

# **Young Deaf Adults:**

## **Perceptions of Career Planning, Goal Setting & Literacy**

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Research and report compiled by Heather C. Marsden

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Introduction

Project Background and Purpose of Study

Methodology and Sample

Advisory Committee

Data Collection

Participants

Findings:

1. Goal-setting as Barrier to Employment:
  - Understanding of and experience with goal setting
  - Current Career Goals
  - Post-Secondary Studies – a closer look
  - Co-op Experiences and Volunteering – the unpaid work experience
  - Goal Setting – The Evolution
  - The Five Year Plan
  - Use of employment services to set or follow goals
  
2. Perceptions of and attitudes towards literacy:
  - Perceptions of the Importance of Literacy
  - Literacy as Compared to Other Barriers
  - Previous Literacy Training and Understanding of Literacy
  - Attitudes Toward Enrollment
  
3. Literacy – A Self-Assessment
  - Writing
  - Reading
  - Numeracy
  - Communication
  - Self-Management/Self-Direction Skills
  
4. Implications for Marketing and Partnerships in the Literacy Field
  - Marketing
  - Partnerships
  - Recommendations

Discussion and Conclusion

Appendices

A: Survey Questions

B: Barriers to Goal Setting

C: Self-Assessment Tool (Reading, Writing & Numeracy)

References

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report summarizes the anecdotes of 34 Deaf and hard-of-hearing youth across Ontario. It's fair to say these youth are very much individuals. In fact, they represent a variety of education, class and cultural backgrounds. Some of the youth we interviewed have a post-secondary education while others don't have the required credentials to enroll in a post-secondary degree program. Some can't perform basic numeracy tasks while others have successfully completed calculus courses. Some enjoy reading Agatha Christie novels while others can't read. Some express articulate thoughts in writing while others struggle with English grammar. Some rely on government assistance to survive while others refuse to rely on any type of government subsidy. Some felt their high school education was very poor while others thought their teachers were good role models. Although the backgrounds of each of the young Deaf adults interviewed varies, their experiences with and knowledge of goal setting and career planning are strikingly similar.

Although most of those interviewed discussed some sort of past goal planning efforts, either in their high school or a literacy program, they can only vaguely remember what and how they planned. Only a few young participants currently follow an effective, actionable plan that includes steps for achieving their desired goal to obtain ideal employment. Instead, most seem vague and dream-like when discussing future career plans. For example, most are unaware of what essential skills are required for their ideal career. Take a young woman whose goal is to become a costume designer yet feels numeracy is not required for her vocation. How will she determine measurements and length of fabric required for purchase? This lack of understanding of the realities of work and its requirements is common among those interviewed.

Many have changed their ideal career goal since high school. The reasons participants cite for this change of plans are as varied as the participants themselves and include self-assessment of skills and abilities, pressure from family and friends and a lack of understanding of the labor market. For example, one young adult, upon high school graduation, aimed to be an architect. It was not until he entered post-secondary studies that he understood the numeracy requirements.

Half of those interviewed would like to participate in a literacy program to assist with their reading, writing and numeracy skills but are not currently in such a program. They cite their need to work, geographical factors and a lack of access for reasons behind their non-participation. Some felt that literacy programs only assist in improving reading and writing skills. None seemed to know that literacy programs can help with career planning.

Anecdotal evidence clearly shows that young Deaf adults need accessible and stimulating programs that will successfully guide them to planning and achieving their goals. This can be achieved by marketing literacy programs to fit individual needs. Young Deaf adults state that they would be interested in attending such a program if it can be shown and proven that there is some degree of success attached to it. Literacy programs need to

promote their programs as challenging and willing to accommodate their levels and learning styles. There has to be heavy emphasis on goal planning. Many of the young Deaf adults have accessed employment services to assist in their goal planning –but most with little progress. The same is reported for those who previously attended a literacy program. The link between the literacy programs and local specialized agencies that provide employment and mental health services is clearly missing. The link to mental health services is explained later.

Many of those interviewed discussed experience with employer discrimination. They felt that, despite their skills and abilities, they could not get hired simply because they were Deaf. Most of their stories supported this perception. Literacy ranked fourth overall among the young Deaf adults. Some of the young Deaf adults perceived their limited literacy skills as no barrier to their employment goal. For example, one young Deaf adult who is seeking employment in the graphic design field was unable to correctly complete the self-assessment tools<sup>1</sup>. Yet she felt that her literacy skills were not a barrier to finding and sustaining employment. She has been looking for a job for three years.

Presently, formal partnerships between literacy programs and mental health services are non-existent. Yet, mental health issues ranked fifth as a barrier to goal setting. It was discouraging to note how many of the young Deaf adults interviewed suffer from either depression or drug abuse problems at this early stage of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Appendix C – Writing, Reading & Numeracy Self-Assessment Tools

## **PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF STUDY**

Only by understanding the role that literacy training has in the growth of the individual as a whole, will literacy delivery agencies be able to prepare their learners for the working world and, indeed, for life. The need for literacy practitioners and managers to understand what motivates young Deaf<sup>2</sup> adults to set and follow career and life goals is a critical one.

Some young Deaf adults do not enter literacy projects. Others go for a while and then quit or graduate without moving on to meaningful employment and/or higher education. What prevents some young Deaf adults from either accessing such programs in the first place or from using the programs as part of a career plan? What are the various barriers that strip work motivation from young people? When Ontario's young Deaf adults graduate from or leave secondary school and decide not to pursue post-secondary studies, what choices do they make? Are they working? If so, where? Have they set career goals? If not, why? Does English literacy play a role? If so, what? How do literacy agencies best attract young Deaf adults who could benefit from training? How is enrolment sustained? How can these same agencies help learners set career goals?

This research project examined these questions with the aim of producing for the Deaf literacy field and associated employment services and outreach agencies, actionable recommendations to help attract young Deaf adults to their programs, best assist these young Deaf adults with career planning and life goal setting, impart meaning and relevancy of literacy training to potential and enrolled students and, finally, encourage the attainment of goals.

This project examined:

- Barriers that young Deaf adults currently face with regard to career planning and life goal setting;
- Young adults' perception of the significance of low literacy as a barrier to career planning and goal setting as weighted against other perceived barriers;
- Young adults' perceptions of the importance of literacy, training in order to career plan or set goals.

This project worked closely with a parallel study, Workforce Literacy and the Deaf Stream Literacy Classroom (G.O.L.D., 2003). The findings of both these projects are used to make recommendations for improvements to marketing efforts, literacy delivery and to advise on future workforce literacy efforts in Ontario's the Deaf and Deafblind literacy stream.

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<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this report, Deaf is defined as having a degree of hearing impairment

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Advisory Committee**

An advisory committee, comprised of key representatives of Ontario's Deaf community, guided this research project. Committee representatives represented both the ideas of young Deaf adults and the supports and services available to young adults. The committee also provided recommendations on the content of the personal interview questions.

### **Data Collection**

A very targeted population was sought for this research. As such, G.O.L.D. called on various Ontario Deaf servicing associations for help to contact 34 young Deaf adults across the province. Word-of-mouth was the most effective approach for reaching our study's participants.

