

Brady: Literacy London has become an important community resource

By [Bill Brady](#), Special to QMI Agency
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Over two decades of talking to people on the phone on the air when I hosted CFPL Radio's *Open Line*, I still can recall a few of those calls and one still stands out.

Perhaps it's due to my lifelong love of books and reading that I was saddened by what I heard that morning more than 40 years ago. A woman called to tell me that she had been dreading making this call, had put it off for months, but finally had screwed up the courage to talk with me and be heard by the listeners: "I am in my 50s and I can't read." I admit I was surprised and wasn't quite sure how to proceed without causing her further embarrassment.

She explained that not all products at her supermarket had pictures of the contents and not being able to read meant that she would not know what to select. She went on to say that when her children were in school notes coming home from the teacher meant one of her kids would have to tell her what they said.

I felt great sadness as this courageous woman told me her story and was able to tell her there was hope — in fact, hope I had learned about only a few weeks before. I always appreciated the way community worked through my program and thanks to an earlier episode, I knew where to send her for help.

It was in 1969 and I was on the air with Beryl, a member of the Council of Woman, and Miriam, a community worker with Children's Services. They were looking for a volunteer to help two single mothers improve their reading skills so they would be able to help their children with homework. Almost immediately Freda, a teacher and new Londoner, answered the call. Tutors were providing literacy training supported by the both the London Public Library and board of education to a small number at the Boys' and Girls' Club.

This vital volunteer work continued and grew and by 2003 Literacy London had evolved. Now a decade later, it is a major community force continuing to empower adults with one-to-one literacy and computer-skills training.

As you hear on those ubiquitous TV spiels, "But wait, there's more." Through Literacy London, not only can adults learn to read or have their skills upgraded, others can move forward to their goals in different areas.

Tony had a bad math experience in high school, his teacher was very difficult and Tony gave up. He found work in a factory, but after 17 years the plant closed and he was unemployed. "I

wanted to improve myself, enroll at Fanshawe and study math. Twenty-eight years had passed since I sat in a math class, but I knew what I had to do. I learned about Literacy London and early this year I went there for help and happily got it.” As with so many others, volunteer tutors took the time to work with an eager Tony. “I’ve had a huge improvement and I will continue to work on my math and am determined to become a Fanshawe student; it has been a great experience.”

Literacy London has interacted with almost 5,000 learners and has surpassed all “core measures” set by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The one-to-one model works. Learners report significant progress and improved quality of life because of their participation. It’s a fact, literacy changes lives. For further information on Literacy London, or other literacy services and programs, contact Irene at 519-452-2660 x69712.

You can learn more about this most important community resource on Oct. 9 at Goodwill Industries on Horton St. from 7 to 9 p.m. I am honoured to have been asked to speak that evening.

I will also be talking about an event coming up on Nov. 6 that fascinates me — a spelling bee for adults. If you like word games and are competitive, you should sign up. This isn’t the high-pressure childhood spelling bee that you sweated over as a kid; this is you and five of your friends collaborating to compete.

I don’t think I’d have much of a chance, for I rely far too much on spell check.

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