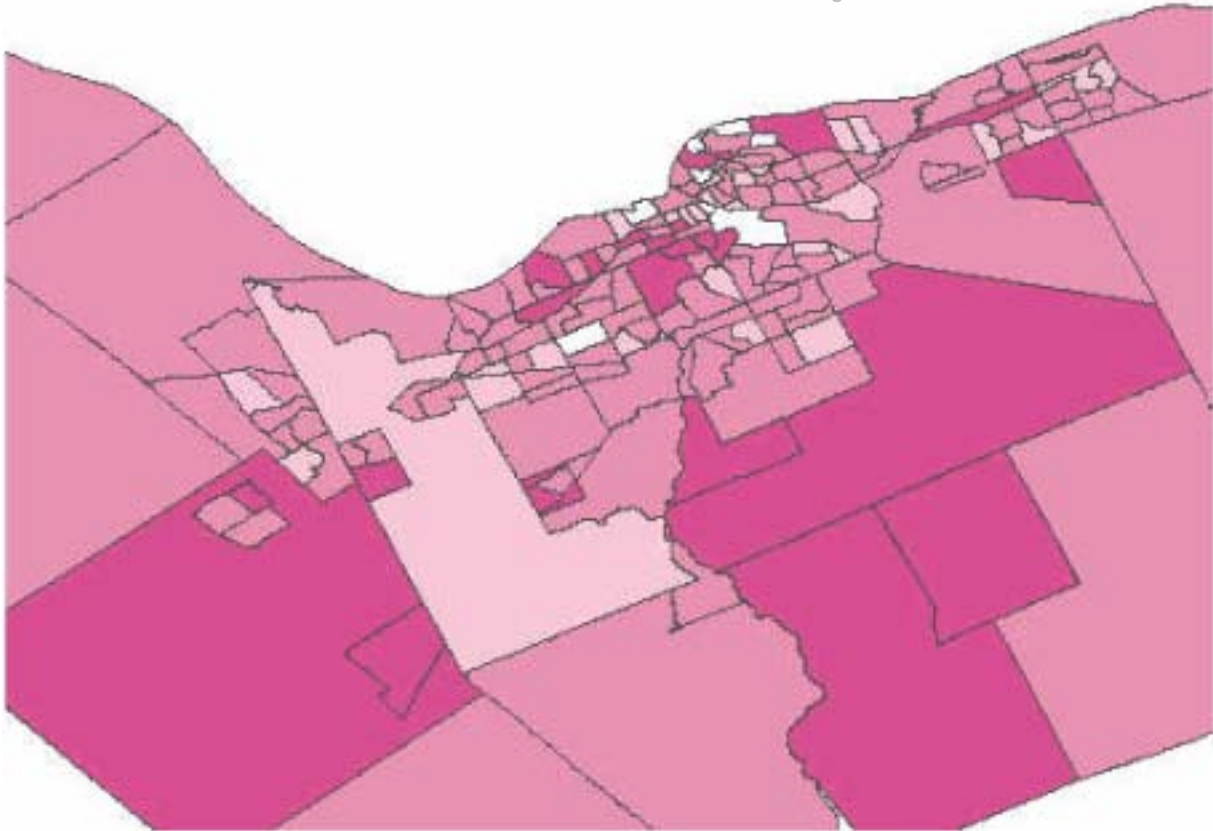


Putting Literacy in Ottawa on the Map



Prepared by Kim Falcigno
Researcher/Writer

With Funding From
United Way Ottawa

November 2003



Ottawa-Carleton Coalition for Literacy

Executive Summary

United Way Ottawa has funded this research to examine the distribution of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) learners in the city in order for the members of the Ottawa-Carleton Coalition for Literacy (OCCL) to coordinate service delivery and outreach efforts to most effectively reach their target audience. This report is intended to be a resource and reference tool for LBS delivery agencies to use for ongoing service delivery and planning purposes.

The researcher used the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' (MTCU) Information Management System (IMS) database in order to obtain information about adult literacy learners, in Ottawa. Anne Parker and staff at AlphaPlus Centre wrote a set of query instructions which allowed LBS agency staff to produce a report containing the necessary learner data.

Twelve LBS delivery agencies had their IMS database mined to produce a report containing five fields: learner postal code, age, gender, source of income and initial (overall) literacy level. In total, this report yielded 1,238 learner records for the reporting period January 1 to December 31, 2002.

Learner data for postal codes was then mapped to show the distribution of learner participation in the city in 2002. This pattern revealed clusters of learners in a number of neighbourhoods throughout the city. Areas of high-density included: Centretown, Pinecrest/Queensway, Carleton Heights, Lowertown, Vanier, Overbrook and Hunt Club.

Mapping of socio-economic indicators and demographic data from the *2001 Canada Census of Population*, using Geographic Information System (GIS) software, allows the reader to make comparisons between characteristics of neighbourhoods and learner distribution patterns. There is linking of the incidence of adult literacy learner location to factors such as the cost of housing, average family income, unemployment level, English language mother tongue, and highest level of educational attainment. These factors play a part in the complicated and multi-faceted array of barriers faced by many adults considering making the decision to participate in literacy upgrading.

Literature on this topic states that factors related to personal situations such as housing, income, transportation concerns, arranging for child/elder care or coordinating around employment tremendously affect whether a person participates in literacy upgrading or not. Being able to see the characteristics of a neighbourhood quantitatively, along with the distribution pattern of participating learners and agency locations, taken in conjunction with each agency's unique delivery model (i.e. classroom, volunteer tutors, etc.), allows programs to plan service delivery and anticipate potential barriers faced by learners. Ideally, programs will find ways to minimize barriers so that more learners can access available literacy service in the future.

Another aspect of this research included carrying forward work started in a previous OCCL project by making contact with, and surveying social service agencies located in the neighbourhoods where high concentrations of learners were found. Community health centres, housing agencies and legal support services were targeted for this research as many are facilities which serve the local community rather than the whole of Ottawa. The survey was designed to identify what agency staff currently know about literacy services in the city, and to learn if they refer any clients to literacy programs. Of the agencies surveyed, few felt they had sufficient knowledge about literacy opportunities in the city and most were not making literacy referrals. As a follow-up to the survey, OCCL will offer information packages and presentations to agency staff. The goal of these presentations is to overcome the barrier of “simply not knowing literacy service is available” by increasing knowledge amongst agency staff so that they can pass along literacy program information to clients who may be potential learners.

This research revealed patterns of participation of LBS learners in Ottawa in 2002 and allows the reader to directly compare these to socio-economic and demographic characteristics for the city so that some barriers to participation can be recognized for neighbourhoods. Additionally, important connections to social service agencies in the neighbourhoods with the greatest numbers of participating learners have been initiated. This information may now be used by LBS delivery agencies to direct their limited outreach resources into the parts of the city where it is known learners live. It is anticipated that there will be an increased likelihood of attracting new learners into programs by overcoming the initial knowledge-gap barrier that adult literacy service is indeed available.

Finally, an additional outcome of this work has been the development of a complex, yet effective, research model which can be repeated again at regular intervals, as part of the ongoing research strategy of the literacy community.