Personal interviews (about 1½ hours each) were used to gather information about the participants' background and attitudes. All interviews were conducted in the language choice of the participant and all were recorded on videotape with the permission of participants. A series of questions covered such as educational background, volunteer and co-operative experiences, goal setting knowledge, employment status, perception of literacy skills, and use of employment services and supports.<sup>3</sup> Participants' writing, reading and ASL skills were also assessed during the interview.<sup>4</sup>

### **Participants**

The target group for this work was young Deaf adults who met the following criteria:

- Out of school and not currently involved in a literacy program
- Not working or, if working, self-identified as not in an ideal career
- Age 16 to 29
- Resident of Ontario
- Self-identified as Deaf, Deaf-blind or hard-of-hearing

A screening questionnaire was used to ensure that the young Deaf adults met the above criteria.

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix A - Survey Questions

<sup>4</sup> Appendix C – Self-Assessment Tools

*Age and gender*

The average age of participants was 25. An equal number of male and female participants were interviewed.

*Self-identity*

Of the 34 participants interviewed, 26 identified themselves as Deaf, seven as hard-of-hearing and one as Deaf-blind. Twenty-nine participants use American Sign Language as their primary mode of communication. Two hard-of-hearing participants do not use sign language; instead, they speak English and lip-read. Two other hard-of-hearing participants use simultaneous communication (both ASL and spoken English).

*Area of residence*

All 34 participants live in Ontario. Eight are from the Peel and Halton regions; six are from Ottawa and the Kitchener area; six live in Toronto; four live in the York region; two live in Hamilton; and one is from Windsor.

Sixty-two percent (21) of the participants live with family members. Seven live with their spouse and/or children. Four of them live alone. Two live with roommates. None of those interviewed own a house or have a mortgage. All are either living with parents and pay no board or live in an apartment and pay rent.

Seventy-one percent were born in Canada. Forty-seven percent were raised in the area where they presently live. Fifteen percent were raised in a country other than Canada.

*Income source*

All of those interviewed have a yearly income of less than \$20,000 with the exception of one woman who relies on her husband's income (\$30,000 - \$40,000 per annum). About half (53%) rely on Ontario Disability Income Supports. Another third rely on their parents, spouse or savings. Fewer (9%) rely on employment insurance and still fewer (6%) have some source of employment income.

*Education*

Most (70%) of those interviewed attended a provincial school for the Deaf. One-quarter attended a mainstreamed high school program in their hometown. Six percent attended a self-contained high school program. (A self-contained program is a program that homogeneously segregates Deaf students from the hearing students in a school.) Some attended both provincial schools for the Deaf and mainstreamed schools.

Three of those interviewed did not formally graduate from high school. One left before graduating and two were expelled. Only one of the two has since successfully completed the remaining requirements to receive an Ontario Secondary School Certificate (OSSD).

## **GOAL SETTING AS A BARRIER TO EMPLOYMENT**

*“An unwritten want is a wish, a dream, a never happen. The day you put your goal in writing is the day it becomes a commitment that will change your life. Are you ready?” – Tom Hopkins*

*“The establishment of a clear central purpose of goal in life is the starting point of all success.” – Brian Tracy*

This section outlines for the reader this study’s participants’ understanding and experience with goal setting, their current career goals, experiences with goal setting steps and tools such as post-secondary studies, co-op work and employment services. This section also discusses the future planning strategies employed by the participants. Together, this information informs us that the young Deaf adults we interviewed, although they have been exposed to goal setting exercises in the past, still struggle to set their own personal and work goals. Until this struggle is resolved, participants will continue to be challenged to find and keep suitable employment.

The goal-setting struggle of the people we interviewed seems to have roots in a number of areas. First, participants’ perceptions of previous goal setting activities are that these activities were imposed on them, that their true dreams and goals were not considered during the exercise; rather, pressure to follow certain paths was placed on them by educators, family and friends. The result seems to be that many participants are able to comment on their current goals yet are taking no concrete actions toward them. In many cases, steps such as enrolling in post-secondary studies have failed. Reasons for such a high withdrawal rate are varied, numerous and often systemic. Other goal-setting steps such as volunteering or co-operative experience are considered by participants to be viable if not exciting options. But factors such as no pay and an eagerness to get on with the business of finding paid employment prevent many from pursuing these choices.

The goals of participants have evolved over time but, sadly, seem to be more a factor of doors closing than doors opening. The result is a group of young people who are somewhat pessimistic about the future and who lack a concrete five-year plan for themselves. To add to the challenge, participants lack a clear understanding of the types and depth of goal setting services available to them, including employment and literacy services. And the literacy and employment agencies themselves struggle with both the funding and human resources needed to support individuals who require substantial assistance with development of job skills over a long period of time.

The implications for literacy agencies include a need for an emphasized marketing effort on the value of goal setting and the role of literacy in this process. As well, formal partnerships among literacy agencies and employment service providers that support goal setting and goal maintenance over a sustained period of time would go a long way to assisting young Deaf adults in Ontario’s communities.

## **Understanding and experience with goal setting**

The goal setting experience of those interviewed goes back to their high school years. Most, but not all, are familiar with the word, *goal*. Some remember goal-setting exercises in high school but say these exercises and discussions did not assist them greatly. Many commented they their high school did not prepare them well for “the real world.” In fact, two-thirds felt that their high school did not give them the proper tools to plan goals and secure employment. Study participants, arguably not unlike most young people, were highly influenced by their surroundings when deciding on future career plans. Most participants chose their employment goals after influence or pressure from family or encouragement from teachers. Others followed up on their own interest.

*“They gave me an aptitude test. The result said that I should be a Fashion Designer. That was so wrong. I wanted to be a P.E. teacher or an Assistant Pharmacist.” Age 24*

*“Did high school prepare me well? (laughing) No! The V.R.<sup>5</sup> support counselor was gone in my graduation year. I ended up staying another year because I was so not ready. If the high school had the proper vocational counseling supports then I probably would be more ahead than where I am now.” Age 28*

*“I wished during high school that someone explained to me about the different types of jobs out there. For example, if a student was interested in computers, they should have shown us different jobs that can be done with computers. For example, fixing computers or other jobs. I wanted to get into doing design work on the computers. They said it was CAD.<sup>6</sup> That was all they said. They did not explain in-depth what the job required in terms of skills and knowledge. Had I know what was required, I would have prepared myself better for graduation ... I think it is a big priority for high school teachers to really explain to the students what is required when they are thinking about their career goal.” Age 21*

## **Current career goals**

More than two-thirds of those interviewed (68%) are looking for employment. About a quarter (26%) are pondering post-secondary studies or specialized training. A few are considering both work and school. The current career goals of these young adults are varied. The jobs cited include ASL instructor, teacher of the Deaf, factory worker, dishwasher, mechanical engineer, photographer, software engineer, costume designer, floral or jewelry designer, sous-chef and teacher’s aide.

