



# TARGET CRIME WITH LITERACY

## CHAPTER 2 - FACT SHEET 2

### The Link Between Low Literacy and Crime

The inability to read and write well may not be a direct cause of criminal behaviour, but low literacy and crime are related.

Daily life is harder for people with low literacy, so they are more likely to feel frustrated and dissatisfied. People with low literacy skills usually have equally inadequate problem-solving skills.

People who have low literacy skills tend to be less active citizens than other people. They are less likely to get involved in community activities like sports, school groups, church groups, and so on. As a result, they often feel isolated and vulnerable, and many of them feel like outcasts.

This may partly explain why people who have low literacy are statistically more likely to be involved in crime – either as the offender or the victim. It may also help to explain why crime rates are higher in neighbourhoods where a high percentage of people have low literacy.

### Low literacy in Canadian jails and prisons

Some statistics:

- Offenders are three times as likely as the rest of the population to have literacy problems.
- 79 of 100 people entering Canadian correctional facilities don't have their high school diploma
- 65 of 100 people entering correctional facilities have less than a Grade 8 education or level of literacy skills.

Inmates who have low literacy are less likely to use the services available to them, like meeting with a Community Services Officer. They are also less able to benefit from the life skills and rehabilitative programs offered, or that a judge ordered them to take at sentencing.

Anger management training and drug rehabilitation programs usually involve reading, so these programs may not help an offender who has low literacy.

## **Literacy training and crime prevention**

While poverty, unemployment, and feeling isolated or desperate may push some people into a life of crime, literacy training can provide many youth and adults with a chance to build a brighter future.

Literacy training gives young people at risk of delinquency the skills they need to find and keep jobs and escape from poverty. At least 75 of 100 adults in prison were persistent offenders in their youth. So improving the literacy of young people could have a significant impact on rates of adult crime.

Raising literacy rates in society will help to prevent and reduce crime.

## **Literacy training and rehabilitation**

Many studies have found a link between prison-based education and literacy programs and high rates of successful rehabilitation. A Canadian study showed that prison literacy programs can reduce recidivism by up to 30%, depending on the level of literacy the prisoner achieves. In a U.S. study, getting a college degree in prison reduced recidivism by 100%.

Prison literacy and education programs give inmates a second chance at an honest, healthy, and productive life. These programs give inmates the skills they need to get steady jobs when they are released, which reduces their chances of re-offending.

With literacy and other training, people return to their communities with a more positive selfimage. They feel proud of what they have achieved, and their new skills and self-esteem help them avoid one of the main causes of criminal activity – unemployment.

The economic and social returns far outweigh the cost of providing literacy training to prisoners.

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