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United for Literacy
Littératie Ensemble

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

**Literacy and Skills for
Success in Canada's North**

Introduction

From 2019 to 2024, the Government of Canada engaged United for Literacy to support 672 adult learners in northern British Columbia, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. This project helped to reduce gaps in skills development services across the North. This report describes the local needs and great achievements of our learners and partners.

We thank our funders, local partners, and volunteers for believing in the power of literacy to rewrite and transform lives. We could not do this work without you!

We are proud of all the learners who engaged with us to improve their skills—thank you for trusting United for Literacy to help you achieve your goals!

The word "Canada" is written in a large, black, serif font. A small Canadian flag is positioned above the letter 'a'.

Funded in part by the Government of Canada's Skills for Success Program

This report is written at approximately a high school reading level for accessibility purposes.

Local Assets and Capacity in Northern Communities

United for Literacy offers learning support to help individuals and communities reach their goals. Our programs support individuals and small groups through tutoring, coaching, and teaching. We build on local strengths, such as working with employers and community partners to increase our impact.

Education, training, and employment are influenced by local culture, history, and geography. This reinforces the need for accessible and culturally informed learning solutions for the North.

People who struggle with literacy or other foundational skills have more trouble connecting to support and opportunity. This is harder in the North, with fewer organizations and workers to assist adult learners in achieving their goals. The high cost of business and limited housing in the North also contribute to the situation.



Making community connections in Yellowknife, NT

Project Overview

A total of 672 individuals from 11 communities received literacy and learning support for school, work, and life in the community. This map shows the tutoring locations for in-person and virtual programs.

LES for the North locations



Burns Lake and Prince George, BC

Community Context

Burns Lake is a rural village in central BC on Highway 16. Part of the Regional District of Bulkley–Nechako in Nechako Country, it is a 3-hour drive to the nearest city of Prince George. Prince George is located at the joining of the Nechako and Fraser rivers, 784 km north of Vancouver.

About 40% of residents in Burns Lake are Indigenous, with six local First Nations in the area (Ts'il Kaz Koh First Nation a.k.a. Burns Lake Band, Lake Babine Nation, Skin Tye Band, Cheslatta Carrier Nation, Nee Tahi Buhn Band, and Wet'suwet'en First Nation) and outlying Nations in the region that are supported by local organizations. In Prince George, about 15% of residents identify as Indigenous. The local Lheidli T'enneh Band is a subgroup of the Dakelh people whose traditional territory includes the City of Prince George, British Columbia.

Major industries in and around Prince George are construction, manufacturing, forestry, professional services, and transportation and warehousing. Major industries in the Burns Lake area are forestry/mills, tourism, and mining (by commute). We started a literacy program to help mill workers in Burns Lake. However, because of Covid-19 restrictions, we couldn't reach them as planned. So, we expanded our program to include Prince George, a bigger city with more industries and a high demand for workers.



Tutoring sessions are one-to-one and follow United for Literacy's Student-Centred Individualized Learning methodology, as seen here in Iqaluit, NU

Project activities and outcomes

Our main project partner was the Prince George Nechako Aboriginal Employment and Training Association (PGNAETA). They are the Indigenous Skills and Employment Training Program (ISET) organization responsible for Indigenous workforce development in the region. Other partners included Burns Lake Native Development Corporation, Correctional Services Canada, and the Elizabeth Fry Society.

A total of 144 learners got individual support to complete and advance their personal and employment goals, including these achievements:

- Complete PGNAETA trades programs and other certifications
- Pass industry-required exams to stay employed
- Justice-involved learners re-engage with reading and group learning



Tutoring sessions support learners to advance their own learning priorities, as seen here in Iqaluit, NU

In their own words

The **United for Literacy Instructor** explained her approach and impact in this way:



"I don't go in as 'the expert' so it stays true to my tutoring philosophy—we're talking it through, figuring it out as 'two heads are better than one'... There are three learners who would have been asked to leave the water treatment program, but because they're working with a tutor, they are allowed to stay in, and I can help get them up to speed."

Learners provided this feedback on their experience working with United for Literacy:



"You got me where I needed to be to pass my Trades Math exam."