Although one-third are considering entering college or university, few of these same participants can demonstrate concrete steps they have taken in this direction. Half of those interviewed, however, do seem to be making concrete plans toward their ideal career goal. For example, some have very good plans with Ontario Disability Supports Program, Employment Services (ODSP-ES). Others have gathered post-secondary applications and course information or have interviewed appropriate contacts regarding vocational expectations and requirements.

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<sup>5</sup> Vocational Rehabilitation

<sup>6</sup> Computer Aided Design

## **Post-secondary studies – a closer look**

### *The year after high school*

After high school graduation, participants took a number of different paths. While seven participants stayed behind in high school, an equal number of participants directly entered post-secondary studies, four of whom would eventually graduate. Eleven participants went on to attend a literacy upgrading program. Three found entry-level employment. One was pregnant at graduation. Five took no action in the first year after graduation.

### *Post-secondary*

Sixteen of those interviewed who completed high school would eventually go on to enroll into post-secondary studies. Of these 16, only six graduated. Of the six who did graduate, one is now working (part-time). The others are now looking for work.

These stories parallel statistics that go as far back as 1988. In fact, in the United States of America and Canada, the estimated withdrawal rate for post secondary Deaf students is between 66 and 72 percent compared with the withdrawal rates of between 30 and 58 percent for hearing students (Rawlings, Karchmer and DeCaro, 1988). The young adults we interviewed cited a number of reasons for not successfully completing post-secondary studies, including a lack of financial aid, interpreter services, a struggle with the course content and personal reasons. Certainly, in the small group we interviewed, literacy upgrading did not appear to increase the likelihood participants would complete their studies. Six participants chose to enter a literacy upgrading program before applying to enter college or university. Of these six, only one went on to graduate from a post-secondary institution.

*“OSAP helped me in my first year. But by the second year, I had to pay for half of the courses. So I had to get a full time job to pay for it. I ended up failing three courses because I could not handle the workload.” Age 28*

*“I wanted to be an architect when I went to National Technical Institute for the Deaf. But I realized that I could not pass the required calculus class so I dropped out.” Age 28*

*“I am confused and dazed about what I want to do.” Age 20*

## **Co-op experiences and volunteering – the unpaid work experience**

Two-thirds of those we interviewed participated in some form of unpaid co-operative experience during high school. About one-third continued to volunteer after high school. All of these experiences fell within a post-secondary or skills-based training program. Some (8) continue to volunteer in their community today.

These types of experiences seemed to influence career goals. For example, one participant who read books to children now plans to become a teacher. Others used the experience to know what career for which they are not suited. One woman wanted to become a teacher but changed her mind after observing her sister as a teacher.

*“I see how tired my sister is when she comes home from teaching at school. I realize that I am not sure if I want to be with small children every day.”*

Participants have some very different perceptions of the value of unpaid work for setting goals and gaining experience. In fact, less than half would accept an offer to do unpaid co-operative experience related to their career goal.

*“I am willing to learn new things. I want the challenge. It would fill up my resume. It shows people that I have the initiative to learn new things. Having a full resume looks good.” Age 19*

*“I never had a real job before. I need the experience. I would love to do this. I know I need to have this before I go for a real job.” Age 28*

About a quarter of those interviewed would not accept unpaid co-operative experience, even though some of them comment that their lack of skills and experience are a barrier to work. The same number are undecided whether they would accept unpaid co-operative experience if offered to them, commenting that the work would need to be goal-related and short-term.

*“I don’t think it is fair to do work and not get paid for it.” Age 25*

*“I need money now. I would feel used by the company for not being paid.” Age 28*

*“It would have to be for a very short time because I have bills to pay. So it depends on how much time I have to give it.” Age 26*

### **Goal Setting – The Evolution**

As one might expect, the goals of study participants evolved after high school as they encountered influences and experiences. Unfortunately, as many negative influences impacted goal-setting actions as did positive ones. For example, many participants faced systemic barriers, such as a lack of available interpreter services and financial aid. Some cite the current economy and discrimination by employers as factors to dropping their original career goal choice. Others attempted post-secondary studies only to find that it was not what they expected it to be. Some were affected by personal life-changing events soon after they graduated from high school.

*“I wanted to be an Architect. I could not finish my third year because I did not have any financial assistance to pay for the courses. Now I am more involved with the deaf community, I am thinking of becoming an interpreter.” Age 27, hard-of-hearing*

*“I wanted to do CAD. But I realized that I had to have calculus background. I can’t pass the course so I decided to drop the idea of working with computers.” Age 21*

*“I wanted to become an elementary teacher. But I became pregnant the first year after I left high school. I have had four children in the last 10 years and have no plans to seek post-secondary. Now I am looking for odd jobs in a factory.” Age 29*

### ***The Five-Year Plan***

Study participants were asked where they see themselves in five years. Some could not envision their lives in five years. Others shared that they hope to have a job, family and a house but could not articulate actions they were taking that would support these ambitions. While several mentioned they hope to be working, they did not mention what type of job they would be doing. When participants did mention a particular type of job, it sometimes did not match an expressed personal preference. In fact, some of the responses showed a lack of organization and critical thinking. For example, one 28-year-old man aspires to become either a teacher or a restaurant owner. Throughout the interview, he used the term, “goal setting” consistently and can recognize when others have achieved their goals. Although he expressed understanding of how goals are set, he is not able to understand why, since quitting post-secondary studies, he is unable to do the same type of planning for himself.

*“I haven’t thought of what I will be doing in five years. I hope to have my driver’s license by then.” Age 25 (goal - own business in Web design)*

*“That is tough to answer. It doesn’t look good. If there was no ODSP, my future would not look good. It would be dark. I hope to become a teacher’s aide, maybe doing it part-time. Or maybe this job, or that job, or ....” Age 27 (goal – teacher’s aide or something to do with airlines/airports)*

*“I don’t know what I will be doing in five years. I never think about what will happen to me in the future. I prefer to be surprised. I like being surprised. I think it is too much to think about the future. I much rather focus on the present. I cannot be bothered to think about the future. I think if I think too much about the future, I may become afraid to do certain things. I would much rather have fun.” Age 19 (goal - hairdresser or piercer)*

*“I want to be married with 2 kids and living in my own house. Be a part or full-time teacher or anything related to computers. I don’t like working with people. I prefer to work with paper.” Age 28 (goal - ASL instructor)*

*“Have a new, big and beautiful house. With a business running a kennel. Be relaxed. Be able to afford a private education for my children that costs something like \$20,000 a year. I want to make my parents proud of me.” Age 24 (goal - none)*

*“I don’t know.” Age 24 (goal - owning a seasonal business cutting grass and snowplowing)*

### **Use of employment services to set goals**

Most (29) of those interviewed are unemployed although six are not actively seeking employment because of pregnancy, small children or mental health issues. The rest are actively looking for employment. As these participants set and work toward employment goals, one important job search tool is the employment agency – and about one-third of the job seekers above are using such services. Challenges with such services include the length of the job-seeking process, a lack of clarity on the services and source of services available. These challenges seem to parallel the challenges presented by literacy practitioners themselves who talk about the length of time required to prepare their learners for the workforce.

