

## **Literacy is a key to a healthy democracy**

Active citizenship is about people's responsibility in working towards the betterment of our community through economic participation, public service, volunteer work and other efforts to improve life for all citizens. It is also about the political rights of people in society.

For 40% of adult Albertans aged 16-65 (International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, Statistics Canada 2005), low literacy is an obstacle to meeting those responsibilities and realizing those rights.

Literacy is needed in order to have true democracy in which each person has the ability to participate fully in Canadian life. We must all have the opportunity to develop the skills we need to be active citizens.

## **Literacy is a key to creating citizens who are interested and want to take part in society**

Governments now often look for input from citizens before they develop new public policies. When governments ask for feedback on issues, people with higher literacy and skills to understand information are more likely to be heard.

When people experience poverty, poor health or isolation often as a result of low literacy, taking part in the broader society may seem like a luxury. Empowering citizens with higher literacy skills allows greater opportunity for participation in civic decision-making resulting in safer, healthier and more vibrant communities in which we can equally thrive.

## **Literacy is a key to taking part in elections to choose our governments**

People need good literacy skills to be able to vote. There are many skills we need to make voting decisions including:

- knowing how to register to vote
- understanding our rights
- knowing how to mark a ballot
- understanding election information, and
- feeling we know enough to vote for the person we think will do the best job.

Can you imagine how difficult this could be for someone with literacy challenges?

## **Literacy is a key to including immigrants and newcomers in Canadian life**

Newcomers to Canada make up almost 70% of the growth in numbers in the workforce. In the coming years, immigration will account for **all** of the net labour force growth. When new Canadians can use one of Canada's official languages well, they can access services, training and employment so that they can benefit and contribute as citizens. In addition, when people become more literate and more tolerant of newcomers, differences are not just allowed, but welcomed.

## **Working Towards a Fully Literate Society**

The Movement for Canadian Literacy (MCL) has worked with Elections Canada to produce easier-to-read election materials. MCL also gives out these materials to adult learners and instructors in literacy programs who know how important it is to include Canadians who have literacy barriers.

MCL encourages everyone to use plain language so that as many people as possible know what goes on in our country.

Literacy programs are important. Program workers can help when they share information about rights and responsibilities with learners. Adult education itself should be a way to learn about how democracy works.

Canadians with lower literacy skills need to be able to take part fully in our democracy. We must find ways to make sure they are truly included when the leaders of our country make decisions.

For more information on literacy and how you can help, contact:

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