"I'm more confident in my math. I definitely know a lot more than I did. I'm someone who doesn't normally have a lot of confidence."



"...if you can adapt the math or English or whatever subject to the individual student, that works far better for the student. I wish I had learned in high school the way [the Instructor] is teaching me to learn."

Community partners also shared that the benefits go beyond academics to impact learners' well-being through positive relationships:



"For one learner, learning how to use his phone helped him connect more with his family... Working with [the United for Literacy Instructor] improved his well-being. He was happier because he could connect with people he thought weren't calling him back. He could send money to his sister through online banking. His mental health was improved because his stress about family matters was lessened."



"Thank you...it has been a pleasure having you with us in providing tutoring services to our clients both in group and individually, you always have a spring forward attitude that complemented the services that we provided to our clients in all areas."



"Some of [the learners] were really nervous because they hadn't done training in a long time. They were like 'Oh, I know [the Instructor]! She's really helpful.'"

“ One [learner] came very demoralized, didn't think she could do the math. It's not just the math for me, but moral support as well. It's about listening, encouraging, making sure they know they can do the work. ”

Inuvik, NT

Community context

Inuvik is the third-largest community in the Northwest Territories. It is located 200 km north of the Arctic Circle on the traditional lands of the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit Peoples. Local languages spoken include English, Inuvialuktun, Gwich'in, and North Slavey.

Project activities and outcomes

Our main project partner was the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC). They provided office space and referred learners. Learners were also referred by the territorial government's Education, Culture and Employment (ECE) department, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, Hope House, and employers Nova Inn and Raytheon Industries in Hall Beach.

A total of 75 learners were supported to complete and advance their personal and employment goals, including:

- Finish a degree or gain admission to school
- Complete coursework
- Pass the Trades Entrance Exam
- Gain employment, credentials to stay employed
- Improve skills, including in English
- Obtain Canadian citizenship
- Gain the foundational skills needed to move on to their next goal with continued support



Seventeen learners attended a Class 7 Driver's License workshop in Tuktoyaktuk, NT, and 100% passed! They can now maintain or begin employment with Gruben's Transportation or the local Hamlet authority.

In their own words

Learners with disabilities and other barriers also received the customized support needed to succeed, as in this case reported by United for Literacy's **Instructor:**



"(The learner) has a learning disability so she struggles with some comprehension. The last course she did was English. She got an 81 on her final mark and I was so happy for her because she works really hard. We work pretty much every morning, on assignments and studying for her final."

In the words of **a learner...**



"Before (the Instructor) came, I did a practice test and it came back at 58%, and I recently took it and she said it is up to 70-something percent..."

I didn't understand any kind of math before I started going. I had to guess and put numbers together. Now I can just look at them and put it all together. It made math easier."

Community partners agree the support to adult learners has improved access to careers in the trades:



"I think it really builds up the students' motivation, determination. They feel more focused. They definitely feel more confident about the trades entrance exam. I've been noticing their boost of self-confidence when they walk into our office, to take the exam."



"[The Instructors] have worked with a few that have completed their journeyman certifications. Without the United for Literacy support, I don't know that they'd be where they are ... Just knowing who these people are and seeing them in their workplaces covered in grease with tools—it's so cool. If we didn't have the support that we do through United for Literacy, I don't know if the people who were challenging those exams would be where they are."



"Without United for Literacy's programming and partnership, [we] would face a greater challenge to support all the academic upgrading and employability skill development needs of the community. We believe that their programs have a positive impact on learners and families in the region, and we look forward to supporting this program in the future."

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One learner who applied for an apprenticeship and wanted to pass his trades entrance exam worked virtually with United for Literacy staff. He had previously failed the Trades Entrance Exam and needed help with math. He watched explanatory videos and then worked through exercises, eventually improving his score by 30 percent, passing the exam, and landing his dream job.

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Instructor and Learner in Yellowknife, NT

Yellowknife, NT

Community context:

Yellowknife is the capital and largest community of the Northwest Territories. It is located on the northern shore of Great Slave Lake in the traditional territory of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation and the homeland of the North Slave Métis Alliance. Yellowknife is accessible by air and by road, making it more accessible than other Northern communities.

