



## Education and Literacy- Interim Report

### Literacy in a Healthy Community

The link between literacy and health has been evolving and broadening over the past decade. Literacy is one of the major influences of health status in any community and directly impacts individuals' ability to influence their own determinants of health. Low literacy levels have negative effects on virtually *all* levels of health; low literacy levels are associated with greater use of health care services, higher levels of morbidity and mortality, and increased prevalence of diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The population health perspective has to give significant consideration to literacy issues.

**Literacy and education are major influences of health status.** Literacy is a major factor underlying most other determinants of health. Given that low income and poverty to a large extent result from low literacy and education levels, so do health problems associated with it.

### Socio-Economic Status: Bridging Literacy and Education

There is strong evidence that socio-economic factors such as low income and poverty, to a large extent, result from literacy and education levels and therefore the health problems associated with them. For example, children who go to school hungry may have difficulty concentrating which may impair their ability to develop literacy skill, directly affecting their ability to learn and to socially develop<sup>(4)</sup>.

The literature provides evidence that health status is closely related to the social environment in which people live. Socio-economic status is determined by one's income, occupation, and educational level. Higher socio-economic status is associated with better health. There is a direct correlation between employment participation rates and educational attainment. According to Statistics Canada Census data, people with fewer than nine years of education have low employment participation rates. Conversely, post-secondary education attainment results in higher employment participation rates (see Appendices C & D). Average Earning Statistics for Fort Erie are below Average Provincial Earnings Statistics (see Appendix E). In Fort Erie and the Province, men's average earnings substantially exceed women's average earnings.

### Risks of Low Literacy and Education

Current Canadian Population Health Research indicates that people with low levels of literacy and education are more likely to:

- Experience negative health impacts resulting from incorrect use of medications;
- Fail to comply with medical directions;
- Execute errors in administration of infant formula;
- Pose safety risks in community, home, and workplace;
- Have limited access to health information, including healthy lifestyle practices;



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- Consume health care services at a greater rate;
- Have higher hospital usage by children;
- Have less disposable income;
- Have higher unemployment rates;
- Experience longer periods of unemployment;
- Have higher rates of occupational injuries.

“A number of statistical analyses which have controlled separately for the effects of education and of income indicate that while both are associated with ill health, **lack of education is the predominant factor.**”

### Education and Literacy in Fort Erie

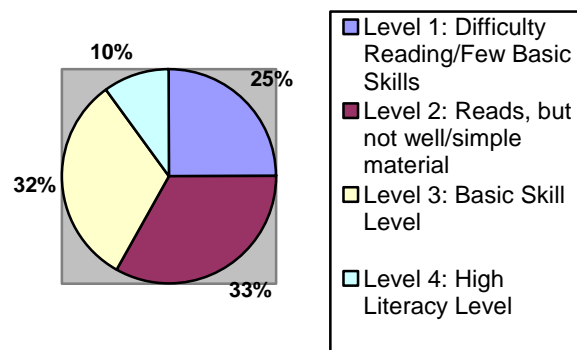
The Education and Literacy Team of the Community Health and Wellness Group examined the literacy and education levels of the people of Fort Erie with the goal of highlighting the important relationship between literacy and education, and Fort Erie’s level of health. The team gathered information from their expert opinion, the “Literacy Risk in the Niagara Region” profile, Census data from Statistics Canada, Ontario School Assessment Data, the Fort Erie Health Survey, and the Social Capital Survey. The team will complete a series of “key informant interviews” this spring. The key informant interviews will involve the following critical stakeholders in Fort Erie:

- Adult education programs
- Literacy providers
- Elementary schools
- Secondary schools
- Parent councils
- Health care professionals
- Employment resource centers

### Literacy Risk Index Report for Fort Erie

The Niagara Regional Literacy Risk Index (LRI) was compiled using 1996 Statistics Canada’s figures, with literacy skill levels measured as described in the International Adult Literacy Survey (1994). The International Adult Literacy Survey (1994) standardized both the definitions for literacy as well as the tools for literacy assessment. The Fort Erie Adult Literacy Council funded the compilation of data from LRI specific to Fort Erie.

