practice Principles
1. Establishing Partnerships	<p>partner and establish a relationship with local banks, libraries, bus services, retail, and grocery shopping centres</p> <p>win/win strategic alliances with corporate partners can provide learners access to technology and interaction with modern workplace environments</p>	<p>Successful programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use literacy as a bridge to learner participation in the broader community</li> <li>have key community members brought in to demonstrate support</li> <li>have co-operation of local community agencies and businesses</li> </ul>
2. Alliances with Key Community Members	<p>alliances with YMCA, local reading clubs, library programs, or developing a new reading club within a sheltered environment</p> <p>partnerships would allow the learner a venue to participate in literacy work during the transition times (learner has progressed as far as he/ she can go, yet is not ready to abandon literacy learning)</p>	<p>Successful programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>have umbrella agencies that are able to work as facilitator/ clearing house for regional information with a number of service bodies</li> <li>have positive outcomes including enhanced training opportunities and avoidance of overlapping</li> </ul>
3. Pre-Literacy Training	<p>training could be made available to staff and volunteers, as well as persons well known to the learners</p>	<p>Successful programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use of resources such as the “Literacy Preparation Project for Adults with Developmental Disabilities” by Ken Beck and Patricia Hatt</li> </ul>

## Promoting Increased Accessibility

Issue	Regional Discussion	Best Practice Principles
1. Life Planning	<p>life planning, learning outcomes planning, and dream sessions are vital steps for adults with developmental disabilities. Networking and creating partnerships that are inclusive of literacy skills are essential in this process.</p>	<p>Successful programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>integrate learning/life plans into their evaluative process</li> <li>ensure that plans attempt to state goals and outcomes that are clear and concise</li> <li>ensure that plans are jointly defined by the learner and tutor</li> </ul>
2. Inclusion of all Relevant Stakeholders	<p>better utilization of family, support workers, friends, while still maintaining the client's individual rights to consent, confidentiality, and full participation in this process.</p> <p>maintain the learner's sense of ownership of outcomes; ensuring learners understand the role that literacy will play in his/her life planning process is critical to success.</p>	<p>Successful programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>work in co-operation with other service providers and funders</li> <li>literacy leaders make conscious efforts to work with other literacy providers, community agencies, businesses that work with adults with developmental disabilities</li> </ul>
3. Ensuring Environment is Respectful and Reflective of the Adult Learner	<p>ensure that material is age appropriate and relevant.</p>	<p>Successful programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>encourage learner to participate in choosing of materials</li> <li>consider use of tutor feedback crucial to learner motivation</li> </ul>

## Using Existing Resources More Effectively

Issue	Regional Discussions	Best Practices Principles
1. Using Current Existing Technology	<p>many current technologies already are in operation and are under-utilized</p> <p>sites to explore are <a href="http://www.nald.org">www.nald.org</a>, <a href="http://www.alphaplus.com">www.alphaplus.com</a>, <a href="http://www.tcln.on.ca">www.tcln.on.ca</a></p>	<p>realize that computers play an increasingly important role in today's society and workplace</p>
2. Existing Volunteers	<p>many communities have existing community volunteer co-coordinators that could be used for pre-literacy training</p> <p>most agencies that serve adults with developmental disabilities use volunteers extensively. These volunteers could be trained by literacy groups</p>	<p>ensure that alliances, partnerships, and supports have been built and are in place to deal with pre-literacy training, skill preservation, and support venues</p> <p>use assessment to establish eligibility or make appropriate referrals to other agencies</p>
3. Existing Research	<p>refer to the list of useful references at the end of this document</p>	<p>be aware that research on literacy and adults with developmental disabilities is generally investigative in nature</p>

## Volunteer and Staff Training

Issue	Regional Discussions	Best Practices Principles
1. Tutor/ Volunteer Training	<p>programs and agencies must “buy in” to the priority and necessity of literacy for adults with developmental disabilities</p> <p>program leaders must be prepared to enhance and expand their training whenever possible</p>	<p>develop teacher tutor training programs</p> <p>training is considered to be a continuous process</p> <p>where possible support having tutor volunteers attend professional development programs</p>
2. Understanding Adults with Developmental Disabilities	<p>literacy instructors must become familiar with the unique issues that are specific to this population (behavioral, social, physical, etc.)</p> <p>do not interpret the slower pace of learning as a lack of progress.</p> <p>use of a learning outcomes based approach is essential to assist an instructor in understanding when a learner has reached a learning plateau due to learning capacity rather than instructional style</p>	<p>Use a learning outcomes approach that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>uses a results-based focus</li> <li>provides program accountability</li> <li>provides learner-centred services</li> <li>is based on adult education principles</li> <li>provides links with the broader education and training system</li> </ul>
3. Creating Alliances with Existing Training	<p>encourage links with existing programs/courses relevant to the human services field such as Developmental Services Worker (DSW) Programs.</p> <p>there should be a commitment by agencies to value these credentials in the hiring process</p> <p>link with the Staff Training Advisory Committee</p> <p>share in-house training opportunities.</p>	<p>encourage life long learning</p>

