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Adult Education in Manitoba

Unearth this Buried Treasure

Jim Silver

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Introduction

ADULT EDUCATION IN Manitoba is a buried treasure. It has the potential to produce a wide range of benefits — to individuals, families and to the broader community. However, despite much skilled and effective work being done in individual centres, its full potential is not being realized. In what follows I describe some of the major problems in adult education today, discuss some of the many benefits that would flow from an improved approach — including, among others, strengthened families, enhanced employability, and an important step toward reconciliation — and set out a vision for a re-imagined and revitalized adult education strategy.

Method

This study is based primarily upon individual interviews done by phone, and three focus groups conducted via Zoom, with 30 adult educators in all parts of the province between May and November 2021. Most of the Directors of Manitoba's 69 Adult Learning Centres and adult literacy programs were emailed and asked to participate in an interview. Some did not respond; others did not participate due to busy schedules. However, with 30 participants, 43 percent of Manitoba's Directors participated. Particular emphasis was placed upon ensuring participation from rural and northern Manitoba, as well as Winnipeg, and from Indigenous adult education programs, as well as non-Indigenous. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in an

open-ended fashion, with participants being asked three broad questions: first, can you describe the work that you do at your program — number and type of staff; number of students; availability of childcare; demand for your program; admission procedures, for example; second, what are the main challenges that your program is facing; and third, what changes would most improve the work that you do? Participants were encouraged to add anything to the discussion that they considered to be important, and to stray from the three broad questions to the extent that they considered it useful to do so. Phone interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour; focus groups lasted approximately two hours each. In roughly half the cases, participants followed up the initial interview or focus group with further comments by email or phone. Twelve of those involved in interviews and/or focus groups made comments, in some cases extensive comments followed by discussions, on a next-to-final draft of this report. Almost all of these suggestions have been incorporated in this report. In addition, two recent graduates of Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) and one current ALC student were invited to comment on the impact adult education has had on their lives, and their experiences are described in sidebars in this report. Two were recommended by Directors of ALCs; the third is a recent graduate known to the author because of my previous involvement at the ALC from which she graduated. Finally, the author undertook a thorough review of the *Adult Learning and Literacy Annual Reports* from 2009/10 to the most recent, for 2019/20.

Adult Education in Manitoba

By adult education I mean what is sometimes called adult basic education — educational activities aimed at achieving sufficient levels of literacy, numeracy and other essential skills that it becomes possible for adults to obtain employment, or to qualify for higher levels of employment, or to qualify for further education and/or training. In Manitoba this means both the mature high school diploma delivered by Adult Learning Centres (ALCs), which requires that students complete eight high school credits, including grade 12 English and grade 12 Math, and adult literacy programs, which work to improve literacy and numeracy skills to the level necessary to be able to succeed with high school credits.

Adult Learning Centres are a relatively new phenomenon in Manitoba, emerging about a quarter-century ago. In 1994 the provincial government

released *Renewing Education: New Directions*, setting out plans for educational change, including a commitment to "establish community-based infrastructures for life-long learning which provide high quality education and training for all Manitobans" (Manitoba 2001: 88). At the same time, school divisions were responding to a perceived need for programming specifically tailored for adults (Manitoba 2001: 89). By 1996/97, ALCs were offering high school credits to adult students.

Adult Learning Centres appear to have emerged in a relatively unplanned fashion. A consultant commissioned in 1999 to provide some general observations about ALCs described their emergence as follows:

> There is no evidence that the ALCs developed as a result of considered policy development by the government of the day, nor that there had been a particular identification of needs to be met. Further, no policy was considered for a local, community-driven, decentralized, flexible, province-wide array of centres designed to meet multiple adult learning needs...there was no prior discussion within government as to the concept, form, or function of an adult learning centre....Since there was no central model or concept for a centre, centres developed very much in relation to the needs of the communities they serve, and both the range of services and the modes of delivery were largely locally determined (Ferris 2000: 3–4)

The locally-based character of ALCs is one of their strengths, since they can be tailored to the needs of particular communities. However, there are also weaknesses inherent in the way this model emerged.

Adult literacy programs have a much longer history than ALCs, but they too have emerged in a largely ad hoc manner, responding to particular needs in various communities, and delivered by a wide variety of organizations.

Part One

The Limitations of the Current Adult Education System in Manitoba

Fragmented and Disjointed

THE ADULT EDUCATION system in Manitoba has emerged over time in such a way that it is now fragmented and disjointed. It is not really a "system" at all. There is much outstanding adult education taking place in the province, but significant improvements would follow from a re-imagining and reorganizing of what now exists.

Adult Learning Centres exist in a variety of different organizational forms. Some are attached to and are supported financially and otherwise by school divisions or other educational institutions. Some lack such supports and are effectively independent, and in most cases are struggling financially. Others are Indigenous in character and organizational form. Some ALCs — ten of the forty in 2019/20 — included co-located adult literacy programs. The other thirty, or 75 percent of ALCs, did not. Among and between these different organizational types, there exist dramatic inequities.

Teacher Inequities

An important instance of these inequities is the wildly different working conditions of adult education teachers. Some are unionized, and paid competitive salaries and benefits. Most are not unionized, are relatively poorly paid and do not have the advantage of benefits. The Director of one ALC said that their program is so poorly funded that full-time teachers are paid approximately one-quarter of what their unionized peers in other programs are paid, which results in teacher turnover of close to 100 percent per year. Students suffer as a consequence. In some rural and northern communities especially, it is difficult to attract certified teachers, because school districts pay considerably more than what most Adult Learning Centres are able to pay. The Director of one large northern centre said, "retention of anyone is a problem…none of us is here for the money!" Teachers in an urban ALC, the Director said, work especially hard to make up for the fact that the funding is not there to hire enough teachers to meet the teaching needs. "It's been a challenge…We all work a lot of hours." The situation in adult literacy programs is typically worse — many still bear the stamp of their origins in church basements run by volunteers. The Province requires only that literacy teachers have grade 12. As a result, one rural Director said, "most literacy instructors earn minimum wage, or what an Educational Assistant would make in the public school system." This despite the fact that I was repeatedly told of the passion, dedication and multi-disciplinary skills that adult educators bring to their work. As one Indigenous adult educator said, she has "really committed staff" and it "just amazes me how much effort staff put in to help students."

Abysmally Underfunded

These inequities are aggravated by the fact that adult education is abysmally underfunded. Funding has been frozen for years, and frozen at a level that does not come remotely close to meeting needs. Adult literacy programs and ALCs must re-apply for funding every year, and for years the funding available has remained flat, which means that in real terms, it has been reduced year after year. One adult educator, to cite but one example, said that in the past 15 years their program has only once had a funding increase. Combined investment in adult literacy programs and ALCs remained effectively flat over the last decade, inching up from $19,153,000 in 2009/10, to $19,920,035 in 2019/20 (Manitoba. 2009/10–2019/20). This was a total increase in nominal

terms of less than half of one percent over ten years, which represents a decline in real terms.

This level of funding has made it impossible to add elements that adult educators know would improve the quality of adult education, and in many cases has required cuts to programming. At least two Directors that I have been made aware of have taken cuts in pay to keep their programs going. One rural adult educator said about her program, "we are in dire straits." The overall level of funding is "really, really pathetic," another adult educator said. All of those interviewed made similar comments about the inadequacy of funding.

Funding arrangements are different for different adult education programs, and this creates serious problems. Some Adult Learning Centres benefit from substantial financial and in-kind support from the school divisions or other institutions with which they are affiliated. This produces "a lot of advantages," I was told, and in most cases those adult education programs are doing well. Others do not get financial or in-kind support from this source, and as a result are financially constrained—severely constrained in many, and perhaps most, cases.

What is more, there appears to be no particular logic by which the funding levels of different programs are determined. Directors do not know what dollar amounts are allocated to other ALCs and literacy programs. There is little transparency. "Lack of transparency is huge," as one rural adult educator told us. For years, ALCs and literacy programs have simply been allocated the dollar amount they received the year before, and in most cases for many years before.

