

# **Common Threads**

**A Report for the Wanganui Community on the First  
Stages of the Adult Literacy and Employment  
Programme**

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**Massey University**

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION & JOURNALISM

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Adult Literacy and Employment Programme



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This report is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr Su Olsson (1942–2005), friend, colleague, and objective leader in the Literacy and Employment Programme.



## **Executive Summary**

The Wanganui-based Adult Literacy and Employment Project is a major, longitudinal research programme that seeks to provide a more in-depth understanding of literacy and the impacts of low literacy on individuals, families, communities, workplaces, and indeed, the 'knowledge economy'. This report discusses and draws implications from the combined initial findings of the first year of the project. Findings from adult literacy participant interviews, non-participant interviews, employer interviews and focus groups, and adult literacy provider interviews are discussed under the major theme headings of 'Employment', 'Literacy', and 'Training' in order to determine similarities and discrepancies of perceptions within and between these various stakeholder groups. Following this, two main areas of conclusions and implications are outlined, ending with a discussion of future directions for this project.





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## Introduction

This report arose from a request by members of the Wanganui community for an analysis that brought together various results of the first stage of the Adult Literacy and Employment project. These have been presented in a series of reports – listed in Appendix 1 – reflecting the variety of investigations in the project.

The Adult Literacy and Employment project, funded by the NZ Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST), is a 3½-year study of adult literacy and employment in Wanganui and Districts. Along with the research team from Massey University's Department of Communication and Journalism, and under the Wanganui District Library's leadership, four key local groups became researchers and subcontractors in the first stage of the project: The Library as partner and community coordinator; Literacy Aotearoa (Wanganui); Te Puna Mātauranga o Whanganui (an iwi education authority representing Whanganui River Iwi); and the Whanganui Community Foundation.

The project aims to develop a deeper understanding of the issues surrounding adult literacy and employment in New Zealand. Concern in this area arose from the 1996 International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), which found 48% of the working-age population was estimated to be at literacy levels one and two, out of a range of one to five. Levels one and two demonstrated a level of literacy considered too low to be functional in the workplace. The Ministry of Education (2001) therefore concluded that, "there are large numbers of people whose poor literacy severely restricts their choices in life and work" (Ministry of Education, 2001, p.4).

Two objectives shaped the first phase of the project:

1. To establish the adult literacy needs of both employed and unemployed in the Wanganui and Districts region.
2. To identify the social, attitudinal, and economic barriers to adult literacy learning of both employed and unemployed in Wanganui and Districts.

The common themes discussed in this report come from the perspectives of the following groups:

1. The wider community: A phone survey of 400 randomly selected, representative residents of the Wanganui community that researched

perspectives and attitudes to employment issues. This was conducted in August 2004.

2. Employers: Focus groups and interviews with Wanganui employers across a spectrum of local businesses, carried out in 2004 and 2005. A follow-up E-survey targeting most Wanganui employers was conducted in March 2006.
3. Adult literacy training providers: In August and September 2004, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of 12 of Wanganui's estimated 13 literacy providers to determine services available to persons with literacy needs. A second survey was conducted in early 2006.
4. Participants in adult literacy programmes: 88 participants took part in in-depth interviews in late 2004 and early 2005. The interviews covered nine theme areas: socioeconomic background; schooling history; perspectives of their learning environment; motivation; resistance; persistence; power dynamics; employment; and barriers to both employment and literacy. The full analysis of these interviews is still continuing and will be available in the 2006 FRST report series. However, an analysis based on a representative sample of 45 participants is discussed here.
5. "Non-participants": To help gain further understanding of the perceptions of adult literacy trainees we also conducted similar in-depth interviews with 40 people who were either approached by community agencies and employers or who had volunteered while taking part in the phone survey. These people had never taken part in an adult literacy training programme. As above, the full analysis from these interviews will be available in the 2006 FRST report series. An analysis based on a representative sample of 29 non-participants is discussed here.

This report discusses results from these investigations under the three broad headings of employment, literacy, and training. The aim is to compare results and outline key areas of concern. We conclude with a discussion of the main implications from the first part of the project and a description of current and future investigations in the project.

## **Notions of 'literacy'**

There are a growing number of definitions of literacy, some robust arguments about what the term means in practice, and an increasing tendency to talk about 'literatecies'. We quickly became aware that stakeholders in the community (including providers

of training, various social and funding agencies, and representatives from the Police, Health Board, District Council, and employers) had varying perspectives on literacy. We also recognised that it was a term that many in the community would rarely use.

We therefore tried to view literacy broadly as incorporating the traditional aspects of reading, writing, speaking, and listening; yet also including critical and creative thinking, understanding, problem-solving, and decision-making, as well as other forms of receiving and imparting information. As much as we could, we encouraged people to speak from their own perspectives and perceptions of the term. We believe this approach embraces the concept of multiple literacies with its applicability at home, at work, and within a community, without ignoring what individual's value as their own social, political, economic, cultural, emotional, and spiritual components.

While outlining this approach to literacies, the research team was still aware of the term 'functional literacy'. This term has been used throughout this report and refers to specific literacy skills such as reading, writing, and numeracy, and also their uses, i.e. reading to understand, writing to understand or communicate, and numeracy to work out a mathematical problem or balance a check book, for example.

Further, we recognised that the Government's and policy makers' concern with levels of adult literacy is based partly on the desire to equip more New Zealanders with the skills seen as necessary for a healthy, modern economy open to global competition. For that reason we initially approached the research by examining what various members of the community saw as important skills for employment in order to examine the place of broadly conceived ideas of literacy in this mix of skills.



## **Employment**

This section focuses on the skills needed for employment as well as on the barriers to employment as perceived by different groups in the Wanganui and Districts community. The information has been collected and collated from research undertaken with employers, the wider community, participants in literacy programmes, and non-participants (those who have never attended a literacy programme).

### **What are the skills needed for employment?**

#### ***Employers***

During 2004 and 2005, interviews and focus groups were conducted with large, medium, and small employers in the Wanganui District. One point should be noted: Given that the sample is small and largely self-selected, it may represent employers who are more rather than less interested in issues of literacy and communication in Wanganui workplaces. Therefore, overall it should not necessarily be considered representative of all local employers.

As a context to the following discussion, overall, employers mentioned that there was a shortage of skills in the Wanganui area, pointing to the increasing skill levels required in the workplace. Small business employers felt it was difficult to find people in Wanganui with the skills required for the job, claiming they would hire more people if they were available. In contrast to the small business group, large employers acknowledged that while there were plenty of graduates, they still encountered some resistance to Wanganui as a provincial town perceived to be lacking in the career opportunities offered by the main centres. The large employers therefore looked nationally and internationally to fill staff vacancies.

#### ***Skills and qualities required for employment***

The major areas of need regarding skills and qualities that emerged from the various employers and the employers' representative are:

1. Literacy, numeracy, and communication skills
2. Basic/foundation/life skills

### *Literacy, numeracy, and communication skills*

At times literacy and communication skills were treated as complementary and almost synonymous. When asked to define what employers mean when they talk of literacy, one interviewee described functional literacy skills in concert with effective oral communication:

Most people would say that it [literacy] is the ability to write, to recognize the written word and comprehend it. Reading and writing and comprehension, I guess in one slot and then your numeracy. Obviously, the ability to do simple mathematic calculations, add and subtract, multiply in their heads. I think from my perspective it's broader than that and I just come back to – I think oral communication is part of the literacy thing too. But I think they are all interrelated, and a lack of confidence in one leads to a lack of confidence in the others.

The need for an increase in functional literacy skills was linked to changes in the employment context. Within New Zealand there is now a greater need for workers to engage in documentation, form filling, and reading and understanding regulations, for example, Health and Safety regulations. Industries where workers could previously function with limited literacy now need higher levels of literacy skills. The changes in the workplace that have resulted in a greater need for functional literacy skills are reflected by the greater number of industries who are carrying out pre-screening of applicants.

Perhaps more than any other group, small business employers have more direct interaction with and reliance on their staff and so are more aware of the need for literacy, numeracy, and communication skills. Certainly, small business employers were acutely aware of a lack of numeracy skills among young people. One employer pointed out the cost to the business of an employee who could not carry out accurate basic measurements and suggested a lack of concern for such matters on the part of the young person:

If you happen to be a couple of centimetres out, you've got 5000 stickers and \$1,000 worth of work up the spout. They don't care. It's just, 'Sorry, I got it wrong'.

Basic reading and writing skills were also problems that affected productivity:

If they can't read written instructions, then they're not going to get the job done right.

The inability of employees to follow oral instructions well was seen as equally problematic and time consuming. Seemingly linked to an inability to follow oral instructions is an inability to record or take accurate phone messages as the employers' statements below make clear:

They'll just take someone's phone number and write it incorrectly.  
They hang up and you say, 'Who was that?' 'A man'.

Employers and the employers' representative agreed that problems with basic literacy skills alienated customers and cost businesses money.

For the most part in large organisations, a certain standard of literacy is both demanded and assumed by these employers:

On the shop floor we expect people to be able to read instructions and fill out control sheets. As they work higher up, if they become supervisors, we expect them to use a computer and to fill out Production Incident Reports. If they read something wrong and incorporate the wrong ingredient it could be an expensive mistake.

At the same time, there was a general recognition from the group that young people, despite the degree programmes they complete, often have poor mechanics of English:

They speak a different language and we're talking about kids that have graduated with a Bachelor of Arts. They've done a Diploma course and they come to us and they cannot spell.

Oh, their grammar! We won't go there!

This recognition led to further comments that if such poor mechanics were evident in graduates, there must be far worse literacy issues in the rest of the young working-age population.

The large employers' lack of awareness of adult literacy problems became explicit at certain points in the focus group meetings. In line with the unprompted responses to the community survey about employment needs in which functional literacy skills were mentioned by 5.2% of people, one employer stated:

I don't think its [adult literacy] fully understood, and I don't believe people understand how much of a problem it is.

