BRIDGES *to* PRACTICE

A Research-based Guide for Literacy Practitioners Serving Adults with Learning Disabilities

A Project of the National Institute for Literacy

GUIDEBOOK 1
Preparing to Serve Adults with Learning Disabilities

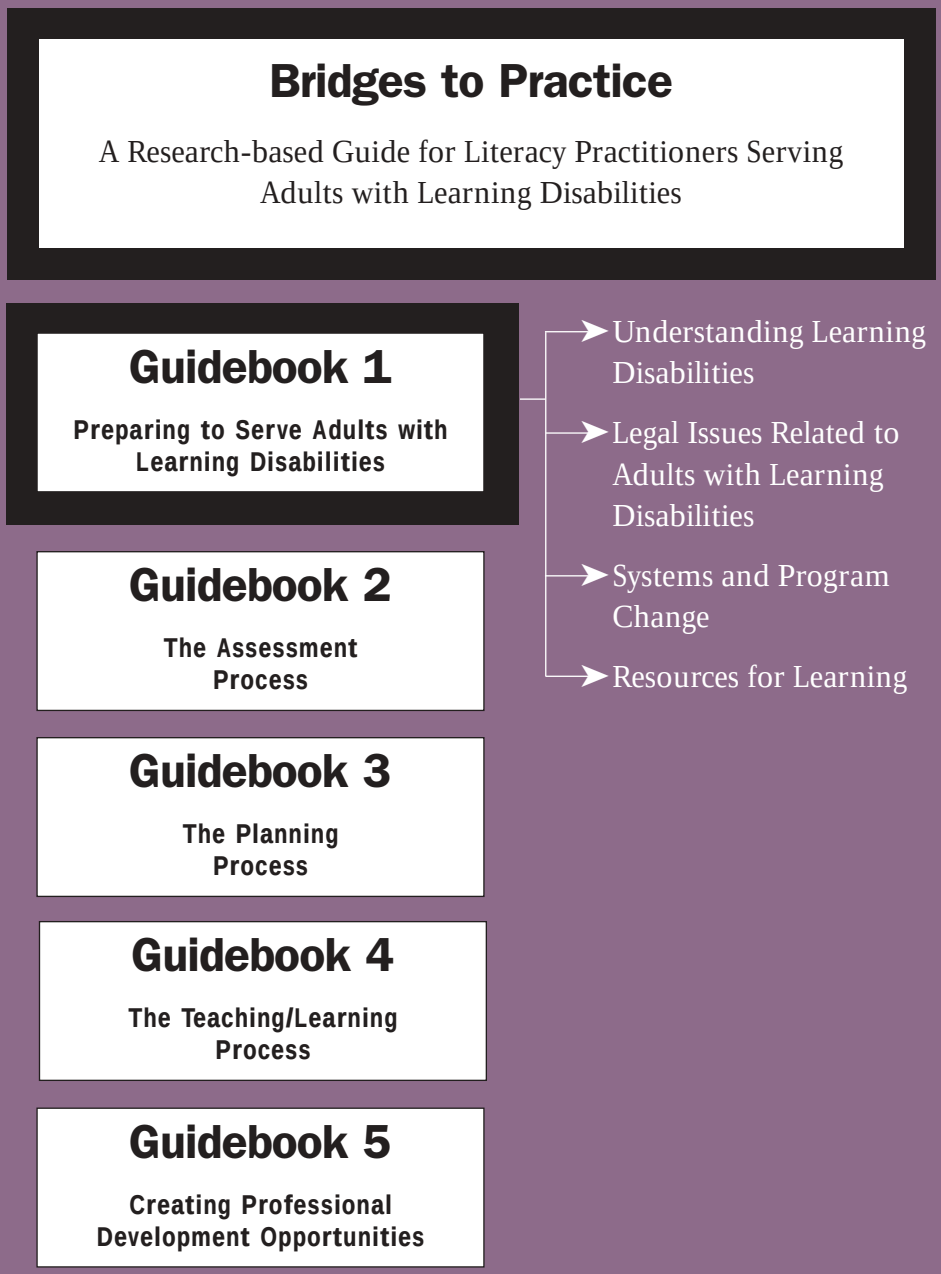
NATIONAL ALLD CENTER

A Collaboration Between

AED

The Academy for Educational Development
and
The University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities

Bridges to Practice consists of five guidebooks designed for use by literacy programs to enhance the quality of services provided to adults with learning disabilities. Each guidebook is designed to answer specific questions that literacy program staff might have, such as legal issues, screening for learning disabilities, selection of curriculum options, and the use of effective instructional methods.



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The National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center
Washington, DC · 1999

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Guidebook 1

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THE NATIONAL ALLD CENTER

The National ALLD Center, funded by the National Institute for Literacy, is a collaboration between the Academy for Educational Development and the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities. The Center's mission is to promote awareness about the relationship between adult literacy and learning disabilities. Through its national information exchange network and technical assistance training, the National ALLD Center helps literacy practitioners, policymakers, and researchers better meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities. We encourage your inquiries and will either directly provide you with information or refer you to an appropriate resource.

THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY

The National Institute for Literacy is an independent federal agency jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services. The Institute's primary goals are to provide leadership and coordination for literacy activities across federal agencies and among states, enhance the knowledge base for literacy, and create a national communications system that links the literacy field nationwide.

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Academy for Educational Development
Washington, D.C.
January 1999

NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY

Fall, 1998

Dear Colleagues:

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) has a small budget and a huge mission: to assure that all American adults who need to improve their literacy skills have access to services of real quality and effectiveness.

One of the greatest challenges to this mission is the issue of learning disabilities (LD) – our field's historic lack of knowledge about these complex obstacles to learning, and our struggle to help adults with LD gain the skills they need to lead productive, fulfilling lives.

Educators have known for years that learning disabilities are among the major problems faced by adult literacy students and by the programs that serve them. But today the need for solutions is especially urgent. On the eve of the 21st century, when literacy skills are more important than ever before to the success of individuals and our nation, state and local programs are under enormous pressure to show that their services make a difference to all their students. We must learn how to do a better job of serving adults with learning disabilities.