Further, most adult literacy programs are themselves funded so poorly that they could not survive without being, in effect, cross-subsidized by the Adult Learning Centre with which they are affiliated—in the 25 percent of cases where an adult literacy program is affiliated with an ALC. Funding for adult literacy programming went from $2,610,000 in 2009/10 to $2,596,395 in 2019/20, a slight decline in nominal and a greater decline in real terms (Manitoba. 2009/10–2019/20). In some cases adult literacy programs have closed their doors permanently, because the funding available was not sufficient to support continuation. There were 42 adult literacy programs in Manitoba in 2009/10. In 2019/20 there were 30—a decline of 28.6 percent over this recent decade.

This decline reflected what had been happening at the federal level. The federal government had become active in adult literacy programming in the 1980s and early 1990s, establishing a National Literacy Secretariat in 1988. By

1992, literacy coalitions that supported front-line literacy programming existed in every province and territory. However, in 2006, when the Conservative government of Stephen Harper took office, the National Literacy Secretariat was dismantled and funding was slashed (Hayes 2013a: 1–2), going from $31.1 million in 2006 to $12.2 million in 2012/13 (Hayes 2013b: 40). The *Ottawa Citizen* reported in 2014 that "The federal government is abandoning adults with low literacy and essential skills" (Pearson 2014).

Investment Disparities

The problem of constantly reduced levels of funding for adult literacy and Adult Learning Centres becomes especially clear if we compare the investment in adult education with other costs. For example, the John Howard Society has calculated that the annual cost per prisoner in a federal penal institution in 2016 was $115,000, and the annual cost per prisoner in a provincial penal institution in 2016 was $69,000 (John Howard Society 2018). The cost of supporting a homeless person in Winnipeg in 2017, including emergency medical services and extra policing services, was estimated to be $45,565 (Latimer et al. 2017).[1] What this means is that while the fiscal commitment to adult education has remained flat, public funds have been poured into the correctional system and policing. The commitment appears to have been to punishing the poor, rather than educating. To make a more direct comparison, the operating cost per student in Manitoba's K-12 education system, as calculated according to numbers in the 2018/19 Province of Manitoba Budget, was $13,284 (Manitoba. *Frame Report, 2018/19*). By contrast, the annual investment per student in adult literacy programs and Adult Learning Centres in 2019/20 was $2,240 (calculated from data in Manitoba. 2019/20). Thus the amount invested per student in adult education is approximately one-sixth of that in the K-12 system, and an even smaller fraction of the cost of keeping an inmate in provincial and federal penal institutions and responding to the needs of those who are homeless.

The total budgeted expenditure in education in Manitoba in 2021 was approximately $3 billion. The total investment in adult education was just

1 The comparison of the cost per adult learner with the cost per provincial and federal inmate and the cost per homeless person may be appropriate in the sense that an enhanced adult education program would undoubtedly have the effect of keeping some people out of prison and out of homelessness.

TABLE 1 Cost Comparisons

Federal incarceration (2016) per inmate	$115,000
Provincial incarceration (2016) per inmate	69,000
Homelessness Winnipeg (2017) per person	45,565
K-12 per student (2018/19)	13,284
Adult education per student (2019/20)	2,240

under $20 million (Manitoba 2019/20). In other words, Manitoba invests a mere two-thirds of one percent of its total education budget in adult education.

Adult education ought to be an important part of the education continuum in Manitoba, funded equitably with the K-12 and post-secondary education systems. Clearly it is not.

A Huge Unmet Demand

A great many Manitobans who would benefit from adult education are not enrolled, because not only are existing Adult Learning Centres and literacy programs underfunded, but also, there are not nearly enough adult literacy programs and ALCs to meet the need that exists. Manitoba Adult Learning and Literacy in their *Annual Report* of 2013/14 reported that there were 192,600 Manitobans between the ages of 16 and 65 whose literacy levels were at stages 1 or 2 (Manitoba 2013/14: 4). That is, their literacy levels were not sufficient to enable them to participate fully in society. Only a small fraction of that number are now taking advantage of adult education. Combined enrolment in adult literacy programs and ALCs in 2019/20 was 8892, which is less than one-half of one percent of those who were functionally illiterate, and who therefore were in need of adult education.

The result is a very significant loss of human potential, and as a result, a great many unnecessary costs to society. A senior economist with the Toronto-Dominion Bank found that for the country as a whole, high levels of illiteracy were costing Canada "hundreds of billions of dollars in lost opportunity" (Gulati 2013: 4). The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has estimated that moving up one level in literacy proficiency "translates to a 9 percent increase in hourly wages in Canada and 20 percent more likelihood of being employed" (Frontier College 2021: 6).

In short, it makes very good economic sense to invest in literacy and adult education.

TABLE 2 Decline in Enrollment and Graduates, Adult Learning Centres and Adult Literacy 2003/04–2019/20

	2003/04	2009/10	2019/20	Decline in numbers	Percentage decline
# enrolled in ALCs	9715		7172	2543	–26%
ALC graduates	1254		922	332	–26%
# enrolled in literacy programs		2866*	1720	1146	–40%

Source Manitoba. *Adult Learning and Literacy Annual Reports, 2003/04-2019/20*
* 2009/10 was the first year that adult literacy data were included in Adult Learning and Literacy Annual Reports.

Despite the economic benefits, the numbers enrolled in adult literacy and Adult Learning Centres, and the number of graduates from ALCs, have declined sharply, no doubt a consequence in large part of the reduced level of funding.

Enrollment in Adult Learning Centres declined from 9,715 in 2003/04, to 7172 in 2019/20, a drop in numbers enrolled of 2,543. This represents a 26 percent decline in enrolment since 2003/04. The number of ALC graduates dropped from 1254 in 2003/04 to 922 in 2019/20, a reduction of 332, or 26 percent, in the number of graduates since 2003/04. Enrollment in adult literacy programs declined from 2,866 in 2009/10 to 1,720 in 2019/20, a drop in numbers enrolled of 1,146. This represents a 40 percent decline in enrolment since 2009/10.

> We do zero advertising and we are flooded with potential students.

These numbers are not declining because of a lack of demand. On the contrary, it is clear that there is a huge unmet demand, and that numbers could and should be growing significantly. Adult educators are not advertising for students because when they do, so many would-be students present themselves that, with their inadequate levels of funding, they cannot accommodate the increased numbers. One Winnipeg-based adult educator told me that "we do zero advertising and we are flooded" with potential students. Her Adult Learning Centre simply cannot accommodate all those who apply. She is forced to turn large numbers away. The funding for her program—this is the case right across the province, I was told—is inadequate to meet the demand. She added that by February or March each year she closes her doors, unable to take any more students until the following September. When she makes this case, she is told, "you have to limit students you take in." There is a large demand for summer programming. She cannot meet that demand because her budget is such that she cannot afford to pay an instructor for the additional course or courses. Another adult educator told

me that especially for those not ready for the mature high school program, there is a "huge demand at the upgrading level."

The Director of an adult education program in northern Manitoba, 90 percent of whose students are Indigenous, told me that there are close to 2,000 people in her region wanting to get into her program. Although her program nominally uses a continuous intake method, "we fill up as soon as the school opens" at the start of the academic year. The long wait list remains. Meanwhile, there are several hundred job vacancies in the region that pay well (https://ca.indeed.com/job-jobs-in-The-Pas). Most of those jobs require that applicants have at least grade 12. Because funding is not available to meet the needs of those many who want to improve their education, jobs go unfilled, and the economy — and the people of the region — suffer.

The wholly inadequate levels of funding, the inequities across the adult learning "system," the poor working conditions experienced by so many dedicated teachers, the large numbers of adults who would benefit from adult learning but are not enrolled — each of these is evidence that adult literacy programs and ALCs throughout Manitoba have been an afterthought, a poor cousin to the K-12 and post-secondary education systems.

An Indigenous Issue

Adult education is to a considerable extent an Indigenous issue. Approximately 18 percent of Manitoba's population is Indigenous. However, in 2019/20, 45 percent of students in ALCs and 38 percent in adult literacy programs were Indigenous (Manitoba 2019/20). That Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in adult education is a product, in part, of the higher than average incidence of poverty experienced by Indigenous people, and their lower than average levels of educational attainment (Lezubski 2014).