Another large organisation employer acknowledged they were not aware of the problem because they did not come across it in their day-to-day experience:

I think I'd be staggered if I understood how illiterate the average population is. I'm not really exposed to it. I assume literacy is normal.

Of computer skills, one employer stated that with the possible exception of the older worker, such skills were not a problem as all young people knew how to use a computer and surf the net, but that did not mean they had good literacy skills.

Given basic literacy skills such as "practical English skills", or the ability "to write a business letter", employers stated they were happy to provide on-the-job training.

### *Basic/foundation/life skills*

As it is difficult to provide a clear definition of basic skills, foundation skills, or life skill, we have put these three "skills" together under one heading as in many cases they have been used interchangeably by the employers.

The employers' representative focused strongly on young people entering the workforce, claiming the *"overwhelming comment from employers is that they can't find people with a work ethic"*. This focus on the need for basic foundation or life skills recurred throughout the interview:

One of the things employers are crying out for is basic life skills. Kids coming through that understand that they need to get up in the morning, they need to be at work on time, they need to be there for 10 hours or 12 hours and they are not going to run the place in the first year.

The representative maintained employers did not see it as their responsibility to train people in foundation skills (nor in basic literacy skills). In particular, a lack of these life skills was a possible parenting and school system issue.

There was general agreement that young people lacked basic foundation skills and had *"unrealistic attitudes about working"*. Like other employer groups in the area, small business employers focused on young people and prioritised basic foundation skills as evidenced in the following statements:

We just want the basic skills.

Good thinking. Attitude and aptitude, and that's pretty hard to come by.

Just commonsense is really hard.

The primary qualities looked for in potential employees were adaptability and attitude. Adaptability included elements such as initiative and responsibility. Employers also value personal skills such as reliability and people skills for good customer service. Other qualities looked for in potential employees were integrity, initiative, practicality, and a willingness to learn.

### ***General community***

In 2004, a short telephone survey was carried out involving 400 residents of working age (16 years of age and over) in the Wanganui and Districts area. Potential participants were identified through a random sampling of phone numbers. Within this, however, there was a particular focus on maintaining a reflection of the Wanganui region in the 2001 Census to acquire representative numbers of respondents from each suburb, ethnicity, gender, and age-group. The survey consisted of nine largely closed-ended questions that focused on what the interviewees thought about employment opportunities in the area, barriers to getting fulltime jobs, and the important skills for job-seekers. The aim was to elicit a number of unprompted responses in the early part of the survey before asking questions specifically concerned with literacy.

When asked the open-ended question '*What do you consider to be the most important skills for people currently looking for employment?*' respondents gave over 40 different responses. The most frequently mentioned skills needed for employment were:

1. Computer skills (18.3%)
2. Unspecified training/education (14.5%)
3. Communication skills (12.0%)
4. The ability to get on with people (10.3%)
5. Experience (9.0%)
6. Willing to work hard (8.8%)
7. Other (including a range of job-specific skills, local knowledge, practicality, etc.) (8.5%)
8. A basic level of education (8.3%)
9. Motivation (8.3%)
10. Work ethic (5.5%)

While respondents did mention 'a basic level of education', this was mentioned only 8.3% of the time. Further, reading, writing, and number skills were explicitly mentioned by only 21 of the total 400 respondents as a skill need for employment.

'Communication skills' and 'the ability to get on with people' rated highly, with 22.3% combined mentions. These interpersonal skills are examples of the kinds of foundation skills employers claimed to need, alongside the willingness to work hard, motivation, and work ethic. Communication skills could also be defined as a functional literacy skill in terms of written communications. It could be argued, however, that the respondents were thinking of communication skills as more of a higher level interpersonal foundation skill, rather than a functional skill, as they were able to give as many responses as they chose, and yet only four mentioned the specific, traditional, functional literacy skills.

The questionnaire also measured respondents' levels of agreement with the statement, "People can't find jobs in Wanganui because they don't have the skills". Almost half the sample, 48%, agreed with this statement. At 23.8%, the level of disagreement was much lower. Those who neither agreed nor disagreed made up 28.3% of the sample.

### *Functional literacy skills*

Interestingly, as mentioned above, in the unprompted responses to the question asking for the most important employment skills only 5.5% of the responses mentioned functional literacy skills: 12 responses mentioned 'reading skills,' 14 'writing skills', and 12 'adding skills'. Because of multiple responses, several people said more than one of these skills was important. However, only 21 respondents in total mentioned any of the functional literacy skills without prompting.

When explicitly prompted, however, respondents agreed overwhelmingly that reading, writing, and number skills were important to gain employment, with a smaller majority agreeing on the importance of computer skills.

- *Basic reading skills are needed to gain employment: 87.6% agreed.*
- *Basic writing skills are needed to gain employment: 86.3% agreed.*
- *Basic number skills are needed to gain employment: 86.1% agreed.*
- *Basic computer skills are needed to gain employment: 59.5% or agreed.*

While members of the community agreed overwhelmingly then, that functional literacy skills are needed to gain employment, in the unprompted situation very few thought to mention that these skills were important for employment. It could be inferred therefore that most people in the community take these skills for granted and assume they are held by most people.

### ***Adult literacy participants' employment needs***

In-depth interviews were conducted with participants in adult literacy programmes aiming to capture the needs of adult literacy participants and the barriers they perceived to both literacy development and employment. The interview frame for both participants and non-participants was established around literacy and employment, so the responses tend to be a combination of what levels of skills participants believe they need to achieve employment. The mixing together of literacy needs and employment needs may also be explained by the finding that most participants in adult literacy programmes take part in the programme in order to increase their chances of obtaining a job. Therefore, the skills they 'need' are in fact related to their employment 'needs'. The skills participants mentioned as important for the workplace are provided below and have not been ranked in any order of priority.

#### *Computer skills*

A large percentage of respondents mentioned computer skills as being very important, with typical comments including:

There's a lot more computers in workplaces now.

If you don't know how to operate a computer there's no way you can get work.

#### *Communication skills*

Communication skills were mentioned by 31% of the participants whose interviews have been analysed so far. Typical comments here were:

You've got to get on with everyone.

You need to be able to relate to people.

#### *Literacy: The "3Rs"*

The findings in these interviews are similar to what was revealed in the community survey. It is striking how few participants to date nominated reading and writing, even when asked to nominate specific "literacy" needs in today's society. Reading, for instance was mentioned by only one quarter of the 45 participant interviewees. However, when mentioned, it was spoken of as an essential in the modern work environment:

...most jobs come with paperwork that you need...

Or it was brought up in relation to safety:

I work in a machinery factory. You've always got to read stuff, because if you don't know what you're touching or you're playing with, you could chop your hand off.

Numeracy or maths was mentioned by very few respondents, and often in a wider, applied context. Skills in English (such as "a good command of English") were mentioned by nine respondents.

Writing was mentioned by seven respondents, frequently in the context of filling in forms. The comment below parallels the concerns of employers explored earlier:

I was a linesman. When I first started working ... we'd go off and fix pylons; fix it or paint it or whatever. Then like half a year or a year into it we had to write stuff down in our log books, not just for personal stuff but to be sent to the main office. That was a bit of a shock.

### *Attitude and foundation/life skills*

Related to communication skills was the need for a combination of "positive" attitudes like motivation, confidence, self-belief, and discipline. For example:

I just want to... get up to a standard where I can be respected because I am pretty much an alright person. It's just getting stuck in a hole.

Foundation/life skills were mentioned by nine people with comments like:

What it takes to actually survive in the real world.

Learning how to handle money, how to handle peer pressure.

Time management.

### *Technical skills*

Academic credits and other qualifications were also seen as important needs for participants in relation to employment. Job-specific skills included "keyboarding and typing skills, accounting" and "food nutrition."



### ***Non-participants' employment needs***

A comparison group of "non-participants" was also interviewed to discover if their employment needs differed from those of participants. The following initial findings are based on the 29 non-participant interviews that have been coded to date.

An important point in considering and comparing the findings of non-participants with other groups is that responses to interview questions were framed by the knowledge that the project was about adult literacy and employment. This contrasts with the community survey where respondents were asked to comment on employment needs in Wanganui and so provided unprompted or unframed responses until part way through the survey when specific questions about literacy were introduced. Once again, the skills non-participants mentioned as important for the workplace are provided below and have not been ranked in any order of priority.

#### ***Computer skills***

In line with the participants and the community survey, computer skills were obviously of high importance to respondents. Illustrative comments on the importance of computers included:

Anybody looking for employment in today's market had better be computer literate, or, or skill up because there're just not gonna be that many jobs that you can get in without having some computer skills.

#### ***Communication skills***

Again, as for participants, non-participants cited communication skills as very important skills for employment. Communication skills included interpersonal skills such as teamwork, listening skills, people skills, assertiveness, leadership, and social skills. Most respondents felt being able to understand and communicate was actually more important than functional literacy; at the same time reinforcing the literacy frame established from the outset:

Social skills are crucial. I mean, I know I should be saying reading, writing and arithmetic, but social skills, confidence and dealing with other people, it's becoming essential in a lot of ways for getting work.

As with many employers, there was an emphasis on the oral communication skills of social interaction:

I think it's really important to be able to communicate, to be able to speak in an articulate and intelligent way.

Such skills included the ability to understand and to communicate that understanding to others in all areas, including the workforce:

Literacy is about understanding and then being able to relay that understanding back where appropriate to the world, to your family, to your friends, your job.

### *Literacy: The "3Rs"*

Functional literacy skills were perceived as being important, and of the "3Rs", maths was mentioned most frequently. Again, while this reflects the prioritising of maths over reading and writing in the community survey, especially among young people in the 16–19 age group, it contrasts with the participants' nomination of reading as a more frequently mentioned skill need for employment than mathematics. One non-participant outlines the importance of mathematics in their employment environment:

Actually, mathematics is in all sorts of different ways. It's in budgeting. It's quoting. It's working out what size canvasses to work on; converting inches to millimetres.

