

An aerial night photograph of Hamilton, Ontario, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous city lights. A prominent street in the center is decorated with strings of white lights, creating a bright path through the city. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

2025-2026

**Hamilton Literacy
Service Plan**

Literacy and Basic Skills

Your Partner in
Client Success

Community Report March 2025

Acknowledgements

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- Contact North – e-Channel
- Fedcap Canada (Service System Manager)
- Hamilton Employment Ontario (EO) Network
- Hamilton Employment Services
- Hamilton Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Learners
- Hamilton LBS Practitioners
- Learning Networks of Ontario (LNO)
- Provincial Support Organizations for Literacy (PSOL)
- Skills Development Flagship Members (including Ontario Works, Employment Ontario Employment Services and other employment and training providers in Hamilton)
- Workforce Planning Hamilton



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For more information click [here](#)



Highlights

- 4** The Importance of Upskilling
 - 6** How Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Can Help
 - 7** Our Focus for 2025-2026
 - 8** Increased Demand for Service with Decreased Capacity
 - 10** Continued Need for Digital Technology Training
 - 11** Supporting Newcomers and the LBS/ESL Relationship
 - 13** Increased Learners on the Employment Goal Path
 - 15** Increased Learners on the Apprenticeship Goal Path
 - 17** Working Together – Partnership Opportunities
- [Check out our partnership tool](#)

[Access this report online.](#)



Literacy and Basic Skills

A Critical Partner for Workforce Development

ABEA and local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs work together to coordinate services and discuss ways to respond to emerging community needs. Our strength is strategic partnerships. Across the adult education network, we have partnerships that support seamless learner transitions.

Examples

- a learner may need individualized support from a tutor to work on fundamental literacy skills, while also connected with a targeted training program to develop digital literacy skills to prepare for work
- network staff may meet with pre-apprenticeship clients to connect them with numeracy support to prepare them for the in-school portion of their program
- a program may partner with an employer to offer customized upgrading based on employee needs

In all cases, we ensure that clients and partners are also connected to the resources, supports and programs they need through service coordination and partnership development.