This is reflected in the data. Michael Mendelson (2016: 25) found that 71 percent of Indigenous people aged 20–24 and living on reserve in Manitoba did not have a high school diploma. He found that the proportion of Indigenous youth who did not have a high school diploma was highest in rural communities and especially on reserve. Province of Manitoba data reveal that there is more than a 30 percentage point gap between the percentage of non-Indigenous students who graduate from grade 12 on time, and the percentage of Indigenous students who graduate on time (Manitoba 2020). This in turn is directly related to the higher incidence of poverty, and the ongoing damage of colonization, that Indigenous people experience.

As an example of the consequences of this damage, the Director of a northern program said that many adults come with a functioning level of literacy and numeracy equivalent to grade 3 or 4. They want to improve their education to build the basis for a better life. They need a literacy program before being able to tackle the mature high school program, which requires the completion of eight high school credits, including grade 12 English and Math. The funding is not available. As a result, large numbers of adults who want to improve their education cannot do so. Most of these adults, she says, are Indigenous.

The same is the case for Indigenous adults coming to Winnipeg from northern Manitoba for the mature high school program. A significant proportion are not ready academically or in terms of life skills. They need a transition program that prepares them for high school studies. Indigenous adult educators in Winnipeg said that funding for such a transition program is simply not available.

They also told me that, because so many of their students come bearing the scars of intergenerational trauma, in large part the product of colonialism and the residential school experience, retention is a major problem. "Retention is our biggest issue," said one Indigenous adult educator. Other adult educators and especially those working with Indigenous adults echoed this concern. Counsellors are needed to provide supports. "The whole counselling piece is huge," I was told. Funding for counselling and related student supports is largely unavailable. Yet, as another Indigenous adult educator said, counselling and related support services are funded and available in both the K-12 and the post-secondary education systems. She added, "I would think that the need for support services for adult learners is more pronounced and should be included in the [adult education] funding. Because adult learners already have a low self-esteem and are probably living under the poverty line, it should be obvious that these students will need more assistance." The consequence of the failure to fund such supports is that many students capable of succeeding leave before completion of their studies.

If anything, the situation is worse in northern Manitoba, and has been made worse still by COVID-19. For example, I was told, "COVID has made prisoners of women living in isolation." In the past year, the Director of an adult education program in a northern community says she has accompanied more students to a women's shelter than she had in all of the previous 23 years. This problem is made worse by the relative lack of community resources, so that those few resources that do exist — and that are similarly underfunded — are "absolutely drowning." Adult education programs need

to be funded sufficiently to be able to provide the counselling and related supports that are so obviously needed if students are to succeed.

Adult Education as Reconciliation

Adult education — by which I mean adult literacy programming and the mature high school diploma — can and should play a key role in the process of decolonization and reconciliation. Adult education is a major means of addressing the past and current failures of education strategies that have caused so much harm to Indigenous people (TRC 2015). One northern adult educator whose program is 90 percent Indigenous described their work as "reconciliation in action," adding "we are the boots on the ground for reconciliation." As Justice Murray Sinclair has said on numerous occasions, and as is reflected in the TRC Calls to Action, "education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it." However, that truth is not reflected in support for adult education in Manitoba. The dramatic underfunding of adult education means that large numbers of Indigenous adults who would benefit from adult education are not getting that opportunity, despite the fact that adult education has proved to be very effective for Indigenous adults (Silver 2013; Silver, Klyne & Simard 2006).

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A 2006 study reported that the reasons for the success of Indigenous learners in Adult Learning Centres were identifiable. They included the fact that ALCs adopted a holistic and learner-centred approach; offered strong social, emotional and practical supports to learners; and created a warm, highly personalized and non-hierarchical learning environment. In addition, the dedication and passion of teaching and other staff were noted — interviews for this report made it clear that this continues to be the case — as was the friendly, non-judgmental and respectful manner in which Indigenous learners were treated. Indigenous adult learners who were interviewed for that earlier study reported negative experiences in previous schools, including experiences with racism, but said they felt much more comfortable in the Adult Learning Centre (Silver, Klyne & Simard: 2006).

Of particular importance are efforts to introduce Indigenous students to their cultures. "Our students don't know lots about their own history," one Indigenous adult educator told me. She added, "the more they understand about themselves the better they feel about themselves," and thus the more likely they are to succeed in their studies. This has been confirmed repeatedly (Silver 2013; Silver, Klyne & Simard 2006).

Attending Kaakiyow li Moond Likol Adult Learning Centre Changed My Life

When I signed up for adult education I was 34 years old, a single mother of four living on social assistance. Living on welfare as a single parent requires superpowers, because I had to provide for my children on a limited budget. That's challenging! I decided to return to high school to gain employment and be financially independent.

I registered for school at Kaakiyow li Moond Likol Adult Learning Centre, in Turtle Island Community Centre in the heart of Winnipeg's North End. While there, I learned that I was able to complete my work and earn good grades, all while caring for my children.

I believe the most important thing I learned at Kaakiyow was in my grade 12 Aboriginal Studies class. I began to learn about the history of Turtle Island, colonization, residential schools, the Indian Act and much more. When I started that course, I was not aware that my family was directly impacted by colonization. As I worked through the course, I learned the true history of my people, my culture and my identity. By learning about colonization, I also learned about the intergenerational trauma that was passed down in my family.

Then it all began to make sense. You see, I grew up in a family that suffered from many forms of abuse, trauma, alcoholism, substance abuse and complex poverty. My mother is a residential day school survivor. Her experiences with colonization and residential school affected her ability to provide a safe environment for us while we grew up. As a result, I was deeply submerged in this perpetuating cycle of trauma that my family could not escape.

I decided to be the one in my family to end the trauma and begin intergenerational healing. Now my children and I are beginning to heal and to reclaim everything taken by colonization, such as culture, identity and language. We are reclaiming who we are truly meant to be.

When I graduated high school in 2017, my younger sister Samantha was inspired. She decided to go back to finish her grade 12, which she completed in 2018. She is now enrolled in the Health Care Aide course at Urban Circle and will graduate in June 2022. She will then enroll in the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) program at Red River College. I also have cousins who have decided to go back to school and have graduated. In our home, it is now an expectation to graduate high school. My daughter has graduated, and my boys are well on their way to finishing school.

Currently, I am a Counsellor at the North End Women's Centre. I believe my experiential knowledge is one of my strongest qualities, because those I counsel know that I come from the same places they have and we have commonalities. When participants say they want to go back to school, I encourage them and provide them with the resources needed. I share my story of finishing high school as an adult and how it has changed my life.

I am grateful for attending Kaakiyow Adult Learning Centre. Adult education has paved a path for me to finally be off social assistance and financially independent. It has shown my children and the generations to follow that we can break cycles in our families, and live mino pimatisiwin, the good life. Now, I believe I am becoming who I am truly meant to be. I am who my ancestors prayed for. Meegwetch Kaakiyow li Moond Likol Adult Learning Centre for having such a positive impact on my journey.

Aja Heather Oliver, Miskwaa Gaagaagiway Ikwe

Large numbers of unmarked graves were brought to public attention at residential school sites in June 2021, evidence of the genocidal character of Canada's residential schools. An effective and appropriate response, and an important step in the process of reconciliation, would be to fund adult education in Manitoba at a level sufficient to meet the needs of those many Indigenous adults whose education has been adversely affected by the intergenerational trauma caused in large part by the residential schools.

Newcomers Need Adult Education

Newcomers to Manitoba in need of educational upgrading and language acquisition are not well served by the provincial adult education "system." A byzantine set of rules and regulations that determine which categories of newcomers are eligible for which adult education programs has meant that large numbers of newcomers in need of adult education are being left out. One adult educator in Winnipeg told us, "We see over and over how many potential learners do not fit into the proper category and so are left without services." Another said that the number of newcomers in her rural community "has increased dramatically in the past 5–10 years," but there is little if any programming for them "due to funding restrictions and red tape." Some ALCs and literacy programs are quite innovative in finding ways to bend and/or work around these rules in order to meet the needs of newcomers. In a handful of cases an immigrant and refugee centre is co-located with an Adult Learning Centre or literacy program, with positive effects. Nevertheless, many who could benefit from adult education are falling through the cracks. This should not be the case, and is especially ironic given Manitoba's and Canada's growing reliance upon immigration to meet our labour force needs.

