



2026-2027
**Hamilton Literacy
Service Plan**

Get SET

(Skills, Education and Training)

Your Partner in
Client Success

Community Report April 2026

Acknowledgements

This report is a collaboration of the Literacy Community Planning Committee. This committee consists of

Learning Connections Hamilton, formerly the Adult Basic Education Association (Regional Literacy Network)
CNIB Deafblind Community Services
Collège Boréal
Conestoga College
Hamilton Literacy Council
Hamilton Regional Indian Centre, Native Learning Centre
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board
Mohawk College, Deaf Empowerment Program
Niagara College

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- Hamilton Employment Ontario (EO) Network
- Hamilton Integrated Employment Services
- Hamilton Get SET Learners
- Hamilton Get SET Practitioners
- Learning Networks of Ontario (LNO)
- Provincial Support Organizations for Literacy (PSOL)
- Skills Development Flagship Committee
- Workforce Planning Hamilton



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**Access
this
report
online.**



<https://lchamilton.ca/literacy-planning/>



Get SET

A Critical Partner for Workforce Development

Learning Connections Hamilton (formerly ABEA) and local [Get SET programs](#) (formerly Literacy and Basic Skills) work together to coordinate services and discuss ways to respond to emerging community needs. Our strength is strategic partnerships. Across the adult education network, we have partnerships that support seamless learner transitions.

Examples

- a learner may need individualized support from a tutor to work on fundamental literacy skills, while also connected with a targeted training program to develop digital literacy skills to prepare for work
- network staff may meet with pre-apprenticeship clients to connect them with numeracy support to prepare them for the in-school portion of their program
- a program may partner with an employer to offer customized upgrading based on employee needs




In all cases, we ensure that clients and partners are also connected to the resources, supports and programs they need through service coordination and partnership development.

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The Importance of Upskilling

It's not just about education on paper – it's also about the ever-evolving skills people need to succeed at home and on the job. Get SET programs know that it's about getting the job, and it's also about keeping the job. Employers continually cite foundational skills and soft skills as key issues for their labour force and/or talent pool. Employees with updated skills are needed, and those skills are becoming more advanced and more digital.

Foundational Skills

-  are needed for work, learning and life
-  are the foundation for learning all other skills
-  help people evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change



Skills for Success are used in nearly every job, throughout daily life in different ways and at varying levels of complexity (from level 1 – basic, to level 5 – advanced) (Government of Canada, 2017).

The Skills for Success are



Reading



Adaptability



Communication



Digital



Writing



Creativity and
Innovation



Collaboration



Numeracy



Problem Solving



Some Key Findings

from the [Canadian Results](#)

Literacy

19% scored at Level 1 or below meaning they have low literacy proficiency. At Level 1, they can understand short texts and organized lists when information is clearly indicated, find specific information and identify relevant links. Those below Level 1 may be able to understand short, simple sentences.

Numeracy

20% of adults scored at or below Level 1 proficiency. At Level 1, they can do basic math with whole numbers or money, understand decimals, and find single pieces of information in tables or charts, but may struggle with tasks needing multiple steps (like solving a proportion). Those below Level 1 can add and subtract small numbers.

Adaptive Problem-Solving

22% of adults scored at or below Level 1 proficiency. Adults at Level 1 can solve simple problems with few variables and little irrelevant information, which do not change as they make progress towards the solution. They struggle with multi-step problems, or those needing monitoring of multiple variables. Adults below Level 1 at most understand very simple problems, typically solved in one step.

The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) corresponds to the first 3 levels of the Skills for Success framework. They are used by all Ontario Get SET (Skills, Education and Training) programs.

Low skills in literacy and numeracy can have significant effects on labour force attachment and can be a significant barrier to using digital technology — an ever-increasing critical skill in the workforce. The pandemic has certainly shed a light on the importance of digital technology skills. Without them — and the ability to continue to learn new skills — many people will be left behind.