**Literacy Statistics For Fort Erie** (see also *Appendix A*) (Source: Literacy Risk in the Niagara Region 2000, Fort Erie Adult Literacy Council)



A brief summary of the Niagara Regional Literacy Risk Index report for Fort Erie (FE) (*See Appendix A for supporting documentation*):

- 58% of FE population is at Levels 1 & 2 which is below national standards for safe functioning representing health and safety risks
- FE has a higher percentage of persons with significant literacy problems compared with Ontario and Canada
- FE has a higher proportion of persons with low literacy compared to the Region, Province and Country, of particular concern



since this group generally does not recognize its limitations

- FE has a lower proportion of persons with basic literacy skills compared with Ontario and Canada
- FE has the lowest proportion of persons with high literacy levels when compared to the Region, Province and Country

**Literacy involves comprehension and understanding, not only of the written word, but also the spoken word.** While most people can read, the real question is whether their reading and writing skills meet the challenge of living and working in today's society. As the demands on society change, so do the necessary literacy skills to function. For example the ability to understand and to be able to act upon verbal instructions from health professionals, e.g. doctors, pharmacists, physiotherapists, nurses, and others.

### Educational Profile of Fort Erie

According to recent census data from Statistics Canada, we can make the following statements with respect to the educational profile of residents of Fort Erie ages 20-64 (see Appendix B):

- percentage of FE residents with skilled trades certificates is proportionally comparable to the Region and proportionally exceeds the Province
- percentage of FE residents with less than Grade 9 is proportionally greater than the Region and Province
- percentage of FE residents with less than Grade 9 is 16.8 % for the population aged 20-24; 23.5 % for

the population aged 35-34; and 31 % for the population aged 45-64

- percentage of FE residents with a Secondary School Diploma is proportionately comparable with the Region and exceeds the Province
- percentage of FE residents with a college diploma is less than both the Region and Province, with the most dramatic variance in residents aged 20-34, meaning proportionately fewer residents aged 20-34 have college diplomas when compared with the Region and Province
- percentage of Fort Erie residents with a university degree is proportionately less than the Region and significantly less than the Province.

**“Education is an investment, not an expenditure.** It’s a public good, not a private privilege. Those societies that are more civic and prosperous have understood that principle. The best investment a society can make is in higher education and research.”

David Johnson, President of the University of Waterloo

### Elementary and Secondary School Education

Based on Provincial Assessment Scores, students attending some schools in the Fort Erie neighbourhoods of Bridgeburg, Fort Erie and Crystal Beach would benefit from additional literacy and educational supports<sup>1</sup>. The committee felt that more data was required than provincial assessment results to analyze links in elementary and secondary school education programs to health factors facing children, youth, and families in our Fort Erie neighbourhoods. Key informant interviews with principals, teachers,





illiteracy by using existing social capital.

**2) Identify Interventions to Facilitate Higher-Level Educational Attainment**

In analyzing the educational profile and our current labour market in Fort Erie, it is recommended that we investigate factors influencing access to post-secondary education programs and retention of college and university graduates in our community. It is also recommended that we investigate factors contributing to a proportionally significant percentage of the population with less than Grade 9 schooling. The intent of the investigation is to identify what interventions we would invest in that would increase levels of educational attainment as a determinant of health.

**3) Rural Health Strategy**

The Rural Ontario Health Services research supports the fact that students who originate from rural communities are at an academic disadvantage when applying for medical school and allied health professions in terms of academic placement. McMaster and Brock Universities have recently undertaken a plan to enhance academic preparedness in high schools serving rural communities. It is recommended that the community investigate this plan, and invest and support this program, if of benefit to our community.

**4) Immigration Strategies**

Documentation reveals that there are a significant number of foreign-trained professionals (including health professionals) and skilled labourers arriving in our community whose

education and training has been paid for elsewhere. Utilizing this labour force potentially influences the economic development of our community. In order to mobilize these resources, we need to continue to support our current language competency training programs and develop employment supports to link with Fort Erie’s labour market.

**5) Educational Centre in Fort Erie**

It is recommended that the community investigate the development and community support for an educational centre in Fort Erie.

a) **Proximity to US:** A significant educational market exists in the Buffalo, New York area for any prospective educational facility. We see a phenomenon emerging where many Canadian students, particularly in the Niagara Region are accessing Universities in Buffalo, New York for Community Health Sciences and Teacher’s College. The question is why do local students pay exorbitant US tuition and travel across the border to meet their goals? Conversely, providing an educational centre in Fort Erie would represent an economic opportunity for Fort Erie in attracting American students and a comparatively affordable opportunity for US students to access post-secondary education.

b) **The case of the University of Waterloo** is one of many examples of the economic impact a facility for education and knowledge creation can have on a community. According to a PricewaterhouseCopper’s study on the economic impact of the University of Waterloo, it was found that \$1.1 billion a year was the direct economic impact on