Twenty-three percent of the population identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit. The main language spoken is English, along with Dogrib (Tlicho), Dene Suline, South and North Slavey, and Inuktitut. There are also many newcomers in the community from the Philippines, United Kingdom, and Vietnam. Often, workers will go to the North to “fast track” their careers before moving south. Major industries include diamond mining, tourism, transportation, and communications.

Project activities and outcomes

Our key partners in Yellowknife were NWT Literacy Council, Aurora College, Conseil de développement économique des Territoires du Nord-Ouest (CDÉTNO), Yellowknife Public Library, Tree of Peace Friendship Centre, and North Slave Correctional Complex. Most learners in Yellowknife were newcomers to Canada.

A total of 137 learners were supported to advance and complete their personal and employment goals:

- Obtain a drivers’ license
- Receive their GED
- Attain Canadian citizenship
- Improve their computer skills
- Become more confident in reading, writing, and socializing
- Gain meaningful employment

A United for Literacy learner and graduate of Aurora College’s Personal Support Worker program



In their own words

In the words of our learners...



"I can read much better. I know more words and I'm more confident."



"I make less mistakes when I speak. I know about my mistakes. I read better."

Our partners affirm the value and need for this support service.



"[The Instructor's] role here is very crucial in terms of the newcomer and immigrant community. He is providing a personal approach. The fact that there is one-on-one tutoring that can be scheduled in accordance with someone's needs means that a lot of newcomers and others who would not have had access (due to timing, daycare needs, transportation) have access. We have a daycare worker shortage here. The role of United for Literacy here for newcomers and immigrants is very important."



"For a lot of people being committed to a class is a challenge. People with young children, or people who are maybe just getting back on their feet... [The Instructor] being able to be flexible to meet people where they're at—United for Literacy is really great. We could use a few people in that role in town."



“A lot of newcomer students have more confidence in their workplace and daily life because of [the Instructor’s] ESL support. He saw a need for drivers’ education training. He knew a lot of students wanted that, so he does a course in the library on weekends. He is filling all these gaps that people were looking for that they could not previously find a place for.”



“[The learners] are progressing really nicely. They feel so much more comfortable navigating their life here in Canada. They feel proud of themselves that they can do this—commit to a schedule and learn. I have noticed improvement in language and computer literacy. They are excited. Some have managed to get jobs from that, now that they can use a computer. I see a sense of empowerment and belonging in my clients, and also achievement.”



Yellowknife learners used hands-on learning to prepare for the Class 7 Drivers Licence written exam. The Instructor designed a series of workshop, one-to-one, and independent learning resources on the Class 7 Driver’s Licence, complete with a plain language, accessible workbook.

Iqaluit, NU

Community context:

Iqaluit is the capital city of Nunavut and only accessible by air travel. It is located on the traditional lands of the Inuit Peoples of the Eastern Arctic. Learners are primarily Inuk or newcomers, and most have a first language other than English. Languages spoken include Inuktitut, French, Arabic, and Somali. Iqaluit is the main hub for government and industry in Nunavut.

Project activities and outcomes

United for Literacy was able to respond to a diverse range of needs. We helped students succeed at Nunavut Arctic College, and offered skills workshops for Inuk government employees. We worked on basic literacy and foundational skills with justice-involved community members. And we delivered workplace communications support for newcomers and Franco-Canadians in the territory. Our Instructor had a waitlist for one-to-one tutoring, indicating high demand for this service.

Our main project partners were Nunavut Women's Correctional Centre, Aaqqigiarvik Correctional Healing Facility, Uttaqivik Community Residential Centre, Nunavut Arctic College, and employers Caribou Cabs and Canadian Arctic Protection Service (CANaps).

In total, 299 learners were supported to complete and advance their personal and employment goals:

- Improve study skills, writing, and English language skills
- Pass trades related exams
- Obtain GED
- Increase confidence
- Remain in good standing with the correctional system
- Gain employment or improve performance feedback from employer

United for Literacy partnered with the Canadian Arctic Protective Services (CANaps), an employer in Iqaluit, to deliver weekly group lessons with frontline security staff on topics like reporting, employability soft skills, numeracy, and writing skills.



