

Message from the Chair

This year at Dartmouth Learning has been a year of many changes within the organization. After many years dedicated to Dartmouth Learning Network, our executive director Alison O’Handley moved on to pursue other opportunities.

Under Alison’s direction, we looked inward as an organization, and with help of all the staff, identified changes to how we operate that allowed for greater accountability to you, our stakeholders, and more time for us as a board to focus on improvement and growth as an organization.



Once Alison announced her intention to depart, she helped us and staff welcome and transition Veronica McNeil as our interim executive director. For those of you that don’t know Veronica, she has extensive experience in the Dartmouth and Halifax non-profit sector and comes from her more recent role as director of operations at Boys and Girls Club. With Alison’s part-time help, Veronica moved into her role quickly and has helped maintain a consistent and quality service for all of our learners. The thing that I have appreciated the most about our success this year is how committed and hard-working our staff are, despite all the added challenges to their day-to-day life. Thank you Karen, Tammy, Brent, Gbone, Amanda, Jim, and Adele! And thank you Alison for your strong commitment to the organization.

This year has been an exceptional year at Dartmouth Learning Network. Program registrations rebounded strongly after years of Covid disruptions. The GED program supported forty-five learners this year to successfully complete individual tests and five learners obtained their GED certificates! Our Tutor Matching program hit a five-year high with twenty-seven volunteer tutors matched with learners, providing that extra help to ensure learners achieved their academic goals. United Way Halifax recognized our new online learning platform [MovingOnUp](#) with a substantial grant that will enable DLN to expand the content, efficiency, and access to this free, online adult learning resource.

I would like to thank our volunteers, staff, funders, and partners within the community for their ongoing support and engagement in literacy. Each of you plays a pivotal role in our ongoing efforts to ensure that everyone has the skills they need to reach their learning and career goals.

2022-2023 Dartmouth Learning Network Board Members: Jennie Sanford, Chair; Phil Pelrine, Treasurer; Trevor Nichols, Richa Grewal, Nancy Walters, Daniel Turpin, Denice Levangie.

Message from the Executive Director



The Dartmouth Learning Network has emerged from the restrictive pandemic years into what feels like a spring garden after a refreshing rain. Learners have returned to our classroom spaces in growing numbers, volunteers have applied in record numbers to support learners, programs are re-engaging with the community, and learner field trips resumed with visits to cultural spaces in the community. We feel a refreshing sense of growth, exploration, and the ability to dream of possibilities.

I am grateful to Alison O’Handley, our former executive director, for her generous support and guidance as I assumed this new role at DLN. She helped provide reflections that are highlighted in this year’s report. One of note is our partnership with NSSAL (Nova Scotia School of Adult Learning) to develop and deliver a new Essential Skills program that consists of courses in digital literacy, stress management, skills and interest identification, community building, and employability. These courses all contribute to DLN’s holistic approach of supporting individuals to establish concrete action plans to attach to the labour market or further education after a significant gap in participation. DLN also launched Aptitude Prep classes, which have helped learners get individual support in writing aptitude tests for things like the Canadian Armed Forces and Firefighting Service.

Our agency team also underwent a period of change as we bid farewell this year to some beloved staff members: Alison O’Handley, Executive Director Gail Thistle, Tutor Coordinator, and Lyssa Steponaitis, Instructor have pursued new opportunities this year. In addition to myself, DLN welcomed Tammy Shields as Community Learning Coordinator, Gbone Okunaiya as Instructor and Family Literacy Coordinator, Adele Megann as Instructor, Reading Strategies, and Jim Ryan as GED Instructor. As DLN welcomed many new faces, it is very grateful for long-serving staff members Karen Janik, Admin Coordinator and instructors Amanda Sabo and Brent MacPhee who, in addition to supporting learners, have also provided stability and guidance for staff and volunteers of Dartmouth Learning Network.

I am grateful to the learners, staff, volunteers and Board of the Dartmouth Learning Network for a warm welcome and I look forward to a full, productive and fun year ahead.