When progress is at a stand still, have you considered:

1. ...learner motivation and commitment to the program?
2. ...timing of the program, e.g. after a hard day of work?
3. ...whether the program and format are relevant to the learner?
4. ...whether there is a learning disability issue, as well?
5. ...what the learner's learning style is, e.g. auditory, visual, kinesthetic?

## **Appendices**

A – Initial Field Survey

B – Focus Group Presentation

C – Workshop Evaluation Results

D – Sample Action Plan

E – Follow-Up Survey

F – Resources/Bibliography

G – AlphaPlus Resources

## A – Initial Field Survey

Dear .....,

This is exciting news! The local project “Building Bridges for Adults with a Developmental Disability” received grant approval and has hired me to bring the project to fruition. It is my task to bring practitioners from the fields of literacy and disability together for a meaningful exchange of ideas, educate each other about direction in the field, support philosophy and identify positive developments, barriers, gaps and overlaps between the service sectors. As the focus groups develop, participants would explore building mutually beneficial partnerships that promote effective and efficient service to people.

Together we can develop a common understanding of how we can join forces to improve literacy services for people who have developmental disabilities. In addition, training on Literacy Preparation Skills for Adults who have a developmental disability will begin to be coordinated.

Practitioners in the Literacy Field have identified a need to improve the appropriateness of referrals coming from agencies serving people with developmental disabilities. Service Providers for people with Developmental Disabilities have challenged Literacy Programs to ensure that their services are accessible and non-discriminatory. According to the Literacy Preparation Project for Adults with Developmental Disabilities, (Beck, Hatt, 1998) "worker/counsellors also noted their own desire to gain more knowledge and skills about basic literacy." The implications outlined in the recently published Best Practices in Literacy for Adults with Developmental Disabilities, (MET, 1998) indicate "cooperative and interagency partnerships are recognized by successful programs as absolutely necessary for the provision of the best service to adult learners". It also noted that "flexibility in approaches to networking, resource sharing and cooperation is essential."

The project will culminate in a workshop on February 23, 2000. We have speakers coming in for a great day and we will provide an update on the project status. We have tentatively booked the Country View Golf Course (just north of Chatham). A great time for sharing and learning, and to get rid of those mid-winter blahs!!

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, otherwise I will call you during the week of November 8<sup>th</sup> in order to arrange a personal meeting to obtain your input as well as inform you of the schedule/agenda for the focus groups.

I look forward to meeting with each of you personally and working with you. I know that this exciting venture will provide a great benefit to the adults with disabilities in the tri-county region and hopefully will provide an enviable model for regions everywhere.

Sincerely,

Glenn Yates,  
ABILITY ... Health and Social Services Consulting  
Project Co-ordinator, Tri-County Literacy Network

## Initial Disability Field Survey

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

1. What issues do you see that need to be addressed in this project?
2. Would you prefer two separate focus groups (Windsor/ Wallaceburg) or one larger group (Chatham)?
3. What would ensure your participation in the February workshop?
4. What needs to be accomplished in order for you to consider this project a smashing success?
5. What would you like to see as a follow-up project? Do you feel there is a need for one?





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# Building Bridges for Adults with Developmental Disabilities

Dr. Glenn Yates, ABILITY ... Health  
and Social Services Consulting

A report commissioned by the Tri-County Literacy Network



## A Little History

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- A need was determined by the Tri-County Literacy Network and partners in the literacy and disability fields for an exploration into issues, and the development of strategies
- A project was conceived, proposed, and received funding
- ABILITY Consulting was hired to complete the task



## Goals for the Focus Groups

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- Determine the issues that are important to the Literacy and Disability fields.
- Determine the perception of each other's field.
- Determine some solutions/strategies.
- Report back.





