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This is the ninth installment of a series, prompted by stories that have appeared in The News, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Multi-Service Centre (MSC).

September 8, 2008 is **International Literacy Day** as proclaimed by UNESCO in 1965. The MSC added Adult Basic Literacy (ABL) to its arsenal of programming in 1987 after a 1986 survey had determined there was a need.

A program profile appeared in the June 15, 1987 *News*, accompanied by a photo of the first coordinator Jeanne Parker. The copy from that article remains relevant today: "if you can read this article, you've got a skill that many others don't possess. Imagine not being able to read the paper, understand the dosage on a prescription, complete a job application or understand written road signs. Imagine."

A photo in the October 7, 1987 *News* captures one of the first tutor groups receiving training prior to being matched with students. This training process continues today - the next such sessions will be held on Sept. 27 and Oct. 4, 2008.

The *News* has covered many literacy themed stories over the years. These have included events like "Reading the Signs" (July 4, 1990), coverage of literacy related fundraisers like the golf tournaments hosted by Heather & Dave Harnett and the annual Food & Farce. The first F & F was held in 2000 and the next will be held on Feb. 21, 2009.

ABL has spawned many interesting partnerships. One of these is the art work, created by Annandale students, that decorates Food & Farce events. One year students created common road signs, another year menus - all scrambled to illustrate the difficulties many ABL students experience every day. The current 30th anniversary "someone you know makes a difference" project inviting Glendale students to write about MSC services through the eyes of clients or volunteers is a natural extension of this community involvement.

In 2007 and 2008, UNESCO began highlighting the connections between literacy and health. Using data from the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey, Accreditation Canada (in "Qmentum Quarterly", Aug. 2008) provides a statistic that suggests this emphasis is timely: "60% of adult Canadians lack the capacity to obtain, understand, and act upon health information and services and to make appropriate decisions on their own". This is truly alarming given both our aging demographic and the increased use of pharmaceuticals and technology in health care.

And yet, when a student develops the skills to express, a great power is unleashed, something we see every day with ABL students. A collection of these expressions are available in the ABL publication "Our Stories". Students talk about how it feels to be able to write a cheque or read a thank you note. They share stories about the worry when buying a house, the loneliness one can feel in a large family or the fear of job loss: "one day I was told that my job no longer existed. It was the biggest shock of my life. I felt like my life was at an end. Having been employed for thirty-six years, how would I find work if I couldn't read and write? That meant not even being able to complete any application that was handed out to me. So with my wife's encouragement I decided that it was time for me to learn to read and write." There is great wisdom in these pages too: "it is much better to enjoy a simple meal with people you love, than to have the most expensive treats or overwork yourself. Then, as the sun brightens the morning, there will always be hope and joy for you."

Adult Basic Literacy continues to offer one on one tutoring. Small group opportunities and on-line learning is also available, all delivered by a dedicated staff and corps of volunteers (86 in 07/08). Volunteers are significant contributors to the success of the program. Wendy Woodhouse, who like Jeanne Parker has great empathy for the students, has been the ABL program coordinator since 1989.

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