Social Assistance and 'Work First'

The problem of declining enrollment and unmet need is made worse by governments' commitment in recent years to the "work-first" approach, by which those on social assistance are discouraged from pursuing adult education. Indeed, one adult educator in Winnipeg insisted that "discouraged" is not a strong enough description. Their experience is that "countless students are told that if they go to school, they'll have their funding cut." They are pushed instead into the lower reaches of the labour market. In

How the Seven Oaks Adult Learning Centre Changed my Life

At 17, I had my first child, a beautiful daughter named Isabella. Prior to her birth, I had steadily been going downhill. I started smoking and drinking at 14, doing hard drugs by 15, and not attending school. I had chances to change my ways, but due to past trauma in my life, I felt like I didn't deserve any type of chance or help, which hurdled me into a downward spiral of despair.

In the summer of 2008 I met my now husband, Eric, and later found myself pregnant with Isabella. Eric was about to be sent to jail for six to nine months, the result of a charge from two years prior, long before we had met. This was a hard lesson for us to learn, as the choices you make in the past can gravely impact your future. I moved back in with my mom, stopped drinking, smoking and doing drugs and attempted to start going back to school. But as my stomach and daughter grew, my motivation to return to school dwindled. I became depressed. The man I loved was nowhere to be found. I went to doctor's appointments alone. I baby shopped alone. I planned my birth alone. I watched my friends, who I thought were so loyal to me, live their lives without a care in the world. They enjoyed parties and boys, and were getting their education and working towards their diploma, while I found myself slinking away to my bedroom. Day after day my motivation to attend class and graduate vanished, and I locked myself away to wallow in teenage angst.

On April 12th, 2009 I gave birth to Isabella. Eric had been released on parole the week before. From then on, I dedicated my entire life to my daughter. I was able to stay at home with Isabella while Eric worked and went to school. He completed his Red Seal at RRC for Roofing, and is now a Journeyman roofer. I started working part-time, to get out of the house and to bring in a bit more money. I said every year that I would go back to school, but I always made an excuse, including simply being too nervous and scared.

In 2015 I became pregnant with my son, Maximus. I had been working for three years at a job that I really hated. After Maximus was born, I plunged into caring for Max and Bella, as well as my stepdaughter Alita. The thought of school crossed my mind, but as usual, I pushed it back down. When my maternity leave was about to end, I was filled with an absolute feeling of dread and despair. I had a breakdown. I knew I couldn't go back to a job that made me so miserable.

After talking with Eric about our options, we were able to budget for me to go back to school, so I could finish my grade 12 and find a profession, and hopefully a job that I loved. I called around, and finally was referred to Fran Taylor. Fran had actually been my Principal at Maples Collegiate, and we remembered each other from ten years prior.

The moment I walked into the Seven Oaks Adult Learning Centre, I knew I had made the right choice. I've never felt more comfortable, respected and happy. Maximus attends the daycare while I am in class. The bond he has made with the workers, Deena and Nesha, is truly amazing. Seeing the way he is loved and cared for makes it so much easier for me to be away from him during the day.

My teachers are amazing. I've never seen such a group of dedicated people before. I can't even fathom the extra work they must put in every single day, and what they sacrifice of their own time to make sure that my

classmates and I excel in our studies. I'm happy to wake up every morning, get myself and the kids ready and head to school. The tone in my daughters' voices when they enquire about how I am doing in school makes me tear up. I'm proud that they can watch me do this, and hopefully they will know that it's never too late to go back to school and you're never too old to learn something new.

It may be the ten-year age difference. It could be my sobriety. But this is a different Branndy than the Branndy from ten years ago. I want to be here. I strive to work my absolute hardest. I want to get those full marks, and make myself, teachers, husband and children proud! I don't think I would be this way without this program, and I am so grateful to have been given the opportunity to be here.

By Branndy Balla

This is a slightly edited version of a letter of application that Branndy wrote some years ago for a scholarship while attending the Seven Oaks Adult Learning Centre. When Fran Taylor, Director at Seven Oaks, asked her if we could use an edited version of the letter for this report, Branndy said yes, adding that Seven Oaks ALC had been an "amazing experience" that "changed my life."

Branndy is now at the University of Manitoba, studying to become an addictions counsellor, and is just starting a new job at Life's Journey, in the women's outreach program.

a great many cases — very likely most cases — this is a recipe for failure (MacKinnon 2015: 3–6, passim). Their literacy levels and life skills are not sufficient to enable them to succeed in the labour market, and they drop back onto the social assistance rolls. Even when "successful," they are stuck in precarious jobs — poorly paid, part-time, no security, no benefits, no union protection — and join the ranks of the working poor. To move adults out of poverty, they need to improve their skills via adult education. They should be encouraged to enroll in appropriate programs — indeed, incentives ought to be available for them to do so — rather than being pushed, wholly unprepared, into an increasingly precarious labour market.

Those on social assistance are discouraged from pursuing adult education.

I was told by many adult educators that rather than preventing people on Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) from pursuing adult education, the provincial government should create a system by which adults who are serious about improving their education can be financially supported in doing so. The goal, I was told, should be to make it possible for adult learners "to live without starving, and make school the job." Monitoring systems to ensure that those being paid to go to school are attending classes and making progress are not difficult to put in place, adult educators told me. Everyone would benefit if much larger numbers of adults were to be financially supported in improving their education. For example, in her analysis of the fiscal benefits

arising from the work of Winnipeg's Urban Circle Training Centre, Eleanor Thompson's cost-benefit analysis concluded that moving adult learners from social assistance to paid employment produced a cumulative net saving of $53.5 million to taxpayers from 1990 to 2010 (Silver 2013: 13).

That there are financial benefits to paying adults to improve their education is confirmed by the clear evidence that those who do not have a high school diploma, compared to those who do, have higher rates of unemployment, lower rates of labour force participation, lower average earned incomes, and receive a higher proportion of their incomes in the form of government transfers (Berger & Parkin 2009: 7–11). It follows logically that in a financial sense, adult education pays significant dividends — greater numbers employed upon earning a grade 12 diploma means increased income tax revenue and reduced social assistance and related costs.

This argument is accentuated in the case of the many adult learners who are short one or two credits to earn their mature grade 12, or who need a specific course or courses, or who need to improve their grades in a specific course or courses, in order to qualify for a post-secondary program or for promotion to a better position at their place of employment. I was told that there are many such students in search of this kind of upgrading. There is a particularly strong financial case for meeting the needs of these "upgraders," because upon completion of, or improved grades in, the one or two courses that they need, they are likely to qualify for a higher-paid job or for entry to a post-secondary program, meaning that they will pay higher taxes for the rest of their working lives.

Poverty and Adult Education: When a Parent is in School, Children Do Better in School

At the root of much of the problem that a re-imagined and revitalized adult education strategy could do so much to solve is the particularly high incidence of poverty that exists in Manitoba, a fact well documented for many years. For example, the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg reported in 2020 that based on 2018 data, 87,730 children in Manitoba were growing up in families that were living in poverty (SPCW 2020). The magnitude of this problem was confirmed in the Social Planning Council's 2021 publication, which found that Manitoba is the province with the highest rate of child poverty in Canada (SPCW 2021: 3) The situation is worse for Indigenous children. Macdonald and Wilson (2016: 6) found that in Manitoba, 76 percent of First Nations

children on reserve and 42 percent of Indigenous children in Winnipeg were growing up in families living in poverty.

Poverty is a key factor — perhaps *the* key factor — in producing poor school outcomes for children and youth. Children growing up in poor families — families in which parents often have low levels of education — are themselves more likely to do poorly in school. This has been documented repeatedly in detailed studies prepared by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (Brownell 2013; Brownell et al. 2012; Brownell et al. 2010). Children who have not succeeded at school are then more likely themselves to experience poverty, creating a vicious cycle that can ripple across generations.

High levels of poverty exist throughout Manitoba. One adult educator in a rural community not known as a high poverty area said "poverty is a huge issue here in this area." The Director of a northern adult education program said, "poverty rates up here are atrocious!" This claim is confirmed by the fact that in 2019, the northern Manitoba federal riding of Churchill-Keewatinook Aski had the highest rate of child poverty in all of Canada (SPCW 2021: 3), and "child poverty" means that children are growing up in families that are living in poverty.