The latest adult literacy survey results, [The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies \(PIAAC\), 2022](#) was released in December 2024. It is an international study of adults measuring literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in technology-rich environments.

“I am starting to read on my own.”

— learner

Get SET is a Springboard for 5 Goal Pathways



Employment



Post-secondary



Apprenticeship



Secondary School Credit



Independence

There are many benefits to participating in adult upgrading programs like being more likely to



complete a high school diploma or equivalent



pursue post-secondary education



earn more income over time and manage it effectively



increase soft skills for further education and employment

Hamilton Get SET programs served 1,306 learners in 24-25, an increase of 9.6% from 23-24. Programs exceeded their community target by 7% with 75% of programs over target.

97% of learner respondents are happy with their progress in the program so far. When asked, "Is upgrading making a difference?", 94% of respondents answered "yes".

... Research shows that improving the skills of people at the lower end of the scale (Levels 1 and 2 on the five-level scale for literacy) will have more impact than improving the skills of people who are already at Level 3 or higher. As the people most at risk of losing their entire job to automation are the people employed in low-skilled jobs, upgrading their skills would have the added advantage of making them more employable in a new higher-skilled job.

(Canada West Foundation [Literacy Lost: Canada's Basic Skills Shortfall](#) Lane & Murray, 2018)

Here's the Good News

How Get SET (Skills, Education and Training) Can Help

Early intervention is key. Learning Connections Hamilton (LCH) is the adult learning network in Hamilton. We provide educational pathway planning including outreach sessions, information, referrals and skills check-ins. We help facilitate partnerships between community partners and Get SET providers. **Clients are more successful at work or in further education programs if they have the support to upgrade their skills.**

Upgrading programs help adults with their communication, numeracy and digital skills to achieve their goals. Service providers design programming to address the specific needs of learners. In Hamilton, we have programs that focus on serving learners who identify as Indigenous, Francophone, Deaf/Deafblind and Anglophone to support their learning needs and preferences.

We're the first place of contact for people after being away from education — the first place they see they can succeed and have a positive experience. Many people have had a negative educational experience — we turn it around and help them believe it's a good thing and that they can learn (Practitioner Consultation, 2025).

Get SET programs support a diverse set of people to get to their next step. Many learners have their grade 12 diploma but need to brush up on some skills before post-secondary. Programs assist many newcomers to not only increase their foundational skills, but also to navigate life in Hamilton and connect to other services.

Get SET Programs in Hamilton

1. are inclusive, learner-centered, and culturally responsive
2. provide support for learners with complex needs (for example, assistive tech, holistic services)
3. have flexible delivery models (in-person, online, hybrid, continuous intake, individualized)
4. offer short-term and targeted training programs that address evolving community needs
5. are accessible (central locations, reduced barriers like transit, technology, etc.)
6. utilize strong community coordination and partnerships (referrals, integration with other services)
7. have experienced and responsive staff
8. have high standards and quality programs
9. use evidence-informed processes

(LCP Consultation, 2025)

“I have increased confidence and self-esteem. I have increased opportunities for access to education, training and employment.”

— learner



Our Focus for 2026-2027

Get SET is helpful as a stepping stone. Learners sometimes don't know their options, and we help them explore and plan. We also help them build their confidence to pursue their goals. We are the missing piece in many people's journey. Some people are resistant to upgrading and don't think they can benefit from it, but many couldn't have done it without Get SET as a start. They see that later in their path. We are the support system for so many who have no support otherwise. We try to reach as many as we can.

This year we're focusing on

- building stronger referral networks
- enhancing learner success for all goal paths
- expanding capacity to meet growing need

1 Building Stronger Referral Networks

Expanding outreach and building stronger referral networks to reach underserved groups that are suitability-related like newcomers and those with interrupted education, focusing on those furthest from employment and training.