Participants have both positive and negative comments about their experience with such agencies but are often unable to articulate a full understanding of the benefits of the services available to them. For example, ten participants presently access Ontario Disability Employment Supports (ODSP-ES). Half of these folks can't articulate the benefits of this program. Some who said they never heard of the ODSP-ES program revealed later in the interview that they do indeed receive assistance from the program.

Gary Malkowski, Director of Consumer Affairs and Government Relations at the Canadian Hearing Society, discusses two types of models for serving clients with employment goals, the job ready model and the job development model.

“Job-ready ready consumers tend to require no intervention,” he says. “They can obtain employment rather quickly. Most of them have a clear, realistic employment goal and are able to work independently on their job search. When seeking employment assistance services, they may only require information on job accommodations, job banks and list of possible websites to access hidden job markets. Those individuals who would be considered job development tend to require intensive individual service.”

The job development process is, understandably, a lengthy one, and, as such, it challenges both the employment agency's funding and human resources.

*“The employment services have just too many clients to deal with. I never get the individual attention I need so I just don't bother with them anymore. I look for a job on my own.” Age 28*

*“The employment service said that they would send my resume to places. I have no idea how many they sent and to who. They don't follow up with me. I ended up having a former teacher helping me and getting a job at a fast food restaurant.” Age 20*

*“I know I am not their only client. I know that they get many resumes. I know that they have to go through many resumes and I know this. But what can I do about it myself? I just say nothing. So I do the job hunting myself and drop off my resumes at different places.” Age 25*

*“After I finished a four-week work assessment program with them, I was ready to find a job. However, I lacked interviewing skills. So I told them this. They gave me papers with interviewing tips. I did not understand it. So I called them and they arranged for an interpreter. We had one meeting and they felt it was enough. I feel like I am doing all the work. I am not satisfied with the progress.” Age 25*

*“I went to get services at the Toronto YMCA for a summer job. My other Deaf friends were going there too. They said that they would call me when something comes up. I noticed my friends were getting jobs. I asked them how and they said that YMCA called them with the jobs. Later I found that the YMCA was calling their hearing parents. They did not call me because they didn’t want to bother with Bell Relay as both my parents are Deaf.” Age 21*

*“Two years ago I decided to look for a job. I called Toronto employment service. They told me on the phone that I had to be receiving Employment Insurance. I wasn’t. They said they could not serve me. So I left it like that.” Age 28*

*“I heard about the Canadian Hearing Society and that you are required to pay for their services.” Age 26*

## PERCEPTIONS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS LITERACY

For this study, we discussed with participants their experience with literacy upgrading, their knowledge of the meaning and significance of literacy, their perceptions of its importance with regard to finding and keeping work, and participants' perceptions of their own literacy skill-set. Responses were informative indeed. In general, participants agree that reading, writing, numeracy and communications skills are important for work. But the participants' perceptions of themselves and the world around them seem to present a challenge for career planning and goal setting. Indeed, many participants seem to lack both an understanding of their own literacy skills-sets and the level of literacy skills required by post-secondary institutions and the workplace. They are also unclear on the types and structures of employment and literacy services available to help them with their goal paths. It's these misperceptions held by young Deaf adults that need to be addressed in the future marketing efforts of literacy programs and in formal partnerships among literacy agencies, employment and support services for Deaf individuals in the province.

### **Perceptions of the importance of literacy**

The young Deaf adults we interviewed were asked about their perceptions of the importance of reading, numeracy, writing, ASL communication skills and self-direction, self-management skills with regarding to finding and keeping employment. In general, with the exception of numeracy, participants agreed that such skills are important for work. In fact, more than 70 percent felt that reading and independence skills are important for career planning and goal setting. Sixty-eight percent felt that writing is an important tool to find and keep a job. Sixty-five percent felt that effective communication skills are important in finding and keep a job. Just over half thought that numeracy is important for finding and keeping a job. Many felt the importance of numeracy depends on the type of job.

*"I have a problem with numeracy. I could not complete an accounting course as everything was numbers." Age 28*

*"I can read and write. However, to communicate with a boss, I feel I cannot." Age 28*

*"I have to improve my literacy skills in order to succeed in college or university." Age 28*

### **Literacy as compared to other barriers**

Participants were given a list of examples of barriers and/or challenges that might hinder their career or goal planning. Cards with pictures<sup>7</sup> were used to represent the information above to reduce bias and help participants retain the information. Participants were then asked to discuss barriers they face (up to five) with regard to finding and keeping work. They were also asked to rank the barriers they had chosen in order of the most significant to the least significant barrier.

How did participants rank these barriers? Hiring discrimination was chosen most often but was not considered by participants to be the top challenge. Instead, participants ranked their own lack of work experience and job skills as the most important challenge. This was followed by an unfortunate financial cycle in which that participants find themselves. Many are unable to accept a minimum wage job because they feel they can't "afford it." Others don't have the finances needed to pay for further education in order to, in turn, gain employment. In third spot, participants ranked discrimination by employers and weak support services. Education followed in fourth place. Literacy skills ranked fifth.

*"I cannot work for minimum wage because I have a family to support. I want something permanent, not temporary." Age 29*

*"I cannot find a job in my own field (software engineering) so I am looking elsewhere. Most jobs pay \$7/hour. My salary needs to be about \$12 to \$15/hour. It could be more but I am being realistic. I have brought my expectations down." Age 26*

It is not surprising that discrimination was cited most frequently among participants. Employment and Employability Needs of the Deaf Community in Peel and Halton Regions (2003), cited similar sentiments among its study participants. A few of the participants shared stories of how they proceeded to take their complaints about discrimination to the Ontario Human Rights Commission. One participant has his case pending and another participant won her case. She is still looking for employment and still contends that companies will not hire her because she is Deaf.

*"I tried to apply for a job in a pet store. I am hard of hearing and can lip read. They told me that they could not hire me because I could not hear well." Age 26*

One of the challenges chosen by participants was related to a lack of academic credentials. One hard-of-hearing participant, who likes to volunteer as an interpreter for friends, wants to become a certified sign language interpreter. But the only program available to him is in another major city. He knows and understands that this field requires formal recognition but feels stuck.

*"I don't have any certificate or licenses to apply for any of the jobs that appeal to me." Age 24*

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix B for a full list of the cards used.

*“I don’t have a high school diploma. I think it might be a problem for me in the future.” Age 21*

Some of the less frequently cited barriers mentioned by participants were child-care issues, location of programs and services, and ethnicity.

*“My name is Muslim. I strongly feel it hinders my opportunities to find a job.” Age 27*

*“I am working part-time now. I am on ODSP. They supplement my income. I share custody of my son with my ex-husband. He lives in another country. We share custody every three months. Soon I will get my son back to live with me. ODSP does not provide enough money for child care which is only \$400. Who wants to look after a child for \$400 a month? No one. I just may have to leave my job.” Age 23*

Perhaps the most significant message for the Deaf stream literacy field is that literacy is in no way an isolated barrier to finding and keeping work. Instead, young Deaf adults face a multitude of challenges, from a lack of access and employer discrimination to personal challenges. There’s no question that, going forward, literacy learners need access to literacy programs that recognize them not simply as people with literacy needs but as individuals with individual goals, backgrounds and challenges.