Reading was the next most frequently cited functional literacy need for employment. The responses here included recognition of the need for reading and comprehension skills at all levels of the workplace. As in the employers' perspectives, there was an implicit recognition that whereas once people with low literacy were able to operate adequately in the workplace, this was no longer possible and would impede both employment opportunities and any career progression:

In almost any job now you've got a deluge of reading to do, in whatever form, electronic or otherwise. You've got to be able to read. You've got to be able to absorb it. You've got to be able to either scan and read in detail and absorb what's in there, and it's necessary now, at all levels. The volume that you must be able to absorb, assess, and then regurgitate in some other form is just massive, and those who have difficulty with reading are just left way behind. They're soon pushed sideways and somewhere out the door, and end up in, not in, an appointment that's going to give them a true career option.

One person pointed to the increased compliance demands of the workplace:

You've got to be able to read the...the compliance book, understanding the codes and all that sort of stuff.

The next functional literacy employment need mentioned was writing, and typical comments included:

We have to do our notes after each shift. If we're assigned so many patients each shift and you have to do a report on how they presented in that eight hour shift and anything that's happened, and you have to be precise and you can't be subjective. You have to be objective. So you've got to know how to word things.

### *Attitude and foundation/life skills*

Often it was felt that the mechanics of functional literacy could not be addressed until either a work ethic or a desire for literacy (or rather goals to which literacy was a pathway) were in place. This attitude/belief links with the employers' prioritisation of basic foundation skills such as work ethic, reliability, attitude, and adaptability. Non-participants also mentioned that attitude or foundation/life skills included self-motivation and good manners. Generally non-participants demonstrated a broader understanding of workplace demands that takes literacy beyond functional skills and suggests the primary importance of life or foundation skills.

## **What are the barriers to employment?**

In this section the barriers to employment are explored. Perceptions of employers, the community, participants, and non-participants are provided.

### ***Employers***

Like many employers throughout New Zealand, as a result of a tight labour market, Wanganui employers are experiencing a skill shortage and a lack of applicants from which to select. As above, it was noted that while people had been able to perform adequately in the workplace with limited literacy skills, this was no longer the case as a higher level of numeracy/literacy skills was now required to understand basic compliance issues.

While all groups of employers argued that literacy problems were systemic, small business employers claimed that such problems were not only systemic, but entrenched. They advocated that schools take a much more directive approach in preparing students for the workforce. Their position reinforces the view put forward

by the employers' representative of a lack of alignment between the school system, the tertiary system, and the New Zealand workforce.

Employers did not see it as their responsibility to train people in basic literacy skills, but advocated that both functional and life/fundamental skills were needed to gain employment. There was much more willingness to provide specific on-the-job or vocational context training. However, there were barriers to training as well with both small and large employers affected by the transient nature of the youthful workforce in a provincial economy. Small business employers described a lack of return on their investment in training school leavers who tend to stay for a limited time and then use their training as a springboard to move elsewhere. While one of the large business employers indicated that his organisation regarded their training and career-path planning as a good investment in creating a loyal and motivated workforce, he agreed with another large business employer that young graduates tended to move away from the district after a few years because they perceived further career opportunities in the main centres.

### ***General community***

The 400 community members interviewed in this survey were asked what the barriers were to finding full-time work in Wanganui.

Respondents suggested 47 different barriers to fulltime employment. Fourteen percent of the sample said they did not know of any barriers, whilst only 1.8% said there were no barriers. The most frequently listed barriers are:

1. Not enough job opportunities (18.5%)
2. Lack of education (12.5%)
3. Need experience (10.8%)
4. Not any or enough motivation/ attitude/ lazy (9.8%)
5. Need for other skills (9.5%)
6. Not the right sort of jobs available (7.8%)
7. Other (5.8%)
8. Lack of qualifications (5.3%)
9. Only part-time work available (4.5%)

All responses (except 'don't know' and 'nothing') were then grouped into six major categories: structural or systemic barriers; skills shortage barriers; individual fault; discrimination; personal circumstances; and other. Percentages were calculated out of 502 responses, as respondents gave more than one answer. Results show that one-third (33.7%) of the responses were related to structural or systemic barriers,

especially the shortage of jobs and the kind of jobs available. Just under one-third (32.9%) of the responses related to a skills shortage: the need for experience, education, skills, and training. Only two responses referred specifically to a lack of literacy skills as a barrier to employment. This could again reflect the 'taken for granted' nature of functional literacy skills.

### ***Adult literacy participants***

Barriers to employment in the perceptions of adult literacy participants are very diverse.

The biggest category so far is 'other'. Further emerging patterns may generate new distinct categories from the 'other' group, but at present it includes such barriers as insufficient experience, insufficient qualifications, racism in the workplace, and particular work being perceived as unfulfilling or insultingly low-paid. If we temporarily place this category aside, the perceived barriers to employment are ranked as follows:

1. Technological skills required

No manual jobs out there now because everything is computerised.

2. Health and physical

I've had three back operations and they tried to force me back into work straight away and ... each time they put me back to work ... my back would pack up again.

3. Lack of confidence

I've been on ACC for ... close on 20 years ... yeah, my self esteem and everything was shot.

4. Family commitments

Since that time she's been a full-time mother and she puts her energy into her two children.

5. Attitudinal

They are not interested in getting a job. They just rely on that benefit.

6. Filling in forms

Respondent was interested in truck driving but was put off because they have to fill in forms.

7. Lack social skills and people skills

If you can't relate to people then you're not going to get a job.

8. Functional Literacy

Respondent was put off by the writing and because he can't use a computer.

### ***Non-participants***

The perceived barriers to employment mentioned by the non-participants were arranged under nine codes, representing broad categories that emerged from the non-participants' own comments. Only 23 comments were made by non-participants about employment barriers, suggesting it is not a high priority concern. Some non-participants were in employment, and their comments therefore tended to speculate on others' employment barriers; some were employers. The perceived barriers to employment for non-participants are:

1. Age

Non-participants report experiencing discrimination as an employment barrier, with ageism, actually the most widespread perceived employment barrier reported so far. Interestingly, none of the participants mentioned age as a barrier to employment, which contrasts with the finding here.

Let's face it – once you're 50, nobody wants you.

2. Confidence

Everyone loses heart. The minute you're unemployed, you do lose heart.

Of the remaining categories, such as lack of qualifications, lack of experience, or lack of interview or self-presentation skills, none particularly stands out at this stage of coding, with most categories receiving one or two comments from one or two respondents.

## **Literacy**

The focus in this section is on literacy issues and needs as well as on the barriers to the development of literacy as perceived by different groups in the Wanganui and Districts community. The information has been collected and collated from research undertaken with employers, the wider community, participants in literacy programmes, and non-participants (those who have never attended a literacy programme).

### **Awareness of literacy**

At the outset of the project we talked with a wide variety of community stakeholders including representatives of the District Health Board, the New Zealand Police, the Corrections Department, Work and Income, and a variety of social agencies. These groups all reported that low levels of literacy impacted on the health, social, and economic wellbeing of individuals and the city as a whole. The Government has also recognised the need to improve adult literacy levels. However, an overwhelming finding from the community phone survey, the first provider survey, and interviews and focus groups with employers showed a general lack of awareness of adult literacy as an issue, combined with a general lack of awareness of who was providing adult literacy services within the Wanganui and Districts community.

In the adult literacy provider survey, the extent of literacy and numeracy problems in the community was claimed to be worse than imagined. Two providers commented that more involvement and acknowledgement from the community would significantly improve adult literacy provision, while others suggested literacy needed to be promoted more to allow help to become available to those struggling with literacy. Perhaps as an example, some participants within adult literacy services noted that their own lack of awareness of literacy services served as a barrier to their literacy development, whereas some non-participants were adamant that suitable adult literacy training did not exist.

### ***Community perspectives***

A key finding of the community phone survey was that few respondents mentioned functional literacy skills (reading, writing, and numeracy) when asked the open-ended question, 'What do you consider to be the most important skills for getting a

job?'. Clearly, while the great majority of respondents agreed that functional literacy skills are needed to gain employment, few thought to mention these skills unless they were prompted. We infer from these findings that the bulk of community members take basic literacy skills for granted, assuming they are held by most people.

This lack of awareness of literacy issues is further reflected in answers to an open-ended question asking where people who had difficulties with reading, writing, and number skills could get help. The wide-ranging responses revealed no clear understanding about who delivers literacy support or how to access literacy training. Almost a third of the responses mentioned secondary school courses (not a delivery mechanism in Wanganui), with a similar number suggesting general tertiary institutes, while 55 respondents (14%) did not know. Fifty-four people mentioned unspecified 'literacy trainers', while a total of only 42 respondents (11%) identified – not always accurately – specific providers of literacy and numeracy services.

### ***Employer perspectives***

Despite acknowledgement of the importance of adult literacy in terms of changing job markets and skills shortages, it was evident that the employer groups in the sample had very different experiences and awareness of literacy issues in their specific workforces.

As in the community survey, medium- and large-sized organisation employers, like the general public, take literacy skills for granted and assume they are held by most adults. In contrast to small business employers, large and medium employers have not generally confronted the problem in their workplaces, other than through pre-screening to eliminate applicants with poor literacy skills.

Further, there was little awareness of specific literacy training programmes in Wanganui and Districts by many of the employers in the focus groups. Employers interviewed were also not aware of any specific literacy providers in Wanganui, though one made passing reference to possible "*night classes*."

In our view, the competitive nature of provider funding detracts from the resources and energies providers of adult literacy services have for publicising their programmes in the community. Employers in the sample clearly stated that where they actually knew of literacy programmes, they did not know how to select from the providers.



