Learners in ACTION

Fall 2004

Learners in ACTION is a publication of the Movement for Canadian Literacy

Movement for Canadian Literacy's Learners Advisory Network

Lynda Richards as she received her training for the Speakers Bureau at the Saskatchewan Literacy Network

Great to Be Alive!

Lynda Richards of Swift Current, Saskatchewan is now the President of the Saskatchewan Literacy Network. She also holds down two jobs and does extensive volunteering. For many years she has been speaking out on the importance of literacy and learning. Here is her amazing story of success:

Two out of every five people in Saskatchewan ages 16-69 have difficulty with reading and writing and I am one of those people. **I have always found learning hard**. I couldn't stay focused on what was going on. The other kids teased me and made fun of me. When I acted out, **the teacher would put me in front of the class and make me read and the other kids laughed at me.**

I was from a low-income family without a mom and an abusive father. My clothes weren't always clean. We lived on a farm and I smelled like the barn lots of times. After a while, I didn't care if I was in school, at home. I lived in a dream world and what really happened didn't happen. **After a while I didn't really know reality from fiction.** I hated everything in my life except for the relationship I had with my brother.

In 1970 my brother was killed in a car accident. After this, I ran away. I was going to find him and I ran around the country from the east coast to the west coast. **I had reached the bottom and there was nowhere to go except to work my way back up the ladder.** ···→

What's Inside

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I had a good counselor and a daughter who believed in me and kept telling me I could do it. I was tired of my past, having low-paying jobs, or being on welfare. I was tired of telling my daughter we can't afford this or we can't afford to go there. I was tired of sally-anne clothes.
I was tired of looking at the ground.
I wanted to see stars.

I went to the Adult Basic Education (ABE) program. I first had to write a test to find out where I was in my education. Then I started at grade 10. Grade 10 was not too bad but I was having some problems with writing and doing tests. Then came grade 11 and the bottom fell out of my studying. I couldn't pass my test. I was having trouble completing competencies.
I was scared of being a failure again.
The school started questioning my ability and I started to feel that I should quit my studies and only do the GED. I was angry, upset, confused, stupid.

We agreed that I take a comprehensive test and if I could pass the GED, I could start at my regular classes again. All of a sudden, Bobbie Baker heard about me and **invited me to attend their learner support group. I finally found people with stories like my own.**

My confidence started to improve. I started going at night as well as during the day to take reading from a scratch program. I then got a tutor, Bill. He was great! He taught me learning skills, like mind mapping, making a song out of the first letters of words I had to remember. I passed my GED, went back to classes and finished my grade 11 and part of my grade 12. I then was accepted at Woodlands College to take the Chemical Dependency Worker Program and I got my diploma.

"Going back to school has given me life. A life that I never had. Today it's great to be alive."

Since I went back to school, I have become a grandmother four times, and run two businesses. I was a member of the Movement for Canadian Literacy Learners Advisory Network and now I'm the President of the Saskatchewan Literacy Network board. I am a member of a learners' support group, and the Learners Speakers Bureau. I'm also on the Literacy Benchmark Committee as a learner rep. I volunteer for Victims Services as well as the Experienced Mothers program.

My daughter and I have an awesome relationship. She is my hero and I am her hero. This relationship alone would have been enough. All these things have happened to me in the last 11 years. I believe if I hadn't gone back to school, I would have lost my daughter, been in the hospital or dead.

Literacy and Health Conference Needs Learner Input

The Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) would like stories, art and poetry to display at the Literacy and Health Conference on October 17-19, 2004 in Ottawa. They want to have a "Learning from Learners" Gallery display area at the conference. This will remind all participants of what people with literacy challenges experience in the health system. Tell them about using health services. What's difficult? What works? All expressions welcome!

Send to: CPHA Literacy & Health Conference - Learners Gallery, 400 - 1565 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON, K1Z 8R1 or tel: 613-725-3769; email: literacyandhealthconf@cpha.ca.

It's Your Right!

Adapted with permission from the California Health Literacy initiative, a project of California Literacy Inc.

- Have you ever been confused by your doctor?
- Have you ever asked a question of your doctor and not understood the answer?
- Have you ever not asked a question because you were embarrassed or scared?