### **Previous literacy training and understanding of literacy**

Participants who have and have not attended a literacy upgrading program in the past are evenly split. Five have attended a skills-based program where co-operative experience was provided. One of the most interesting findings of this project was discovering the perceptions and attitudes among young Deaf adults toward the word, “*literacy*.” When asked whether they knew what the word, “*literacy*” means, a few of those who had previously attended a literacy program did not know. Most young Deaf adults relate the word, “*literacy*” to reading and writing.

*“..people with low English and numeracy skills...” Age 23*

*“...it is not ASL...” Age 23*

### **Attitudes toward enrollment**

Just over one-third of those interviewed (38%) **would consider** enrolling in a literacy program. Factors affecting their decision not to enroll into literacy programs include location, perceptions of inflexible programming, child-care issues, personal problems, perceptions of classroom setting and misperceptions of what literacy programs offer. Over half (56%) said they **would not consider** taking a literacy program. Their reasons were passionate and included fatigue with school, a perception that programs are not advanced enough and a lack of awareness of the existence of such services.

*“There is nowhere that I can go to get individual attention.” Age 27*

*“I am looking for a full-time job now and there is nothing available part-time.”  
Age 22*

*“I have children. Who would look after them if I attended classes?” Age 28*

*“I have had enough of school. I did many years of training. A job comes first right now. I am concerned about my age. If I continue with training then I would have to find a job at an older age.” Age 28*

*“I never heard of such a program.” Age 26*

*“I feel good about my reading and writing abilities.” Age 25*

*“They don’t provide any challenge.” Age 19*

What about if the programs helped participants with their goals? We asked participants twice if they would consider taking a literacy program. The second time, we added, “IF this program would assist with goal planning and a particular career goal.” Interestingly, many of those who had previously answered, “no” now changed their response. In fact, almost three-quarters of those who had previously said, “no” would now consider literacy upgrading. Most of the rest said their participation would depend on several factors, including guaranteed success, heavy content, no fee and an appropriate learning level.

*“If it will make a difference in getting me a job, then I would consider taking the program.” Age 25*

*“Yes if they can guarantee success.” Age 20*

### **Literacy – A Self-Assessment**

Our perceptions of ourselves are often created from interactions with our family, friends and our social environment. Unfortunately, false perceptions of skills and abilities can lead to closed doors, prolonged frustration and a sense of failure. With this in mind, for this project, we set out to determine whether participants’ perceptions of their own reading, writing and numeracy skills correlate with the results of our assessment of these skills.

A three-page self-assessment tool<sup>8</sup> was given to each participant. The self-assessment tool was taken from Common Assessment of Basic Skills<sup>9</sup>. Remember that the goal of the self-assessment was not to determine the overall skill levels of the young Deaf adults, rather, to determine whether or not their perceptions of their own literacy skills correlate with the results of a self-assessment. To do this, answers to the question, “How comfortable do you feel about (skill set)?” was matched against the result of the self-assessment tool.<sup>10</sup> If a participant generally felt that her writing skills were poor and then

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<sup>8</sup> Self-Assessment Tool Appendix C

<sup>9</sup> Common Assessment of Basic Skills, May 2000

<sup>10</sup> Self-Assessment Tool Appendix C

demonstrated she could not write a story, her perception of her own writing skill likely correlates fairly closely to the assessment. On the other hand, if a participant felt that his writing skills were very good but then went on to make several mistakes on the assessment, thereby not meeting the required markers<sup>11</sup>, his perception of his own writing skills perhaps does not correlate strongly with the assessment results. While we certainly don't claim our results to be statistically valid, they did supply some interesting answers to why career planning may have its difficulties for participants and why participants may be reluctant to access literacy upgrading as a means to reach career goals.

### **Writing<sup>11</sup>**

Evaluating written work can be one of the most difficult to assess for deaf and hard of hearing students because it doesn't necessarily reflect their actual knowledge.<sup>12</sup> In their writing, Deaf adults often make vocabulary and structural errors that include omitting or confusing articles, prepositions, and verb tense markers, and they have difficulty with complex structures such as complements and relative clauses (Swisher, 1989).

About half of those interviewed said they felt good to very good about their writing skills and abilities. Fewer (26%) felt their writing skills were fair to so-so. Even fewer (21%) felt that their writing skills were poor to very poor. Several of the participants who felt that their writing skills were good to very good made grammatical errors and wrote run-on sentences. Some could not punctuate or use proper capitals. One young man, who has a post-secondary degree in engineering, showed a lack of confidence in writing a short story, this despite his assertion that his writing skills are good.

### **Reading<sup>13</sup>**

Just over half of those interviewed felt either very good or good about their own reading skills and abilities. One-third felt that their reading skills and abilities were fair or so-so. A small portion (12%) felt their reading skills and abilities were either poor or very poor. Eighteen percent of participants could not attempt this assessment tool at all. 56% of the participants felt that their reading skills were "very good". However, 26% (9) of those 56% did not meet the markers accurately. Some of the errors were not making up a postal code or not providing the right province code. One participant did not write down the required city name. However, more than half (56% - 19) read the instructions correctly and met all the required markers accurately.

Many of the participants felt that their reading skills and abilities were not a barrier to finding and sustaining employment. For example, one young woman reported that her reading skills were "okay" and that these skills were not a barrier to her goal of working

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<sup>11</sup> Markers (as per LBS Learning Outcomes) used for the writing samples included being able to give out personal information (name, address), write short sentences to express thoughts; leave space between words, and use capital letters beginning of sentences, proper nouns and for "I" and use a period at the end of the sentence.

<sup>12</sup> Preparing Postsecondary Professionals, 2002

<sup>13</sup> Markers (as per LBS Learning Outcomes) used for the reading sample are being able to copy from printed materials, leave space between words, use capital letters for beginning of sentences, proper nouns, use knowledge of alphabet, demonstrate basis awareness of familiar forms of writing (envelope) and read text of one paragraph.

in a restaurant. However, she was unable to complete the reading assessment. She also felt that her literacy skills and abilities was not a barrier to her career goal.

### **Numeracy<sup>14</sup>**

Less than half (44%) of those interviewed felt their numeracy skills and abilities were either good or very good. One-third felt their numeracy skills and abilities were fair to so-so. One-quarter felt their numeracy skills were either poor or very poor.

Fifteen study participants who felt that their numeracy skills were either good or very good made mistakes on the self-assessment tool, which had questions at the Grades 3-5 level. (Some of the young Deaf adults commented that they had never seen the long division symbol before.)

Many of the participants admitted to disliking numeracy. They stated that they even seek out jobs where they would not need to rely heavily on numeracy. One man, whose goal is to become an electrician, surmised whether his numeracy skills and abilities would be a barrier to his career goal. He concluded that numeracy skills would not be relevant because “you just have to match the color of the wires and use common sense.”