BRIDGES TO PRACTICE is NIFL's major contribution to that goal. BRIDGES is the centerpiece product of our National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center. It is the culmination of a five-year investment in developing useful, concrete tools related to learning disabilities in adults for literacy and other human resource practitioners. We are convinced that BRIDGES and its accompanying training and technical support will meet critical professional development needs that have never been met in such a comprehensive way.

The publication of BRIDGES is not the end of NIFL's commitment in the area of literacy and learning disabilities. We hope it will be the beginning of an increasingly collaborative process with all of you to find better and better ways of serving this significant population of America's adults.

Sincerely,

Andrew Hartman
Director

Susan Green
Project Officer

Glenn Young
Learning Disabilities Specialist

In memoriam

William R. Langner, 1932–1998

tireless advocate for adults with special needs…

visionary…dreamer…

passionate believer that we can make a difference…

adult education practitioner and lifelong learner…

world traveler and intrepid rider of camels and elephants…

friend.

Contents

Preface

Welcome to *Bridges to Practice.* You are about to embark on a journey designed to help literacy programs enhance the services they provide for adults with learning disabilities. The development of *Bridges to Practice* is centered around the vision of the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (National ALLD Center). This vision consists of the following beliefs:

- Adults with learning disabilities have specific and unique educational service needs.
- Literacy programs can and should meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities.
- By focusing on research-based information, the National ALLD Center can help literacy programs better meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

Bridges to Practice is organized around five guidebooks designed to document and reflect "best practices" in working with persons with learning disabilities. What distinguishes these guidebooks from similar products is that the content is based on research. The purpose of these guidebooks is to influence the decision-making process of literacy practitioners in evaluating and selecting screening tools, curricular materials, and instructional strategies that are effective for adults with learning disabilities. Ultimately, by making changes in the provision of services for adults with learning disabilities, literacy programs can help countless adults reach their potential and lead more fulfilling and self-sufficient lives.

By the end of the *Bridges to Practice* training, you will have:

- a broader awareness of learning disabilities and their impact on the provision of literacy services;
- a repertoire of skills and practical tools for tapping the creativity and experience of those you work with;
- a vision of the changes you would like your program to initiate in providing services which are more responsive to the needs of persons with learning disabilities; and
- an action plan for how you intend to achieve those changes.

To derive maximum benefit from these guidebooks, literacy program leaders are encouraged to participate in the companion training/professional development program developed by the National ALLD Center. When used in conjunction with this training and the accompanying video, *Bridges to Systemic Reform*, these guidebooks can provide the stimulus for literacy programs to begin to address overall system change and, thereby, to enhance the quality of services provided to adults with learning disabilities.

For more information on the training, contact the National ALLD Center at (202) 884-8185 or (800) 953-ALLD [2553].

Mary Ann Corley, Ph.D.
Director, National ALLD Center

Foreword

Learning disabilities is an umbrella term that describes a wide variety of disorders, including disorders in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. Adults who have difficulties with listening, thinking, speaking, reading, or writing are likely to experience problems that significantly affect their academic achievement and their lives.

Varying estimates of the number of American adults with learning disabilities range from 3 to 15 percent of the general population. An even greater incidence of learning disabilities is likely to be found among the population of adults with low-level literacy skills. Research has yet to determine just what that proportion is; estimates range from 30 to 80 percent.

Bridges to Practice: A Research-based Guide for Literacy Practitioners Serving Adults with Learning Disabilities was developed through funding from the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), which was created by the National Literacy Act of 1991. The NIFL's mission is to maximize the effectiveness of local literacy services nationwide. One of the goals of the NIFL is to enhance the capacity of literacy service providers to identify, teach, and support adults with learning disabilities.

In 1993, the NIFL provided funding to the Academy for Educational Development (AED) to establish the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center (National ALLD Center) in collaboration with the University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning

Disabilities (KU-IRLD). Together, the staff at AED and the KU-IRLD developed a service, research, and development agenda designed to assist literacy practitioners in enhancing services to adults with learning disabilities. This agenda was developed in recognition of:

- the link between low-level literacy in adults and the apparent prevalence of learning disabilities;
- the high student attrition rate nationwide in adult literacy programs;
- the paucity of research studies on adult literacy students with learning disabilities; and
- the need to improve the outcomes of adult literacy programs.

The National ALLD Center developed the *Bridges to Practice* series for adult literacy program supervisors and professional development specialists. The goal of *Bridges to Practice* is to increase awareness among practitioners about learning disabilities and to help program leaders address the changes they might initiate to make their programs more responsive to the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

By setting forth guidelines for best practices and by stimulating discussions among program staff, these guidebooks can be the catalyst that causes some literacy programs to rethink and restructure their delivery systems to be more effective in serving adults with learning disabilities. Programs that are responsive to the needs of adult learners ultimately will assist greater numbers of students in achieving their goals.

Development of the Guidebooks

Research efforts in the fields of literacy, adult education, and learning disabilities are just beginning to yield clear directions for practice. Furthermore, what is known from research on learning disabilities has found its way only sporadically into instructional practice. It has been estimated that less than 10 percent of educational materials and methods currently used in instructional settings has been validated through any type of research (Carnine, 1995). To address this dilemma, the team at the National ALLD Center developed a three-phase research and development plan.

Phase 1: Gather Information from the Field

During the first phase of research and development, the National ALLD Center staff organized focus groups, sent out questionnaires, surveyed

resource centers, and evaluated current screening practices and instructional materials. Through this research, the staff

- identified the beliefs, issues, and values of practitioners in the fields of literacy and learning disabilities;
- identified and validated standards for developing, evaluating, and selecting practices related to screening and instructional materials for serving adults with learning disabilities; and
- identified current practices related to serving adults with learning disabilities.

The last step in this phase was to develop and field-test procedures related to teaching literacy providers to apply the standards to screening practices and instructional materials.