What is Health Literacy

Health literacy is the ability to read, understand, and act on health information. This is not the same as literacy skills which are the ability to read and write and understand the printed word… Low health literacy can affect even well-educated people who read and write well.

Why Are You at Risk?

- There's a lot of written instructions for patients.
- The health system is hard to understand
  - There are more medicines
  - There are more tests and things you have to do
  - Patients have to take care of themselves

Low Health Literacy Equals Problems With…

- Medications
- Appointment slips
- Informed consents
- Discharge
- Instructions
- Health education materials
- Insurance applications

You Have The Right To Understand

- You have the right to understand the health information that you hear from your doctor
- The doctor works for you!

What Can You Do?

Before the appointment:

- Prepare questions
- Write down symptoms and concerns
- Decide how you will get to your appointment and make sure you know where it is
- Research (talk to friends and family)

During the appointment:

- Ask questions
- Bring a friend or family member to help you understand the doctor
- Take notes (or have a friend take notes)
- Ask for a photocopy of any helpful information the doctor has
- Ask for a photocopy of any test results (keep these notes in a file and bring them when you go to a new doctor)
- Ask the doctor to repeat the information
  - More slowly
  - With a picture or example
  - In different words
- Check your understanding: when you can repeat it in your own words, you can understand it.

After the appointment:

- Tell a friend or family member what the doctor told you
- Have a clear understanding of your doctor's or pharmacist's instructions
- Follow through on any instructions for healthy living or taking medication
- Ask more questions (call the doctor's office if you need to)

What Questions Do You Ask?

1. What's my main problem?
2. What do I need to do?
3. Why is it important for me to do this?

Here's an example of how to get your information in plain language

The doctor says:
"You have hypertension. You need to abstain from high-sodium foods, and partake in a rigorous exercise regimen."

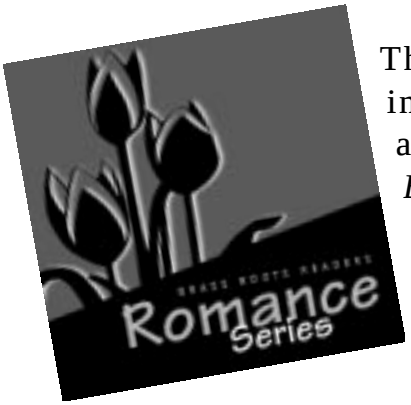
What is my main problem?
"Your blood pressure is too high."
What do I need to do?
"You need to eat less salt and exercise more."
Why is it important for me to do this?
"If you eat healthy food and exercise, you can stay healthy and feel better."

For more information, visit: **www.askme3.org.**

Learner Resources

Popular Books Now Available as Computer Software

Grass Roots Press publishes books and other resources for learners and people who work with learners. They have two well-known series of reading books which have become popular in many adult learning programs because of their entertaining and real-life stories that learners enjoy.



The ***Romance*** series includes 4 titles such as: *The Big Goof, The Big Snore, The Big Question* and *The Big Surprise.*

The ***Be the Judge*** series has 4 titles including: *Fran's Story, Tony's Deal, Just Good Friends,* and *Mandy's Garage Sale.*

Now these books are available as software packages. They will be ideal learning tools because they include independent reading and writing activities for very beginning readers. The cost is $59.95 for one package of 4 stories.

You can order the books or request a free catalogue from Grass Roots Press at toll-free telephone: 1-888-303-3213 or email: grassrt@telusplanet.net or visit their website at **www.literacyservices.com**.

Learner Views on Web-Based Learning

What Difference Does It Make? is a report that describes learners' experiences of using online learning. The AlphaPlus Centre in Ontario surveyed 142 literacy learners at 42 literacy programs about their learning experiences with the AlphaRoute, the web-based literacy-learning environment developed by AlphaPlus. The majority of AlphaRoute learners felt that AlphaRoute had definitely helped them build literacy and technology skills. They said they felt more comfortable using computers and the Internet. These learners also said that AlphaRoute had increased their access to information and allowed them to direct their own learning.

The report talks about the importance of learner support, transferable skills, self-direction, and learning communities. It also makes recommendations for further study. To order the report, contact AlphaPlus Centre at tel: 1-800-788-1120, or email: info@alphaplus.ca, or online at: **www.alphaplus.ca**.