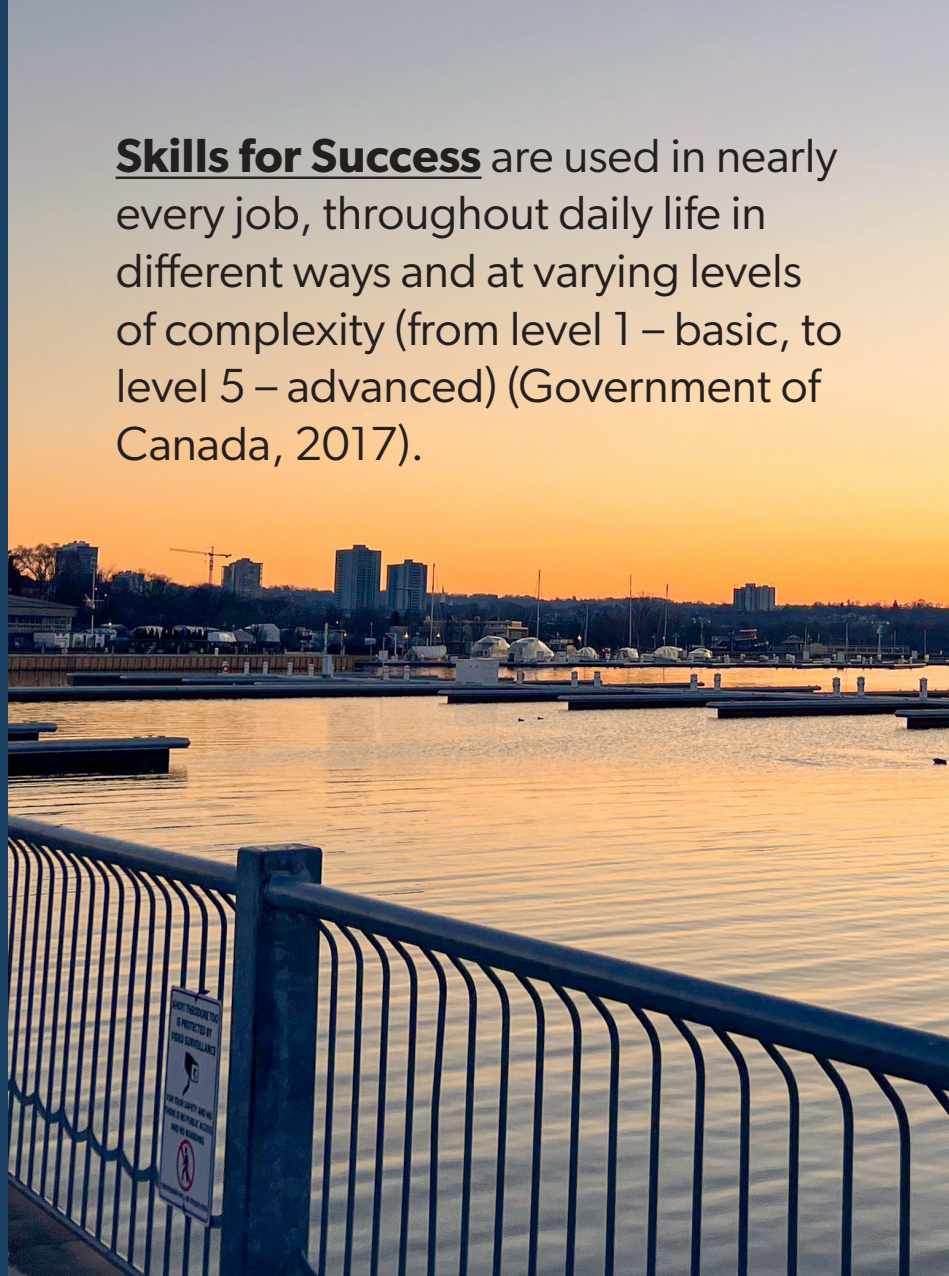
The Importance of Upskilling

It's not just about education on paper – it's also about the ever-evolving skills people need to succeed at home and on the job. Literacy and Basic Skills programs know that it's about getting the job, and it's also about keeping the job. Employers continually cite foundational skills and soft skills as key issues for their labour force and/or talent pool. Employers need employees with up-to-date skills, and those skills are becoming more advanced and more digital.

Foundational Skills

- are needed for work, learning and life
- are the foundation for learning all other skills
- help people evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change

Skills for Success are used in nearly every job, throughout daily life in different ways and at varying levels of complexity (from level 1 – basic, to level 5 – advanced) (Government of Canada, 2017).



The Skills for Success are



Reading



Adaptability



Communication



Digital



Writing



Creativity and Innovation



Collaboration



Numeracy



Problem Solving



The program has helped me strengthen my skills, and I can see clear improvements in areas that I was previously struggling with. I feel more confident and motivated to continue (Adult Learner, 2024).



The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) corresponds to the first 3 levels of the Skills for Success framework. They are used by all Ontario Literacy and Basic Skills programs.

Low skills in literacy and numeracy can have significant effects on labour force attachment and can be a significant barrier to using digital technology – an ever-increasing critical skill in the workforce. The pandemic has certainly shed a light on the importance of digital technology skills. Without them - and the ability to continue to learn new skills – many people will be left behind.

The latest adult literacy survey results, The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), 2022 was just released in December 2024. It is an international study of adults measuring literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments.

Some key findings from the Canadian Results

Literacy

19% scored at Level 1 or below meaning they have low literacy proficiency. At Level 1, they can understand short texts and organized lists when information is clearly indicated, find specific information and identify relevant links. Those below Level 1 may be able to understand short, simple sentences.

Numeracy

20% of adults scored at or below Level 1 proficiency. At Level 1, they can do basic math with whole numbers or money, understand decimals, and find single pieces of information in tables or charts, but may struggle with tasks needing multiple steps (like solving a proportion). Those below Level 1 can add and subtract small numbers.

Adaptive Problem-Solving

22% of adults scored at or below Level 1 proficiency. Adults at Level 1 can solve simple problems with few variables and little irrelevant information, which do not change as they make progress towards the solution. They struggle with multi-step problems, or those needing monitoring of multiple variables. Adults below Level 1 at most understand very simple problems, typically solved in one step.