## Literacy Preparation Project for Adults with a Developmental Disability

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- Rather than re-inventing the wheel, we will use a program that has been recently developed and used very successfully
- Created by Ken Beck, PhD, Pat Hatt and their team
- A program developed with the front-line worker/ counsellor in mind
- Focussed on the adult learner



## Barriers to Access

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- Let us keep in mind our reason for being—that generally, the disabled person with low literacy skills has lower health outcomes, less employment and financial opportunities, as well as lower self-esteem.





## Focus Group Participants from the Disability Field

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- **Lambton County Association for the Mentally Handicapped**
- **Chatham and District Association for Community Living**
- **Essex County Association for Community Living**
- **Sarnia and District Association for Community Living**
- **Windsor Community Living Support Services**
- **Wallaceburg and Sydenham District Association for Community Living**
- **Christian Horizons**



## Focus Group Participants from the Literacy Field

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- **Greater Essex County District School Board**
- **St. Clair College of Applied Arts and Technology**
- **South Essex Community Centre**
- **Unemployed Help Centre of Windsor**
- **Windsor Volunteers for Literacy**
- **Lambton-Kent District School Board**
- **Lambton College, Literacy & Basic Skills**
- **St. Clair Catholic District School Board**
- **Organization for Literacy in Lambton**
- **Chatham-Kent Council on Adult Basic Education**



## ABILITY... Health and Social Services Consulting

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- It is my job, as your consultant, to gather, evaluate, and disseminate- issues, ideas, solutions.
- Prepare a Workshop day for Feb. 23, 2000.
- Recommend one or more strategies that could be implemented.
- Prepare a final report.

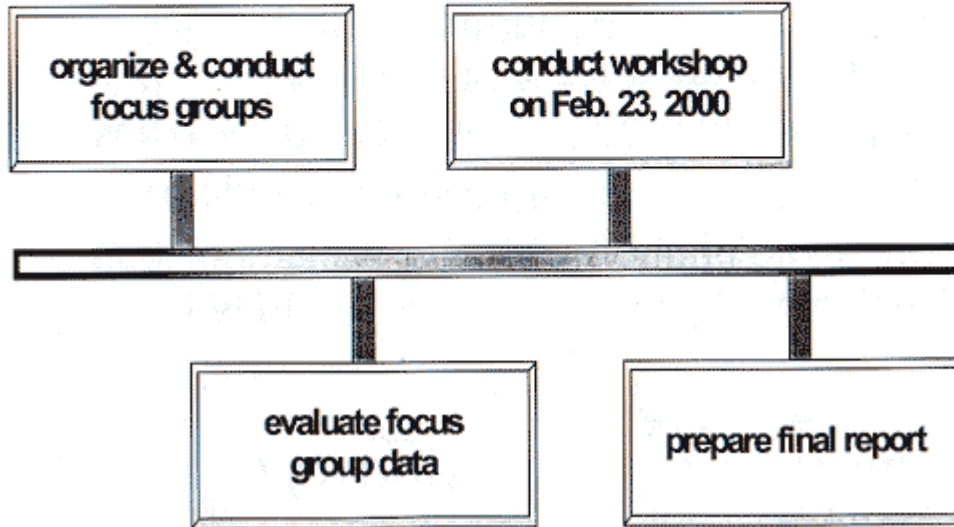






# Timeline of Events

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## Focus Group Initial Questions- 1

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- What are the 'positive' issues that you have with regards to literacy for people with developmental disabilities?
- What are the 'negative' issues that you have with regards to literacy for people with developmental disabilities?
- Please answer appropriately for your field.





## Focus Group Initial Questions- 2

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- Did you answer the two previous questions with a regional focus on the issues or are they provincial/ global issues as well?
- Do you feel that people who have a developmental disability within your agency have ready access to literacy programs? Why/ why not?
- What do you see as a solution(s)?



## C – Workshop Evaluation Results

### Evaluation Results Summary

Thirty-seven (37) evaluation forms were received. Thirty-two (32) individuals were very happy with the workshop, five were certainly satisfied, while none circled dissatisfied.

1. How do you feel about this workshop? Please circle one.



2. What did you like best about the workshop? Why?

- u** Speakers entertaining as well as informative
- u** Represented by people knowledgeable about the field, dedicated to it and very realistic about the how and what – lots of ideas
- u** The way Pat and Ken understand the way workers in the field feel and also that they reduce things to every day realities
- u** Information was presented in a clear, humorous manner
- u** Both speakers were knowledgeable and excellent facilitators
- u** Very comfortable atmosphere
- u** Meeting new people active presentations
- u** Good group experiences
- u** Useful books

3. What did you like least? Why?

Many respondents did not answer this section, but those who did mainly disliked the following:

- u** Room noise
- u** Poor lighting
- u** Poor sound system
- u** Two groups trying to speak in the same room
- u** Being forced to mix at specific tables

4. What is the one thing that could make this workshop better?

- u** Distribute 'Learning Outcomes' book to workers/counsellors as well as literacy practitioners
- u** Separate rooms for discussion
- u** More in-depth learning
- u** More visuals
- u** Run a two-day workshop

Many answered that nothing was needed to improve the workshop.