### **Communication**

Participants were asked how comfortable they felt with their own communication skills, how well they were able to communicate during the interview as well as answer everyday questions. Just over half felt comfortable to very comfortable. Fewer (38%) felt their communication skills were fair or so-so. Only a small number (9%) felt their communication skills were either poor or very poor.

A small number of participants could not articulate responses to simple questions such as “What type of a job are you looking for?” or “What did you do for 12 months after leaving high school?” Yet, these same participants indicated their communication skills were good.

Some of the participants lacked confidence in their skills, providing well-thought answers yet commenting that their communication skills were not effective. One young woman said that her social skills were good but not good enough for the workplace.

### **Self-Management/Self-Direction Skills<sup>15</sup>:**

Participants were asked how good they felt about their own life skills and ability to be independent, exercise common sense, know what to do, work without a lot of assistance. Their comments, behaviour, patterns in decision-making, follow-through with decisions

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<sup>14</sup> Markers (as per LBS Learning Outcomes) used for the numeracy sample are as follows:  
1-to 4-digit numbers:

- Add
- Subtract
- Multiply
- Divide

<sup>15</sup> Self-management is defined by Literacy and Basic Skills as skills a learner achieves by becoming self-directed and able to set, monitor and revise long and short-term goals

and understanding and use of available services throughout the interview were all taken into consideration.

Almost three-quarters (71%) of those interviewed felt either comfortable or very comfortable with their own independent living skills. Far fewer (24%) said they felt their skills were fair. Two admitted to not feeling good about their self-management and self-direction skills.

Many young Deaf adults' independent living skills were actually not as good as they perceived them to be. For example, one young woman had no action plan to reach her goal of running a web design business and could not remember her own postal code despite having lived in her apartment for one year. A few of the participants arrived very late to the interview.

Many of the participants who performed poorly on the self-assessment clearly indicated they have abilities in using social networks and coping strategies. Yet they don't appear to be applying these skills toward a viable action plan toward their career goal. Many of them were unaware of Ontario Disability Supports Program, Employment Supports or benefits available from Employment Insurance.

None of the young adults interviewed own a home. Most of them still live with their parents. Some of them admitted to feeling not ready to leave on their own. Most of the participants revealed personal challenges in budgeting.

## **Implications for Marketing and Partnerships in the Literacy Field**

The comments and experience of the young Deaf adults present a number of issues that have implications on the marketing of literacy programs and on the types of partnerships among literacy agencies and employment/support services that would be beneficial going forward.

### **Marketing**

#### *Selling goal setting assistance*

During our interviews, none of the young Deaf adults made the connection between the literacy programs and the improved potential to reach their goal. Yet, gaining employment seems to be the priority among those we interviewed. And to this, end they would be grateful for any goal setting assistance. As one young person commented, “That would be better than winning the 6-49 lottery. If the program would help me improve my writing and reading, and be at par with hearing people, I feel I would be successful.” Age 27

In her how-to manual, Barbara E. Smith (1996) advises that the acronym WIIFM (What’s In It For Me?) and programs’ subsequent answer to the question show potential participants how the program’s goal and their goals coincide. While young Deaf adults may understand the purpose of adult literacy, they may not accept it as helping them with their personal employment goals. By showing how the program’s goals and purposes coincide with the young Deaf adults’ expectations, the program has a better chance of greater participation and retention.

Future marketing efforts might consider emphasizing the relationship between literacy upgrading and obtaining one’s larger goal, employment or otherwise. Certainly Literacy and Basic Skills programs are currently structured as learner-centered. As such, goal setting is intended to be a large part of these programs. Whether or not this is the case, varies from agency to agency. Some agencies struggle with goal setting strategies when individuals enter programs with no clear goal in mind. Practitioners say goal setting is the most complex task to perform with learners because most have difficulty understanding the concept of a goal. In fact, goal setting is sometimes set aside altogether. Other challenges that practitioners express with regard to setting employment goals include learners’ low literacy and lack of a first language (Stephenson, 2003).

A discussion of marketing focus on workforce literacy and goal setting would not be complete without commenting on the important conflict that lies between the goals of those we interviewed and the realities of the skill-sets of these learners. The notion that literacy programs should move ahead with a stronger marketing focus on workforce literacy and goal setting does create an uneasy conflict for literacy practitioners. These same practitioners often put aside the work goals of new learners because of the need for attention to self-direction and self-management skills and basic language skills. Many practitioners say that learners in Level 1 – 3 are not ready for work themes in their daily learning activities. Practitioners comment that without a basic understanding of language

(ASL or English), learners are not able to work successfully toward employment-type goals (Stephenson, 2003). This challenge to reconcile the employment goals of young Deaf adults with the realities of their own skill-sets is a difficult one. It's a challenge that the single literacy practitioner is unlikely prepared for if working in isolation and without a more formal partnership with employment or support agencies.

### **Partnerships**

There needs to be a visible, seamless partnership between adult literacy programs for Deaf adults and employment preparation services and programs. In her report, *Workforce Literacy and the Deaf Stream Literacy Classroom*, Stephenson (2003) reports that practitioners within the adult literacy programs felt that it was not their mandate to provide direct employment services and supports. From the employment service provider's point of view, *Employment and Employability Needs of the Deaf Community in Peel and Halton Regions (2002)*, career counselors working with the Deaf community expressed frustrations in servicing deaf consumers who have either a lack of vision in their goal or literacy skills required for the workforce.

### **Recommendations**

Taking cues from the young Deaf adults who previously attended an adult literacy program as well as those who have personal barriers to attending programs, the following suggestions in designing effective literacy programs are encouraged:

- Provide high quality childcare in close proximity to the program and/or accessible subsidy for those who wish to attend that have small children
- Provide some sort of income supplement for participation
- Emphasize transportation, childcare and material subsidy for those who qualify
- Emphasize success within the program; indicate life-long learning; potential to moving forward and opening doors to opportunities of achieving one's goal
- Use images and concepts that will disassociate the assumption that adult literacy programs are similar to early years or high school schooling
- Design the program as not "one size fits all." Show that individual tutoring is available for those who require it.
- Offer flexibility in scheduling that can be performed consistently by the learner; some prefer evening or part-time or even short-term participation
- Show that the program doesn't teach where the learner "left off" from the last time they attended school
- Emphasize no cost to the learner
- Show the ability and flexibility of meeting each learner's level whether it is from basic to their perception of 'advanced'
- Establish programs in communities with a large concentration of deaf people. For example, London, Windsor, Newmarket, Mississauga and Brampton as examples cited by our participants.
- When working with a potential learner whose long-term goal is to seek employment, develop a job placement component either by self or in partnership with a local employment service
- Have effective partnerships with local agencies that provide mental health services for deaf people

*Young Deaf Adults: Perceptions of Career Planning, Goal Setting and Literacy*

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- Center around the participant's individual needs and goals. Indicate a strong sense of result-oriented to ensure a high degree of interest, motivation and success
- Materials should be chosen to appropriately reflect the academic levels of the participants
- Use real-life materials obtained from various businesses and workplaces and utilize them within the program
- Provide hands-on practice with a task related with their long-term goal
- Touch on career issues such as the importance of networking
- Bring in guest speakers from various vocations who can indicate how important literacy plays a role in their job; also, provides participants with role models and a feeling of "can do too"

## **DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION**

In her report, “Barriers to Youth Acquiring Literacy Assistance (1997) Dr. Linda Jessup indicated six factors that affected youth’s acquiring literacy assistance. These factors include a dislike for school; perceived effort within the class/self-confidence, situational barriers, low perception of need, psychosocial barriers and perceived effort beyond class. Perceived effort within the class means that the individual feel that they cannot succeed in school no matter what the circumstances are. Psychosocial barriers are when an individual feels that they may be too old to participate in a program or the feeling would be too “strange” to return to school. Perceived effort beyond class means for those individual whose excuses are related to lack of monetary means. They may state that it cost too much to attend a literacy program or that they cannot find affordable childcare services.