LBS is a springboard for 5 goal pathways



Employment



Post-secondary



Apprenticeship



Secondary School Credit



Independence

There are many benefits to participating in adult upgrading programs like being more likely to



complete a high school diploma or equivalent



pursue post-secondary education



earn more income over time and manage it effectively



increase soft skills for further education and employment

Early intervention is key.

... Research shows that improving the skills of people at the lower end of the scale (Levels 1 and 2 on the five-level scale for literacy) will have more impact than improving the skills of people who are already at Level 3 or higher. As the people most at risk of losing their entire job to automation are the people employed in low-skilled jobs, upgrading their skills would have the added advantage of making them more employable in a new higher-skilled job.



(Canada West Foundation [Literacy Lost: Canada's Basic Skills Shortfall](#) Lane & Murray, 2018)

Here's the Good News

How Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Can Help

Early intervention is key. Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA) is the adult learning network in Hamilton. We can assist with educational pathway planning including outreach sessions, information, referrals and skills check-ins. We can facilitate partnerships with Literacy and Basic Skills service providers. Clients will be more successful at work or in further education programs if they have an opportunity to review and upgrade their skills.

Upgrading programs help adults with their communication, numeracy and digital skills to achieve their goals. Skills learned in LBS help people to become more resilient and can help people move into roles that are more protected when the economy shrinks. Service providers design programming to address the specific needs of learners. In Hamilton, we have programs that focus on serving learners who identify as Indigenous, Francophone, Deaf/Deafblind and Anglophone to support their learning needs and preferences.

Programs are learner centred. Learners work with practitioners to build a specific learner plan to help them transition to their next step with the skills they need to succeed. The program is flexible and built to support work in other programs. Programs have in-class and online options and offer full and part-time studies. Many programs also offer targeted training programs which are short, specific courses like computers for work or food handling prep.



Our Focus for 2025-2026

Current Trends and Our Planned Actions to Address Them

The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program is an integral pillar to the workforce development system. We support job seekers, workers, pre-apprentices and apprentices who need to upgrade their skills to transition to their next step. We also support literacy and learning as a human right, and support learners with a range of personal and educational goals. In Hamilton, we continue to have a significant impact on the lives of learners in our community. In 2023-2024 we served 1,125 learners, 102% of the community target. 93.5% of learners completed all their learning activities and 87% completed all of their milestones. At exit, 22% of learners were employed and 56% were in training, education or other occupational skills training (EO Data, 2024).

From the learner consultation survey (October 2024), 90% of learners reported being happy with their progress and 98% reported that upgrading is making a difference.

The reach of LBS also continues to expand. We serve diverse learners with a range of backgrounds, identities and educational experiences. It's

important to note that we're not only serving learners with less than a Grade 12 diploma (42%), but also many learners with a Grade 12 diploma (23%) and with higher education (34%). Regardless of their educational history, these learners are assessed at less than level 3 in a core competency and require LBS programming to reach their next step. In 2023-2024, 40% of learners identified as having a disability, 26% identified as a visible minority and 15% identified as a newcomer.

It's also important to note that learners are living with multiple barriers that affect their learning including

- mental health challenges
- learning disabilities
- physical disabilities
- language barriers
- childcare concerns, family obligations
- managing competing priorities
- transportation difficulties
- food insecurity

(LBS Practitioner Survey, 2024)

There are 5 key trends impacting our community that are having significant implications for LBS programming.

- ① Increased Demand for Service with Decreased Capacity
- ② Continued Need for Digital Technology Training
- ③ Supporting Newcomers and the LBS/ESL Relationship
- ④ Increased Learners on the Employment Goal Path
- ⑤ Increased Learners on the Apprenticeship Goal Path

I recently had an older learner in my program successfully complete her final culminating task and move onto credits. She thought that she would never achieve this, but through hard work and dedication, she is so proud of herself for having achieved this feat.