## **Why is literacy a hidden issue?**

### ***Coping strategies of participants***

As functional literacy skills are taken for granted and there is a general stigma attached to not having these skills, those with low literacy can sometimes develop coping strategies either to function adequately without literacy, or to allow themselves to avoid literacy activities altogether. Some of these coping strategies were discussed in the adult literacy participant interviews and include: asking lots of questions, sitting back and watching, self-deprecating humour, “bluffing”, and self-teaching. One interviewee who claimed to have ‘bluffed’ his way through school was able to learn by hearing others verbalise the information he needed to know. He would then be able to recall it:

I could only get back what I’d been told ... not what I learned but what I’d been told, not read.

### ***Community stigma***

One indication of why literacy issues have low visibility is obvious in the response to the question, “What do you think would stop people seeking help if they have problems with reading, writing, or number skills?” More than half the responses referred to embarrassment or stigma in seeking help. A significant number of other responses mentioned societal or peer pressure, and the emotional factors of not wanting to go back to school (perhaps linked to the finding that many adult literacy participants did not have good memories of school). Community members also said that lack of confidence, low self esteem, and fear would act as barriers to seeking support, and thus contribute to keeping literacy a hidden issue.

### ***Employment barriers***

Small-sized business employers pointed to the cost to their businesses of employees who lacked literacy and numeracy skills. There were clear indications that these employers expected that people would already have such skills and they felt considerable frustration at having to provide staff with detailed step-by-step written instructions or teaching basic mathematics. While they were open to specific on-the-job training, one employer suggested they should be subsidised for workplace training to compensate for the cost to the employer. However, these small-sized businesses did take on those with low functional literacy skills as, in a time of skills and labour shortages combined with a lack of ability to attract or finance those with high qualifications, the small business employers did not appear to have many options.

In contrast, the medium-sized business employer was very clear that literacy and numeracy skills were essential to his business and he simply would not employ people who lacked such skills. To ensure this did not happen he carried out a form of pre-screening, asking for handwritten letters of application and including numeracy problems in the interview process.

## **What is literacy?**

While this full report focuses on the first 45 participant interviews, and 29 non-participant interviews, this particular section allows an analysis of the full set of participant and non-participant interviews. This is because an analysis of the definition of 'literacy' was not undertaken with the initial sample, but has been undertaken for the full sample. This section also includes initial results from the employer e-survey that asked for employers' definition of 'literacy'.

### ***Adult literacy participants***

Seventy-nine participants' described what they understood 'literacy' to be. Some respondents' perceptions were clearly based in a deficit model. They conflated 'literacy' with 'illiteracy' or described 'literacy' as meaning some sort of 'problem'. They felt implicitly judged (and negatively so) by the very word itself. Respondents appeared to find the word itself off-putting, perhaps officious or long-winded, with a connotation of, as one respondent put it, "blah, blah, blah". Other respondents could not provide an answer to the question of what 'literacy' meant to them. The term was entirely meaningless for them and did not appear to relate to their lives or their needs in any way. Other respondents perceived literacy as meaning strictly functional skills. While, some respondents, however, saw literacy as extending slightly beyond these functional skills, for example to include computer literacy, very few if any respondents perceived the word 'literacy' as broadly inclusive of multiple strengths or a wide range of life and employment skills.

An illustrative answer that suggests some of the complex problems about the term 'literacy', including its association with English, was provided by one participant:

What does the word literacy mean to you?

Answer: Nothing. It's just a word to me. Honestly, it doesn't mean anything. Literacy means...I'm not sure what literacy means. I think it's all to do with

that English stuff, but literacy, I should imagine, means making things sound right and having your words spelled correctly.

These and similar comments point to the major problems with 'literacy' as a term, and as a brand. Such comments suggest the impossibility of marketing 'literacy' courses to potential participants as something that will provide multi-faceted fundamental/life and communication skills, because the term 'literacy' itself has deeply negative connotations. Participants do not seem to connect the term with what is actually currently on offer from training providers or with where they want to go with their lives:

Literacy and that, like, see, this is where I don't know, I know we've been learning that ... um, yeah, I can't remember that

What does the word literacy mean to you?

Answer: I wouldn't have a clue.

Comment from interviewer: OK, that's fine. Actually, literacy is about being able to read and write and good mathematical skill – it's whether you're computer literate or reading literate and so on.

Answer: But I don't know what it means to me though [laughs].

### ***Non-participants***

The majority of non-participants viewed literacy as a combination of functional skills (reading, writing, and numeracy) and deeper (beyond the functional) skills. These deeper skills included such things as the ability to understand yourself and know where you come from, and the ability to follow instructions. Only five of the non-participants (out of 34) stated they did not know what the word 'literacy' meant to them, and only a few mentioned literacy in a deficit-related context. Interestingly, more non-participants than participants situated literacy in a context of opportunity and empowerment, as opposed to the deficit model. The situating of 'literacy' by participants within a deficit framework may reflect the stigma participants felt, perhaps more strongly, than those who may not need to learn functional literacy skills as much but are still aware of the issues.

### ***Employers***

The employer e-survey asked employers directly for a definition of 'literacy' for their organisation. Most employers gave multiple answers to this question. Twenty-three employers noted that reading (a functional literacy skill) was a part of their organisation's definition of literacy. Nearly half this amount also included verbal and/or written communication as part of the definition.

Interestingly, writing was considered to be part of the definition of literacy third, while the ability to understand (and make use, in one instance) of the English language came a close fourth. Spelling, numeracy, the ability to follow instructions and plans, and computer skills were also mentioned as instances of 'literacy' by more than one employer. Other skills that were less readily captured by employers under the definition of literacy were more job-specific skills, including recording data, timesheet completion, proof-reading, completing invoices, and working with technical equipment.

In terms of defining literacy, therefore, while employers took a functional view, they also focused on the role of oral communication (as found in the employer focus groups and interviews), and also defined 'literacy' in terms of particular job contexts.

## **What are the learning/literacy needs of those with low levels of literacy?**

### ***Adult literacy participants***

Participants tended to answer this question in terms of literacy and learning for employment. However, some participants mentioned learning needs outside the employment context. Learning needs are also discussed under 'skills needed for employment' in the employment section.

Functional literacy skills, computer skills, and communication skills were mentioned by adult literacy participants as skills necessary for their learning development as well as employment. An outline of these skill needs has been given in the 'employment' section and so will not be revisited here.

However, nine participants did mention broader foundational/life skills as learning needs for themselves:

What it takes to actually survive in the real world

Learning how to handle money, how to handle peer pressure

Time management

Punctuality

Another two participants discussed their learning or literacy need for Te Reo, while four mentioned the importance of learning their whakapapa. A learning need for confidence was also explored by a significant number of participants: confidence and employment were often mentioned in linked contexts, i.e. the course had made participants confident that they could get a job.

### ***Non-participants***

Non-participants also tended to answer this question in terms of literacy and learning for employment. However, learning needs similar to the participants' learning needs outside the employment context were discussed (the other learning needs that were linked to employment have been discussed previously under the employment section).

Non-participants mentioned a learning need for whakapapa to be incorporated into literacy learning. This was a key motivator some non-participants felt might have encouraged them to join literacy programmes, if they had known it was available (although some others mentioned that it was not important to them at all). Although Te Reo was not specifically mentioned as in participants' responses, it was apparent that whakapapa was clearly linked by non-participants with a sense of identity, as the two following comments illustrate:

I want to find my whakapapa, but I don't know how to go about it. I've always wondered... It would give me a cloak, I've always wanted to know what my roots were and I just feel I'm not a whole person without it.

Your family history is extremely important, because that's who you are and if you haven't got that rock of who you are, you're going to flounder in life, as I've seen with a lot of people.

## **What are the barriers to literacy development?**

### ***Adult literacy participants***

The most frequently mentioned single individual barrier to literacy is a health-related or physical barrier, followed by schooling not meeting interviewees' needs, then by goal orientation. Goal orientation refers to incidences where respondents indicated they did not have a goal or a reason for pursuing literacy. However, it also refers to those situations in which people felt they had a goal but were unable to reach it.

As many respondents mentioned these barriers of health, schooling and goals multiple times, we interpret them as the barriers with which they are most concerned. We equate frequency of times mentioned with respondents' level of concern.

When we re-analysed the interview codes according to the number of respondents who mentioned a particular barrier, health, schooling, and goals remained the top three, although goal orientation increased in importance. In other words, these three items are both more widespread, and of more intense concern than all other barriers.

When participants' responses were grouped into issues with schooling, issues with adult training, health, economic or social issues, attitudinal issues (self or social), and other, school and learning issues were by far the most frequently mentioned.

It is noteworthy that nearly half (47%) the total comments relate to problems at school that, in the perception of respondents, impeded successful literacy. Many of the health and physical issues mentioned also occurred during school time, becoming a literacy or learning issue for participants. Examples included difficulty in catching up when returning to school, or physical learning style-related difficulties (such as not being able to see the blackboard), which appeared on occasion to have gone unrecognised. The actual impact of schooling issues may therefore be even higher than noted here. Four different elements of schooling account for over 70% of the total comments on school: school not meeting needs (25% of comments); teaching at school (19%); learning style not catered for (16%); and peer pressure at school (11%).

The second largest category concerns health, economic and social barriers. In a number of instances respondents were able to identify a single health issue that they connected with the onset or worsening of their literacy problems. One respondent who missed school for 6 months for health reasons commented,

That was a huge ... and I felt that with that gap and even my parents said that's where they feel I might have gone wrong somewhere. I still had the work, but it just wasn't sufficient. I needed more and because of that space and that time ....

Health comprised the largest single category; approximately half the health, economic, and social comments.