Poverty levels can be reduced, and reduced significantly, with a major enhancement of Manitoba's adult education program. The 2009 *Adult Literacy Act*, which unfortunately was repealed in 2021 by the provincial government, recognized this. It opened with the clause, "Whereas higher literacy skills lead to reduced poverty and improve the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities."

What can be done about this?

A part of the solution — admittedly, not the whole solution — to the causally related problem of unmet demand for adult education opportunities, and poor K-12 school outcomes, can be found in an enhanced and more strategic and systematic approach to adult learning. When adults, especially parents, are involved in educational programming, many benefits follow. These include the fact that their children are likely to do better in school, and that a ripple effect occurs, by which others in their family and community are also likely to pursue adult education (MacKinnon 2015: 155–56). The Director of Education and Training at the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development, Heather McCormick, is reported to have said, "Most of our students have children and once our students graduate their children are more likely to stay in school and graduate one day as well" (Greyeyes 2019; see also Aja Oliver's comments, page 15 above). That children do better in school when their mothers are employed has been demonstrated in multiple

Adult education can play an important role in breaking the cycle of poverty that causes so much pain, and that imposes such a high cost on society.

studies in the UK (Shafik 2021: 43), and adult education is an important path to employment. In this way, adult education can play an important role in breaking the cycle of poverty that causes so much pain, and that imposes such a high cost on society.

Adult Learners as Relatively Powerless

If this is the case, why has investment in adult literacy and Adult Learning Centres been so surprisingly low, in real terms and relative to various other public expenditures? The answer almost certainly has to do with the fact that a very high proportion of students in adult literacy programs and ALCs are among those in Manitoba with the least power—economic, political and social power. They are the precariously employed, the colonized, the racially targeted and those struggling with life in poverty. We can see this by considering the demographics of those taking adult education programs. In ALCs in 2019/20, for example, 45 percent of students self-identified as Indigenous, 18 percent declared that English was their second language, and 19 percent said that they were employed on a part-time basis (Manitoba 2019/20), and thus were almost certainly among the precariously employed. They are, by definition, among the ranks of the marginalized, the poor and the 'othered.' They are not relatively powerful. They are, in fact, among the relatively powerless. Their situation is similar to that of adult learners in Ontario: "Except for isolated cases, adult learners have no organized voice to support their interests" (Wynne 2005: 1–2). What is worse, those living in poverty and without a high school diploma are typically stigmatized and blamed for their educational "failures." These are almost certainly major parts of the explanation for the fact that the adult educational institutions in which they are studying are allocated two-thirds of one percent of the total Manitoba education budget.

This is wrong. It is also dramatically short-sighted, since investment in adult education can produce significant benefits, for marginalized adults and their families, and for society as a whole.

Part Two

The Benefits of a Re-imagined and Revitalized Adult Education System

SOME OF THE benefits that flow from adult education can be quantified. However, many of the most important benefits are difficult to quantify. The case can be made that too much emphasis has been placed in recent years on quantifiable outcomes — numbers of literacy stages advanced, numbers of credits earned, numbers of graduates, numbers of jobs, for example. These indicators are important, and in no way is the intent to diminish their importance. As indicated above, earning a high school diploma produces financial benefits both for graduates and their families, and for society at large. We want adult learners to graduate, and an enhanced and expanded adult education strategy will produce many more high school graduates. That matters.

However, those actually engaged in the day-to-day work are unanimous in saying that for adult learners returning to school, adult education is a difficult challenge. It takes time. Patience and persistence are required — by

adult learners and by their teachers. In many cases the absence of immediately quantifiable gains masks equally important intangible gains. These include, for example, the gradual growth of self-confidence and self-esteem. I was repeatedly told by adult educators that low levels of self-confidence and self-esteem are major barriers to success for many adult learners. In many cases adult learners "are terrified to walk in" to an Adult Learning Centre, because they lack confidence and/or because they have had negative educational experiences earlier in life. A northern adult educator told me that many adults come to her program "with zero self-esteem." A rural adult educator said that many of his students have so little self-confidence that they are "fearful to ask for help" when they clearly need it. Kathleen Wynne, former Premier of Ontario, has written, "Adult learners live complex lives. Their re-entry into the learning environment, in many instances, requires a profound leap of courage" (Wynne 2005: 1). There are myriad reasons why this is the case. The solution is the patient, gradual process of building trusting relationships with students. Out of this often long, slow process can come the building of a sense of hope for a better future, for adult learners themselves, and for their families and communities.

For a powerful depiction of the fears experienced by many adults as they make the leap into adult education, see the poem in the accompanying sidebar on page 24, written in 2017 by JoAnne Saunders, Education Director at the Swan River Adult Education program.

What is being proposed is an approach to Adult Learning Centres and adult literacy that will produce a number of interrelated benefits, which together will have the effect not only of moving adults into good jobs, but also of strengthening families and communities. An enhanced adult education system that enrolls significantly increased numbers of adult learners will produce, over time, many thousands of adults with improved skills, improved health,[2] greater self-confidence, stronger personal relationships and mutual supports (Prins, Toso & Schafft 2009), and a deepened awareness of the value and benefits of education. Women in particular have been found to develop mutual support systems and a greater sense of solidarity as the result of involvement in adult education (Marsteller 2012). These adults will have made these gains because of their hard work — getting to classes on time in the morning, doing homework to complete assignments in the evening, discussing issues and ideas with fellow students. Adult education is hard

2 There is a wealth of evidence that health improves with educational attainment. See, as but one example, Mikkonen & Raphael 2010.

Will They Know

Will they welcome me with open arms,
and make me feel at home?
Will they calm my anxious heart and mind,
aware I'm all alone?
Will they understand the shame I hide,
Deep beneath my "mask"?
Will they know that I am fearful,
of the questions they may ask?
Will they see beneath my outer calm,
emotions I suppress?
Will they hear beyond my silences,
the fears I can't express?
Will they overlook the scars I bear,
from my troubled past?
Will they know success has always been,
just beyond my grasp?
Will they honour my uniqueness,
without judgement or contempt?
Will they value me for who I am,
and treat me with respect?
Will they help me find the confidence,
to raise my self-esteem?
Will they know...
this may be my last chance,
to realize my dreams?

JoAnne Saunders

work, yet many more adults than those who are currently enrolled would be prepared to do that hard work, if enough spaces were made available, and especially if student financial support were made available.

If this were to happen, K-12 outcomes would also be improved. Parents involved in adult education will come home from school and talk with their children about what they are learning. Their view of the world, their ways of understanding, will have been broadened. Children will see, from their parent's experience with Adult Learning Centres and adult literacy programming, that education can produce real benefits for them. Children's school attendance — which today is a particularly serious problem in low-income areas (Burrows 2021) — will be improved, because children whose parents are in school will be much more likely to be encouraged to attend and to do well in school. Growing numbers of parents will be able, for the first time in their lives, to read bedtime stories to their children. They will be able to read the notes sent home from their children's school, and will be more able and willing to be active partners in their children's educational experience (Silver 2014). There is plenty of evidence in the literature showing that "children do better if their parents have higher incomes and more education themselves" (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009: 105. See also Ontario Education 2005: 11; Levin 2004: 53). Adult education produces many benefits for parents. But it also benefits children. An enhanced and expanded adult education strategy will also produce improved K-12 outcomes, an issue about which Manitoba has been much concerned in recent years.

The vicious cycle by which poverty produces poor educational outcomes, which then produce still more poverty and, in turn, more poor educational outcomes, is worsened by a host of inter-related issues that are known to exist in Manitoba. These include, among others, poor housing, poor health, social exclusion, racism and colonialism, intergenerational trauma arising from the damage occasioned by residential schools, community and domestic violence, disproportionate involvement in the criminal justice system, addictions and relatively low levels of labour force participation. These in turn cause damage to peoples' self-esteem and self-confidence and, in many cases, create a sense of hopelessness about the future. This is what has been called "complex poverty" (Silver 2016). Poor educational outcomes and high levels of functional illiteracy are among the many adverse consequences. This vicious cycle has to be broken, and a coherent, ambitious and well-funded system of Adult Learning Centres and adult literacy can be an important part of breaking the cycle.