These factors are true for young Deaf adults. However, their circumstances are compounded by systemic barriers such as lack of local accessible literacy programs, weak literacy programming, employer discrimination and lack of prompt and accessible mental health services.

Very little formal partnerships exist among employment and mental health agencies and deaf literacy programs. Literacy programs and agencies serving the deaf communities are “aware” of each other but don’t provide the transitional link for learners who complete their goal in the literacy program. Students who attended literacy program may gain basic literacy and numeracy skills but may leave without job readiness skills or the tools to effectively plan goals. Some of those students leave without having their mental health issues addressed and nowhere to go but to seek other outlets such as drugs to resolve their issues.

Literacy and numeracy skills acquired are not sufficient in meeting the requirement of their career goal. Students who are in need of goal planning do not know where to access such services that are accessible and unique that their resources can individually meet their needs.

Young Deaf adults perception of their own skills and abilities have been distorted mainly due to the lack of information sharing and goal planning by their high school and literacy administrators. It was not until some of the young Deaf adults entered post-secondary studies that they realized how their literacy skills were a barrier to their original career goal. This resulted in many young Deaf adults dropping out of post-secondary studies. This realization has stripped motivation from some of the young Deaf adults in planning for their futures.

The word, *literacy* has shown to have a negative, misunderstood connotation among the young Deaf adults. It is important for the existing literacy programs to address their marketing and purpose among the deaf community. The content within the literacy programs is seen as too easy, not challenging, too basic, inflexible, irrelevant and disconnected from the workforce. It is not until young Deaf adults are asked whether they would consider a literacy program if it would assist with their goal planning that

these young Deaf adults would consider taking such a program. The key component in attracting adult literacy programs to young Deaf adult is to change the way the literacy programs currently promote themselves as “assisting with reading and writing”. There needs to be a strong impact made that goal planning is a very crucial part of literacy and basic skills programming.

While youth’s perceptions of literacy and adult upgrading programs are noted in this report. there is no collaboration to their perceptions. Therefore, further study is needed to seek input from adult literacy upgrading programs for the deaf stream and employment agencies. The study would seek to see if the changes and suggestions in this report are indeed viable. Exploration of partnerships and its implications would benefit all groups affected such as youth, literacy programs and employment agencies. What are some of the unique challenges that deaf adult literacy programs face in dealing with deaf youth as compared with those over the age of 29?

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### *Marketing Literacy*

The written word and communication sign of *literacy* needs to be de-empathized when referring to adult literacy programs for deaf adults. It was evident from those who originally would not choose to attend a literacy program would do so if the program empathized on the aspect of *goal planning*. The ideas and wording of marketing adult literacy programs to deaf young adults need to be clear. Long sentences, emotion laden language and poor organization must be avoided. Programs need to avoid the perception that they are the “same old thing” or appearing too easy.

Some of the characteristics that the young Deaf adults mentioned often that they look for in a literacy training are:

- Classroom setting; very small groups
- Preferably affiliated with the Canadian Hearing Society
- One to one ratio
- tutoring service available
- Don’t make it so that numeracy has to be part of the curriculum
- No cost
- Flexible schedule; part-time
- Students have similar skills, priorities and goals
- Not in a high school environment
- Provide child care subsidies
- Subjects to be “advanced”

**APPENDIX A – Survey Questions**

I: Gender:  Male  Female

II: Communication method used:  ASL  Oral  Signed English  Simcom  
(Simultaneous Communication)  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

III:  Deaf  Hard of hearing  Deafened  Oral-deaf  Hearing  Deaf-blind

Background – Demographics

1. What year were you born? \_\_\_\_\_ (age: \_\_\_\_)
2. Were you born in Canada?  Yes  No \_\_\_\_\_
3. Name the city/town where you live now \_\_\_\_\_
4. Where were you raised? \_\_\_\_\_
5. When were you exposed to ASL (if applicable as some may not use ASL at all):  
 Less than 3 years ago  Between 4 – 8 years ago  More than 8 years ago  All your life
6. Do you live with:  Alone  Parents/family  Spouse/common-law  Your children  Friends
7. What are your interests/hobbies?
8. What type of community involvement do you do? (I.e. sports, local deaf club)
9. Do you have a second disability?  Yes - \_\_\_\_\_  No  
 Don't know  Refused to answer

Education Background

10. Did you attend at one time or more the following schools:  Ontario Provincial school for deaf students  Mainstreamed  Self-contained
11. What area did you study?  Vocational  Academic  Other - \_\_\_\_\_  Don't know
12. What is the highest grade you completed? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Did you graduate from school?  Yes - When you left school/graduated, what did you do for 12 months after?  No - If you did not graduate, what are the reasons you stopped going to school?
14. List other types of education/training have you done. (Include post-secondary studies if any)
15. What type of cooperative and volunteer experience did you do in school?
16. After leaving school, what volunteer experience did you do, if any?
17. Would you consider unpaid volunteer work in order to gain experience?  Very unlikely – definitely not  Unlikely – doubt it  Somewhat likely – maybe/maybe not  Likely – possible  Very likely – for sure  Don't know
18. Why did you pick your answer for #17?
19. Have you ever *attended* a program to improve your ASL, numeracy and/or English skills?  No – go to question #22  Yes – what year did you join and leave? Why did you leave? What was your short-term and long-term goals? Was the program beneficial for you – yes, how? No – why not?