Phase 2: Integrate Research and Write Guidebooks

During the second phase of research and development, the National ALLD Center staff integrated the knowledge they had gathered during the first phase and used this information as a basis for the first four *Bridges to Practice* guidebooks. The staff also developed training for using the program and field-tested the guidebooks to determine how literacy service providers could use the information to improve services for adults with learning disabilities.

Phase 3: Review and Refine Guidebooks

After the first four guidebooks were developed, the National ALLD Center staff used field-test results and reviews of external evaluators to revise the guidebooks. They also collaborated with the four NIFL-funded Learning Disabilities Training and Dissemination (LDTD) hubs and developed the professional development guidebook (*Guidebook 5*) to enhance the dissemination of information contained within the *Bridges to Practice* series.

Because of ongoing research and development in the fields of adult literacy and learning disabilities, additional information will be continuously added to these guidebooks so that they reflect the most current knowledge concerning adults with learning disabilities.

Ensuring Success

The fields of adult literacy and learning disabilities represent many audiences and interest groups. The *Bridges to Practice* guidebooks provide

information about learning disabilities and their impact on literacy programs. However, these guidebooks cannot compensate for the development of specialists in learning disabilities and professional training. Ideally, literacy services for adults with learning disabilities should be organized and delivered by, or under the direct guidance of, a practitioner who is a "master" in providing instruction to those who struggle with learning and learning disabilities.

Terminology Used in the Guidebooks

For consistency throughout these guidebooks, the term "practitioner" is used to describe persons who provide direct services to adults with learning disabilities. Practitioners can be tutors, teachers, program leaders, or volunteers.

These guidebooks specifically focus on adults who are either diagnosed as, or suspected of, having learning disabilities. On occasion, particularly for the sake of simplicity within tables and charts, the term "learner" is used to refer to adults who have, or may have, learning disabilities.

Because of the limited amount of research on programs and practices available for adults with learning disabilities, many of the practices referenced in these guidebooks represent best practices across the field of learning disabilities, and require translation for use in the adult community. Therefore, the terms "person with learning disabilities" or "individual with learning disabilities" imply that learning disabilities are a lifelong condition.

In some instances, again for simplicity, the abbreviation LD is used for learning disabilities, as in the term "LD-appropriate literacy services." When the term "accommodation" is used to describe the responsibilities of adult literacy programs, it refers to changes that are legally required to allow the adult who has been diagnosed with a learning disability to access and profit from the basic or essential services provided by a program. The term "adaptation" refers to the routine changes that a teacher makes during instruction to increase student learning. Adaptations are usually not legally required and may be thought of as good teaching practices responsive to the heterogeneity within any group of learners.

Finally, the term *Bridges* is frequently used to refer to the entire set of guidebooks in *Bridges to Practice*, and the term "guidebook" is used to refer to each of the five guidebooks included in the series.

Seizing the Opportunity!

A Call to Action

Adults come to literacy programs for a variety of reasons: they want to get a job or a better job; they want to help their children with their schoolwork; or they want to be able to read a newspaper or write a letter. In essence, they want to improve their lives. Many of these adults may only consider approaching a literacy program for help when faced with serious personal embarrassment, struggles with friends and family, or the imminent loss of employment. It takes great courage to face these fears and take those first steps to walk through the doors of a literacy program.

Literacy programs may view the provision of services for adults with learning disabilities as a problem or an impossible challenge, especially when faced with limited financial resources, limited or poorly designed professional development experiences, and a shortage of personnel. However, there is no shortage of caring or commitment on the part of literacy practitioners. They know first-hand the joys and rewards felt by learners who have met their goals. Most literacy programs and practitioners will welcome and seize the opportunity to improve services for learners, provided they can identify the necessary resources and tools.

One challenge for literacy programs and practitioners is to change their views about learning disabilities and the impact of learning disabilities on the provision of services to learners. Literacy programs cannot overlook the fact that their learners' real-life responsibilities and obligations, combined with a real history of failure, embarrassment, and fear, shape a set of conditions that require a significant amount of staff planning and creativity. They must thoroughly understand the circumstances which shape their actions to develop high-impact programs.

Shaping an Agenda

In 1994, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD), an interdisciplinary consortia of organizations formed to review issues surrounding learning disabilities for educational and governmental agencies, identified the following eight issues that should be used to shape decisions about programming for adults with learning disabilities (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994):

1. Learning disabilities are both persistent and pervasive throughout an individual's life. The manifestations of the learning disability can be expected to change throughout the life span of the individual.

2. At present there is a paucity of appropriate diagnostic procedures for assessing and determining the status and needs of adults with learning disabilities. This situation has resulted in the misuse and misinterpretation of tests that have been designed for and standardized on younger people.
3. Older adolescents and adults with learning disabilities frequently are denied access to appropriate academic instruction, pre-vocational preparation, and career counseling necessary for the development of adult abilities and skills.
4. Few professionals have been adequately prepared to work with adults who demonstrate learning disabilities.
5. Employers frequently do not have the awareness of, or sensitivity to, the needs of adults with learning disabilities. Corporate as well as public and private agencies have been unaware of the issue, and therefore have failed to accept their responsibility to develop and implement programs for adults with learning disabilities.
6. Adults with learning disabilities may experience personal, social, and emotional difficulties that may affect their adaptation to life tasks. These difficulties may be an integral aspect of the learning disability, or may have resulted from past experiences with others unable or unwilling to accept, understand, or cope with the person's disabilities.
7. Advocacy efforts on behalf of adults with learning disabilities currently are inadequate.
8. Federal, state, and private funding agencies concerned with learning disabilities have not supported program development initiatives for adults with learning disabilities.

In addition to these concerns identified by the NJCLD, adults with learning disabilities are frequently viewed as not having *real* disabilities and, as a result, are often not given access to information about their civil rights and about how to become their own advocates for these rights. Consequently, they are denied the information they need to bring about change for themselves and to take control of their lives.