Skills requirements are changing/increasing. It's critical that individuals and community partners know where they can turn when skills upgrading is needed. Partnerships with employment and community agencies are important to enhance coordination and visibility. Better Jobs Ontario (BJO) has been expanded to two years of training which will likely require applicants to seek out upgrading to be prepared for their training.

Key Actions

- continue to enhance communication and collaboration with other services providers to address barriers and gaps outside our expertise and to enhance cross-referral opportunities – we'll do this through Literacy Community Planning (LCP) and frontline working group meetings as well as community planning groups like Skills Development Flagship, Hamilton Employment Resource Network, Hamilton Employment Ontario Network and the Red Book Community Group
- work with our Integrated Employment Service partners to support clients interested in Better Jobs Ontario



"I never got the chance to finish high school so this is an amazing opportunity to finally finish and I'm happy I'm learning all the new things [I've] missed out on."

— learner

2 Enhancing Learner Success for All Goal Paths

Enhancing learner success by supporting progress toward all goal paths - employment, further education or personal goals and persistence in the program for goal completion.

With decreasing capacity, there's a need to maintain current approaches, as they are meeting learner needs effectively. Given the changes to federally-funded language programming to only Stage 1, Get SET will continue to serve more newcomers at lower levels who may progress slowly, creating concern about enrollment management. There is continued need for increased digital technology (DT) skills, reported as a top priority from Employment Services (ES). With the new service plan item around the interest in long-term apprenticeship it will be important to continue to increase capacity to serve learners interested in apprenticeship and skilled trades. External elements on learner success will need to be considered such as transit and transportation-related access barriers.

Key Actions

- maintain current approaches, as they are meeting learner needs effectively
- maintain flexible delivery options (in person, blended, remote, day/evening) and consider ways to increase program flexibility, particularly learners with work, family or transportation barriers – although this will be challenging with current capacity
- continue to offer a range of programs to meet community needs, including digital training, employability skills, foundational skills refreshers and programming related to the skilled trades – this will be an ongoing discussion at the LCP meetings to react to community needs as we're able
- continue to adapt programming to meet learner needs, including integrating soft skills and trauma-informed practices – this will be discussed at the frontline working group meetings to share best practices and resources
- continue to work closely with our local language assessment centre and language programs to coordinate services for those that would benefit from upgrading
- increase digital technology (DT) training – working with our employment partners to better understand the digital technology skills gaps of job seekers and integrate programming (core and/or targeted) to respond to those gaps
- continue to offer professional development for frontline practitioners to increase their capacity to support learners with digital technology upgrading needs
- continue to share and discuss apprenticeship and skilled trades resources and pathways
- partner with pre-apprenticeship programs to provide foundational skills refreshers
- monitor transit and transportation-related access barriers and consider location-based outreach, in consultation with community partners

