

# NEWS BULLETIN

SEPTEMBER 2017



## A SPOTLIGHT ON STUDENT SUCCESS *in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Programs*

Join us as the Provincial Support Organizations for Literacy put the spotlight on student successes in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs across Ontario.

In Ontario, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development funds adult literacy organizations to provide free training to help adult students achieve personal goals related to independence, secondary school credits, postsecondary education, apprenticeship and employment.

LBS training addresses the skills, knowledge and behaviours that adult students need to as they work towards success in their education, work, communities and general-life situations. Community-based, school board and college programs provide goal-related training to serve Anglophone, Deaf, Francophone and Indigenous students.

Naturally, we couldn't share every story of student success but we have selected a sampling that showcases the value of LBS programming and what success means to adult students with literacy and basic skills challenges.

## LEARNING ONLINE AND IMPROVING PROSPECTS

Fabian Bonaparte found that he could no longer avoid learning how to use the computer and smartphone. With the support of Contact North | Contact Nord online learning centre in Orleans, he has discovered a world of possibilities with technology.

"I need to get in-line with the 21st century," joked Fabian. "I realized this is something I need to learn."

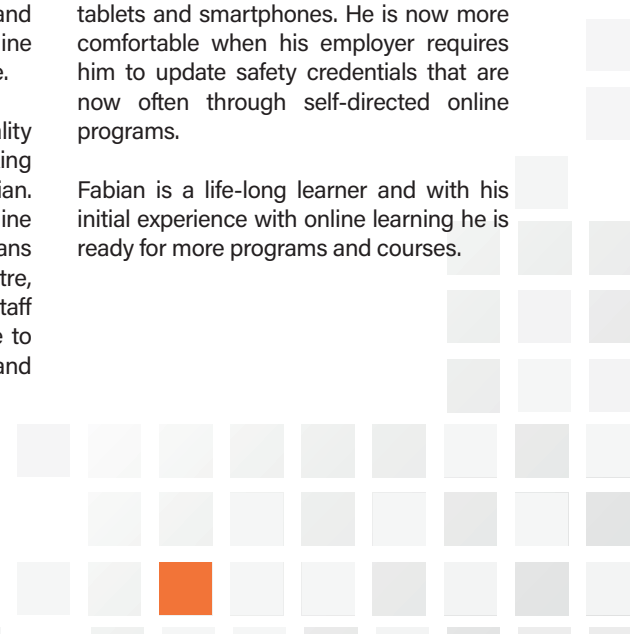
The Online Learning Recruitment Officer at the Orleans online learning centre was able to help Fabian find an interactive course to learn the basics of using computers. He says that people his age, forty and over, appreciate this type of learning to stay

relevant with technology. In fact, Fabian admits he actually likes computers now. He initially thought that online learning would not be suitable for his learning style and he was hesitant about the quality of online learning compared to an in-class course.

"I find online learning to be great quality and I am comfortable now to explore taking my Masters degree online," says Fabian. He liked being able to come into the online learning centre located at the Orléans Cumberland Community Resource Centre, away from distractions at home. The staff at the online learning centre were able to help him with any connection issues and encourage him throughout his course.

His success with online learning has also improved his job performance now that he is more comfortable with using computers, tablets and smartphones. He is now more comfortable when his employer requires him to update safety credentials that are now often through self-directed online programs.

Fabian is a life-long learner and with his initial experience with online learning he is ready for more programs and courses.



