

News Release

For Immediate Release

## **Capital Region Employers Crucial To Increasing Supply of Workplace Literacy Skills**

July 8, 2008 – Victoria – The Victoria READ Society through its Workplace Learning Project is again at the forefront of addressing an issue of national concern – adult employees with low literacy skills.

By 2031 the number of adults with low literacy is forecast to increase by more than three million to 15 million, according to a new study from the Canadian Council on Learning. The document, *Reading the Future*, contradicts the common belief that literacy is improving in Canada.

Here in the Capital Region, the READ Society's research into workplace learning issues is well underway. "The Workplace Learning Project is working with employers and employees to find affordable ways to improve literacy and basic skills," says Claire Rettie, project manager and the executive director of the READ Society. "We know that in today's economy, it's essential for all workers to be continuously learning in order for businesses to be competitive," adds Rettie.

READ researchers are engaging Capital Region employers in discussions about how improving their workers' basic skills can help improve recruitment and retention challenges—significant information considering Victoria has one of the tightest labour markets in the country.

"It's been proven internationally that employers who address their worker's basic skills have greater success in retaining and recruiting employees," says researcher Nancy Watters, MA. Interviews are now taking place with employers and employees in industry sectors struggling with the greatest labour shortages— construction, retail sales, accommodation, food service, and healthcare.

The Canadian Council on Learning study suggests employers can impact "stock and demand" by requiring employees to use literacy skills so that workers don't lose what skills they do have. The Council also suggests employers should visibly support learning, help employees assess their learning needs and provide follow up literacy training programs to improve their skills.

Most adults feel their skills are adequate for their jobs when in fact their literacy levels are below what's considered internationally acceptable to function in a modern society, according to *Reading the Future*. In 2008, almost half of adult Canadians (48 per cent) of all Canadian adults over the age of 16 experience some degree of difficulty in their ability to read, write and understand effectively in English and/or French.

As Dr. Paul Cappon, CCL's president and CEO said, "It is not that more Canadians are illiterate; it's that more Canadians experience some degree of significant difficulty in their ability to read, understand and function effectively. Millions of our fellow citizens may learn to read but they cannot read to learn."

The Victoria READ Society has been helping adults improve their literacy and basic skills for three decades through programs such as the Adult Basic Skills program, ESL for Work, and others. The Workplace Learning Project is funded by Service Canada.

For more information on what's happening on this issue in the Capital Region, please contact Claire Rettie, executive director of the Victoria READ Society and the Workplace Learning project manager at ph: 250-388-7225.

More information is also available on READ's website, on the Workplace Learning Project page at: <http://www.readsociety.bc.ca/workplace.htm>. A link to the Canadian Council on Learning's report can be found on the employers' page at: <http://www.readsociety.bc.ca/workplace/employer.htm>.

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