

Literacy problems need not be a stumbling block

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There was a time when it was relatively easy for a person to get by in the world without sufficient literacy skills. Times have changed.

Julie Holder, executive director of the Victoria Read Society, says it's surprising how the reading and writing skills of many adults need a lot of improvement.

"I think we're realizing the problem more now than be-

fore because literacy is becoming a real prerequisite for any job now," she says.

"You used to be able to get jobs that were manual labour jobs where you could get by without strong literacy skills. But now everything requires a

fairly good knowledge of reading and writing."

UVic professor Mary Sakari, who specializes in literacy development, argues that more people are labelled as having an inability to read and write than actually have a seri-

ous problem. That, she says, can prevent them from progressing when it comes to literacy development.

Sakari says she noticed the trend when she ran UVic's student reading clinic.

"I've gone through probably

over a thousand kids since I've been here. And during that time I've probably only ran into one kid that couldn't progress."

In other words, the vast majority of students labelled with developmental disorders such

as attention deficit disorder can vastly improve their ability to read and write, she says.

Many students have literacy problems simply because they weren't interested in the reading material they were given in elementary and high school, notes Sakari.

As for adults with literacy problems, they essentially fall into two categories, she says.

Some adults weren't that interested in reading and writing in school, and consequently never developed their literacy skills, says Holder. Then there are those adults who don't use the skills they learned when they were younger.

"Like any skill they sort of lose it," she says.

The Read Society offers three main programs for residents in the Capital Region who need to improve their reading and writing skills.

A remedial program aimed primarily at children covers reading, writing and math, says Holder. It's a fee-for-service program but bursaries are available, she says.

The society also provides a Basic Adult Skills for Employment program which is funded by the B.C. Ministry of Human Resources. As well as helping adults improve their ability to read and write, the program provides assistance in areas such as computer skills and math.

Then there is the ALPHA program, which Holder says provides assistance for immigrants and refugees trying to learn the English language and develop literacy.

The ultimate aim is for people to adjust to living in Canada and to help them work towards finding employment," she says.

Holder says a lot of adults who have difficulties reading and writing try to cover the problem up, which can be quite stressful for them and lead to low self-esteem.

Holder says the society's programs have helped adults resolve such problems by improving their literacy skills.

"They come away with a real sense of confidence and self-worth," she says. "It's just very empowering for people."