An Agenda for Action

Improving the overall quality of how our society responds to adults with learning disabilities is a global issue which needs to be addressed by soci-

ety in general. There are, however, unique responsibilities within the field of adult literacy. The field must acknowledge that it has a significant history of inaction and that there has been an absence of information about effective services for adults with learning disabilities. With this acknowledgment, program leaders can make a commitment to take the first step in carrying out a new agenda for radically changing current practices in literacy programs. This opportunity to change the lives of millions of adults cannot be missed.

Every literacy program in America can embark on an aggressive campaign to develop high-quality, high-impact literacy services for adults with learning disabilities. To do this, every literacy program should make the following commitments:

- **Understand, use, and demand more research-based practices.** When research is not available to guide practice, literacy programs should demand that federal or state funding be provided to develop practice, and thoroughly test the practices on adults with learning disabilities.
- **Believe that they can improve all literacy services by improving services for adults with learning disabilities.** Practices for serving adults with learning disabilities are based on the idea of providing explicit and structured instruction while honoring and building on the perspectives, knowledge, skills, and experiences of the individual. The process of understanding and then trying to achieve this balance is at the very heart of offering LD-appropriate literacy services.
- **View all those in literacy programs as having a high probability for having learning disabilities.** Not everyone enrolled in literacy programs has learning disabilities. However, most adults with low literacy skills are likely to have learning disabilities. Many of these individuals will not seek formal diagnostic testing to confirm a learning disability. Instruction that is appropriate to learning disabilities—whether or not a learning disability is confirmed—should be the rule rather than the exception in literacy programs. In addition, literacy programs should continuously consider, at all phases of an adult's participation in a program, whether confirmation of a *suspected* learning disability could provide civil rights protections that might have a positive impact on the adult's success in life.
- **Make the improvement of LD-appropriate literacy programs a**

top priority. To create changes that are required, programs need to embrace policies and procedures that will ensure high-quality services for adults with learning disabilities. These policies include spending more time learning about learning disabilities, assessing learning problems, developing effective instructional plans, using high-quality instructional methods, and developing necessary community linkages.

- **Enlist private and public organizations to help shape a new system of thinking about civil rights and develop policies and services related to learning disabilities.** Changing current practice in literacy programs is only part of the solution. If literacy programs try to do this alone, their efforts will always be inhibited by resources, time, and the problems associated with transferring new knowledge and skills into the real world. They must develop links to the community that will ensure adequate resources, support, and follow-up. By making these connections, literacy programs can ensure that adults with learning disabilities can continue to be successful, not only in literacy programs, but in life in general.

How practitioners think and interact with adults with learning disabilities affects the adults in many ways, such as their ability to learn or their self-perception, hopes, fears, and accomplishments. Adults with learning disabilities sometimes have few allies to stand by them and champion their cause. Literacy practitioners are among the few professionals that adults with learning disabilities can turn to for help fighting the battles that they face every day of their lives.

Although their resources are few and their numbers small, literacy practitioners possess the greatest asset of all—relentless courage. They have nothing to lose and everything to gain by accepting this call to action to help improve the lives of millions of adults with learning disabilities.

Introduction to *Bridges to Practice*

The primary purpose of these guidebooks is to help literacy programs and practitioners provide services which are effective and appropriate to the needs of adults with learning disabilities. The use of *Bridges to Practice* should increase practitioners' understanding of adults with learning disabilities—their strengths and challenges—and directly help literacy practitioners to

- empower learners with an understanding of their learning disabilities and civil rights;
- collaborate with learners to select curriculum goals related to life needs (including how to advocate for civil rights);
- construct learning partnerships with adults that result in the use of more successful instructional approaches, effective instructional adaptations, and appropriate accommodations;
- develop and use community linkages to create and tap needed resources to enhance needed literacy services; and
- develop an understanding of the need for reforming the system of private and public services for learners in our communities and developing plans for achieving change.

These guidebooks can be used to expand a literacy program's vision of what to do immediately and in the future. When used in conjunction with approved professional development, these guidebooks can provide the stimulus for literacy programs to begin to address overall systems

change, and thereby enhance the quality of services provided to adults with learning disabilities.

Intended Audience

These guidebooks are intended for use primarily by program leaders and persons responsible for the professional development of literacy practitioners. However, teachers, tutors, staff development directors, advisory board members, and other professionals from related agencies and the community might also find the information in these guidebooks useful.

Although the practices included in these guidebooks are based on research in learning disabilities, and are essential for ensuring the success of adults with learning disabilities, practitioners will find that many of the practices can be used with other adult learners who need intensive, explicit teaching. For example, these guidebooks were not specifically field-tested with, or designed for, practitioners who primarily serve individuals with limited English proficiency or English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) students, especially in the context of trying to pursue whether someone with limited English proficiency has a learning disability. However, the practices included in these guidebooks can significantly enhance instruction if they are woven into the services for these individuals.

These issues and others require that *Bridges* be used as part of a broad effort of program improvement that involves those who have knowledge of the practices included in *Bridges* and how to adapt them for specific program needs and development. To derive maximum benefit from these guidebooks, we encourage literacy program staff members to participate in the companion training program developed by the National ALLD Center.

Features

These guidebooks contain the following features:

- current information on learning disabilities in adulthood;
- consumer-based and researched standards applicable to screening instruments and instructional materials;
- a review of research-based information on planning for instruction and instructional methods for persons with learning disabilities;
- structures and activities for arranging professional development experiences;

- reviews of popular screening and instructional materials used across literacy programs; and
- tools for program staff to use in initiating changes to make their services more responsive to the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

There is a wealth of information presented in these guidebooks. They are intended as resources that can be used by literacy leaders and staff development specialists to improve professional development activities and practice. The information is presented in five guidebooks so that it can be used easily by various program personnel, depending on their responsibilities in their programs. For example, the program administrator, counselor, or other person responsible for managing student intake may find the guidebook on screening most useful. The teacher or tutor may find the guidebook on teaching methods and instructional materials most helpful. The staff development specialist may find greatest utility in the guidebook on providing training activities for and disseminating the guidebooks among program staff.