(A lack of) goal orientation has already been noted as a significant barrier, and it is possible other barriers stated above interact with one another to make a goal more difficult to achieve. For example, persisting experience of low achievement and

perceived discouragement at school, coupled with adverse peer pressure and difficult home circumstances, will come together to undermine the possibility of a strong focus on any goal.

Another major concern is time available for undertaking literacy training. In some instances participants' work commitments made attendance at courses difficult. Family or community commitments were also common barriers to training attendance, such as for sole parents attempting to juggle childcare with work or other responsibilities.

### ***Non-participants***

The most frequently mentioned single perceived barrier to literacy by non-participants is learning style, followed by economic barriers. Given that many respondents mentioned these barriers multiple times, these could be interpreted as the barriers about which respondents are most passionate or concerned.

However, when the ranking is reordered according to the number of respondents who mentioned a particular barrier, economic issues become the most widely mentioned, followed by family environment. In other words, more respondents initially mentioned these barriers, but returned to them less frequently throughout the interview. These might therefore be more widespread than learning difficulties, but are perhaps more 'acceptable' to or tolerated by respondents, whereas learning style difficulties appear to arouse significant emotions.

We next grouped the numbers of comments on barriers by category into: issues with schooling; issues with adult training; economic or social issues; and attitudinal issues (self or social). Here, school and learning issues are by far the most frequently mentioned. When the number of respondents mentioning a barrier is grouped by category, however, economic and schooling issues are almost equal in prominence. Again, this suggests that while respondents mention schooling issues more often, economic and social issues are equally, or more, widespread.

One interesting schooling issue is that the practice of streaming students is invariably mentioned as having a detrimental effect on learning. All respondents who report being streamed, whether into 'higher' or 'lower' streams, indicated this had a negative impact on their subsequent schooling.

A further barrier mentioned by non-participants is that the stigma associated with 'literacy' would form a barrier to literacy development. However, this stigma was not so much focused on the embarrassment of having low literacy skills, but rather on the

perception of 'literacy' as an academic non-practical endeavour. This suggests that some non-participants may not see the relevance of 'literacy' or adult literacy programmes to their lives. This is emphasised by the finding that some adult literacy participants define 'literacy' purely in terms of a deficit, or functional view, with a vast number stating that 'literacy' had no meaning for them personally.



## Training

### Employers' needs

Employers (along with a large percentage of the community) all agreed a 'work ethic' or life skills were their prime requirement in an employee. Because such skills are not commonly a major focus of education and training processes, it is perhaps not surprising that employers rarely felt this need was being met. Small employers and the CEO of Enterprise Wanganui were perhaps most aware that there were literacy problems in the community, but all employers we spoke to recognised there was a fundamental skills shortage and frequently placed the blame on schools.

Generally employers believed that schools and pre-employment courses needed to be more practical, with members of the small business focus group claiming that students do not currently see the relevance of subjects they study at school and that there should be "a more directive approach to teaching these kids work force skills". These can be as simple as, knowing how to set your alarm clock; knowing how to read a bus timetable to get to work. One employer suggested Use examples that actually mean something."

Another employer from a large enterprise also believed the school curriculum was largely irrelevant to the workplace. Some young people slip through the system, while others come out with skills bearing little relation to what is needed: A school leaver can use a computer and not balance a budget.

Training courses also presented a problem. Enterprise Wanganui Managing Director, Geoff Hintz suggested that many courses focussed too closely on theory and did not engage in sufficient applied or hands-on training. He also pointed to the way in which government-funded 9.00 am to 3.00 pm courses did not adequately prepare students for the realities of the workplace, which might involve a 10- to 12-hour day.

Hintz said it had been a mistake to move away from the old apprenticeship system that taught basic work disciplines and foundation skills while training people in specific trades. He felt employers found the new apprenticeship system too difficult to cope with. For example, the new framework for the engineering industry consisted of 3,000 modules. Employers find it too hard and give up, resulting in a big gap in

training. While Industry Training Organisations (ITOs) work to some extent for the main centres, there is a lack of help in the provinces, which increases the training problem.

As mentioned previously, employers generally agreed they should not have to train people in basic life or literacy skills – this was the role of school or pre-employment courses:

[Employers] would expect them to come out ...not only with those foundation skills but also the ability to read a micrometer. To know the difference between millimetres and inches and gallons and litres or whatever. So that they come into the work place and at least understand the basic language and tools.

At the same time, there was considerable evidence that small business employers in particular, perhaps because they had less choice, were willing to give on-the-job training to those who demonstrated reliability and life skills. Although small employers, conscious of costs, felt the Government should help out:

We wouldn't mind training if it was recognised that it costs us money to do the training. I would rather subsidize employers than unemployment.

Employers in general were willing to up-skill current employees who had a good work ethic when new equipment or demands were present.

Most employers also saw specific workplace skills as their responsibility. For instance, an employer for a medium-sized enterprise was adamant: "if they can't read or write we are not going to employ them." However, he took responsibility for training in the skills necessary for selling, product information courses, and customer service programmes such as Kiwi Host courses. He also believed first aid and workplace safety training to be important responsibilities.

The two focus groups of large employers appeared to have different responses to training issues. One group recognised there were those who had become 'lost' in the school system and agreed there was increasing awareness of the need to support staff training in large organisations: There's nothing like a tight labour market also to drive up-skilling, because if you can't do it externally, you need to do it internally.

In one large organisation, staff training and up-skilling was seen as an “investment” in employees. The organisation had a full-time training coordinator and used an Associate Development Model (ADM) with all permanent employees starting at entry level with components for succeeding levels from line leaders or supervisors on. Mention was also made of businesses developing a relationship with an ITO such as Competenz so that staff acquired a transferable certificate of unit standards. Some of these larger employers were also using or had developed their own work-based training, parallel to NZQA courses.

In the second large employer focus group, however, little was said about staff education and training. One employer did speak of his company’s in-house training for customer service and so on, but commented, How much is taken in by the individual, we don’t know.

Overall, large employers (in common with other employers) seemed to prefer vocational context training related to specific competencies identified within the organisation or industry. Linked to this was an awareness of the possible benefits of working with vocational-based training providers such as ITOs.

While some employers spoke highly of individual training providers, most felt that workplace needs were not being adequately met by the current system. Enterprise Wanganui’s Geoff Hintz said there was no alignment between the New Zealand school system, the tertiary system, and the workplace.

New assessment and qualifications processes were seen as confusing and inadequate, and there was a general feeling that there were no benchmarks and schools had given up on measurement through tests and examinations.

Employers we spoke to from small businesses expressed some scepticism and perhaps lack of understanding of the NZQA. Laughter greeted the question, “Does NZQA understand the needs of the business situation?”<sup>1</sup> Not everyone was scathing, but no-one expressed satisfaction with NZQA, and among employers in larger businesses in particular there was a search for alternatives.

For the most part, small business employers had uneven experiences with workforce training providers. One employer had visited a training organisation with students, only to be met with resistance from the providers. There was general agreement that

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<sup>1</sup> Enterprise Wanganui was planning on running a course to help employers understand more of the NCEA system as the focus groups were being run.

it was important to find the right provider, but that this was a real dilemma for employers because there were so many providers to choose from. There was a sense that employers did not have enough information about providers and their programmes. Over-riding this, however, was the view that employers wanted a provider who would carry through and make sure training produced results for the individual worker.

One further issue for small employers was the way they were sent ill-matched or unsuitable potential employees from pre-employment programmes and Government agencies: It's exhausted us because we just haven't got the quality ... they haven't the standards. In particular, Work and Income was criticised for providing employers with ill-matched candidates: They'll send me 20 CVs with nothing like what I want.

Employers also expressed considerable dissatisfaction with and resistance to being sent the long-term unemployed as possible workers: Some of them are unemployable. I don't know that any amount of training would help.

### **Awareness of literacy issues and literacy training opportunities among employers**

As mentioned above, Enterprise Wanganui was aware of literacy issues in the community because of survey work the organisation had undertaken. Small businesses were also aware of the impact of low literacy. But because larger businesses representatives to whom we spoke either aimed at the top end of the market or had a wider (sometimes national) choice for employees, they were less aware of low levels of literacy as an issue.

One small business employer said training providers needed to publicise: "If I haven't heard of them and I regard myself as a responsible, you know, there'll be other people like me". Others were unaware that low literacy was a significant issue and it was of little relevance to them.

### **Community awareness of literacy training providers**

Even more than the employers, members of the wider Wanganui community showed a very low awareness of who provided literacy training. There was a wide range of generally inaccurate responses to this open-ended question, which probably linked to the fact (discussed above) that the community generally seemed to take literacy skills as a “given”:

- 55 respondents (13.8%) did not know;
- 121 respondents (30.25%) suggested tertiary institutions including ‘university’, ‘polytech’, UCOL, and Te Wānanga o Aotearoa.
- Secondary school courses of varying kinds (even though they are not providers in Wanganui) were regarded by a large proportion of the respondents (31.5%) as providing help;
- Interestingly, relatively few respondents thought of specialist literacy providers: 55 (13.5%) mentioned literacy trainers without specifying them. Only 42 or 10.5% of the sample identified (not always accurately) specific providers of literacy and numeracy services
- A few respondents mentioned family, friends, and a number of community and social support agencies.
- 3 respondents suggested potential clients should look in the newspaper; while 6 said such people would not seek help.

## **Community attitudes to training**

In the light of the acknowledged importance of constant upskilling, we asked community members, “What might make you personally decide to seek further training or education?” Most people would undertake further training for job-related reasons, but a significant number also mentioned personal development. Only 11% were clearly not interested in further education or training, and a small number indicated there were big barriers to their taking up training.

Over half (52.2%) the reasons respondents gave for being willing to take up further training were related to employment. Most were to improve job prospects, but 65 people said simply they would train to get a job. Other reasons were the demands of the current job or financial reasons. This finding is consistent with further analysis of the International Adult Literacy Survey, which states most people participating in adult training courses do so for professional or career-upgrading reasons (Culligan et al., 2004).