Veronica McNeil, Interim Executive Director

Community Learning Program

The Community Learning Program (CLP) offers free, one-to-one tutoring for adults who want to improve their reading, writing, math, or computer skills, or prepare to write GED tests. Adult learners are matched with an adult volunteer tutor to meet on a regular basis to work on their learning goals.

First I would like to say thank you to my predecessor Gail Thistle for making my transition into DLN in December 2022 a smooth one. Gail laid the foundation for the CLP for 2022-2023 and it has been my honor to take the reins of the program.

There have been so many successes this year to talk about with you. Over the course of the year, Dartmouth Learning Network has been supported by almost 30 volunteers who have supported our learners in working towards their learning goals. We have had 27 one-to-one matches as well as 3 volunteers who provided many hours of support to our various classes.



Two of our CLP learners this year have successfully completed their GED, with support from their volunteer tutors. In this photo it's hard to tell who is happier, the learner or the tutor! Congratulations! This success will help both learners work toward their long-term goal of going to NSCC in September 2023.

More and more adult learners are looking for digital skills support and our digital skills volunteers are often matched with many learners throughout the year. In 2023 alone we had 6 learners meet their digital learning goals.

Digital inclusion is an issue that was exacerbated by the pandemic.

We are happy to be referral partners with GEO Nova Scotia (Getting Everyone Online), supporting our learners to have access to technology and access to the internet.



Tutoring can take place in a variety of formats. Some tutor matches happen at DLN, some matches happen virtually, and others at community locations. It goes without saying that we have flexible volunteers, which makes learning so much easier for our adult learners.

This year marked the return of our educational field trips, community celebrations, and our famous potlucks! Having volunteers and learners back in our DLN space has been so rewarding! As the CLP coordinator, my biggest highlight in celebrations was our Volunteer Appreciation Spring Party! Growing was the theme as we have grown together this year and it was such an honor to be able to give our dedicated volunteers some plants to take home and enjoy!

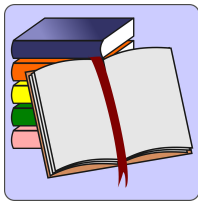


This year many of our new tutors and I participated in the Literacy Practitioner training. Being new to the role, I wanted to experience the training so that I can support tutors in the future in taking this training. I want to send a shout out to LNS for providing CLOs with such amazing training year after year!

Adult Learning Programs (Levels I & II)

Communications

In Communications, learners gain academic and essential skills necessary for life and work. Learning and improving early literacy and phonemic skills is the primary focus of our Communications classes. Small class sizes and individual learning plans combine with structured literacy, Orton-Gillingham methodology, and practical applications to provide learners with tools, benchmarks, and ongoing motivation to advance in their learning goals. Learners practiced decoding the written word from individual words to sentences and books, as well as encoding sounds, spelling, and writing.



Regular activities, such as Reading Mondays, focused on reading comprehension strategies like finding the main idea, comparing and contrasting, and sequencing. Writing Wednesdays focused on writing strategies from parts of speech and simple sentences to the art of persuasive writing.

The opportunity to practice and apply new skills is important to adult learners, so some lessons focused on activities like grocery shopping, food security, writing projects, and online communications. Others focused on projects to mark important issues such as Treaty Day, Novella study of Wenjack, and Black History Month. Field trips were a highlight and focused on learners visiting cultural spaces in the city, such as Pier 21.



The Reading Strategies program supports learners in ALP I, II, and GED programs. Students made a deep dive into the English language. Using the Orton-Gillingham approach to structured literacy, students learned to recognize and explain vowels and consonants. They learned about the kinds of syllables before learning how to divide words into syllables.

*"I feel I improved the most
in reading because I did it
every day."
- learner*

Instead of guessing words, students learned the sounds of letters and how letters are combined to make different sounds. For example, a syllable that has a single vowel followed by a consonant has a short vowel sound; a syllable with the pattern vowel-consonant – E probably has a long sound. Students learned guides for making spelling choices, like when to use C or K. Lots of practice helps to reach mastery and build confidence.