In their own words

Learners provided this feedback on their experience receiving skills support from United for Literacy:



“Often (the Instructor) gives me some homework and technical exercises. We like to share some discussion, and he corrects me on certain points. He told me that for my work purpose, I could ask him for help—writing things and him correcting me, working together on my weaknesses... It’s an ongoing process and I still have a lot to do, but I feel much more comfortable with my understanding of certain cultural things now.”

“[The Instructor] would provide tips and I would try them out, to see what was a fit for me. The meetings I had with her definitely helped in different ways— for me to be consistent and have someone to check in with me.”

One of our community partners shared this success story:



“(The Instructor) is just really good at adapting to what the individual person needs. All the (learners) that see him are happy and seem to be learning, not cancelling programs themselves. One that he was teaching just got a certificate— she was the first female in Canada to get it and was super excited about that.”

Rankin Inlet, NU

Community context:

Rankin Inlet is the second-largest community in Nunavut. It is located on the west coast of Hudson Bay, 300 km north of Churchill. It is the hub for transportation, health services, and business in the Kivalliq Region of Nunavut. The population is 80% Inuit, with immigration from the Philippines and Middle Eastern countries.

Project activities and outcomes

One of our key partners in Rankin Inlet is Nunavut Arctic College. Through this and other collaborations, United for Literacy supported community members with their college programs, pursuing employment, and developing a career path. Across all our partnerships in Rankin Inlet, a total of 17 learners were supported to complete and advance their personal and employment goals:

- Improve study skills, writing, and English language skills
- Retention and advancement in Nunavut Teacher Education Program (NTEP) and the Pathways to Adult Secondary School Graduation (PASS) programs
- Improve job search skills and career planning through mentorship



In Rankin Inlet, Kye Alooq has worked with our Instructor since February 2023.

He was our first registered learner with the program in that community. The Instructor provided tutoring and mentorship on workplace essential skills to help Kye get ready for career opportunities.

Kye was accepted into the RCMP's Indigenous Pre-Cadet Training program in Saskatchewan. He successfully completed the initial training and now qualifies to work as a guard or office assistant with the local Rankin Inlet RCMP. He can also pursue further RCMP training to advance his goals.

In their own words

Rankin Inlet was the final program site to launch, with less time to establish partnerships. However, there is great need and opportunity to continue United for Literacy support at this location, as articulated by **one project manager**:



"It's a good priority for us just because it's a travel hub for education. Rankin is also a bit of an industrial centre too, so from a workplace standpoint, there are a lot of opportunities to look into future funding related to employability skills."

A community partner also emphasized the value of the program:



"Students who were having challenges with aspects of their Finite Math and other aspects of the curriculum were assisted. Students' confidence, preparedness and retention skills has markedly improved evidenced in their end of course assessment."



Individual tutoring in Yellowknife

What we achieved

United for Literacy helped 672 adult learners to pursue and achieve their goals by strengthening their foundational skills. Learners ranged in age from 18 to 64, with the vast majority in the 25-to-34-year-old range. All programming was free to participants and partner organizations. Many partners donated space and time for the project, including paying wages during tutoring.

United for Literacy offered student-centred and culturally informed programming that was adapted to the community and learners' circumstances. Instructors went above and beyond to help learners achieve their goals. This included shadowing learners in the workplace to accommodate their schedule, offering evening and weekend classes, and acting as a "buddy" to assist learners in challenging situations (e.g., going to the bank to set up a new account). This speaks to our founding philosophy that "every place is a learning place"!



On-the-job language and employability upgrading with a driver at Caribou Cabs

Conclusion

United for Literacy provides customized programs to improve reading and learning outcomes in Northern communities by using local resources and working with local partners. Our approach is focused on the needs of the students and respects their personal goals and experiences. This method has been shown to improve adult literacy and learning if it has ongoing funding. Many partners have said they would like even more help if it were available.

With Government of Canada funding ending in August 2024, United for Literacy is prepared to keep offering these valuable services if possible. With access to funding and housing, we can use our program models and experience to help all learners across the North who need and want our support.

To learn more about our mission, programs, and impact, please email us at info@unitedforliteracy.ca, check us out at unitedforliteracy.ca, or follow us on social media!



Photos from Inuvik area