



Ideas to overcome barriers in your organization

Introduction

Creating literacy friendly environments starts with recognizing that some adults have difficulties with reading, writing and related communication practices. Here are some ways to address some of these difficulties and help people access your agency's services.

Face to face communication

First steps

- Identify what knowledge and literacy skills a client needs to use your agency's services.
- Identify jargon that is specific to your agency. Develop simple ways to explain these terms to clients.
- Learn to recognize signs that clients may have reading or writing difficulties. Be sensitive to clients' situations.
- Have staff available to assist clients with any reading or writing tasks.
- Offer all clients the same help to avoid drawing attention to people with literacy problems.
- Accommodate clients who may want to bring friends or spokespersons to their meetings with staff. Allow others to assist as needed.
- Have translators available to help clients who don't speak English easily.

First contact

- Collect intake information over the phone to reduce the need to fill out forms at the reception desk.
- Give simple directions over the phone, including bus route numbers, so clients can find you easily.

Help with reading and writing tasks

- Ask all clients if they need help with completing forms.
- Use literacy sensitive lead-ins such as: "I'm not sure the questions on this form are very clear. Let's go over them together." OR "The print on this form can be hard to read. Can I help you with it?"

Written by Michael Wallace, 2009.

Widening Access for Adult Literacies Project
<http://www.wideningaccessforliteracies.ca>

- When giving out printed information, go over information with clients.
- Use simple language and avoid using jargon.
- Use a highlighter to underline the most important points.
- Know how to check for understanding: "Let me review this with you"
- Ask non-offensive questions: " Does this make sense to you?"
- Paraphrase what the person said to show you understand.

Print-based communication

- Take training in clear language principles and practices.
- Use clear language principles when you prepare print materials:
 - Provide information in logical sequences. Use point form.
 - State and respond to typical client questions.
 - Use simple sentence structures and avoid jargon.
 - Aim for a readability level of 7 or below using the Flesch/Kincaid readability scale. (You can set the readability function in Microsoft Word spell check.)
 - Use a large font, plenty of space and illustrations that support understanding of text.
 - Have a definite contrast between background colours and printed words.
 - Align text to the left.
- Develop brochures, pamphlets, posters, forms and websites with input from the community and some of your clients.
- Obtain client feedback before printing/copying materials. Pre-test a brochure with students in a literacy program in your area.
- Design posters and information signs that can be read from a distance and that provide helpful illustrations and directional indicators where appropriate.
- Review and improve your printed materials on a regular basis.
- Make print-based materials available in other languages where appropriate.

The Widening Access for Adult Literacies website includes information about clear language.

Referral

- Be familiar with literacy programs in the community. Contact programs and introduce yourself to program staff. Find out about programs' referral and registration processes.
- Display posters and other information about adult literacy programs.
- When people ask about programs, offer to help contact the program. Provide a name and phone number to call.