

President's Reflections

Taking new approaches to reach more learners



By Sherry Campbell

There are a number of barriers preventing adults with low literacy from seeking out programs to improve their literacy skills. A sense of stigma at the prospect of being identified as a person with low literacy consistently tops the reasons why so few people seek help.

Low literacy is linked to those who are often marginalized, vulnerable and often without a voice. The people we see at Frontier College are often in crisis, have difficulty advocating for themselves and their own literacy issues prevent them from accessing the services they need.

Many have trouble understanding or realizing they have low literacy skills until they are faced with it: entering a re-training program and struggling to understand course content or an inability to help their children with their homework. Not surprisingly, they are hesitant to admit they need support and many try to hide their challenges.

I recently appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources looking into ways the federal government can reduce poverty. I cited numerous studies that link low literacy and poverty. One of the proposed recommendations we made to the government is that they fund pilot projects to embed community based literacy programs among non-traditional literacy service settings such as food banks, health clinics, counseling services, shelters and retraining programs in order to reach new potential learners.

Without this investment in literacy and education we will continue to see the cycle of long-term unemployment, intergenerational poverty and continued low literacy.

Government clearly has an important role to play if we're to reach additional learners but so too does the private, charitable and non-government sectors. We need to look at innovative, multi-sector partnerships to deliver literacy programs in different settings to help more people reach their potential.