Research Basis

By presenting "best practices" throughout the series, *Bridges* emphasizes a research-based approach to developing literacy services which are appropriate to the needs of adults with learning disabilities.

Research and experience demonstrate that best practices in serving adult learners consist of making good decisions about how to help an individual learn. These decisions become the foundation for the adult learner's experience. Such decisions are made collaboratively with the adult learner from the first point of contact with literacy program staff. Determining what is important to learn, for example, is the basis of any further decision processes, from planning for instruction through evaluating performance and establishing new goals with the adult learner. The program's activities become best practice when they lead to efficient and effective attainment of that learner's goals.

There are best practices in serving adult learners all along the continuum of services from program entry to exit. For example, planning for instruction, teaching a skill or concept, and evaluating learner progress all have their best practices. There also are best practices for specific teaching skills and knowledge bases—for example, how spelling rules are taught or how multiplication tables are best learned.

A Guideline for Selecting Best Practices

Ellis and Fouts (1997) provide a valuable framework for a discussion about research-based best practices. They describe three levels of research:

- **Level 1 research** consists of basic or pure research studies on learning behaviors, usually conducted by researchers in laboratory or experimental settings, to establish that an idea or a theory has some validity.
- **Level 2 research** consists of studies, usually conducted by researchers, to determine if a theory or idea has some validity in educational settings when translated into programs or instructional methods.
- **Level 3 research** consists of studies that validate programs or instructional methods implemented by school- or district-based personnel working in educational settings.

The term best practices, as used in these in guidebooks, refers to educational programs and methods that are the result of Level 3 Research.

Many educational innovations are novel and interesting. In some cases, these interesting ideas may emerge as part of best practice. However, in many cases, these interesting ideas fail the test of research scrutiny. To be considered a *practice,* an innovation should at least have Level 2 research support showing its validity. To be recommended as *best practice*, an innovation should have a history of research at all three levels

Research Databases Used for Selecting Best Practices

Many different sources were used to select best practices. Research reviews using meta-analysis methodology provided valuable information. Other sources of information included books, reviews, and publications listed in the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Psychological Abstracts. Unfortunately, because of the lack of studies involving adults, much of the research involved students with learning disabilities in secondary school settings. Overall, the selection process was based on the criteria described by Ellis and Fouts (1997).

Standards Developed for *Bridges to Practice*

The developers of *Bridges to Practice* used a three-step process to select the screening instruments and instructional materials that are mentioned in *Guidebook 2: The Assessment Process* and *Guidebook 3: The Planning Process.*

First, a standards-based review process was adopted. Sets of standards for evaluating screening and instructional materials were created, validated, and applied to existing materials. Literacy providers nominated the instruments and materials. Multiple reviewers evaluated materials and instruments using the standards. Authors and publishers of these instruments and materials were given an opportunity to respond to the reviews.

The standards-based review process has its origin in the goal-free model of program evaluation. This consumer approach was pioneered by Michael Scriven (1976). The model assume that the consumers (in this case, the literacy program staff) want to make the best possible choices among the many available screening instruments and instructional materials, and that the staff share at least some of the same concerns about making those decisions.

Second, a standards-based reform process was adopted. Because new instruments and materials would continue to be developed following the publication of *Bridges to Practice*, program leaders would require information about how to use the standards to independently evaluate and select practices for self-guided program improvement. Therefore, procedures were developed to help literacy leaders make selection decisions. *Bridges to Practice* is based on the idea that program staff will use the standards provided to stimulate goal setting, professional development activities, and systemic reform related to improving services to adults with learning disabilities.

Third, recommendations for research-based practices were based on broad research on learning disabilities. In the absence of research on adults with learning disabilities, recommendations were made related to practices validated with adolescents and young adults with learning disabilities. Research reviews clearly show that learning strategies, direct instruction, and mastery teaching promote accelerated academic improvement. Reviews of the research on these instructional materials are included in *Guidebook 3: The Planning Process.*

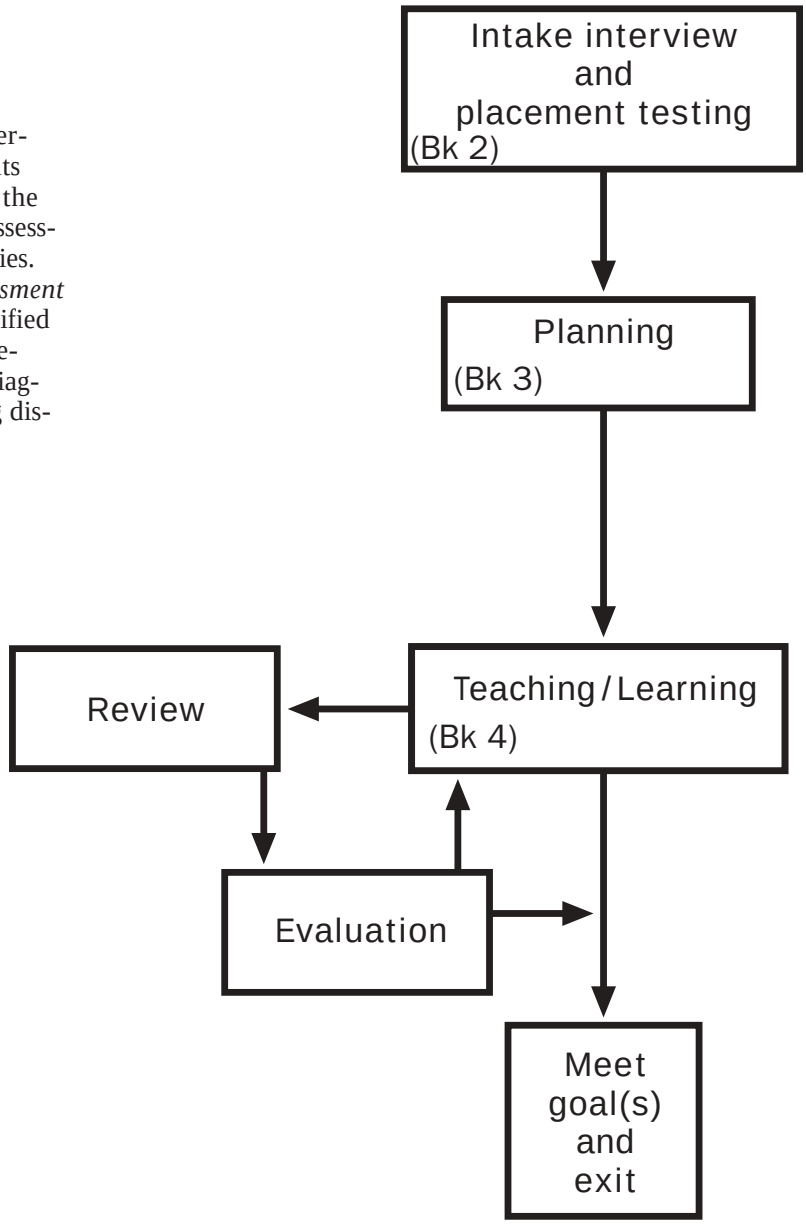
Components of an Effective Literacy Program