Over a quarter (28.3%) of reasons given for further education were related to personal growth, self-improvement, the desire to learn and interest; linked to these responses were those that mentioned helping others in various forms.

## Literacy training in Wanganui

The low profile of many literacy providers, and the turnover of active literacy providers in the region was the basis for initiating the provider survey in which 12 of the then estimated 13 organisations who fitted the description of “providing adult literacy training services as a programme or part of a programme” took part.

The main finding of the providers’ survey was the wide variety of ways in which literacy courses are taught in the Wanganui area. Below we list alphabetically the 12 providers surveyed and the type of service they provide; and then make some overall comments. Provider descriptions come from websites and interview material.

**1. Ag Challenge Training Centre** is one of Wanganui's longest serving Tertiary Institutes. The goal of Ag Challenge is to give students the skills to gain employment as well an introduction to the industry of their chosen career.

Ag Challenge Limited has specialist trainers in Automotive, Agriculture and Carpentry National Certificate programmes. Students are able to start the 44-week programmes at any time. Most training is hands on and students are able to experience the automotive, carpentry and agricultural industries as practical experience. Theory training is undertaken at the Ag Challenge Campus. Individual literacy and numeracy assistance is also available.

A fee paying Veterinary Nursing programme is offered in conjunction with Wanganui Veterinary Services where students are able to train in a working veterinary practice. Student loans and allowances are available. Part-time safety programmes (HSNO and agrichemicals) are also offered.

**2.** This service is part of the National Association of ESOL Home Tutor Schemes. **ESOL Home Tutors (Wanganui) Inc.** is overseen by the national association, although individual schemes are run differently according to the needs of learners in that area. The Wanganui scheme is governed by a local committee, which includes a co-coordinator, secretary, chairperson, and treasurer. The goals of the scheme are to provide English language and social support to migrants and refugees. Differences between people are valued.

Services are provided to speakers of other languages in Wanganui through both group classes and one to one home tutoring. The groups take place at the provider premises as well as in the community. They include a multicultural women's group, beginners and intermediate English language groups, 'New Zealand English' classes, and social events. The content taught is related to migrants' needs, such as dealing with banking, health, or immigration issues. Volunteer tutors trained in the Certificate in ESOL Home Tutoring provide one to one tuition within learners' homes, directed at their individual requirements.

**3. Land-Based Training** specialises in training for those who wish to work on the land. It is a private business with two owners, one of whom is the manager. Management determines the strategic directions and objectives of the business and meets regularly with staff. It operates from a number of sites across the North Island. The goals of Land-Based Training are to provide a pathway to knowledge and self-awareness leading to better employment; and to provide opportunities through work-based training. It also has a focus on building closer relationships and promoting successful career options within the agricultural and civil construction industries.

Retail, hospitality, administration, and many other areas are covered. Land-Based Training delivers a range of educational programmes, including the National Certificate in Agriculture Level 2, Introduction to the National Certificate in Employment Skills, National Certificate in Civil Construction Works, and Introduction to Horticulture. It also provides training in mixed employment skills, health and safety, marae trades, and vehicle licensing and endorsements. Teaching methods include classroom based work and workplace training.

Numeracy and literacy training is integrated into the courses, with one tutor providing much of the support. This includes 1:1 assistance and referral to a specialist Wanganui literacy provider.

**4.** One of 54 independently incorporated members of Literacy Aotearoa Inc., the local branch works closely with the head office in Auckland. **Literacy Aotearoa Whanganui** is a community organisation and a foundation skills training provider with New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) accreditation, and specialises in delivering services that meet the needs of the local community. As a member of Literacy Aotearoa, the local branch works in accordance with the national mission statement and definition.

A local governing committee is responsible for establishing policy, strategic direction, being gatekeepers of the organisations' kaupapa, good employment practices, and monitoring the effectiveness of the organisation. Management is charged with implementing agency plans within a quality management framework.

Literacy programmes are designed to meet the assessed literacy needs of each learner and tuition is provided to achieve negotiated learning goals. Learning is contextualised, provided in-house and within the community, and scopes the local business community, government departments, community organisations, Private Training Organisations, and community groups.

Literacy Aotearoa (Whanganui) provides a holistic learning service with the services of a Clinical Social Worker available to all learners. Core literacy services are provided at no direct cost to the learners and are delivered in ways that value the culture, gender, and age of the learner. Workplace literacy programmes are supported by the Tertiary Education Strategy.

Services include: literacy needs assessment/screening; workplace literacy needs assessment; pre-employment skills; computer skills; National Certificate in Employment Skills; workplace literacy programmes; literacy programmes – 1:1 and group; road safety programmes – learners and restricted licences; return to work support and mentoring; learner support for local private training organisations; clinical social worker support services; family/whanau literacy programmes; professional development support for local literacy tutors; Adult Literacy Research and Development Services.

**5. Literacy Training Limited** is a privately owned, specialist literacy provider based in Palmerston North but working throughout New Zealand. It is overseen by a Managing Director, with most of the day-to-day operations being dealt with by a Contracts Manager. Project leaders and tutoring staff work on individual contracts held with Government Departments or private businesses. The main goals of Literacy Training Limited are to: 1) Provide the opportunities for individuals to function within the community and their workplaces with the literacy and numeracy skills they require (through their contracts with government departments and business); 2) Give people a foundation for making real choices about their lives. They value strength and confidence within individuals and work to promote these.

Literacy Training Limited provides national and regionally based services in three areas: Work and Income clients, Prison-based services and Workplace Training. The prison-based services incorporate a variety of programmes for prisoners based around literacy and numeracy and employment skills. These are delivered through a variety of courses which have literacy training integrated within them. The Workplace Training service is negotiated individually with each employer. The Work and Income contract allows the individuals to develop their literacy, language and numeracy skills in a self directed or work linked capacity.

**6. SPELD New Zealand** is a not-for-profit organisation, which provides services to people of all ages with specific learning difficulties such as problems with spelling, reading, maths, handwriting, spatial skills, as well as attention deficits and various degrees of autism. Its overall objectives are to provide advocacy, assessment and



tutoring, and family support to those dealing with these difficulties. It has 29 member associations nation-wide, of which SPELD Wanganui is one. SPELD Wanganui is overseen by the National Association, but is governed at a local level by a committee comprising the president, secretary, treasurer, teacher, and parent representatives. The local committee makes operating decisions for the Wanganui Association and holds an open Annual General Meeting.

SPELD tutors aim to provide students with a feeling of self-worth, working from areas of strength to weakness, helping students to survive in a classroom, tertiary institution, and workplace. Registered educational testers first identify the students' areas of strength and weakness, and then plan remedial programmes based on these detailed assessments. SPELD provide tutoring on an individual basis. Progress is assessed at regular intervals. SPELD Wanganui provides two NZQA approved courses for parents, teachers, teacher aides, and those interested in specific learning disabilities.

**7. Sport and Recreation Wanganui (SRW)** is one of 17 Regional Sports Trusts throughout New Zealand and is active in the Wanganui, Rangitikei, Central, and Ruapehu Regions. SRW is managed by a locally appointed Board of Trustees. Management staff includes the CEO, an Operations Manager, and a Finance and Administration manager. All staff have input into developing the strategic direction for the trust. The purpose of this organisation is “to support and develop sport and physical activities through others to ensure the people of the Wanganui region sustain a healthy and active lifestyle”.

From the late 1990's until 2006, SRW operated a number of training courses as a Private Training Establishment. The provision of these courses reduced significantly over time with only one course, Mountain Sport and Recreation in Taumarunui, being offered between 2004 and 2006. The reduction in training courses was due to the changing nature of SRW's focus and the final Mountain Sport and Recreation Course was completed in June 2006.

The training courses provided aimed to prepare students for the workforce by providing foundation skills for employment or further learning. Training was provided within the sport fitness and physical recreation environment. Students were encouraged to work on their own physical fitness and received certificates in lifeguarding, customer service, sport fitness, and recreation. Courses were open to people of all ages and education levels. Those requiring additional assistance with literacy were referred to a local specialist literacy provider.

**8. Training For You Limited** is a Tertiary Education Organisation that aims to provide innovative programmes and inspire learning. Two Owner-Directors, one of whom is the managing director, govern Training For You. A programme supervisor who is a member of the management team leads each educational programme. This

team reports directly to the manager. Training For You values the individuality of all students, understands that each student is different and specialises in individual learning styles. Training For You staff believe that education is the key to empowerment, enabling students to create an optimistic future for themselves and their families.

Training For You delivers Training Opportunities (TOPS), STAR, Gateway, Youth, and Correspondence Programmes. Fulltime programmes include integrated literacy delivered by the course tutors supported by a dedicated literacy facilitator. Programmes include: National Certificates in Early Childhood Education and Care; Employment Skills; Horse Skills, and a Certificate in Teacher Aiding. Training For You has a well-resourced Student Learning Centre staffed by three specialist literacy tutors providing 1:1 assistance to all students and the delivery of 13 credits from NCEA level 2 English. Students with high literacy needs are able to access additional assistance above the standard provision of 1:1. Training For You has training sites in Wanganui, New Plymouth, and Palmerston North. All programmes have practical components, allowing students to link theory taught in the classroom environment to real life work situations.

**9. Tupoho Whanau Trust** is an iwi-based organisation, focussing on the needs of local Māori. Tupoho has three bases across the region. The Wanganui branch covers the bottom part of the region. It is governed by a Board of Trustees and is part of the WHAMPTE network. The vision of Tupoho Whanau Trust is to 'build a vibrant, robust and prosperous iwi, culturally, socially and economically.' Its kaupapa is 'To protect, nurture and educate all learners who attend Tupoho Whanau Trust Education and Training Establishment' (Programme pamphlets, Tupoho Whanau Trust).