(LBS Practitioner, 2024)

1 Increased Demand for Service with Decreased Capacity

Increased Demand

LBS programs across Hamilton are reporting increased intake both for core programming and especially for targeted training programs and they are struggling to meet the demand. As of September 2024 (50% of the year), Hamilton had served 67% of their collective learner target compared to 60% in the western region and 60% across Ontario. Referrals from Employment Services increased 3.2% from 2022-2023, accounting for 14.5% of total referrals in 2023-2024 (EO Data, 2024). This is likely due to the significant benefits of targeted training as part of someone's employment plan.

ABEA continues to play an active role in service coordination and planning and regularly meets with community partners interested in increased connections with LBS. This is particularly true for organizations offering pre-employment training programs like pre-apprenticeship. In these programs, skills identification, pathway planning and skills upgrading will be critical for clients to transition successfully to their next step.

Decreased Capacity

Flatlined funding has been combined with significant increases in program costs because of steep inflation rates. This has decreased program capacity to serve learners, and to serve them with the level of intensity that they need. Although Hamilton LBS programs are continuing to meet their learner targets, they've had to make difficult decisions about program delivery. For example, programs have had to reduce program hours, cut targeted training programs and decline partnership requests for offsite service delivery. The repeal of Bill 124 has added additional pressure to school board and college programs with the obligations of retro-active and continuing pay increases.



The demand for our services continues to grow, outpacing our available resources, which affects our ability to provide adequate support and programming for the increasing number of learners.

(LBS Practitioner, 2024)



Actions

- a. Continue to work with the ministry to advocate for increased core funding.
- b. Explore ways to streamline administrative tasks so more time and resources can be focused on serving learners with the level of intensity and support they need.
- c. Consider offering training for administrators focused on delivering programming on a continued decreased budget.

2 Continued Need for Digital Technology Training

Digital fluency is needed for work, learning and life. Over the next decade, 90% of jobs will require digital skills but only 54% of workers have the necessary skills (Conference Board of Canada, 2022). We must address this digital divide for economic growth and for people to thrive.

56% of employment and training partners cited digital technology as a key skills gap for employment. 52% had made a referral to LBS in the past year to support their client to upgrade their skills, including digital technology skills. They identified several barriers that their clients are facing including digital technology skills and lack of access to digital technology (Employment and Training Partners Survey, 2024).

Digital technology targeted training programs continue to be oversubscribed across Hamilton. Topics include computer basics, digital skills for work, social media, Internet use and safety, etc. Added to this is the continued lack of access to digital technology and reliable Internet. Despite the great need for digital technology training, programs

are challenged to keep up with this need by aging devices and don't have funding for updating them

"... with the world becoming more and more technology based, a lot of people feel like they are getting left behind and are seeking digital literacy training" (LBS Practitioner, 2024). This is especially true considering the recently launched Canadian Adult Education Credential (CAEC) which is a digital-based assessment.



It's making a difference in my everyday life getting me back on track with a daily routine.

(Adult Learner, 2024)

Actions

- a. Attempt to maintain the current level of targeted training focused on digital technology.
- b. Continue to provide professional development for practitioners around digital technology in the classroom.
- c. Continue to provide information to practitioners about loaner and refurbished programs to support increased access to digital technology.

3 Supporting Newcomers and the LBS/ESL Relationship

Newcomers in Ontario had the highest unemployment rate in September 2024 at 11.8% (Workforce Planning Hamilton, Labour Market Snapshot, September 2024). According to the EmployerOne Survey (2024), employers were dissatisfied with the newcomer labour pool (Workforce Planning Hamilton).

Their reasons included that applicants

- had insufficient work experience – 29%
- didn't meet the language requirements for the job – 21%
- had insufficient technical skills – 20%
- had insufficient qualifications (education/credential) – 18%
- had insufficient motivation, attitude or interpersonal skills – 18%

In 2025-2027, the Government of Canada will be reducing immigration from 2024-2025 levels (permanent residents by 21%, new international students by 10% and temporary workers by 16%) (Government of Canada, 2024). Hamilton has been receiving approximately 1% of new permanent residents in Canada. In 2024, the projected number of permanent residents is 5,955. If this 1% continues, Hamilton will receive about 4,300 permanent residents in 2025, 4,100 in 2026 and 4,000 in 2027 (Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council Newsletter, October 31, 2024). Although a decrease may alleviate some stress on the language and literacy programs, there will still be thousands of newcomers potentially in need of language and upgrading support.