# MAES WRITING A NEW CHAPTER IN LIFE

BY BRAD PRITCHARD AT SIMCOE.COM | SUBMITTED BY LAUBACH LITERACY ONTARIO

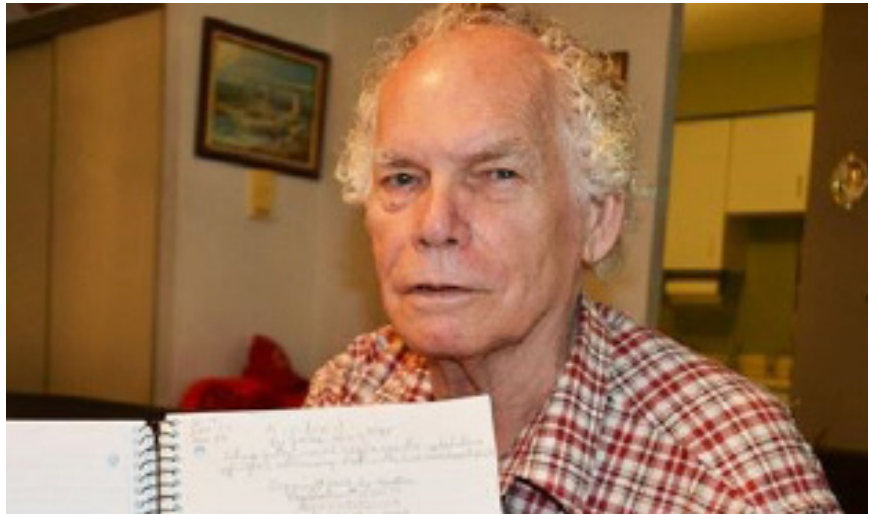
Bill Maes has spent a lifetime hiding a secret. The 78-year-old Alliston, Ontario man has spent the majority of his days unable to read books, peruse the newspaper to catch up on current events, or write letters to his family.

Maes grew up on a tobacco farm in a small town in southwestern Ontario, where helping his parents with the crops took priority over getting an education. While he did attend elementary school, the experience wasn't pleasant. "The first teacher I had was a pretty mean fellow," he said. "I struggled and he would always kind of bully me."

Maes was around 12 years old when his family relocated to a farm in Alliston. He spent a few weeks in school before giving it up. While he could get a good grasp on some subjects like math, reading and writing never clicked for him. A few years later, his family moved to Mansfield, and Maes just carried on helping around the farm.

When his father died suddenly, his presence on the farm became even more important, ruling out the possibility of ever going back to school. Not being able to read and write limited him in many ways, but he was able to get by with help from family and friends. On days when he had to do errands on his own, like getting a loan at the bank, he would get the teller to write down his instructions. "It's an awful way to live, because everybody thinks you can do it, but you can't," he said.

When Maes returned to Alliston about three years ago, he decided it was time to learn to read and write. A friend told him about the Next Step Literacy Council of South Simcoe, but it took courage to overcome his apprehension of asking for help. Inside he was greeted with a warm welcome—a far cry from



his initial experience in school. Maes was set up with a private tutor, John Rosenthal, who meets with him two hours a week. "He works really hard and he's done everything basically on his own, which is terrific," Rosenthal said. "I give him some guidance and he goes home and he reads, and reads, and reads!"

Since Maes started lessons two years ago, he has mastered the alphabet, read about 40 books and has started writing about his life in journals. He is also learning to use the computer so he can send emails to family and friends. "If it wasn't for John and the rest of the good people around here, I'd likely have turned around the first day," Maes said.

Literacy council administrator Shira Harrison McIntyre said the organization helps adults of all ages, although it's a little unusual for someone at Maes' stage in life to walk in the door. "We usually see people who are still looking for employment, but it's not unheard of for some people to hit a certain age and say 'This is enough, I want to learn!'" she said. When a person enters the program, she said they undergo an assessment

to determine their literacy capabilities. From there, she said the person sets their own goals and how quickly they want to achieve them. "There's no timeline," she said. "People can be here as long as they need to in order to accomplish their goal." In addition to reading and writing, the council also offers math and digital literacy tutoring, general education diploma preparation and other services.

For Maes, the most satisfying moment since learning to read and write came after sending his daughter a birthday card. "I wrote the address myself, I signed it myself and also wrote a small poem inside," he said. "Then one day she called me crying, and when I asked what was wrong, she said she was so happy because I have never sent her a card before that I wrote myself"

"I would never have believed you if you had told me I'd ever win something like this in my lifetime," he said.