Tupoho delivers literacy services to learners in conjunction with its other programmes, if required. The programmes are:

- Fishing (a set programme of 30 hours a week).
- Individual Pathways (up to 15 students at a time, for 44 teaching weeks) focusing on whatever is required by the student, with literacy integrated if required.
- Active Employment Assistance (WINZ funded), which assists with whatever, is required for the person to obtain a job such as obtaining subsidies or training in a specific skill.
- A new programme began in July whose focus is foundation learning. The aim is to improve literacy, numeracy, and communication skills. The programme is flexible, enabling tutoring to be done in both group and/or one on one situations.

**10. UCOL (the Universal College of Learning)** is a government-funded Institute of Technology with 4 campuses in the North Island. It is governed by the UCOL

Council who are responsible for preparing the charter and profile that ensures UCOL is managed according to these, and for appointing a chief executive. Wanganui management staff includes a campus principal who has overall responsibility for the learning centre, and programme leaders in different faculties.

UCOL has an open access policy for students over school leaving age. It aims to provide a tertiary education to all students that will enable them to find employment. Courses are offered in the areas of fashion, computer graphics, fine arts, creative industries, business, nursing, hospitality, catering, tourism, hairdressing, construction, and welding.

UCOL provides a range of student support services including academic counselling and learning support. Personal Education Plans are provided to support and guide students when choosing careers and educational options. The Learning Support Service employs a literacy tutor to see those with difficulties either in small groups or 1:1. The assistance provided here can include: time management, memory retention, computer skills, assignment writing skills, grammar and English as a second language, and extra tuition in subjects such as maths. Students can also access the accessibility Coordinator, counsellors, a nurse, and a doctor at the Health Centre. At Whanganui UCOL, the Learning Support Staff work in A10, opposite the Information and Enrolment Centre on the Main Campus in Campbell Street.

**11. Waiora Christian Community Trust** is a Christian organisation governed by a Board of Trustees. The Board develops the strategic planning and vision for the organisation, while operational decisions are made by the management team, which includes the CEO, Education Manager, and administrator. Waiora aims to provide the information required by students to move forward in life and fulfil their goals.

Waiora delivers services within a strong Christian focus. These include Youth Programmes, a retail TOPS Programme, Alternative Education Programmes, and a Literacy Programme, which covers 4 stages up to NCES level. Waiora has made use of self-directed learning materials in the past. Literacy assistance is integrated within programmes and a part-time literacy tutor is employed to help students with very low literacy levels.

**12. YMCA Wanganui** is an autonomous non-profit organisation whose goals are to support families and youth, to make training opportunities accessible to all, and to fill gaps in the community. YMCA Wanganui is part of a national body, but is governed at a local level by a voluntary board. Management staff includes the executive director and three managers. YMCA promotes a set of values, which are integrated into each programme, and all participants are expected to abide by these. These are: caring, respect, honesty, bi-culturalism, responsibility, and enjoyment of life.

The training courses provided by YMCA Wanganui are: National Certificates in Furniture Making, Employment Skills, Meat Processing; Business Administration and Computing; and Workplace Learning. The YMCA also offers 'Y's Learning' (including life skills, communication, and literacy skills), a Certificate in Supported Employment, and the conservation Corps. Alternative education programmes are delivered for young people alienated from mainstream schooling, as well as a Young Parents' Programme. Numeracy and literacy assistance is integrated throughout programmes and 'roving' literacy tutors provide additional assistance within classes. Teaching takes place in a variety of locations, for example in classrooms on provider premises, during camps, or at a separate house (programme for young parents).

## **A composite picture of Wanganui providers**

All providers were NZ Qualifications Authority accredited or had accreditation pending in August 2004. Providers had been operating in Wanganui from 2 months to 20 years. Client numbers varied from five to 500. Most providers said clients stayed 1 to 2 years, for others the stay was 6 to 12 months, and the shortest reported stay was under 5 weeks.

It was difficult to describe a 'typical' literacy client, but we noted the following. Across the board 58% of clients were female but the ratio of males to females varied widely among providers. Only 15% of clients had English as second language. Client demographics reflected government funding: two thirds were either unemployed or taking part in unpaid work. Only 4.5% were in full-time work. Further, over a third of the clients were between 16 and 19 years old, and just over a quarter were aged 20–29, with numbers tailing off fairly rapidly so that only 1% were aged over 60.

The majority of providers also delivered services specific to target groups including Māori and those receiving welfare benefits. Many clients' literacy needs had been identified by other agencies. Work and Income referrals accounted for a quarter all of clients, although a further quarter was 'self referred'. Seventy-one percent of students were funded by external agencies; about two-thirds of those were funded by the TEC.

## **Training needs as providers see them**

Providers were asked to identify what they saw as the most frequently seen literacy needs of clients. Maths was reported by 11 of the 12 providers and nine mentioned reading, writing, and spelling. Communication skills and needs to build confidence were also mentioned.

Five of the twelve providers reported that they taught predominantly work-related skills, four taught predominantly general literacy skills (defined as reading, writing, numeracy, and problem solving), and another four said they taught both. Most providers preferred the integrated approach to teaching literacy. It is interesting to note that, in a separate discussion, tutors of skills for one organisation said they felt ill-prepared to integrate literacy training into their teaching.

Five of the providers said that training for a job was a main motivation for students to improve their literacy, with four talking about the importance of tutor support and expertise. Other 'motivators' mentioned by several providers were 'peer influence', 'self-awareness', 'a desire to better themselves' and 'to help family members'. More than 80% of students finished their courses and the most frequently mentioned reason for non-completion was 'personal reasons'. About 30% did not finish the course because they had reached the goal of a job. One theme that came out of the interviews was that Government funders need to recognise that many literacy students require further training, rather than moving straight into employment as an outcome of their course.

## **Other provider needs**

The providers reported a number of funding and resourcing issues. Of those funded on the basis of client numbers, half saw their funding as insufficient. A quarter of the providers felt they were not able to see their clients as frequently as necessary. A lack of funding was seen as the major challenge for the majority (60%) of providers, with more money needed for resources, programmes, and staff training. A range of other challenges were referred to, including the necessity to address multicultural needs, the need for standard assessment tools, and the changing nature of literacy in relation to technology.

Many other suggestions for changes to funding were also made including: funding for counsellors; funding aimed at in specific areas such as employing qualified tutors; funding for advertisers. Providers mentioned the need for proper pay and

recognition of tutors, and the need for a professional body. Providers also commented that full funding was needed, as were funds to recognise the complexity of the work and the additional social support that was often required, as well as the need for funding contracts to be more transparent and to last longer than 1 year. The volatility of funding is reflected in one organisation reporting that a staff member left in the last year because “[Work and Income] pulled funding for the position”. However, most providers reported new staff had joined because of new job opportunities (with one reporting a position “specifically funded by [Work and Income]”).

## **How participants see their training**

Participants’ response to their training reflected the diversity of courses they were attending. The most frequently mentioned positive aspect of their training was one-to-one tutoring. One participant said this worked better for him than group work where he would be ‘cheating’ by ‘sitting back’. For him the main benefit was immediate feedback: “We’d work on that to get it right until I could learn it”. And the result was transforming: “once that door opened up in the ground, it’s just unlimited what I could do”.

Another respondent, with humiliating school experiences and self-confessed behavioural problems, has found one-on-one tutoring a safe and trustworthy space. A further participant also compared the experience to school where teachers had always been too busy. One-on-one teaching has built confidence and she now feels worthy of someone’s attention: “That’s why I’m so happy in this place ... there’s a lot of encouragement”. For another respondent, who admitted he was easily distracted, the primary benefit of one-on-one tutoring is in keeping him focused. While for another, the gain was learning at his own pace.

However, two responses indicated that one-on-one training is not for everyone. One said he would have ‘hated to be the only one’ when he first started training. It worked for him to be in a group with two others where, importantly for his confidence, they were at the same level.

The only directly negative comment about one-on-one tutoring was from a student uncomfortable with close attention. The friendly atmosphere of group work was his clear preference.

About a quarter of the participants mentioned their tutors when asked to comment on significant aspects of the course. Several commented on tutors' approachability and the respect they gave students. One participant who had discovered about his learning style from a former tutor had to challenge his new tutor insisting that the tutor showed, rather than told him: "Actions, for me, speak louder than words". This approach worked: "since then we've never looked back".

Some found their tutors to be a mixed bunch, but only three comments were openly critical of tutors. One participant thought one tutor was "really cool" and another, "a bit of a grump", largely because the tutor did not take seriously the student's health problems that caused absences from the course. Another student was cynical about a tutor who "just wanted people to be on his course so he could have a job. So I thought, 'Oh, stuff this'". One other negative comment simply labelled a certain tutor as "a hypocrite" but this is balanced with affirmation of other staff, one of whom is found to be "quite cool".

Courses were seen as beating the boredom factor of staying at home – a reflection of the fact that many participants were beneficiaries. However, this also made it important that courses were appealing: "I'm finding it quite interesting. So it's actually ... as far as motivation goes ... I want to actually be here".

As well as the hope of getting jobs, courses also provided learning in life skills. As one participant said: "The routine took a bit of getting used to ... It's teaching me to be a bit more patient and think before I just go out and do things, just think it through a bit more".

For many participants, their appreciation of courses is in sharp contrast to earlier educational experiences, particularly of secondary school. While a number feel their courses are not giving them much help, others found their training to be life-changing: "I get a buzz out of just reading something new and finding out something... The experience is unbelievable".

When participants were asked about training as preparation for work, a significant number spoke about the confidence, hope and resolve that had resulted from the course. Two respondents made comparisons with on-the-job training they had received in previous workplaces and how empowering their course has been. For another, whose limited education had long held him back, being forced to take a preparatory course has made a difference: "I'm doing what I should have been doing back when I was 14, 15, 16. But it's cool".