A Long Journey

Susan Jobb-Beaulieu is a 53 year old residential school survivor who lives in The Pas. Hers has been a hard life. She was abused at residential school, something that she has talked about only recently. She has worked for 30 years cleaning houses, been a caregiver looking after parents and grandparents in their final days, experienced the death of a son, and now lives with and supports her husband who has a disability.

She returned to school because, she says, she "had enough of cleaning houses."

Susan was nervous, even scared, when first entering the Kelsey Learning Centre (KLC) in The Pas. She did not know how to read or spell, and had never used a computer. Letters and other documents she received over the years were read to her by one of her children. Coming back to school was a challenge.

She started in the Kelsey Learning Centre's literacy program, at stage one. Today, she has made so much progress that she is in grade 10, with the goal of completing grade 12. The transition from the literacy program where she started, to the Adult Learning Centre where she is now, was made less of a challenge than it might have been because at the KLC the literacy program and the ALC are co-located in the same building. Going from the literacy program to the mature grade 12 program has been pretty much a seamless transition.

When asked what going to school after all these years is like for her, Susan replied, "I'm having a ball!" She is having fun, and is a leader among the adult learners at the centre. This despite the fact that she continues to work evenings as a cleaner so that she can afford to attend classes full-time during the day.

Adding to the challenge is the fact that she and her husband do not have adequate housing, and are living in a hotel. His pension disqualifies them from any of the kinds of student supports for which she might otherwise qualify. Tara Manych, Director of the Kelsey Learning Centre, describes Susan as a "resilient, powerful woman" and an inspiration to others. And there are others. As Tara says, there are hundreds of northerners who have had few chances in life, and who would jump at the opportunity to improve their education if sufficient spaces were available.

Susan is quick to point out that her success is being made possible in large part because the teachers are "awesome." The Director, Tara Manych, is an "amazing woman" Susan says. These positive personal relationships have been essential in making Susan's success possible. In fact, it is likely that she would not have continued without those strong and supportive personal connections.

Susan's goal, one she has had from a very early age, is to become a counsellor. Once she completes her grade 12, she plans to enroll in the Aboriginal and Northern Counselling Certificate Program at University College of the North (UCN). Her lifetime of lived experience, together with the skills she will have acquired earning her mature high school diploma, will serve her well as a counsellor. Good counsellors are in high demand in the North. Adult education can go a long way to meeting that demand. Susan is proving that's the case, and there are hundreds more out there waiting for the chance.

It is important to make particular note of the many benefits produced by adult education in rural and northern communities. Most adults in such communities would not embark upon earning a mature high school diploma if doing so required moving, because of the financial costs and disruption to family life that doing so would cost (Storie & Storie 2005). More high school graduates in rural and northern settings strengthens those communities, especially given that there are jobs in many of these communities for those with a high school diploma. Perhaps when we think of "natural resources" in rural and northern communities, we should be thinking of the many adults living there who would benefit from adult education, and who would add to the strengths of their communities if given the opportunity to pursue adult education.

In short, a re-imagined and revitalized adult education strategy in Manitoba would produce many benefits. It would strengthen families and communities. It would move many more adults into the paid labour force, and/or into better paid jobs, thus strengthening the economy. It would contribute to improving K-12 school outcomes. It would strengthen rural and northern communities. It would drive down Manitoba's very high poverty rate, with all the many benefits that would flow from doing so. Why would we *not* make the investments to produce these multiple benefits?

What might an ambitious, well-funded and strategic system of Adult Learning Centres and adult literacy programs look like?

Part Three

An Enhanced Adult Education Strategy for Manitoba

IN DEVELOPING A strategy to enhance the delivery of adult education, the following are some of the elements that would need to be included.

First

We need to think systematically and strategically about the issue. What we are trying to achieve is to get many more people — especially but not only those who are living in poverty, are at risk of poverty, are precariously employed, have suffered the consequences of colonialism and the residential school system, or have recently arrived in Manitoba — to become actively engaged in either an adult literacy program or an Adult Learning Centre, and to enhance significantly the numbers and the capacities of those adult education programs so that they are delivering the best possible quality of adult education to the greatest possible number of adult learners. Adult education should not continue to be the poor cousin of the K-12 and post-secondary systems. It should be recognized as a crucial part of the educational continuum in

Manitoba, and should be funded accordingly. Adequate funding is a necessity for a re-imagined and revitalized adult education strategy.

Second

We should be delivering adult educational programming in a way that is interconnected and has a strong network of supports. This would best be achieved by developing a *hub model*. A hub model would include at least three elements at each centre: an Adult Learning Centre delivering the mature grade 12, an adult literacy program, and a childcare centre.

- Adult Learning Centres have a proven track record of success. They offer the mature grade 12, which requires adult learners to earn eight high school credits, including grade 12 English and grade 12 Math. They offer warm and friendly environments and emphasize the building of positive and supportive relationships with adult learners. Their spaces and curricula are, in many cases, Indigenous-friendly. Everyone would benefit enormously from a significant expansion in ALC spaces.

- Adult literacy[3] programming is best located in the same building as an ALC. Doing so produces many benefits. A problem identified by those working in adult literacy programs is that the transition from an adult literacy program to a mature high school program is difficult. In some cases this is because ALCs do not offer grade 10 courses, or other courses that would facilitate the transition to high school-level studies. In other cases the transition is made difficult by adult learners' fears of the unfamiliar, their fears of a new and more difficult challenge in a new place. These fears are much more likely to be overcome by co-locating adult literacy and mature grade 12 programming, creating a seamless connection from one level to the next. This may be especially important in rural and northern settings, where potential adult learners may not be quite ready for high school courses, and so require high school preparation. If there is no literacy program in a particular rural centre, as is the case in some settings, then they would have to be told that they do not meet the criteria for admission to the mature high school program. As one adult educator told me: "One of the worst things is to tell someone

3 Some adult educators do not use the term "literacy" at all, because it has negative connotations. They prefer terms such as high school preparation or upgrading.

they can't come to the Centre." This problem is largely solved when literacy and mature high school programs are co-located.

- Childcare is a *necessary* support for success in adult literacy and ALCs. Every person working in adult education that I have spoken with has confirmed that ready access to childcare is *essential* if adults living in complex poverty are to succeed in adult education. The absence of childcare is a "huge barrier," I was told. In the case of one ALC that includes a relatively small number of infant and toddler spaces, I was told that while 100 percent of those adult learners whose children did *not* find childcare do *not* finish the program, almost all of those parents whose children are in the infant/toddler centre graduate. The hub model would include a childcare program in the same building as the adult literacy program and ALC, or in close proximity. This should be at the forefront of strategic planning as the Province rolls out the federally-driven universal and affordable childcare program.

Third

Staffing needs to be enhanced.

- All teachers in Adult Learning Centres should be certified teachers, earning the same rate of pay and the same benefits that apply to teachers in the K-12 system, and benefitting from the same access to professional development and other opportunities. This is best achieved when ALCs are connected to and supported by a school division or other educational institution, and teachers are represented by the Manitoba Teachers Society.

- Similarly, all teachers in adult literacy programs should be certified teachers, earning the same rate of pay and the same benefits that apply to teachers in the K-12 system, and benefitting from the same access to professional development and other opportunities. We need to take adult literacy seriously enough that we no longer rely on well-intentioned volunteers. Adult literacy programs should no longer be "run by volunteers out of church basements," as one long-time adult literacy teacher put it. The wide disparities in rates of pay and access to benefits for Manitoba adult educators is simply not right. We need certified, well-paid, unionized teachers doing the teaching, in both literacy and mature high school programs, as is the case in the K-12 system. The transition to these new requirements may require

special interim arrangements to ensure that existing teachers and programs are not adversely affected.

- Consistent with these objectives, it would be beneficial if Faculties of Education were to offer courses in adult education, and were to make students aware of the adult education system and its importance in Manitoba. One Faculty of Education graduate now working in adult education told me that she "stumbled" into her job after graduating with a B. Ed., and knew nothing at all about adult education when she left university. This reflects the extent to which adult education in Manitoba is an afterthought.