In addition to helping Maes learn to read and write, the organization is also showing him how to use a computer so he can learn to type and send emails.

# A MATTER OF CONFIDENCE

BY RACHEL ANNE NORMAND, SENIOR ANALYST | COFA



Brigitte Valade comes from a business savvy family. Indeed, her father and mother founded Glengarry Tire in 1978 and her brother became co-owner a few years ago. As for Brigitte, she set up her own beauty care salon. Recently, however, she traded in her hat to join her family at Glengarry Tire, where she now works in a secretarial position.

When she started this new job, Brigitte felt she did not have all the skills she needed to carry out her current tasks and those she anticipated taking over in the months and years to come. Like many people who work in an office, Brigitte had mastered all the basic functions in software such as Word and Excel; she "got by," she says. She knew, however, that she could do more with new knowledge and that these achievements would help her to flourish in her profession. This is what motivated Brigitte to ask her boss for permission to register in a few courses at the adult training centre in her area. Her boss did not hesitate and set aside two paid mornings for her professional development. He recognized the added value and long-term savings this would bring the company.

Before she even got to the training centre, Brigitte had a few worries and concerns: she was afraid of failing her courses. During the initial meeting, the trainers quickly eased her fears by explaining that she would work at her own speed and that someone would be available to support her. In fact, Brigitte says that even though she no longer attends courses at the centre, the staff is there to help her when she has questions. "I just have to send an email or make a call."

From one class to the next, Brigitte applied what she learned in her daily tasks at work. She took her manuals to work, and used real tasks when completing her exercises. She did not hesitate to ask the trainers to teach her additional concepts that would be useful in her work. This is how she came to manage

her learning, a skill that has spilled over into her professional life.

On that point, Brigitte says that what she achieved during her time at the training centre goes beyond simply appropriating new knowledge. She gained confidence in herself, right from the start of her second session and onwards. In fact, throughout the entire interview, Brigitte repeated the word "confidence" many times and used it in various contexts. These courses helped Brigitte gain confidence in her own abilities.

Just as Brigitte gained confidence in herself, so, too, did her boss. He gave her new assignments and even delegated some of his own duties, thereby allowing him to focus on his own strengths. Brigitte loves her job. Her days are getting increasingly busy because of her new responsibilities. She feels like she is making an important contribution to the growth and sustainability of the company. In fact, since completing her studies, Brigitte is exploring new ways to maximize resources at work; she is looking to implement systems that are advantageous with regard to both time and money. According to Brigitte, the computerization of the billing and payroll system is the perfect example and her biggest achievement with the company.

She owes this success to the training centre, where she got the knowledge, the tools, and most of all, the confidence she needed to propose a restructuring of the system in the first place, and then to set it all in motion. Everybody wins as a result of this system, including the company, the employees, the clients and the suppliers. As an example, employees and suppliers no longer need to go to the bank to cash their cheque, because payments are made directly into their bank account. Staff members now have access to pay stubs that Brigitte created using her new skills. "This might seem simple," she says, "but you would be surprised by the number of companies in small communities that do not offer this service. In addition to having access to all the details about their payroll deductions, employees now have a proof of income that they can use when applying for a bank loan."

Brigitte discovered very quickly that she could adopt what she had learned in other contexts as well. This is why she believes that employers are well advised to provide their employees with professional development opportunities. Brigitte says that companies evolve with the changing needs of their clientele as they concern the product, but that is often where the change stops. In her opinion, companies need to stay up-to-date on new systems and

new trends in human resources, physical and financial management. By making use of the services offered by adult training centres, where learners can develop their skills for free, employers drive the quest for continuous improvement among their employees, which then ensures continuity for the company.

This is exactly what happened in Brigitte's case. These courses motivated her to continue obtaining knowledge and finding ways to enhance and modernize the company's business processes. She is doing research right now to find grants that help small- and medium-sized companies – like Glengarry Tire – train their staff. In particular, she would like to take a course on human resources management at a college in the area.