Goal Setting – Career Planning

20. Do you know what the word GOAL is?  No - Use other concept such as goal to ask following questions. Example, “dream”, “target-future”. Go to question #25  
 Yes – Where or how did you learn this word? Did they do goal-setting exercises with you? Did they develop an “action plan” with you?
21. When you left/graduated school, what was your career goal back then?
22. What steps did you do to reach this goal? How did you plan to get this goal?
23. What is your career goal now?
24. What steps are you doing to reach this goal? How are you planning to get this goal?
25. If your career goal changed since, why?  Has not changed
26. Do you feel you are making progress?
27. What has made it difficult for you to reach your goal?
28. Have you ever met with a guidance/employment counsellor/teacher to talk about making your goals?  No – never  Not sure  Yes – When? Where? Who? Beneficial – yes, how? No – why not?
29. Have you ever done a self-assessment of your literacy skills? (i.e. EQAO)  No – never  Not sure – don’t know  Yes – when? With who? Where? What type? What were the results?
30. Have you ever done any assessments of your employment skills and abilities?  No – never  Not sure – don’t know  Yes – when? With who? Where? What type? What were the results?
31. List or show (place cards in front of youth) the following, if applicable, in order the reasons or barriers that are making it the most difficult for you to reach your goal: Transportation (programs or places of employment too far; not feasible to travel); Money (programs too expensive, no benefits to pay for training, pay not enough to support family); No skills (lack of specific job skills); Lack of education (don’t have required certification or training); Child care (special needs or troubled child requires on-going parental support, lack of funds and resources in area); Personal (legal problems, mental health issues); Location too far (available programs are not convenient); Local programs not accessible (not pay for interpreters, lack of available interpreters); Literacy (reading/writing/numeracy); Drug/alcohol abuse; No time or poor time management; Don’t know; Other: \_\_\_\_\_
32. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Employment

33. Are you currently working?  
 Yes -  Full-time  Part-time - What is your job title? Are you satisfied with your job -  
 Very satisfied  Satisfied  Somewhat satisfied  Not really satisfied  Not satisfied at all  
 Not sure - Why did you pick your answer for this?

No - Do you have plans to find work?  No - why not?  Yes - How long have you been looking for work? What type of work? Do you have plans to take training – yes, what kind? – no, why not?

### Literacy Training

34. What do you think L I T E R A C Y mean?
35. Have you ever *considered* taking training to improve your ASL, English and/or numeracy skills? No, sometimes - List reasons why you would not consider taking such training. Yes – why did you consider taking such training? Why did you end up deciding not to enroll? How do you prefer to learn?  One to one  Class/small group  Correspondence  Video-conferencing  Drop-in – independent study. Where would you feel most comfortable learning?  School – college or high school environment  CHS or community center for the deaf  Library  Home  Church  Coffee shop, pub or restaurant  If applicable, your workplace  Doesn't matter where. List reasons you feel would motivate you to join a program to improve your ASL, English and/or numeracy skills:
36. Regarding your career goal – do you think your **lack of** \_\_\_\_\_ (Communication; reading, writing; numeracy; independent living skills) skills are a barrier/problem? Answer by either: Strongly agree; agree; agree somewhat; don't really agree; don't agree at all; not sure or don't know
37. Overall – in general – every day...how COMFORTABLE do you feel about your \_\_\_\_\_ (Communication; reading, writing; numeracy; independent living skills) skills? Answer by either: very good/very comfortable; good/comfortable; fair/so-so; poor/not really comfortable; very poor/not comfortable at all; not sure/don't know
38. To get a job, how important do you think \_\_\_\_\_ (Communication; reading, writing; numeracy; independent living skills) skills are? (Do you think the following are important?) Answer by either: very important, important, somewhat important, not really important, not important at all, not sure/don't know

*GIVE APPLICANT 3-PAGE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL. Write observations.*

Ask the following questions:

Reading: Do you read/understand food labels?...the mail that comes to your door? What part of the newspaper do you read? Do you read for fun in your spare time? What areas do you think you need improvement in reading?

Writing: Do you ever fill in forms? Do you write cheques? Do you write notes or letters? What do you think you need to do to become a better writer?

Numeracy: Do you do your own banking? When you shop for groceries, do you keep a rough tally of the total in your head? When you pay a cashier, do you know how much money to give? When you pay a cashier, do you check to see that you get the correct change? When you leave a tip in a restaurant, how do you decide how much to give? If an item is on sale for 35% off, do you know how to calculate the exact cost? When did numeracy become difficult in school?

Income Information

What is your primary source of income?  Employed *Specify if FT, PT, contract, permanent, temporary*  ODSP  Ontario Works  Unemployment Insurance  CPP – Disability  Spouse  Family/parents  WSIB  Self-employed  Other:

\_\_\_\_\_

What is your secondary source of income?  Employed *Specify if FT, PT, contract, permanent, temporary*  ODSP  Ontario Works  Unemployment Insurance  CPP – Disability  Spouse  Family/parents  WSIB  Self-employed  Other:

\_\_\_\_\_

What is your income before taxes?

- No income  Less than \$20,000  \$20,001 to \$30,000  \$30,001 to \$40,000  
 More than \$40,001  Refused to answer  Don't know  Other:

\_\_\_\_\_

ADDITIONAL Questions/COMMENTS:

- 1 – Has youth ever done Labour Market Information research?
- 2 – Has youth ever heard of or used ODSP-ES?
- 3 – Does youth feel that their high school prepared them well?
- 4 – If there was a literacy program established to assist with goal planning, would the youth be interested in taking this program?
- 5 – How did the youth find out about this survey?

## **APPENDIX B – Barriers to literacy**

The following list was given to study participants in pictograms. Participants were asked to rank in order of significance barriers to finding and keeping employment.

Cards represented the following:

- Transportation – no local public transportation
- Financial – unable to accept a job at minimum wage; unable to pay for training and/or post-secondary studies; heavy debt; programs and/or services come with a cost; no benefits available; not enough wage to support family
- Lack of specific work skills
- Lack of education – no high school diploma; ideal career requires degree/diploma and/or certification
- Child Care – special needs or troubled child requires on-going parental support; lack of funds and resources in home area
- Personal – legal tie-ups in courts; care of ill relative; mental health issues
- Location – current town economy not viable for ideal career; programs and services not available or convenient
- Discrimination – employer unwilling to hire because they are deaf
- Literacy – reading, writing and numeracy
- Inadequate support services – none available locally to provide goal planning guidance, existing services are not meeting their needs
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Poor time management skills
- Lack of available interpreters for programs/services, post-secondary studies, training, job interviews
- Do not know
- Other

**APPENDIX C – Writing Assessment**

Personal Information

Name:

Address:

City:

Postal Code:

Telephone #:

E-mail:

Write a short story. Describe your family:

**APPENDIX C – Reading Assessment**

Addressing An Envelope

Send a letter to your Aunt Cathy who lives in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She lives on Front Street and her house number is 24. Be sure to use the correct province code. You don't know the postal code, so, just for now, make one up!

**What's the two-letter code for your province/territory?**

Alberta	AB
British Columbia	BC
Manitoba	MB
New Brunswick	NB
Newfoundland	NF
Northwest Territories	NT
Nova Scotia	NS
Ontario	ON
Prince Edward Island	PE
Quebec	QC
Saskatchewan	SK
Yukon	YT

The envelope template consists of a large rectangular box. On the left side, there are three horizontal lines for the return address. On the right side, there is a postage stamp icon. In the center, there are three horizontal lines for the recipient's address.

**APPENDIX C – Numeracy (Basic Operations) Assessment**

$3 + 2$	$8 - 5$	$5 \times 4$	$12 \div 3$
$\begin{array}{r} 26 \\ + 17 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 36 \\ - 15 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 43 \\ \times 7 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$184 \div 4$
$\begin{array}{r} 308 \\ 25 \\ 4 \\ + 4071 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 3502 \\ - 2834 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$\begin{array}{r} 202 \\ \times 86 \\ \hline \end{array}$	$414 \div 23$

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