The problem of low literacy in Canada is an historic one, and for many years there have been job readiness, employment skills and adult upgrading programs offered in every province. In the 1960s, Canada Manpower programs were created to tackle low literacy in adults. These were all literacy programs but under a different name. The term ‘literacy’ was not widely used.

In the 1980s, an international study on adult literacy painted a bleak picture of the literacy skills of Canadians. Senator Joyce Fairbairn began to speak publicly about the seriousness of the literacy problem; but there was also a serious misunderstanding of the root of the problem. Articles were appearing in newspapers across the country that linked literacy rates with financial and economic issues. LNS co-founder Jane MacDonald recalls reading a Globe and Mail article in which the author blamed adults with low literacy skills for Canada’s economic ills of the country instead of actually doing something to help them improve their skills. “This was just a dreadful ‘blame the victim’ attitude,” observes Jane. “People have low literacy because the system failed them, not the other way around.”

In 1987 the National Literacy Secretariat was formed to provide funding for the creation of an independent literacy organization in every province and territory. These regional organizations would be able to examine and address issues at the local level and provide solutions.

The definition of literacy has evolved, and there were changes over the years in how our goals were met, but the goals remain unchanged and that is a great compliment to LNS. For over twenty years, Literacy Nova Scotia has remained true to its mission,” Ann Marie emphasizes. “Mission drift is a downfall for an organization, and like any non-profit, you have to go where the funding is. Literacy Nova Scotia has managed to do this and still maintain a commitment to its core values.”

Literacy Nova Scotia has always been a voice for adults with low literacy who could not speak for themselves. As the glue that keeps literacy together in this province, LNS has connections to learners, practitioners, governments and the business world, and allows movement of ideas from one to the other. For all of us, learning is life-long, and as a conduit for learning, Literacy Nova Scotia has become a voice for all.

Literacy is the ability to use printed information to function in society, at work and in the family. It is often combined with other skills, such as thinking and problem solving, oral communication, numeracy, computer use, working in a team and continuous learning, to become the essential skill set needed to control our lives, achieve our goals and develop our knowledge and potential.

Our Mission: That all Nova Scotians have equal access to quality literacy, essential skills, and lifelong learning opportunities. Literacy Nova Scotia cares about literacy and essential skills learning opportunities being available wherever and whenever there is a need or interest. That means we support community sector programs and college and school board programs, as well as programs in workplaces. LNS supports the adult literacy field in the broadest sense. We have always known that literacy is bigger than reading and writing. We know that literacy is all those skills needed for accessing and using information that help us contribute to our communities, families and workplaces.

How to reach us...

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This organization is partly funded by the Government of Canada’s Office of Literacy and Essential Skills. All Content © Literacy Nova Scotia

We are very proud to have served the literacy community in this province for 20 years. We look ahead to a future where all Nova Scotians continue to have equal access to Literacy, Essential Skills, Lifelong Learning and Workplace Education opportunities.
Jacques Demers: Literacy and His Life’s Journey

By Lesley Dunn

On November 15, 2012, thanks to the Investors Group and Literacy Nova Scotia, I had the great privilege of taking a group of adult learners from the Dartmouth Learning Network to hear Senator Jacques Demers, former head coach of the 1993 Stanley Cup winning team the Montreal Canadiens, and two time winner of the Jack Adams Award for NHL Coach of the Year speak at the Bella Rose Centre in Halifax.

Demers spent much of his life hiding an inability to read or write. He grew up in a home with considerable violence and explains when you live in that kind of environment the noise through the night makes it difficult for you to sleep and impossible for you to learn during the day. He has overcome many challenges in his life and believes that everything is possible if you believe in yourself.

His message to those in the audience was clear. “When things go bad you cannot crumble under pressure. We all have the right to dream and when we stop dreaming of what could be it becomes hard to achieve that goal. We all have weaknesses and we all have strengths. My weakness was my struggle with literacy. Too many people want a smooth ride to the end of the goal road. Normal people work hard to achieve their goals. Those that tell you that you are incapable of reaching your goals don’t want you to succeed and are jealous of those who do succeed, so don’t listen to them. You need to have confidence in yourself. Have a vision for your future and accept responsibility for how you are to reach that vision. Do not lay blame on others if you hit a bump in the road. Those who expect to be given things fail. You have to pay a price to succeed and that price is hard work and determination.”