Brigitte feels that employers often limit their training to technical skills only, and they forget about essential skills development (it might be just as beneficial as a hands-on workshop). She adds that workers are often the ones to take the first step towards professional development – if they even have the confidence to do so. Some hesitate to ask, because they believe it shows a lack of knowledge rather than a willingness to improve themselves in their job. It therefore becomes the employer's duty to stay abreast of learning opportunities and to ask staff members whether they have any specific needs that must be met.

If Brigitte could offer the training centres one piece of advice when it comes to recruitment, it would be to change the terminology used in promotional tools and during presentations. She recommends focusing on what professional development opportunities might offer above and beyond the acquisition of new knowledge, rather than focusing on the courses. According to Brigitte, it needs to be clearly stated in black and white that employees will increase their autonomy, their self-confidence, and their organizational and management skills, etc. In addition, the development of such generic skills will ensure that employees perform better, have a better attitude towards their work, and will stimulate their creativity. All of this might lead to proposals for improving existing processes and systems, to the benefit of the company.

This young professional's inspirational story is one of genuine success. Brigitte's experience is a validation of why these adult training centres exist, namely to give adults of all ages the opportunity improve their skills and achieve their full potential, no matter which transition path they choose to follow.

# STUDENT SUCCESS IN COMMUNITY-BASED AGENCIES

Community Literacy of Ontario recognizes that success cannot be defined by only one type of achievement in community-based LBS agencies and the goals of students are as diverse as the students themselves!

Hard work and dedication are traits that immediately come to mind when we think of LBS students. With this in mind, CLO would like to share the success of Dan from Literacy London who is working primarily on employment related tasks and activities with a focus on basic literacy.

Dan came to Literacy London in late 2012 with only the ability to write his name. Dan has worked extremely hard, made much progress and passed his WHIMIS with a perfect score. He is able to write and read on his own now, read a menu in a restaurant, speak to a group and is extremely proud of how much his hard work has paid off. He is a true ambassador for adult literacy and the importance of being given a second chance.

"My road to learning how to read has been long and difficult and I never could have done it without the support and encouragement of my tutors. These tutors help me move along the road to learning and becoming better. This is giving me the strength to move on in my life.

Reading is now part of my life. I read every day and am thankful for this amazing gift!"

**Dan, Adult Student, Literacy London**

## Let's also celebrate

- » The single mom with four children who didn't complete high school and worked on basic literacy and skills and is now ready to apply to a college course to be a personal support worker

- » The student who was out of school for 15 years and needed reassurance and some "brushing up" to prepare for his GED exam
- » The parents who can now help their children with their homework
- » The adult who wants to be able to complete an online resume
- » And the list goes on....

CLO is pleased to share more stories from LBS agencies that are available online as videos or as web-based stories.

### Barrie Literacy Council

- » Student stories: [www.barrieliteracy.ca/index.php/student-stories](http://www.barrieliteracy.ca/index.php/student-stories)

### Literacy Council of Durham Region

- » Student stories: <https://literacydurham.ca/category/learner-stories/>

### People, Words & Change, Ottawa

- » "Make the Call for Literacy" - Student success video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HTL2C09gQNk>

### The Literacy Group, région de Waterloo

- » Student stories: <http://theliteracygroup.com/success-stories/>

### Tri-County Literacy Network

- » Student success video: <http://tcln.on.ca/videos/>

### Programme Next Step : Literacy Council of South Simcoe

- » Student success story: <http://nextstepliteracy.ca/>

CLO loves being able to share the successes achieved in LBS programs and we encourage you to send your stories to [info@communityliteracyofontario.ca](mailto:info@communityliteracyofontario.ca)

*"My road to learning how to read has been long and difficult and I never could have done it without the support and encouragement of my tutors. These tutors help me move along the road to learning and becoming better. This is giving me the strength to move on in my life. Reading is now part of my life. I read every day and am thankful for this amazing gift!"*

*- Dan, Adult Student, Literacy London*