In providing literacy services to adults, effective programs typically engage in the following activities or services: 1) conducting intake interviews to determine the learner's interests and needs; 2) conducting academic placement testing to determine the learner's current knowledge and skills; 3) planning for instruction tailored to the needs of the learner by involving the learner in setting instructional goals and in selecting

curricular materials; 4) individualizing instruction in the targeted goals; and 5) reviewing learner progress and reevaluating the learning plan. These services are represented in the model shown in Figure 1.

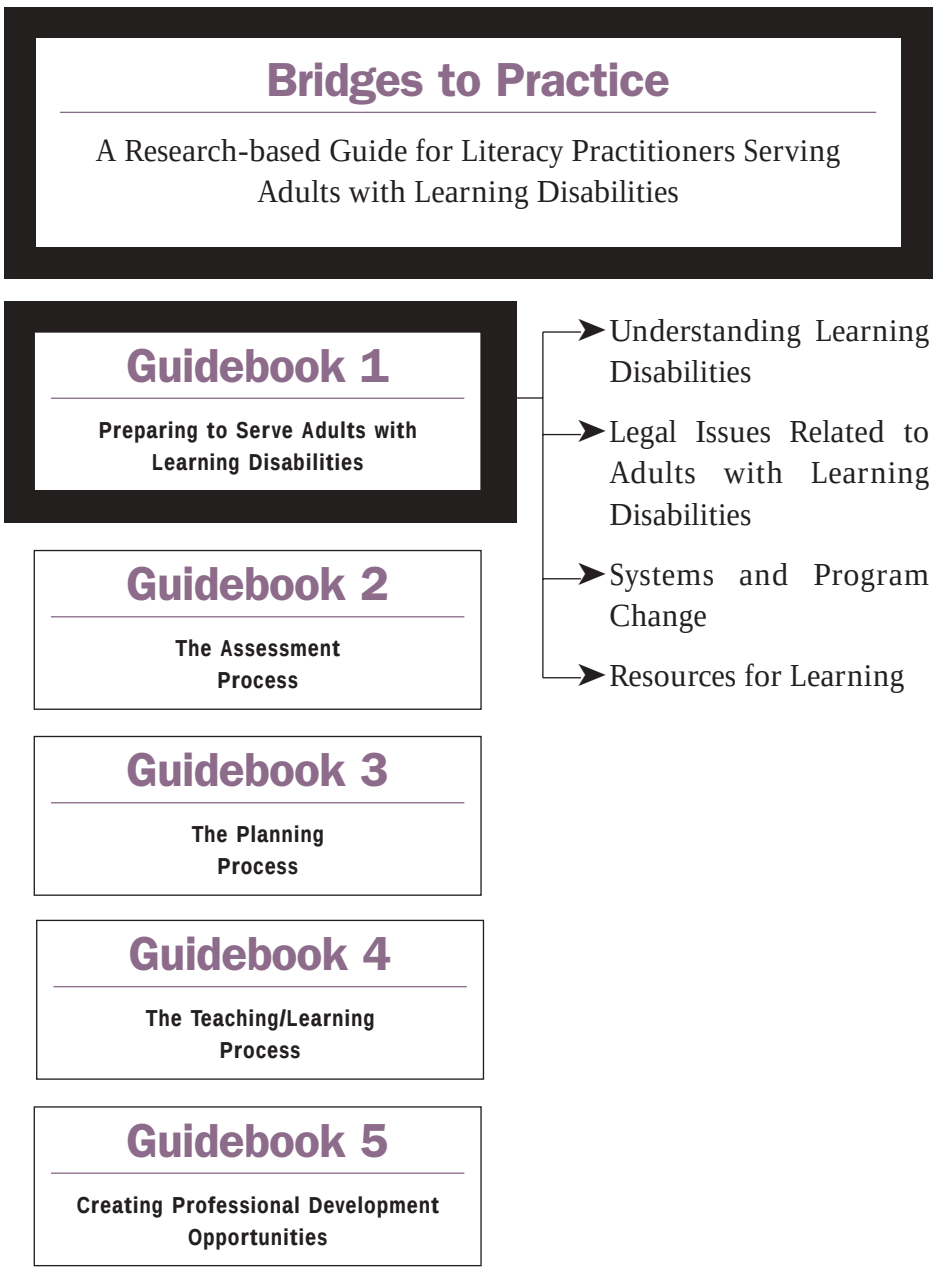
FIGURE 1. MODEL OF ADULT LITERACY PROGRAM SERVICES

To make these program services appropriate for adults with learning disabilities, the model needs to include assessment of learning disabilities. In *Guidebook 2: The Assessment Process*, this figure is modified to include the optional elements of screening and diagnostic testing for learning disabilities.