Almost 15% of learners in 2023-2024 identified as being a newcomer to Canada, many of whom speak English as a second or additional language (EO Data, 2024). Again and again, through Literacy Community Planning (LCP) meetings, Frontline Working Group meetings and the practitioner survey (October 2024), practitioners are confirming an increase in learners that speak English as a second language.

In conversations with the YMCA Language Assessment Centre we know that many ESL and LINC programs are at capacity and language programs are faced with long waiting lists (upwards of 6 months). ABEA and the YMCA have a formal referral protocol to ensure that clients are connected with the programs that are right for them.

There is a high need for collaboration between language and literacy programs to support learners to gain the skills they need to reach their goals. LBS is a strong partner of choice for language learners that need math and digital technology upgrading to supplement language learning. LBS is also a great transition partner from ESL/LINC so learners can pursue further education, training and employment. But with LBS reaching capacity as well, these collaborations and pathways are at risk.



It's made a huge improvement on my education.

(Adult Learner, 2024)



Actions

- a.** Continue to work with the ministry around better integration of literacy and language programming.
- b.** Continue to maintain a formal referral protocol with the YMCA Assessment Centre to ensure clients are getting to the right programs.
- c.** Continue to offer educational pathway planning supports with newcomer-serving organizations/ programs.
- d.** The school board programs will continue to work with their language program counterparts to maintain partnerships as much as possible. This may include transition referrals to adult upgrading programs. For example, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners taking part in targeted training.

4 Increased Learners on the Employment Goal Path

Hamilton's unemployment rate is 6.2% or 28,100 people. Unemployment continues to be highest among youth at 18%.

The highest posted jobs in September 2024 were

- registered nurses
- retail salespersons
- cooks
- store shelf stockers
- food service jobs

(Workforce Planning Hamilton, Labour Market Snapshot, September 2024)

According to Workforce Planning Hamilton's EmployerOne Survey (2024), employers continued to have hiring difficulties where they couldn't find qualified candidates. 13% of employers cited foundational skills gaps as a negative workplace impact and 33% said they had challenges recruiting skilled employees. 56% of employers reporting difficulty with hiring due to poor labour pool and unqualified labour pool. Key shortages were felt in the skilled trades, early learning sector and sales.

The top reasons employers cited for hard-to-fill positions included

- insufficient work experience – 36%
- insufficient interpersonal skills – 35%
- insufficient qualifications – 31%
- not enough applicants – 29%
- insufficient technical skills – 27%

"The labour market is very competitive right now" (Employment and Training Partner Survey, 2024).

"There is definitely a skill gap for the jobs requirements and the applicants qualifications" (Employment and Training Partner Survey, 2024).

Hamilton employment and training partners report the following top skills needed for their clients to prepare for employment

- soft skills - 84%
- short-term training (like smart serve, food handlers, etc.) – 60%
- language skills – 60%
- digital technology - 56%
- apprenticeship – 48%
- grade 12/equivalent, reading, writing – 44%

The majority of respondents (40%) reported that 71-90% of their clients could benefit from skills upgrading to prepare for employment (Employment and Training Partners Survey, 2024). 52% had made a referral to LBS in the past year to support their client to upgrade their reading, writing, math and digital technology skills. They also referred to LBS for soft skills development and targeted training programs. In a consultation with Fedcap Canada (Service System Manager), they recognized the need for employment service clients to access LBS and other education and training programs to reach their goals of getting and keeping a job (Fedcap Canada Consultation, 2024).

Employment partners identified several barriers that their clients are facing including

- lack of education or skills, gaps in learning
- mental and physical health concerns, substance use
- transportation
- financial insecurity
- food insecurity
- housing insecurity
- lack of Canadian work experience
- underemployment
- language proficiency
- time away from paid employment
- childcare

- systemic barriers (examples - racism, ageism, sexual identity, justice-involved)
- digital technology skills and lack of access to digital technology

(Employment and Training Partners Survey, 2024, Ontario Works Consultation, 2024)

When asked about employer needs for workers, employment and training partners (2024) reported

- skills like communication and digital technology
- experience
- education
- soft skills such as reliability, positive attitude, willingness to learn, strong work ethic, ability to take constructive feedback
- licences and training such as drivers licence, CPR/First-Aid

Retention is also an issue. Many clients struggle to retain employment for multiple reasons. Clients could likely benefit from developing skills for resilience and to overcome employment-related obstacles (Skills Development Flagship Consultation, 2024).

