



5

Facts about literacy

Literacy and justice

The Canadian legal system is based on equity and fairness for all. Literacy barriers may weaken the rights of people with lower levels of literacy.

Fact

Fewer than 25% of Canadians can read legal documents and understand legal language and process.

Low literacy can lead to unemployment, poverty, poor health, and lack of access to services and information. This can lead to crime. Literacy is a key part of any crime prevention strategy.

Key issues

- ◆ Any crime prevention program must include literacy.
- ◆ Parents need better literacy skills to break the cycle of low literacy for their children.
- ◆ Justice is not equal if people do not have equal access.
- ◆ Improving literacy helps long-term economic growth. It creates a more productive and community-oriented culture.
- ◆ On average, offenders have lower literacy skills than the rest of us.
- ◆ Offenders who improve their literacy skills are less likely to commit another crime. Literacy programs give inmates a second chance.
- ◆ 65% of people entering prisons or jails for the first time have less than a grade 7 education.
- ◆ Literacy affects all who participate in the justice system: jurors, witnesses, victims, the accused and convicted.

Literacy

A citizen with low literacy may have fewer rights and less understanding of the law and justice system.

Crime

Low literacy may lead to risky behaviour. This can lead to criminal behaviour.

Society

Improving the literacy levels of a society leads to less crime.

While poverty, unemployment, isolation, and desperation can lead to a life of crime, literacy training provides many youths and adults with their first chance at a brighter future. At least 75% of incarcerated adults were persistent offenders in their youth.

One million dollars invested in incentives to graduate from high school would prevent 258 crimes a year.

Literacy is for life.



What is literacy?

Literacy is **the** essential skill. It is the ability to use printed information to function in society, at work and in the family. It is the combination of thinking and social skills we need to analyze and use information to control our own lives, achieve our goals and develop our knowledge and potential.

Literacy Nova Scotia (LNS) supports the literacy community in Nova Scotia. Our mission is to make sure every Nova Scotian has access to quality literacy education.

How to reach us...



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Resources

Correctional Services Canada, 613.992.5891 or
www.csc-scc.gc.ca

John Howard Society of Canada, 613.542.7547 or
www.johnhoward.ca

Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies,
613.238.2422 or www.elizabethfry.ca

Movement for Canadian Literacy, www.literacy.ca
*Money Well Spent: Investing in Preventing
Crime*, National Crime Prevention Centre, 1996.

Literacy and justice challenges

- ◆ Support and fund prison-based education programs so inmates can get a grade 12 diploma.
- ◆ Form partnerships among justice advocates, legal professionals, literacy groups and governments to research literacy levels and needs, and respond by creating new initiatives.
- ◆ Make sure that families and youth “at risk,” especially children in care, have access to early literacy programs and help in school.
- ◆ Provide consistent and accessible supports to children, families and adults who have learning disabilities.
- ◆ Promote plain language in the legal process to make sure the courts are fair and effective.

Fact

55% of people in prison in Nova Scotia have language and math skills at less than a grade 10 level.

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