We also worked on vocabulary. Students explored Latin and Greek root words and learned how to combine them with prefixes and suffixes to understand longer words. Take the English words tractor, distract, attract, and subtraction. Don't they make more sense when you know that tract is the Latin word for pull?

We found out that English reading, spelling, and vocabulary make sense if only you know the secrets!

Math Club

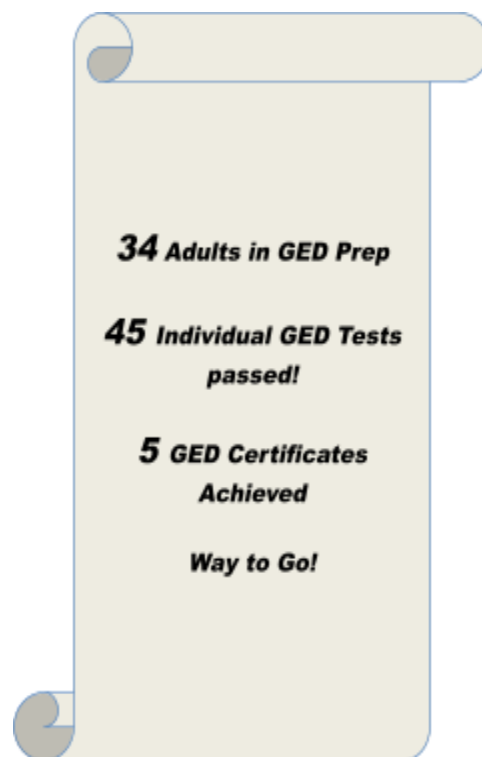
This year in Math Club, we started by giving our learners a diagnostic test provided by an online math program. Once that was complete, the program would select lessons and work based on filling in their learning gaps and needs. The program uses a Smart Score that marks for confidence and provides good feedback as the learner progresses through the practice problems. It was very successful and the learners enjoyed using it.

At the beginning of every math class, and after break, we would play a card game as a group to get everyone warmed up and comfortable. We played Crazy Eights, 21, Poker, and Bingo. One of the nice things about these card games is that the learning meets the learner where they are. If they are learning addition, they can add cards, and if they are working on probability, they can estimate the probability of getting the card they want. We improved our skills while having fun.

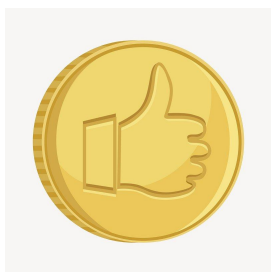
GED

The GED is an internationally recognized high school equivalency testing program. One of the most common misconceptions about the GED is the testing. There are actually five tests that are written one by one. Our adult learners generally tackle tests in the following order: Science, Language Arts – Reading, Language Arts – Writing, Science, and Math. We work with students to come up with a plan that meets their individual needs and goals. We have had students that attend regular classes and complete most of their work in class and we also support students that choose to do most of their learning at home, perhaps with the support of a tutor.

Some GED learners participated in Reading Strategies classes to help them prepare for the reading and writing tests. We reviewed vocabulary, comprehension, and punctuation, as well as how to structure sentences, paragraphs, and essays. Students that passed the Language Arts tests found that the review of literacy skills directly supported their ability to succeed in GED testing.



... a learner shared with us that getting their GED is the ONE thing in life that they have done all on their own. They shared that having a volunteer tutor has changed their life for the better, giving them an independence that they didn't know was possible.



A huge smile came across their face as they shared that yesterday was the first time they didn't need help from a family member to go to the bank and pay their phone bill.

Aptitude Testing

We now offer Aptitude Testing Preparation for standardized exams like the RCMP Aptitude Test, Firefighting Aptitude Test, and the Canadian Forces Aptitude Test (CFAT). The Canadian Forces has partnered with DLN to support its members in upgrading their education and improving their ability to rise through the ranks. We can focus on individual learner needs to help them prepare for and write aptitude tests, which can open doors to new employment opportunities. One learner in this program recently wrote his CFAT and scored better than 85% of the other members who wrote the test. He was hoping to change trades and because of his hard work and good score on the CFAT, he was advised that he could pursue any trade he wanted.