In LBS in 2023-2024, 40% of learners were on the employment goal path, higher than the western region (32%) and the province (33%). The employment goal path is now the highest chosen goal path of learners in Hamilton compared to secondary school credit (19%), post-secondary (17%), independence (16%) and apprenticeship (8%) (EO Data, 2024). This is likely due to factors in the labour market and increased connections and referrals from Employment Services (as noted above).

Actions

- Continue to refer learners to Employment Services for short and longer-term employment support.
- Continue to highlight employment supports in the Learner Spotlight Series.
- Continue to support practitioners to serve learners on the employment goal path through our online portal, frontline working group meetings and the practitioner conference.
- Continue to provide outreach to Employment Services and other community partners serving job seekers and workers to raise awareness of upgrading programs.
- Continue to work with Fedcap Canada to analyze the effectiveness of the new Referring to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Desk Aid for employment counsellors.
- Potentially work with Workforce Planning Hamilton around an Upskill Hamilton campaign.
- The public school board will continue to partner with Employment Service providers to provide services onsite at the Issac Brock, Hill Park and Jackson Square locations. This will include presentations and drop-in appointments.
- Review existing and new employment-focused culminating tasks through the Frontline Working Group meetings.

5 Increased Learners on the Apprenticeship Goal Path

Apprenticeship and skilled trades continue to be a key priority for LBS, given its implications for the current and future labour market. “The need for tradespersons is now higher than ever in Hamilton” (Workforce Planning Hamilton, EmployerOne 2023). WPH published the Under Pressure 2.0 report in 2020. It focused on the skilled trades shortage in Hamilton. The report identified a hiring crisis in the skilled trades. Causes included high training costs, low retention rates and an unqualified labour pool.

1,183 people registered for an apprenticeship in Hamilton in 2022-2023, an increase of 32% from the previous year. Not surprisingly, 49.7% of new registrants were in the 15-24 age group or youth. However, 47.5% were in the 25-44 age group, signaling that entry into the skilled trades is happening later in life as well. In 2022-2023 there were 3,721 active apprentices (EO Data, Workforce Planning Hamilton, 2023). Overall completions across Canada remain low – 47% for men and 34% for women in 2021 (Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, National Registration and Completion Trends in Red Seal Trades 2023).

In a consultation with the Skills Development Flagship committee (October 2024), they reported that there is a lot of client interest to enter the skilled trades but also a lot of challenges including

- difficulties navigating the various apprenticeship/skilled trades pathways
- connecting with employers interested in hiring apprentices
- lack of information about what careers in the skilled trades realistically look like and what’s required to be successful

Newcomers and immigrants with skilled trades experience also experience barriers. Many have the skills and experience to challenge the Certificate of Qualification exam but aren’t successful because they may have been out of school for some time and don’t have the preparation support they need such as language programming and understanding the exam model.

On the other side, employers are struggling to retain enough staff. They don’t have enough journeypersons who can train apprentices and they don’t have enough time to train new employees (Skills Development Flagship Consultation, October 2024). The EmployerOne survey (2024) identified key shortages were felt in the skilled trades by employers.

8.1% of learners were on the apprenticeship goal path in 2023-2024, an increase of 3.5% from 2022-2023 (EO Data, 2024). Referrals from apprenticeship programs increased by 3.2% from 2022-2023, accounting for 5.8% of total referrals in 2023-2024. This is significantly higher than the western region and the province with 2.8% and 1.9% respectively (EO Data, 2024). This is likely due to the increased connections with apprenticeship stakeholders through the Skills for Success initiative. However, in the first half of 2024-2025, programs are reporting decreased connections and referrals from apprenticeship because of the initiative coming to a close and decreased capacity to maintain relationships and provide service with decreased funding.