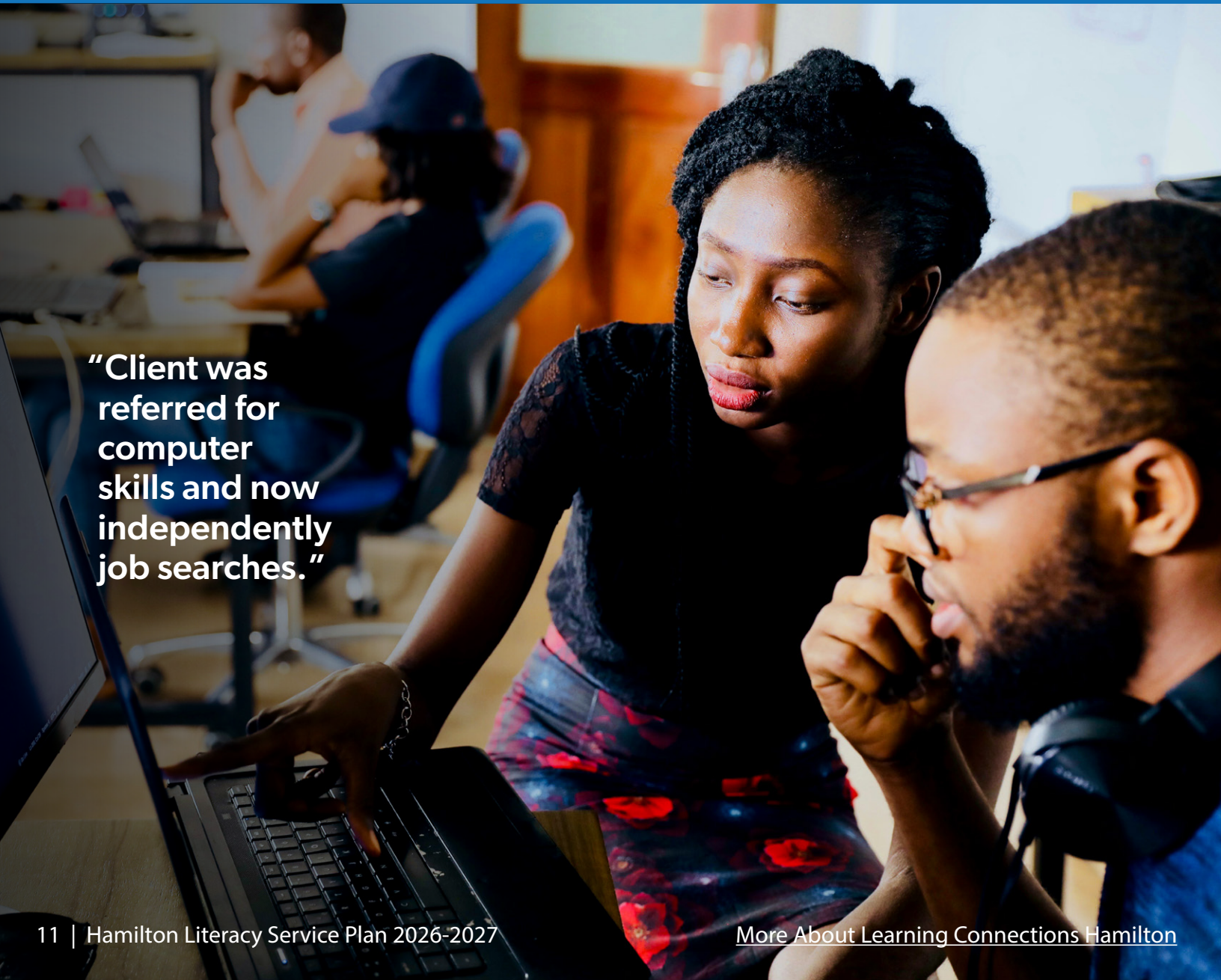


3 Expanding Capacity to Meet Growing Demand

There is increased demand due to several factors including the economy, decreased program capacity and administrative burden (continuing with respect to registration, repetition of data input and follow-ups).

Key Actions

- analyze service gaps and emerging needs through a learner lens and gather data and information to collectively advocate to the ministry for increased resources
- continue to discuss strategies around administrative burden and continue to make suggestions to the ministry around registration, repetition of data input and follow-ups



“Client was referred for computer skills and now independently job searches.”

“I am grateful to be in this program to improve my skills.”

— learner

Demographics and Labour Market Trends

Hamilton’s population has grown by 2% since 2023 and 6% since 2020. Adults 65+ increased the most (up 10%) and now make up nearly 19% of the population. An aging population raises the risk of skill shortages due to retirements (Literacy Community Planning Committee (LCP), 2025). Working-age youth (15–29) and adults (30–54) are our largest group, at 53% of residents (Workforce Planning Hamilton (WPH), 2025). Many youth lack post-secondary or employment readiness—potentially a residual effect of the pandemic (LCP, 2025). In 2021, 26% of Hamilton residents were foreign-born (Census, 2021). In Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council’s (HIPC) 2025 immigrant survey, fewer than half of participants were employed, and of those, only half said their job matched their qualifications.