Four participants said they were there for the qualifications; others were very enthusiastic about the practical benefits of the course.

## **Conclusions/Implications**

### **Awareness, marketing, and promotion**

The findings of the community survey show a low awareness of the need for functional literacy skills for employment, with only 5% of respondents indicating that reading, writing, or numeracy skills were important for gaining employment. Yet when prompted, respondents agreed overwhelmingly that the 'traditional', basic skills of reading, writing and 'adding' are necessary for employment. Overall, however, the difference between the unprompted skills (where literacy was identified by few) and the prompted responses supporting the link between literacy and employment indicates strongly that most in the community take adult literacy skills for granted and assume they are held by most people. This in turn suggests that both the Government and providers need to publicise and raise community awareness of adult literacy as a major issue in our society and a basic prerequisite to employment.

The level of awareness of literacy training providers was also an issue. The community in particular had little idea of where people with literacy needs could seek help, and employers (who were more inclined than the community to see that low literacy was a problem) were little better in this regard. Some literacy providers in the region have indicated they are not well known to the public and the results of the community survey appear to bear this out. This is an important finding in the light of Government efforts to tackle adult literacy issues and improve outcomes.

These findings show there is not only scope but a necessity for a specialist research project examining the marketing of 'literacy,' potentially including a critical analysis of current methods and development of alternative terminology and branding based on participants' own perceptions of their needs and course benefits. Such a project, combined with a test-marketing experiment and marketing-related interviews with current and potential participants, community leaders, and marketing experts, would provide an overall picture of the ways in which greater and better awareness can be created of the nature of available learning opportunities. A significant part of such a



research project could consist of addressing the cross-cultural context in which such marketing often takes place.

Linked to the marketing and promotion of literacy issues and providers, are the issues about the way 'literacy' is perceived. Adult literacy participants did not generally define 'literacy' as encompassing life or fundamental skills. Many respondents either associated the word 'literacy' with functional definitions (the 3 R's) or some sort of deficit, or did not know what it could mean. This reaction indicates that care needs to be taken when using the word 'literacy' in the marketing or promoting adult literacy programmes, as participants, employers, and the wider community may associate these programmes with a deficit functional skills view.

Many of the adult literacy programme participants acknowledged that they received wider skills from their programme of choice, with some mentioning time management, punctuality, confidence, motivation, and a better attitude. It seems that the kinds of skills wanted by employers are being provided in a number of literacy and training schemes, despite the general avowed purpose of such training.

In concert, employers nominated forms of 'work ethic' or foundation skills as their primary requirement in employees. Aspects of this work ethic were described as attitude, reliability, integrity, practicality, initiative, willingness to learn, insight, and adaptability. The employers' prioritising of work ethic forms a parallel with the results of the community survey of perceived employment needs, which similarly prioritised work ethic and foundation skills in the unprompted responses.

One implication of this research and a consideration for promotion of adult literacy programmes is that further research is needed to investigate how better to publicise providers' programmes so as to strengthen employers' sense of the alignment between providers and workplace needs.

### **Improved alignment between school, tertiary, and workforce systems**

Significantly, all employer groups suggested that literacy problems are systemic. Small business employers claimed such problems were not only systemic, but entrenched, and advocated that schools take a much more directive approach in preparing students for the workforce. This position reinforces the view put by the

employers' representative –that there is a lack of alignment between the school system, the tertiary system, and the New Zealand workforce. Linked to this view was the claim that the education system has done a disservice to young people by pushing them towards university rather than preparing them for trades or other forms of work that might better suit their abilities.

Employers focused on the need for basic foundation or life skills, which they feel are not being taught in today's society. Some of the foundation/life skills and communication skills desired by employers are scattered in various parts of the qualifications framework but they are rarely the focus of training. While providers are aware of the importance of foundation and/or life skills, and do address these areas in their programmes, funding mechanisms restrict the ability to address these within a strict time frame. Also, the vocationally based literacy programmes are usually funded based on employment outcomes – the number of participants who have obtained employment by a pre-determined follow-up date. However, it has to be noted here that employment is a big 'carrot'. Participants frequently sought employment from their courses, and for the majority of community members, employment demands were described as the main reason they would consider further training.

A further issue is raised when trainees do obtain jobs. In this case, their training generally ceases, as only larger companies can afford to offer on-the-job training for anything but immediately needed specific skills. While Government policy reflects an acknowledgment of the need for lifelong learning in a knowledge economy, subsequent implementation of Government funding appears to be based largely on the perception of a national "deficit" in terms of adult literacy being viewed as functional literacy skills. Policy is geared to raising literacy standards by the enhanced recognition of individual need, a more coherent delivery system, and better measurement of teaching success.

Future directions could be perhaps forged by funding for a more flexible delivery of continued training in the workplace, including some form of employer compensation. A number of the participants were experiencing the positive benefits of formal learning for the first time; and this could be built on. In our view, lifelong learning remains a critical part of the solution to persisting low adult literacy.

All this perhaps begs the question of who is responsible for training or teaching life skills and a work ethic and should, or indeed can this be educational or training organisations? The task of teaching literacy is not a simple one, especially when providers in general are teaching these skills in conjunction with other specific workplace training skills in an integrated model. While integration is preferred by

vocational providers as it helps participants see the relevance of the literacy skills they are learning, this can provide challenges of its own. Providers recognise a funding shortfall in providing resources and staff training, with Government-funding shifting and short term, and based on outcomes that might differ in subsequent years. This seems an inadequate basis to meet the skills shortage identified by employers, and is a poor model for providing the on-going training needed by a number of clients. Further, while providers do report sharing information and resources with other providers, the competitive model of funding also does not encourage the Government's expressed desire to achieve collaboration amongst providers.

Given the current tight labour market, it becomes increasingly necessary for all employers to deal with adult literacy needs. Do employers expect too much when they take on a young person in the hope of only having to provide limited on the job training? Do we need some more formal initial training system perhaps with a contract outlining the responsibilities of both employer and employee supported by some form of government funding? While employment of those with low literacy levels appears to be an issue mainly for SME's (generally because larger enterprises hire graduates and can afford to advertise and hire at regional, national, or international levels), the backing of middle and large business employers is crucial to create positive changes and advancement of adult literacy. While this backing is evident in many of the initiatives in the main centres, and is equally important throughout New Zealand, it is of specific importance to the Wanganui district.

## Future Directions

### Current investigations in the Literacy and Employment programme

At the time of publication, the Literacy and Employment Team was undertaking the following projects:

- A second survey of adult literacy training providers with the aim of exploring in more depth the issues and challenges such providers face in the Wanganui and District region. This survey will also offer a more thorough understanding of how these providers operate and the services that they provide.
- A series of approximately 30 follow-up interviews with participants in adult literacy and numeracy training 1 year on from the initial interview.
- A series of approximately 30 interviews with new participants in adult literacy and numeracy training 1 year on from the first set of participant interviews.
- An iwi-based research project exploring issues including ancestral literacy and bi-literacy within the traditional rohe of River iwi was conducted over 2004 and 2005. A report on this project is currently being compiled.
- An e-survey of employers in the Wanganui region exploring their views on employment skills, barriers to literacy, and the processes within their organisation for hiring or working with those with literacy issues.
- Managing/Undertaking/Organising/Investigating focus groups with Wanganui stakeholders and community agencies to gather their perspectives on literacy and employment issues.
- Undertaking a focus group with Wanganui and District literacy practitioners on their perceived needs as practitioners.
- Exploring, through an action research project, the use of self-reflection methodologies within a literacy training programme. An investigation is underway to determine whether these methodologies and others enhance perceived learning of literacy skills, and general learning within the programme. The first phase of data collection has occurred, and planning for the second iteration is now under way.
- Organising a family literacy action research project that aims to introduce and encourage parents to share books and literacy activities with their children in a school setting. The first phase of this research will begin with a

few parents and children; the aim is that all Year Zero and Year One children will one day become involved as part of the school system.

- Undertaking a case study that explores the experiences and impacts on employment and life in general for those who worked with Enhanced Task Force Green in Wanganui and Districts. This case study makes use of in-depth interview and focus group methods and includes participants in ETFG, as well as those who oversaw its development and implementation.

### **Future investigations planned for the Literacy and Employment programme**

- A family literacy project is proposed to take place within a prison setting to encourage incarcerated parents to share books and literacy activities with their children. This is not only to enhance the experience of literacy for both parent and child, but also to enhance the bond parent and child share that may be weakened by the distance of incarceration.
- A proposed formative evaluation of the development of a workplace literacy programme.
- A case study employing an in-depth investigation into self-care unit inmates and their experiences with literacy is proposed.

## Appendix A: 2005 Literacy and Employment Reports

### *2005 FRST Report Series – ISSN 1176-9807*

Sligo, F., Comrie, M., Olsson, S., Culligan, N., & Tilley, E. (2005). *Barriers to adult literacy: A discussion paper*. Palmerston North: Massey University. ISBN 0-9582646-0-0.

Comrie, M., Olsson, S., Sligo, F., Culligan, N., Tilley, E., Vaccarino, F., & Franklin, J. (2005). *Perceptions, needs and issues: A discussion paper*. Palmerston North: Massey University. ISBN 0-9582646-1-9.

Neilson, D. & Culligan, N. (2005). *Provider survey – phase one: The provision of adult literacy services in Wanganui*. Palmerston North: Massey University. ISBN 0-9582646-2-7.

Culligan, N. (2005). *Theoretical understandings of adult literacy: A literature review*. Palmerston North: Massey University. ISBN 0-9582646-3-5.

### *Further publication*

Franklin, J., Olsson, S., Comrie, M., Sligo, F., Culligan, N., Tilley, E., & Vaccarino, F. (2005). *Wanganui and districts employers' perspectives on literacy and employment*. Palmerston North: Massey University. ISBN 0-9582646-4-3.

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