Demers spoke passionately about his life’s journey; about the people along the way who were never afraid to provide him with an opportunity to succeed. Through the highs and lows of his address we were challenged to reflect on our own lives: “just because you graduated from university doesn’t mean you’re smarter or that you have better judgment than someone who has trouble reading and writing. I’ve fought hard and I’ve overcome the challenges I faced.”

I watched intently as our learners listened to Demers’ message, their faces acknowledging that this man has walked the same path as they and managed to achieve great things in his life. I cheered inwardly when he challenged those in the audience to be the first to lend a hand and the first to show respect when they encountered anyone with literacy challenges, as they will never truly understand the circumstances that led that individual to where they are today.

In a quiet message to our learners he challenged them to continually test themselves, to not be afraid of failure as it is a stepping stone to learning, and to never be the one to say “if only I had done...” as life is too short for regrets and what-ifs.

It was a perfect evening to share with our learners and we are very grateful to the Investors Group and Literacy Nova Scotia for this wonderful opportunity. Just when you think the evening could not get any better one of our learners won an autographed picture of Demers on the bench during his historic 1993 Stanley Cup win with the Montreal Canadiens, a symbolic passing of the torch from one man who overcame his literacy challenges to one young woman who is looking to overcome her own.

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ACALA TV offers workshops to literacy organizations and practitioners on photography, video production and social marketing skills. They welcome volunteers, particularly those with a background in journalism, video production, or documentary filmmaking. They are happy to train and mentor any individual willing to work hard and learn.

Lesley Dunn is Executive Director of the Dartmouth Literacy Network

Jacques Demers with Marie Williamson, winner of a special autographed picture.

ACALATV Project Coordinator Caroll Shabala
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Terri-Lyn remembers the moment she first walked into an ALP classroom: “My future began to change, and change it certainly did. Initially I intended to enroll in the IT program at the college after I completed the ALP, however things happened that changed my direction. While helping fellow classmates that were struggling with school work, I discovered that I loved helping people to help themselves. Imagine my excitement when I also discovered that not only could I make a living at it, but I could study Human Services at the Truro Campus.”

Before attending ALP, Terri-Lyn felt that she had good organizational skills. Returning to school enhanced them to the point that she became an organizational tutor for NSCC Disability Services. While she had a home computer, she rarely used it, only to send an occasional email.

Today Terri-Lyn teaches her children how to operate different software programs. Her computer skills have developed to the point that she can now list them on her resume as employable skills.

Looking back over her adult learning journey, Terri-Lyn says she always believed she was smart, and now she has an education to back up her beliefs. “I know that tomorrow I could lose everything. It has already happened to me once. But now I know that I have an education, so I have the tools to rebuild my life if I should ever have to again.

“I had a bucket list when I started: Graduate high school, learn to drive a car, get a car, graduate from college, get a job and buy a house. Now every single thing is crossed off, so I have a new list: Get my degree, travel to Europe, visit the North and take my children to Disney. Before ALP, dreams were just dreams, but now dreams are actually to-do lists. That’s the best thing I took away from the ALP program: the belief that I can make my dreams come true.”
By 1991, the Continuous Learning Association of Nova Scotia had received funding for regional facilitators to seek out literacy stakeholders across Nova Scotia and organize discussions that would lead to the formation of this province’s first literacy coalition. These stakeholders would include other organizations, not-for-profit associations, volunteers, and established service providers such as Laubach Councils, as well as anyone who could be considered a ‘consumer’ of adult learning.

Jane MacDonald remembers the evening when she met one of the regional facilitators at the University of Cape Breton (UCB) where she was working as their resource centre manager. “He was doing research on whether there was a need for an umbrella organization that could bring all the community-based adult learning groups in Nova Scotia together. I was able to contribute because I had been involved in the public school system, and with initiatives like UCB’s co-op reading program. I knew the importance of literacy, and I knew we all had to work together to make things better.”

In 1992, after a series of provincial meetings and much discussion, one adult learner and one practitioner were chosen from each of six regions in Nova Scotia to form the new coalition. From these twelve representatives, two co-chairs were selected: Craig Logan, an adult learner from Sheet Harbour and practitioner Barb Moreton.