As of October 2025, Hamilton’s unemployment rate is 7.0%, lower than Ontario’s 7.8% (WPH, 2025) but well above past lows (e.g., 4.6% in Sept 2022). Layoffs continue in manufacturing, steel, automotive, hospitality, and call centres. Tariffs are contributing to job losses, reduced hours, and shifts in business strategy (Fedcap Canada, 2025).

The 2025 Hamilton Business Survey cited employer concerns: financial pressure, under-qualified applicants, recruitment challenges, and limited knowledge on accessing newcomer talent (WPH, 2025). 14% cited foundational skills gaps as a key issue. The Skills Development Flagship (SDF) committee also flagged skills mismatch: employers struggle to find candidates with the right skills, education, and experience. There is strong competition for both entry and mid-level jobs, with clients remaining unemployed for extended periods (SDF, 2025).

Nationally, the 2024 adult literacy survey found 1 in 5 Canadian adults scored below level 2. These individuals are at greater risk of job loss and more likely to work in unstable, low-wage jobs (Community Literacy Ontario (CLO), 2025). The Future Skills Centre (2025) highlighted the need for robust upskilling and reskilling policies.

At the secondary level, while Grade 10 literacy test results have improved, 15% of students failed in 2023–24 (CLO, 2025). Graduation rates hover at 85%. While many succeed, a notable group lacks the foundational skills needed to thrive in the labour market.

Employment Ontario data shows increased uptake: new apprenticeship registrations rose 33%, active apprentices by 14%, Integrated Employment Services (IES) clients by 19%, and Better Jobs Ontario participants by 36% (CMSM, 2025). This reflects growing demand for employment supports in the current labour market.

Ontario Works (OW) caseloads remain high—above 13,000 cases per month, representing 23,000–24,000 people (Consultation, 2025). Barriers for OW recipients include cost of living, mental health and addictions challenges, and limited access to support. Employment Services are responding by offering more direct mental health support.

Hamilton’s labour market has many strengths: a diversified economy, strong trades demand, consistent population growth, and a robust employment/training ecosystem. But challenges persist: youth unemployment, recruitment and retention issues, sector-specific shortages, skills mismatches, and inequitable access across equity-deserving communities (WPH, 2025).

“I have more knowledge and more skills to get ready for a job.”

— learner

Populations with the Greatest Barriers to Employment and Training

Across multiple consultations (SDF, Consultation Survey, LCP – 2025), a consistent message emerged: many individuals face multiple barriers to employment and training and would benefit from upgrading, particularly

- newcomers
- older workers
- youth
- underemployed adults
- people with disabilities
- individuals with low income or low skills
- those who’ve been in conflict with the law

Employment counsellors (IES Survey, 2025) identified key barriers

1. language barriers and ESL waitlists
2. digital literacy and access to technology
3. low education levels and incomplete high school
4. mental health, addictions, and stress
5. job readiness, limited experience, few opportunities

85% of Employment Counsellors reported that between 25–75% of their clients could benefit from upgrading (34% chose 1/4, 26% chose 1/2, and 25% chose 3/4).

Upgrading priorities for job readiness included

- digital technology (83%)
- soft skills (81%)
- language skills (72%)
- writing (66%)
- short-term training (58%)
- reading and math (46%)

Impact on Get SET Services

Newcomer Demand

Increasing requests for language, literacy, and system navigation support.

Digital Skills Needs

Urgency for digital and AI literacy training to improve employability and access to services.

Service Delivery Pressures

Waitlists, limited resources, and the need for hybrid, in-person, and flexible delivery options, including short-term training and accessible locations.

Youth Readiness

Many youth graduating without key skills needed for employment or postsecondary success.

Complex Learner Needs

Many clients juggle work, family, education, lack of childcare, and food insecurity.