- Each program also needs support staff. Students who have grown up in and are living in complex poverty will come to an adult literacy program or ALC with many challenges — poor housing, domestic abuse, addictions, family members involved in the criminal justice system, lack of ID to gain access to benefits, among many such examples. They need support in navigating these challenges. They need life skills training and counselling. The teachers cannot do this, or cannot do enough of this, because their focus is on teaching the curriculum. Therefore, support staff skilled in working with adults, particularly by serving as advocates who can navigate complex systems, are essential if adults living in poverty are to succeed.

Fourth

Because a disproportionate number of adult learners, and very likely large numbers of those who could benefit from adult education, are Indigenous, a reformed adult education strategy has to place Indigenous needs and values at the forefront. Adult education can be a central part of reconciliation. As one Director in a northern centre told us, "adult education is the way through reconciliation." An expanded and reformed adult education strategy can be and must be a crucial component of reconciliation, and an appropriate part of what Manitoba needs to do in response to the massive damage caused by the residential schools. Recall Justice Murray Sinclair: "education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it." This has to include adult education.

Fifth

Significant numbers of newcomers to Manitoba, immigrants and refugees, are falling through the cracks of a system whose rules and regulations are

byzantine. It will likely require cooperation with the federal government to reform these regulations (at least one recent federal program is a step in this direction) so that newcomers to Manitoba — so important for our collective economic future — can take advantage of adult educational opportunities.

Sixth

The primary goal of adult educational programming ought to be to build stronger and healthier families and communities. The practice of recent decades, which has been to measure success by counting numbers of people who move into the paid labour force, has been overemphasized, and should be complemented by a commitment to building the capacities and capabilities of adult learners so that families and communities can be strengthened. Objective measures, including numbers employed upon graduation, ought not to be the only measures of success. As a rural adult educator put it, "statistics don't show the whole picture at all." The often slow, patient process of building relationships and developing adult learners' self-confidence and self-esteem is a crucial part of the "whole picture."

Seventh

Other systems outside the adult education world ought to be working to identify those adults in need of and likely to succeed in an adult literacy program or Adult Learning Centre. The goal ought to be to move into adult literacy programs or ALCs as many low-income people who want to improve their education and are capable of doing so as possible.

- Workers in the EIA system ought to be encouraged to refer suitable candidates to adult literacy programs or ALCs. Today, this is not happening, or is happening infrequently. As one adult educator told me, "We don't get nearly enough referrals. They push them to work." I heard this concern repeatedly in speaking with adult educators throughout the province. EIA workers should be pushing people into adult education.

- Teachers and support staff in the K-12 system ought to be encouraged to do the same. Some ALCs now do outreach to schools. More of this could be done, so that teachers in the K-12 system are fully aware of the adult education opportunities available for suitable parents, and are referring as many parents as possible. When a parent is involved in adult education, her or his children are much more likely to do well in school.

- The Province ought to develop, in consultation with adult educators and adult learners, an advertising campaign aimed at promoting the benefits of adult education and increasing enrollment. Many adults who would benefit from adult education are simply unaware of the opportunities that exist. A local advertising campaign conducted by one rural ALC produced a three-fold increase in enrollment — evidence of the unmet need that exists. The advertising in that case was abandoned when the enrollment growth was not accompanied by the growth in funding that was needed. But this example is evidence of the benefits that would flow from actively promoting adult education.

Eighth

Financial supports ought to be made available to adult learners. Lack of financial means is a major impediment to enrollment in adult education programming. A financial support system that includes a living allowance and access to computers and high-speed internet and transportation, the lack of all of which are major impediments to adult learners' success, could be devised that would support adult learners. Some adult learners currently get financial support, but the criteria are relatively narrow and most do not qualify for various reasons. A monitoring and reporting system that would ensure against abuse could relatively easily be devised. The increase in the numbers of adult learners and graduates, and the taxes paid in future by those who secure employment, would more than justify the costs of supporting students. As a society we want more functionally literate, skilled people actively and productively engaged in the labour force, and we ought to be prepared to pay for it, especially when the long-term benefits are likely to outweigh the costs.

Ninth

Adult education and its parent organization, Adult Learning and Literacy, ought to be placed in a permanent departmental home, and that ought to be the Department of Education. In recent years adult education has been bumped from one department to another and then another, adding significantly to the sense that adult education is an afterthought and is not respected. In recent years adult education has at different times been in the Departments of Advanced Education and Training, Multiculturalism and Literacy, Education and Training, Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration, and Economic Development and Training. It belongs in the Department of Education, because it needs to become an important part

of the educational continuum in Manitoba. The Department of Education should then make it a practice to work in close collaboration with adult literacy programs and Adult Learning Centres to develop the most rational and supportive and coherent approach to the expansion and improvement of adult education.

Tenth

Access to the internet is a major problem, especially but not only in rural and northern areas. One rural adult educator said "access to the internet is huge in our area." This, I was told, is the case in most rural and northern areas. One adult educator in Winnipeg told me that for her relatively large program, access to the necessary technology "is bleak at best." Equitable access to technology is essential. Everyone deserves to be able to use the internet without, as one adult educator put it, "falling asleep as things get downloaded." There has been a great deal of creativity by adult educators in responding to the demands of the pandemic, and this includes creative uses of on-line learning. However, it is important to be careful with this option. Most adult learners need the personal relationship building that happens in all ALCs and literacy programs. Lack of confidence is identified by virtually all adult educators as an important impediment to most adult learners' success, and it is personal, face-to-face relationship building that can overcome this barrier. The absence of that face-to-face relationship is thought to be a major reason why on-line success rates are relatively low. One rural Director said, "It's been my experience that those who have tried [on-line learning] with us have failed to succeed." The Director of a northern program said, "on-line learning does not work in the north." This has been the general experience during the pandemic, although I was told of some circumstances in which creative efforts have produced some successes when in-person learning was not possible. Further, it is important to note that over the past 15 years a small number of ALCs have specialized in offering on-line courses. These ALCs maintain close contact and develop supportive relationships with students via phone, text, email and other methods, and can arrange face-to-face meetings. Self-paced remote learning of this kind has a place in adult education, because it can meet the needs of those adults who, for various reasons, simply cannot attend classes. Adult educators are clear, however, that for the vast majority seeking a mature student diploma, classroom learning is the ideal environment, and on-line learning should not replace in-person learning.

Eleventh

Enhanced funding for Adult Learning Centres and adult literacy is an absolute necessity. This is undoubtedly the issue in most immediate need of fixing. An enhanced adult education strategy requires significantly increased revenues for adult literacy programs and ALCs, and especially for adult learning hubs. Adult education ought to be funded well enough that it becomes a professional public service that is treated as being on a par with the K-12 and post-secondary systems. If the funding per adult education student were to be equivalent to the funding for K-12 students, this would mean a six-fold increase in funding to ALCs and literacy programs in Manitoba.

Adult Learning Hubs

An adult learning hub ought to be located in those areas of Winnipeg and other Manitoba cities and communities where the incidence of poverty is high. Often this will mean, in the case of Winnipeg, adult learning hubs being located in parts of the inner city, or in suburban areas where there is a high concentration of Manitoba Housing units.

Adult learning hubs can be thought of as "one-stop shopping" for adult learners. They combine, in one physical space or in close proximity, an Adult Learning Centre, an adult literacy program and a dedicated childcare centre.

- A good example of an adult learning hub is the Aboriginal Community Campus located at the Neeginan Centre on Higgins Avenue in Winnipeg. They offer the mature grade 12, plus a Literacy and Upgrading Program. They also have student housing and two on-site childcare programs. These programs are divisions of the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD), which provides financial support, especially to the Literacy and Upgrading Program. CAHRD also has the Neeginan College of Applied Technology, which prepares adults for skilled employment in high demand careers. As part of their holistic approach, CAHRD also provides funding for a "healthy living program" created to address the physical, emotional and spiritual wellness of their students. This is important because of the trauma that so many of their Indigenous students bring to the classroom, and the crises in their personal lives that are so common. The sharing of resources at the Neeginan Centre makes this an attractive model of adult learning.

- Another good example of an adult learning hub is the Seven Oaks Adult Learning Centre, which is located on Jefferson Ave in north-west Winnipeg, and is affiliated with and supported by the Seven Oaks School Division. Located close to the Elwick Manitoba Housing complex, this centre includes an ALC that offers the mature grade 12, and a childcare program accessible by (a limited number of) adult learners. The Centre includes English as an Additional Language (EAL) classes, and related immigrant and refugee services. Efforts are underway to add an adult literacy program. The Centre also includes the highly successful Wayfinders program, which is an after-school, high school support program.