“We formed the Nova Scotia Provincial Literacy Coalition,” says Barb. “Most provinces were using their provincial name in their titles. We started with ‘NS’ and were going to follow it up with ‘Literacy Coalition’ until someone realized that the letters NSLC already stood for something else! So we added the ‘P’ for ‘Provincial’ and ended up with NSPLC.”

Barb recalls the early days of the coalition: “We received tremendous support from our funders and the literacy section of the Department of Education. We built the organization from the ground up, everything from registering with joint stocks to creating our mission.” The NSPLC’s mission was:
- Promote the right and access to publicly funded education,
- Increase public awareness of the availability of existing education and training for adults,
- Promote equity and equality in education,
- Promote the right and access to employment focused programming and training,
- Increase public awareness of the availability of the Literacy Nova Scotia’s definition of literacy is maintained that province-wide focus.”

In the twenty years that Literacy Nova Scotia has served the community, ‘literacy’ has grown and expanded to include essential skills, workforce development, curriculum development, workplace education, employability, cultural and life skills, portfolio, prior learning, competency levels, and the list goes on. What remains constant in the definition of literacy is that learning is applied in all aspects of one’s life, whether it is in the home, in the workplace, or in the community.

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- Promote equity and equality in education.
- Promote literacy as a consumer of adult learning.
- Increase public awareness of the availability of existing education and training for adults.
- Create opportunities to help develop the educational and employment needs of the community.

In 1992-93 activities:

- Received funds for their NSPLC Secretariat, they began a series of projects that moved the organization forward.
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- Held a conference for practitioners and learners.
- Developed a community-training program for literacy and leadership skills.
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“We felt like we were walking and running at the same time to build the organization and do the literacy work.”

- Barbara Moreton

Former Chair

In 2002, Ann Marie Downie became the executive director of the coalition. In 2003, NSPLC officially changed its name to Literacy Nova Scotia, but became known as Literacy Nova Scotia. Ann Marie had been in government during the founding process and had watched from a distance. “The coalition founders were adamant that this organization be provincial in focus, and not just centred in one area of the province, even though a lot of the literacy activity at the time was centred in Halifax. To this day, Literacy Nova Scotia has maintained that province-wide focus.”

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Continued on page 8
ACALA TV
By Philip Girvan

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Celebrating 20 Years of Service: 1992 – 2012

20 Years:
Changing Names, Same Mission

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What’s Inside?

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Literacy Nova Scotia

The definition of literacy has evolved, and there were changes over the years in how our goals were met, but the goals remain unchanged and that is a great compliment to LNS. For over twenty years, Literacy Nova Scotia has remained true to its mission,” Ann Marie emphasizes. “Mission drift is a downfall for an organization, and like any non-profit, you have to go where the funding is. Literacy Nova Scotia has managed to do this and still maintain a commitment to its core values.”

Literacy Nova Scotia has always been a voice for adults with low literacy who could not speak for themselves. As the glue that keeps literacy together in this province, LNS has connections to learners, practitioners, governments and the business world, and allows movement of ideas from one to the other. For all of us, learning is life-long, and as a conduit for learning, Literacy Nova Scotia has become a voice for all.

Literacy is the ability to use printed information to function in society, at work and in the family. It is often combined with other skills, such as thinking and problem solving, oral communication, numeracy, computer use, working in a team and continuous learning, to become the essential skill set needed to control our lives, achieve our goals and develop our knowledge and potential.

Our Mission: That all Nova Scotians have equal access to quality literacy, essential skills, and lifelong learning opportunities. Literacy Nova Scotia cares about literacy and essential skills learning opportunities being available wherever and whenever there is a need or interest. That means we support community sector programs and college and school board programs, as well as programs in workplaces. LNS supports the adult literacy field in the broadest sense. We have always known that literacy is bigger than reading and writing. We know that literacy is all those skills needed for accessing and using information that help us contribute to our communities, families and workplaces.

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This organization is partly funded by the Government of Canada’s Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

We are very proud to have served the literacy community in this province for 20 years. We look ahead to a future where all Nova Scotians continue to have equal access to Literacy, Essential Skills, Lifelong Learning and Workplace Education opportunities.

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