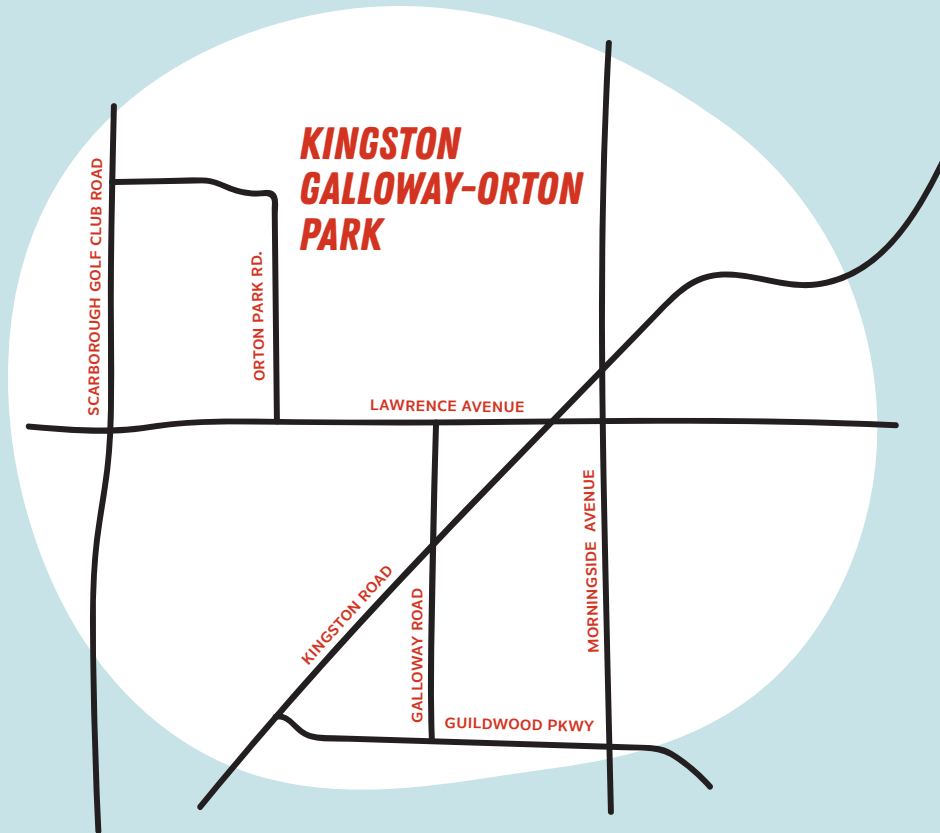


LITERACY NOW!

Exploring challenges, capacities
and opportunities for improved literacy in
Kingston Galloway-Orton Park (KGO)



WHAT'S THE CHALLENGE?

According to school data, too many people who live in KGO have low-level literacy scores.

There is currently no comprehensive community-based strategy to address this challenge.

There are opportunities for change, but those opportunities need to be rooted in sound research, a deeper understanding of the challenges experienced by residents of KGO, and a cross-community strategy (KGO Literacy Improvement Collective [KLIC] Terms of Reference, 2016).

WHAT DID WE AIM TO DO?

The research project was aimed at gathering insights, experiences and suggestions from a wide range of KGO community members.

As part of our work, we delivered the following:



Scanned academic and policy literature to determine how literacy can be improved through community-based approaches

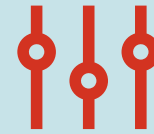


A set of recommendations for literacy initiatives that align with the long-term vision of the KLIC

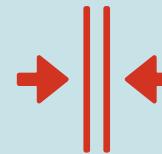


Delivery of a booklet sharing the findings, which the KLIC can use to communicate this project to funders, community members and other key stakeholders

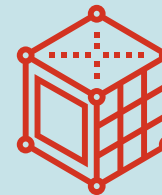
WHAT DID WE ASK?



1. How can we measure levels of illiteracy in KGO?



2. What are the existing community literacy assets in KGO, and where do gaps in literacy programs and services lie?



3. Which models have successfully been used in the past to develop community-based strategies? How can these models be applied to improve literacy in KGO?



4. How can research knowledge be meaningfully shared to inform work being done by other communities facing similar challenges?