- Another example of an adult learning hub is the Rene Deleurme Centre, located beside Lavallee School in the Louis Riel School Division and surrounded by Manitoba Housing complexes. This centre includes an adult literacy program and an English as a second language program, a childcare centre that will soon be using the Abecedarian model piloted in Lord Selkirk Park, and an immigrant/refugee centre that caters to the needs of the many newcomers in the area (Silver & Sjoberg 2019). The St. Vital Adult Learning Centre is located close by, and perhaps could be relocated to or otherwise integrated with the Rene Deleurme Centre.

- Selkirk Ave in Winnipeg's North End has most of the elements of an adult learning hub, each located in close proximity although not all in one physical space. These include:
  - The Urban Circle Training Centre, which offers the mature grade 12 plus several employment programs for Indigenous adults.
  - The University of Manitoba's Inner City Social Work Program.
  - Merchants Corner, which includes the University of Winnipeg's Department of Urban and Inner-City Studies and the CEDA-Pathways to Education program which, like Wayfinders, is an after-school high school support program.
  - 30 units of fully subsidized student housing, which is part of the Merchants Corner complex.
  - The Makoonsaq Intergenerational Children's Centre, a childcare program affiliated with Urban Circle and open to the children of other students.

- In addition, at Lord Selkirk Park, which is located several blocks from the Selkirk Avenue complex, there is the Kaakiyow Adult Learning Centre, the Lord Selkirk Park Adult Literacy Program and the Manidoo Gi-Minni Gonaan Childcare Centre.
- Given the particularly high levels of poverty in this part of the North End, it might well make sense to locate an adult learning hub — including an ALC, a literacy program and a childcare centre — on or close to Selkirk Ave. This would be in addition to those various programs already located on Selkirk Ave. and in Lord Selkirk Park. The high incidence of poverty and related need for adult literacy and the mature grade 12 may warrant such a development, and space would be available on Selkirk Avenue.

- The Winnipeg Adult Education Centre is located on Vaughan Street in downtown Winnipeg. It is a well-established Adult Learning Centre, with a close and positive relationship with the Winnipeg School Division, and their students have access to a childcare program. WAEC does not have an adult literacy program. However, there are adult literacy programs nearby, and some thought might well be given to moving toward the adult learning hub model. Doing so might involve some consolidation of existing programs.

- It is possible that the current Stevenson-Brittania Adult Learning Centre in St. James could become another adult learning hub. Stevenson-Brittania now includes both an adult literacy program and an ALC, and is located close to Manitoba Housing. Approximately 50 percent of their students are Indigenous. With the addition of a childcare centre, this could be yet another adult learning hub.

- Similarly, Yellowquill College could usefully become an adult education hub, adding to its already successful programming. First Nations owned and operated, it offers the mature high school diploma and various important post-secondary programs to almost 300 adult learners. Many Indigenous students who come to Yellowquill from the North for the mature high school program would benefit from a literacy and life skills program that would enable them to transition both to the high school program and to life in the city. The addition of a childcare centre would make Yellowquill a strong adult education hub.

- There may be other areas of the city where the incidence of poverty is high enough to warrant the establishment of an adult learning hub. These might include the northeast quadrant of the city, including Elmwood, and the south end of the city.

- A similar approach, making use of the hub model that combines in one space or in close proximity an adult literacy program, the mature high school program and a childcare centre, would be enormously beneficial in many rural and northern cities, towns and communities. Adult educators there have told us explicitly that the hub model would be enormously beneficial in their communities. In many rural and northern centres — perhaps in most — the incidence of complex poverty is high, and there are jobs available for those with a high school education. The design of adult education hubs cannot take a 'one-size-fits-all' form, but must be determined in close collaboration with adult educators and learners in each community. Again, the benefits of this approach would outweigh the costs over time.

Conclusions

AN ENHANCEMENT OF adult literacy programs and Adult Learning Centres along the lines described here would produce enormous benefits in Manitoba. Currently, education in Manitoba consists of the K-12 system and the post-secondary education system, with adult education as the poor cousin treated as an afterthought. The adult education "system" is poorly coordinated and severely underfunded. It would be beneficial educationally to move to a tripartite system in which adult education is seen to be, and is treated as being, as important as K-12 and PSE. If this were to be done strategically, using the adult learning hub approach targeted especially at low-income adults and low-income areas, and funding the system well enough to professionalize teaching staff and provide the range of supports that are known to be needed for success — the target might usefully be that per capita funding be equivalent to that in the K-12 system — the benefits would far outweigh the costs. Among those benefits would be stronger and healthier families and communities, improved K-12 school outcomes, improved rates of adult functional literacy, major steps in the direction of reconciliation, significant reductions in the incidence of poverty with all the associated benefits that would produce, and over the medium to long term, enhanced tax revenues and reduced social assistance and related costs as many more people move into the paid labour force.

Appendix

TABLE 3 Adult Learning Centres, 2003/04 to 2019/20

Year	# ALC	# Enrolled in ALCs	% Indigenous	% Below Age 35	# ALC Grads	% of Grads Indigenous	$ Invested in ALCs
2019/20	40*	7172	45%	78%	922	44%	$17,323,640
2018/19	40	7409	44%	78%	1138	49%	$17,538,814
2017/18	42	7802	44%	79%	1058	45%	$17,535,250
2016/17	42	8111	46%	79%	1207	46%	$17,549,952
2015/16	42	8450	47%	79%	1256	47%	$17,218,860
2014/15	42	8153	46%	75%	1328	47%	$16,804,900
2013/14	42	8409	47%	76%	1329	43%	$16,804,900
2012/13	42	8389	45%	76%	1425	44%	$16,851,900
2011/12	42	9007	42%	76%	1356	40%	$16,678,900
2010/11	45	9281	42%	75%	1438	37%	$16,458,000
2009/10	48	9070	40%	73%	1456	34%	$16,543,000
2008/09	46	8056	42%	73%	1231	36%	$15,402,000
2007/08	45	7929	41%	75%	1174	37%	$14,810,000
2006/07	44	8300	37%	70%	1260	33%	$14,435,000
2005/06	43	8446	35%	69%	1238	35%	$14,075,000
2004/05	44	8745	-	71%	1229	35%	$13,529,400
2003/04	49	9715	40%	67%	1254	-	$13,057,900

Source Manitoba Adult Learning and Literacy. *Annual Reports, 2003/04-2019/20.*
***** A part, but not all, of the decline in the number of ALCs is attributable to amalgamations.

TABLE 4 Adult Literacy, 2009/10 to 2019/20

Year	# Literacy Programs	# Enrolled	# Enrolled ALC + literacy	% Indigenous	% 35 Years or Less	Amount Invested in Adult Literacy	Total Invested ALCs and Adult Literacy
2019/20	30	1720	8892	38%		$2,596,395	$19,920,035
2018/19	31	1956	9365	37%	51%	$2,596,395	$20,135,209
2017/18	32	2138	9940	42%	54%	$2,666,715	$20,201,965
2016/17	33	1991	10,102	41%	53%	$2,650,855	$20,200,807
2015/16	33	2182	10,632	45%	53%	$2,650,855	$19,869,715
2014/15	33	2228	10,381	44%	49%	$2,586,200	$19,391,100
2013/14	34	2254	10,663	40%	49%	$2,586,200	$19,391,100
2012/13	36	2387	10,776	38%	43%	$2,642,600	$19,494,500
2011/12	37	2508	11,515	38%		$2,554,300	$19,233,200
2010/11	41	2773	12,054	37%		$2,593,000	$19,051,000
2009/10	42	2866	11,936	33%		$2,610,000	$19,153,000

Source Manitoba Adult Learning and Literacy. *Annual Reports, 2003/04-2019/20.*

- 2003/04 was the first Annual Report for Adult Learning Centres. Annual Reports were required under the *Adult Learning Centres Act*, which took effect July 1, 2003.
- 2009/10 was the first Annual Report that included Adult Literacy data. These data were required under the *Adult Literacy Act*, which was proclaimed January 1, 2009.

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