Overview of *Guidebook 1*: *Preparing to Serve Adults with Learning Disabilities*

This is the first of the five guidebooks in the *Bridges to Practice* series. The purpose of the series is to help literacy programs and their practitioners (teachers, tutors, volunteers, and program leaders) learn how to develop or improve services to adults with learning disabilities.



Guidebook 1 is divided into four sections. The information included in these sections will help program staff answer the following questions:

- What makes adult literacy services sensitive to the needs of adults with learning disabilities?
- What is the nature and impact of learning disabilities on adults?
- How does the law affect the quality of life of adults with learning disabilities?
- What linkages to other community agencies are critical for literacy programs to increase the success of adults with learning disabilities?
- What resources are available to program staff as they begin to address change in the provision of services to adults with learning disabilities?

Section 1: Understanding Learning Disabilities

This section presents information about the definition, characteristics and consequences of learning disabilities that can promote better understanding of learning disabilities among literacy practitioners. This section was developed around studies and research syntheses that have tried to capture the elusive characteristics of learning disabilities. Both cognitive and behavioral perspectives have been represented.

Section 2: Legal Issues Related to Adults with Learning Disabilities

This section presents legal issues related to learning disabilities and the rights and responsibilities of both the literacy program and the learner.

Section 3: Systems and Program Change

This section presents information about how to promote program and systems change related to services for adults with learning disabilities. *Bridges to Practice* was field-tested to determine how it might stimulate literacy programs to begin developing and implementing plans to change practice associated with learning disabilities. Programs participating in the field test completed a needs assessment, and staff developed goals and plans to improve program services. *Bridges to Practice* was then modified based on data collected in the field test. That change process, as refined through the field test, is reflected in these guidebooks.

Section 4: Resources for Learning

This section includes lists of state and national resources, toll-free numbers, and interesting web sites.

Bibliography

These suggested readings were selected by special education and adult education professionals during the field-test and review process of developing *Bridges to Practice.*

Glossary

The glossary can be used as a reference for all the *Bridges to Practice* guidebooks.

Understanding Learning Disabilities

Cautions When Using the Label "Learning Disabilities"

To discuss a disability, literacy programs need to have a common understanding of the disability. Coming to terms with a definition of learning disabilities is the first step in effectively serving adults who have learning disabilities. However, in defining this disability, literacy programs should consider the following cautions:

- Using labels can lead to stereotyping and thereby restrict opportunities for individuals.
- The learning disabilities label should not be used to direct society's view of a person.
- Describing a person's difficulties does not describe that person.
- The learning problems experienced by an adult should not become the characteristics that overpower other more positive features of his or her identity.
- A person's strengths are far more important than his or her weaknesses.
- The existence of learning disabilities should not be used as an excuse for lack of success.

Although literacy programs need to be cautious in defining learning disabilities, they also need to understand the potential advantages of recognizing learning disabilities. Because a learning disability is a disability recognized by federal law, the learning disabilities label can provide access to services that otherwise may be denied to an individual. Understanding one's learning disabilities can provide a new perspective on previous failures and learning difficulties, and can lead to obtaining valuable information about how to learn, perform, and advocate for rights and accommodations.

A Definition of Learning Disabilities

There are several definitions of learning disabilities used throughout the country by professional and advocacy organizations and service agencies. For these guidebooks the National ALLD Center has selected the definition of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) in its 1994 revision.

> Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences. (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994, p. 16.)

This definition was selected because it

- reflects current information and issues associated with learning disabilities;
- allows for the presence of learning disabilities at any age; and
- has been accepted by a committee with broad representation in the learning disabilities community.

The NJCLD definition is presented below in an annotated format to help you interpret its meaning as applied to adults.

Learning disabilities may be manifested in a variety of ways and degrees of severity. In addition, these disabilities will influence success differently in different situations. Learning disabilities may also take the form of home and/or workplace literacy problems. While learning disabilities tend to be recognized mainly in educational settings, they are disabilities that truly have an impact on a person's whole life experiences.

NJCLD Definition	Application to Adults
Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders	There is neither one type of learning disability nor one profile for adults with learning disabilities. There are many different patterns of learning difficulties. For example, one adult may have a serious reading disability, while another may be able to read adequately, but not be able to communicate thoughts in writing.
manifested by significant difficulties	All individuals have strengths and weaknesses. Adults with learning disabilities have serious problems that affect some major functions in the home, community, or the workplace. For example, an adult may not be able to work at a preferred job because of lack of literacy skills related to learning disabilities.
in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities.	Learning disabilities are specific in nature. Learning problems encompass one or more ability areas (e.g., reading or math) but do not necessarily include all ability areas. They do not represent simply a delay in development.
These disorders are intrinsic to the individual,	Learning disabilities are part of a person's makeup. They are not eliminated by changes in the environment, such as increased exposure to literacy events. Although a person can learn to deal effectively with a learning disability, the learning disability does not go away.
presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction,	Although most adults with learning disabilities will not have a medical diagnosis of a neurological disorder, the assumption is that there is some sort of difference or difficulty in how the brain works. Current research is shedding greater light on this area.
and may occur across the life span.	Learning disabilities may be uncovered at different stages of a person's life, depending on many factors. Some factors include: severity of the disorder; academic, vocational, and social setting demands; and educators' knowledge of learning disabilities. The symptoms change over time so that a learning disability in a 7-year old child looks different from that in the same person as an adult.

Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities	Some adults will have difficulty in self-control, perceiving social situations appropriately, and getting along with other people.
but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability.	The problems described in self-regulation, social perception, and interaction, although often present in adults with learning disabilities, also occur in persons with other disabilities, as well. There are many reasons for these types of problems other than underlying learning disabilities.
Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance)	A learning disability may be present with other disorders, but these conditions are not the cause of the learning disability. For example, an adult may have a hearing loss along with a learning disability, but the hearing loss is not the cause of the learning disability. Also, learning disabilities are not related to low intelligence. In fact, most people with learning disabilities are average or above average in intelligence, but the impact of the disability may impair their ability to function well in school or the workplace.
or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences.	Although learning disabilities are not the result of inadequate schooling or opportunity to learn, they are often exacerbated by these factors. For example, individuals with learning disabilities sometimes have fewer opportunities to learn; they tend to be challenged less by their teachers and parents. Therefore, by the time individuals with learning disabilities become adults, they are further behind than their learning disabilities would predict.