Essential Skills

Essential Skills is a broad framework of programs designed to develop transferable skills to help learners participate fully in the community, at work, and at school. Programs focus on developing skills like:

- Finding and using information;
- Communicating ideas and information;
- Understanding and using numbers;
- Using digital technology;
- Managing learning and engaging with others.

Throughout the year, learners built resilience and mindful strategies through exploring personal strengths, skills, and interests. They also built portfolios, used technology to explore websites and community resources, developed learning and career portfolios, developed SMART goals, learned First Aid & CPR, and discovered learning styles and personality dimensions. Participants described positive outcomes such as positive communication strategies, stress management, self esteem building, and self-awareness of personal, professional, and transferable skills.

In this program, learners developed computer skills by finding information through online research, using digital technology to build marketable skills such as WHMIS, Skills Pass, and BlueDrop. Learners built a website on Google Sites to showcase creative writing while also working on digital skills.

Digital Literacy

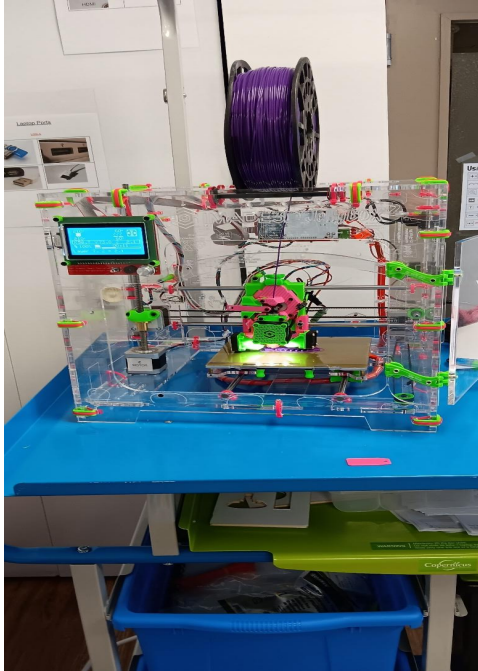
Dartmouth Learning Network offers two digital literacy programs: Basic Digital Skills and Computer Applications.

Computer Basics used Northstar Digital Literacy to reinforce basic concepts learned in class as well as to normalize self-directed learning. Starting with the basic hardware and location of all features, learners became comfortable and competent in understanding computer features.

Many accessibility options were identified and utilized to support diverse learners and create a welcoming classroom community where peer helpers and DLN volunteers were a regular part of the learning. Learners develop typing skills by using ED Club Typing Club and participating in monthly typing assessments for certificates. Learners explored virtual meeting platforms like Zoom and Google Meet for personal and professional use. The biggest outcome for this class was a significant reduction or removal of the fear that many people new to computers have about their new machine. By demonstrating how computers and technology are necessary and fun tools in our world, learners were able to use games and humour to create an open learning environment where everyone felt supported and recognized for new learning.

Computer Applications is a natural extension for learners who are comfortable using computers and want to learn more about the practical benefits that can arise from computer applications. This class builds upon the foundations learned in Computer Basics and provides a safe environment for learners to take risks and try new things under the supervision of an instructor. Learners expanded their computer vocabulary and used Google's Applied Digital Skills to self-direct project-based learning according to personal interests or goals. Personal projects were developed, such as creating a poster on Google Docs for a missing pet or filling out a form online to make a doctor's appointment. Learners used tools like Padlet and Google Jamboard to share ideas in real time and explored Artificial Intelligence and Chat GPT to create unique pieces of writing or art. Learners explored QR codes and how to create and use them, studied digital security and privacy, running regular scans in class with Chrome extensions, and discussed the threats, risks, and benefits of online shopping. There were many games and lots of fun along the way, such as starting the class with learners working together to solve the day's WORDLE puzzle.

3D Printer Project



Dartmouth Learning Network is excited to announce that on May 18th, 2023, our 3D printer came to life!