5. What did you learn that you could apply in the next month?

- u** More ideas that I can use for my learners
- u** Demonstrations
- u** Environmental Resources
- u** Applying the three stages of assessment
- u** Resources in the manual
- u** Exchange of information
- u** I learned to challenge the statement “he/she does not qualify”
- u** Practical techniques to apply ASAP
- u** Simple literacy exercises
- u** Assessment procedures and strategies

6. Do you think you need more training in this topic?

Yes – 10          No – 4          Not Sure – 17

If yes, what do you need?

- u** As an advocate, parent, and volunteer, I would like more resources to have available to help my son and other individuals and their families
- u** More networking

7. Would you recommend this workshop to someone else? Why or why not?

Yes – 24          No – 0          Not Sure – 4

- u** Well paced, very informative
- u** I came to learn and share information
- u** I would recommend for parents, administrators of groups for developmentally disabled
- u** An eye-opener – did not realize these literacy programs were available in this area
- u** Good resources and good contacts

8. Additional Comments

- u** Very interesting, well done
- u** Great opportunity to network, meet a variety of people
- u** It’s made our task easier
- u** Got a lot out of it!
- u** Include an individual (developmentally delayed) to a session
- u** I especially liked the mixing of delegates
- u** Great speakers, facility and topics
- u** More public awareness needed to inform families, community groups
- u** Good day! Great first time experience in this area!!
- u** Thanks so much! Enjoyed the workshop

## D – Sample Action Plan

### Sample Action Plan Worksheet

What is to be done?	When will it be done?	Who will do the tasks?	What was the result?
Include literacy in Developmental Services Worker Program	September 2000	Network & DSW Faculty	Two hours workshop provided by the Network on the importance of literacy for adults with a developmental disability to be included in Life Skills Course.
Share contact information with all participants in the project	October 2000	Network	To be determined
Distribute Next Steps documents and follow up on actions taken	December 2000	Network	To be determined
Share training information	Ongoing	Agencies, Staff Training Advisory Committee, and Network	
Yearly workshop	February 2001	Network & Training Advisory Committee	

### Blank Action Plan Worksheet

What is to be done?	When will it be done?	Who will do the tasks?	What was the result?

## E – Follow Up Survey

### Building Bridges for Adults with a Developmental Disability

#### Follow-up Survey

Over the past year, the Tri-County Literacy Network has been involved in developing a project called “Building Bridges for Adults with Developmental Disabilities.” You may recall meetings, focus groups and workshops that looked at literacy as it relates to people with developmental disabilities. One of the objectives of the project was to create an ongoing dialogue and communication between practitioners in both the literacy and developmental disabilities field. We would like to find out the extent to which this has come about across the region?

1. Do you and your organization feel that building “literacy bridges” between the literacy field and the agencies that support people with developmental disabilities is still a priority in the region?

Yes

No

Why? or Why not?

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2. Did you implement any of the strategies/ solutions that came about because of the Building Bridges Project?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ If yes, please check all that apply.

Innovative Partnerships	_____	With Whom? _____
Volunteer/Tutor Cross Training	_____	
Using Technology	_____	
Alliances with Community Leaders	_____	
Pre-Literacy Training	_____	
Literacy as a component of Life Planning	_____	
Others? Please expand below	_____	

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3. If you answered No to question # 2, please explain why you did not.

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4. How do you and your program/ agency/ organization feel that you will continue to "build even more bridges" in the future and continue the work that has started in this region?

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5. What do you feel should be the continuing role (if any) of the Tri-County Literacy Network with regards to literacy issues for adults with developmental disabilities?

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6. Other comments?

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*Thank you for your feedback.*

**For your convenience, we have provided a self-addressed stamped envelope.**

Sincerely,

Marianne Simpson,  
Executive Director, Tri-County Literacy Network



## F – Bibliography/ Resources

Please note- all references plus many other useful materials are available from the Tri-County Literacy Network office.

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## G - AlphaPlus Resources

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