Actions

- a.** Continue to work with apprenticeship stakeholders to raise awareness of how adult upgrading programs can support people on the apprenticeship continuum.
- b.** Continue to support practitioners to serve learners on the apprenticeship goal path or apprenticeship as a long-term goal. For example, preparing for the specific in-school portions of their training or the Certification of Qualification exam.



Partnerships with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)

Here are some scenarios of how we can work closer together.

Goal Setting and Planning – Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) can assist clients to increase their Skills for Success in reading, writing, math, digital technology and more and gain the soft skills and confidence needed to set achievable employment goals.

It includes those who

- are early school leavers – don't have their Grade 12/ equivalent
- report difficulties with literacy/numeracy skills (or don't have the skills for their employment goal)
- have little experience or have difficulty with digital technology
- are unsure of their skills or the program they need
- want options and information to meet their upgrading needs
- have or may have a learning disability or learning challenge
- lack soft skills/work skills for employment

Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA) is the first point of contact for upgrading programs in Hamilton. [Refer clients here.](#)

A top-down view of several hands of different skin tones working together to assemble large, interlocking gears on a dark, textured wooden surface. One gear is a vibrant gold color, while the others are a matte grey. The hands are positioned around the gears, some holding them in place while others appear to be fitting them together. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the wood and the metallic surfaces of the gears.

**Referrals/action plans through ABEA
can be made to all adult education
programs including**

- upgrading programs (including targeted skills/employment training programs)
- credit programs (secondary school diploma)
- apprenticeship
- post-secondary
- short-term training/licenses
- digital technology upgrading



Pre-Employment

Adult upgrading programs can assist clients with specific skills for the job they are preparing for. They can also offer targeted training if needed and available.

Pre-Apprenticeship/Apprenticeship

There has been a lot of targeted curriculum developed in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) around the skilled trades. Programs can support foundational upgrading for specific trades. They can also promote the apprenticeship/skilled trades option to learners without clearly defined employment goals. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs can also support signed apprentices to prepare for the academic workload and to prepare for the Certificate of Qualification exam by working on study skills and test-taking.

Check out this [video](#) highlighting the benefits of upgrading for apprenticeship.

Employment

LBS can help workers keep their job and advance by helping them upgrade specific skills needed. We can support workers at risk of losing their job due to increased skill demands, automation and/or soft skills or employability skills.

LBS, by its very nature, is flexible. Programs are continually finding ways to serve more learners who are working – evenings, online, blended, etc. LBS can play a role in long-term employment retention as well as improvement of employment outcomes. With continued skills upgrading, clients can not only keep their jobs, they can get better ones. Key areas of support are digital literacy, financial literacy, job-related literacy and numeracy tasks, and upgrading to access further education and training.

Are you working with clients interested in exploring in-demand, entry level jobs with opportunity for growth? Check out the **Career Pathways** tool developed by ABEA and partners.



The program has helped me strengthen my skills, and I can see clear improvements in areas that I was previously struggling with. I feel more confident and motivated to continue.

(Adult Learner, 2024)



LBS programs are, at any given moment, working with hundreds of learners across the city. Learners are working to transition to their next step.

LBS programs act as a recruitment pipeline for many programs. Do you offer a program that might be of interest to adult learners? Connect with us today so we can learn more!



[Click here for the
full community
partner toolkit.](#)



Let's
work
together!



What ABEA Can Offer

As the adult learning network, we are your first point of contact for adult education in Hamilton. We coordinate and facilitate partnerships. If you're looking to partner with a service provider, we can set up a meeting with one, several or all service providers as needed.

We also offer

- educational planning presentations to client and staff groups
- individual educational interviews
- skills check-ins - Refer clients who have been out of school for a long time, are unsure of their skills, report learning challenges, have difficulties with daily literacy tasks, need a Grade 12/equivalent, etc.
- Clear Writing training and consulting (including accessibility)
- Workplace Education Services

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program Partnerships

A key component to the LBS program is that it's flexible and customizable. If planned and resourced, programming can be created and delivered to meet specific community needs onsite, or at a partner location.

Connect with us today to learn more!