The first production was a flexible fish - one of many we saw over the next few days.

This learning project started in December 2021 with the arrival of a box with MANY pieces. Participants in the Essential Skills program began the huge task of assembly.

DLN learner "D" has consistently led the way by learning all of the technical know-how required to build and then operate the 3D printer.

"I've never done anything like this before," reflects D.

The DLN team is very proud to recognize our Essential Skills participants and especially the leadership and learning that D has brought to this new and exciting project. A big thanks also to instructor Amanda and everyone who worked on this great project.

The 3D printer project has opened doors for other learning activities for DLN participants, so stay tuned for more updates on the DLN's exciting new venture.

Family Literacy and Family Fun with Phonics

The Dartmouth Learning Network receives support for family literacy initiatives from the Nova Scotia School of Adult Learning (NSSAL) and the Family Learning Initiative Endowment Fund (FLIEF). This year we offered a blended learning model of in-person and online family literacy workshops.



We also hosted a community Family Literacy Day on January 28, 2023 in Dartmouth North, in partnership with BGC Halifax, Dartmouth North club site.

1. Raising Math and Literacy Thinkers Workshops

In partnership with the North Grove and Parents and Children Together (PACT), two organizations that serve families in Dartmouth North, the Family Literacy program hosted three interactive, parent-child workshops for families with preschool children. Two workshops were hosted at The North Grove and the third workshop was hosted by PACT.

*"I learned
lots of things
to teach my
son"
... parent*

Eight families and their preschoolers attended these facilitated sessions to learn, share, and practice new ideas to develop early literacy skills with their young children. Families created bonds with other parents in the community and some families new to the community made great connections to local family and children resources.

2. Family Fun with Phonics

The Family Literacy program also offered an online option: the Family Fun with Phonics program. The first cohort of programming was from October 2022 to February 2023. It had 12 families and 20 children.

*"It gave me
confidence to
help teach my
child"
...parent*

The second cohort ran from March 2023 to May 2023. It had 9 families and 12 children.

In the Family Fun with Phonics program, families were provided with take-home craft materials. These were complemented by online links and resources to guide weekly phonics learning for children. We also had a special guest come on the Facebook platform to read a popular kids' book. Finally, families in the first cohort received paid access to the Jolly Phonics application, which serves as both reinforcement and continuation of the program.

January 28, 2023 – Family Literacy Day!

In partnership with BGC Halifax, Dartmouth North site, we hosted a community Family Literacy Day event on the 28th of January, 2023. Almost 100 parents and children attended the fun day. Participants were engaged in learning games, book exchanges, cartooning, book readings by authors, a puppet show, dance, and family portraits. We gave out a lot of free books, door prizes, and other learning resources to families in attendance.



Dartmouth Learning Network has great news to share about its new eLearning platform

[MovingOnUp.](#)

Moving On Up

Get the skills you need to reach your earning and career goals.

[Learn More](#)

[View All Lessons](#)

Free and interactive eLearning for adult basic education.

MovingOnUp is an eLearning platform developed by the Dartmouth Learning Network to support adult learners in

their journey to upgrade their education or to pursue GED certification.

MovingOn Up is also used by Instructors to help their learners practice new skills.

In the coming year Dartmouth Learning Network will dedicate further resources to expand, update, and sustain this new eLearning resource designed for adult learners and adult educators. User feedback is critical to content and design development of MovingOnUp, so drop into the site, look around, and let us know what you liked and ideas for improvement!



MovingOnUp is used by more than 100 learners and instructors every month.
More than 80% of site users are engaged in math and GED.



Many thanks to our volunteers for all that you do!

Thank you to our learners for showing up every day ready and willing to learn.

Thank you to our community partners for your referrals and collaboration.

Dartmouth Learning Network is grateful to the agencies and organizations that provide funding to ensure we are all able to continue to learn and grow together, specifically the Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills & Immigration, Literacy Nova Scotia, The Halifax Youth Foundation (FLIEF) and to United Way Halifax.