Program Alignment Needs

Greater alignment needed with postsecondary pathways, especially for apprenticeship and college programs.

“It opens the doors to colleges and universities. It increase[s] the hope to get a job.”

— learner





Partnerships with Get SET (Skills, Education and Training) Programs

Partnering with Get SET can provide your clients with the skills support they need to be successful in their training, further education and employment.

Here are some scenarios of how we can work closer together.

Goal Setting and Planning—Get SET providers can assist your clients to increase their Skills for Success in reading, writing, math, digital technology and more and gain the soft skills and confidence needed to set achievable employment goals.

It includes those who

- are early school leavers – don't have their Grade 12/ equivalent
- report difficulties with literacy/numeracy skills (or don't have the skills for their employment goal)
- have little experience or have difficulty with digital technology
- are unsure of their skills or the program they need
- want options and information to meet their upgrading needs
- have or may have a learning disability or learning challenge
- lack soft skills/work skills for employment

Learning Connections Hamilton (LCH) is the first point of contact for upgrading programs in Hamilton.
[Refer clients here.](#)



**Referrals/action plans through LCH
can be made to all adult education
programs including**

- upgrading programs (including targeted skills/employment training programs)
- credit programs (secondary school diploma)
- apprenticeship
- post-secondary
- short-term training/licenses
- digital technology upgrading



Pre-Employment

Adult upgrading programs can assist clients with specific skills for the job they are preparing for. They can also offer targeted training if needed and available.

Pre-Apprenticeship/Apprenticeship

There has been a lot of targeted curriculum developed in Get SET to help prepare learners for the skilled trades. Programs can support foundational upgrading for specific trades. They can also promote the apprenticeship/skilled trades option to learners without clearly defined employment goals. Get SET programs can also support signed apprentices to prepare for their technical training and to prepare for the Certificate of Qualification exam by working on study skills and test-taking.

Check out this [video](#) highlighting the benefits of upgrading for apprenticeship.

Employment

Get SET can help workers keep their job and advance by helping them upgrade specific skills needed. We support workers at risk of losing their job due to increased skill demands, automation and/or soft skills or employability skills.

Get SET, by its very nature, is flexible. Programs are continually finding ways to serve more learners who are working – evenings, online, blended, etc. Get SET can play a role in long-term employment retention as well as improvement of employment outcomes. With continued skills upgrading, clients can not only keep their jobs, they can get better ones. Key areas of support are digital literacy, financial literacy, job-related literacy and numeracy tasks, and upgrading to access further education and training.

Are you working with clients interested in exploring in-demand, entry level jobs with opportunity for growth? Check out the [Career Pathways](#) tool developed by LCH and partners.

Get SET programs are, at any given moment, working with hundreds of learners across the city. Learners are working to transition to their next step. **Get SET programs act as a recruitment pipeline for many programs. Do you offer a program that might be of interest to adult learners?**

“Jobseeker had never used a computer. After training, she completed a BJO application and was accepted into PSW training.”



[Connect with us today so we can learn more!](#)

What Learning Connections Hamilton (LCH) Can Offer

As the Learning Network, we are your first point of contact for adult education in Hamilton. We coordinate and facilitate partnerships. If you're looking to partner with a service provider, we can set up a meeting with one, several or all service providers as needed.

We also offer

- [educational planning](#) presentations to client and staff groups
- individual educational interviews
- skills check-ins - [Refer clients](#) who have been out of school for a long time, are unsure of their skills, report learning challenges, have difficulties with daily literacy tasks, need a Grade 12/equivalent, etc.
- [Clear Writing](#) training and consulting (including accessibility)
- [Workplace Education Services](#)

Get SET (Skills, Education and Training) Program Partnerships

A key component to the Get SET program is that it's flexible and customizable. If planned and resourced, programming can be created and delivered to meet specific community needs onsite, or at a partner location.

[Connect with us today to learn more!](#)