25

People who live or work in KGO were interviewed

4

Focus groups were conducted with members of the community

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Challenges with literacy can be grouped into 6 broad categories:



01. School-based issues



02. Outreach and engagement



03. Transportation



04. Accessing reading material



05. Newcomer and ESL needs



06. Community narratives regarding literacy



Four major themes emerged from our research. These include:

01. Community Capacity and Literacy Assets

02. Models for Change

03. Program Evaluation and Shared Accountability

04. Knowledge Mobilization

*“There are good literacy programs in the neighbourhood. I’ve learned so much just being a participant. **THEY’VE TAUGHT ME A LOT AS A MOTHER AND A RESIDENT.**”*

COMMUNITY CAPACITY AND LITERACY ASSETS

Community members discussed that most KGO programs are action oriented and responsive to learner needs. This cooperation and responsiveness has come about despite limited resources in KGO. For example, although there is no core funding for The Reading Partnership, its members have worked collaboratively to distribute resources and deliver events such as the annual Spotlight on Literacy.

MODELS FOR CHANGE

<p>Promise Neighborhoods</p> <p>Biglan et al. 2011; Center for the Study of Social Policy 2016: 10-26</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented in several US cities • Deliver “cradle-to-career” programming with an emphasis on childhood literacy in participating schools • Has shown success in literacy rates and overall academic success
<p>Community-Based Learning Models</p> <p>Coalition for Community Schools 2006: 1</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools and community partners are linked together to create curriculums that are responsive to communities and the issues they face • Students are physically placed in community spaces to facilitate active learning • Requires a high degree of trust between local schools and community agencies
<p>Chicago's Engaged Library</p> <p>Silver 2014: 1; Kretzmann et al 2005: 3</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Libraries are turned into active sites of learning that directly engage with community networks • In KGO, this model responds to stakeholders who wish to see program integration, and can be done in collaboration with the Toronto Public Library
<p>Community-Based Early Childhood Initiatives</p> <p>Schumacher 2013: 2, 8, 11</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local communities work together to align all available service sectors - parenting education, childcare and family support, health and mental health, K-12 schools, child welfare, family literacy, higher education, workforce development, substance abuse treatment, food security, economic and housing development and law enforcement and legal services • This approach aims to address the “root causes” that underlie many of the problems with illiteracy.

“I’m not sure if our literacy programs are actually leading to employment or training outcomes for our learners. WE DON’T REALLY HAVE THE DATA.”

PROGRAM EVALUATION AND SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

While most community members reported that literacy programs in KGO offer sound learning opportunities for KGO participants, several believe that there is a need for improved evaluation of existing programs.

*“It’s important that we talk about **WHAT’S AT STAKE** if we don’t address our **COMMUNITY’S CHALLENGES** with literacy, and the **AMAZING THINGS THAT CAN HAPPEN** if we do!”*

SHARING OUR STORIES

For several respondents, storytelling relates to the value of literacy activities and their impact on lives. Storytelling is also seen as the documentation of a literacy journey, and the role that community members play within it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations can be categorized into three broad categories: community engagement, service development and knowledge sharing.

Community Engagement

1. Develop an outreach strategy to invite community members to engage with literacy learning opportunities across KGO. This strategy should include promotional materials that have been translated into the many languages used by KGO’s diverse community members.
2. Develop a KLIC events calendar and a promotional “roadshow” to recruit and connect learners to existing programs and services.
3. Create a high-quality engagement video that promotes existing literacy learning opportunities and can be shared with various KGO agencies.
4. Draft and implement a “Literacy Improvement Charter” that calls for more inclusive programming, diverse learning opportunities, and situated learning. The Charter should include ways to measure success and track performance.

Service Development

5. Create a multi-agency KGO service “pipeline” that provides literacy supports for learners throughout their educational journeys, from pre-school to employment. This requires sharing resources, increased partnership between existing agencies, robust referral systems, and shared evaluation measures.
6. Increase and expand employment-focused literacy program content in KGO.
7. Provide learners with opportunities to inform the development of literacy programs. This can be accomplished through encouraging learners to share stories about their literacy journey, and engaging in participatory program evaluation.
8. Connect literacy programming to other high value issues such as food security, voter engagement, education and employment.

Knowledge sharing

9. Implement an online tool or a community of practice to be used by literacy-focused agencies to share best practices and other knowledge products.
10. Develop a strategy to secure the necessary funding and resources to implement a community-based literacy action plan.

“We need to get people
UNDERSTANDING THEIR RIGHTS
and **PUSHING GOVERNMENT**
TOWARD ACTION *in KGO.”*

This research was commissioned by the Kingston Galloway Orton-Park Literacy Improvement Collective (KLIC), and was generously sponsored by the Laidlaw Foundation.

Please contact The Reading Partnership for further information: info@readingpartnership.com