Other Definitions of Learning Disabilities

There are several other definitions of learning disabilities that have been accepted by educators, federal agencies, advocacy groups, and/or professional organizations. The 1977 U.S. Office of Education's definition provides the basis for determining learning disabilities among school-age children. The Learning Disabilities Association of America's definition reflects the views of one of the largest advocacy groups for learning disabilities in the country. The definition of the Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities is used by federal agencies on the committee, with the exception of the U.S. Department of Education. The definition developed by the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities is acceptable to most advocacy and professional organizations. And, finally, the definition of the Rehabilitation Services Administration is one of few attempts to formulate a definition that focuses on work. (For each of these definitions, refer to Appendix A). Although each definition varies somewhat, based on its intended purpose, common elements include:

- The cause for learning disabilities is a problem in the central nervous system.
- Learning disabilities can be present at any age.
- Problems understanding spoken or written language can be caused by learning disabilities.

It is important to recognize that definitions of learning disabilities have been developed not only to clarify the nature of the disability, but to determine who is eligible for certain services. For example, 5% of the school-age population has learning disabilities under the definition and standards set under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) PL 105-17. However, research supported by the National Institutes for Health (NIH) has found that 15–20% of the population may have reading disabilities.

In the adult arena, the Rehabilitation Services Administration definition deals more with which adults qualify for services, as opposed to which adults have learning disabilities. Therefore, someone may have learning disabilities as an adult, but may not qualify for vocational services through the state.

How are Learning Disabilities Related to Dyslexia?

Dyslexia is a common form of learning disability and a commonly misunderstood term. Dyslexia usually does not involve seeing or reading words backwards. Rather, it refers to problems in learning to read, write, and spell. The International Dyslexia Association has proposed the following definition:

> Dyslexia is one of several distinct learning disabilities. It is a specific language-based disorder of constitutional origin characterized by difficulties in single word decoding, usually reflecting insufficient phonological processing. These difficulties in single word decoding are often unexpected in relation to age and other cognitive and academic abilities; they are not the result of generalized developmental disability or sensory impairment. Dyslexia is manifest by variable difficulty with different forms of language, often including, in addition to problems in reading, a conspicuous problem with acquiring proficiency in writing and spelling.

Dyslexia is *not*

- a problem related to intelligence,

- a vision problem, or
- outgrown.

Characteristics of an individual with dyslexia include:

- deficits in phonological processing;
- unexpected difficulties with single word decoding; and
- conspicuous problems in reading, writing, and spelling.

It is important to remember that many individuals with dyslexia can learn to read and write, given the appropriate supports.

Individuals with dyslexia are not alike; each individual may have different strengths, weaknesses and instructional needs. Individuals with dyslexia may be highly successful when learning skills unrelated to language.

Introduction to Case Studies: Alex and Delia

To illustrate how learning disabilities can affect adults, these guidebooks follow two typical adults with histories of learning problems—Alex and Delia.

Alex's learning disabilities were diagnosed when he was in elementary school, but he did not receive the assistance he needed. Delia's learning disabilities were never recognized while she was in school and she also did not receive the instruction that she needed. We meet Alex and Delia as they enter a literacy program. The remaining *Bridges* guidebooks then follow these adults through the screening, planning, and instructional processes.

The use of real-world examples of adults with learning disabilities to illustrate the practices described in these guidebooks can help create a vision for literacy programs of how information can be coordinated to develop a comprehensive approach to addressing the unique needs of adult learners who may have learning disabilities.

MEET ALEX

Alex is 28 years old. He came to the Community Literacy Center (CLC) because he recently married and his wife encouraged him to seek help. He is about to become a father and he wants to learn to read and write so that he can be a better husband, father, and provider for his family.

When Alex was in elementary school, he was told that he had a learning disability. This led to a diagnosis of a reading disability during 4th grade, but there were few efforts made to provide the type of instruction he needed. As Alex got older, accommodations were not provided to reduce the impact of his learning disability. Alex attended a vocational high school, working in the foods and catering program, but he dropped out in 11th grade. He was frustrated with academia throughout his school years and reported hating school. In his initial interview at the center, Alex said, "I couldn't do the work, so I cheated." He wasn't shown how accommodations could help him in school or the workplace. He was a good baseball player and both his high school coach and his special education teacher helped him with his schoolwork. He remembers getting into trouble a lot for skipping classes and not completing his work.

After dropping out in 11th grade, Alex felt that he had no direction. Continuing his education was not a choice because of his poor reading skills and lack of information about available accommodations. Even if further schooling were a possibility, he would not consider that route. Six months after he dropped out of school, Alex still had no plan and no job; he decided to "thumb" his way across the country. He held odd jobs here and there, but he was always frustrated. He also seemed to have trouble interacting with others, including co-workers. He would eventually quit each job and move to another place, hoping to "find himself."

Finally, his mother helped him get an apartment above a day care center/preschool. He cleaned the school in exchange for rent. When no one was around, he attempted to read the books on the shelves he cleaned.

Presently, Alex is working at a local fast food restaurant. He feels that his life is improving. He is happy about being a husband and father. He now wants to get a better job, or at least become the assistant manager at his current job.

MEET DELIA

Delia is a 47-year-old woman who was referred to the CLC after she confided to a co-worker that she wanted to "do something different" at work.

Delia can remember having reading difficulties in first grade; she was in the lowest reading group. She would look at the pictures and guess at the words. She enjoyed hearing the teacher read to the group, but was embarrassed when it was her turn to read aloud. She noticed her classmates were becoming more fluent, yet she kept stumbling. As she got older, it was difficult for her to read the science and history books because of all the "big words"; her grades were often below a C level.

Because junior high school was particularly difficult for her and she was increasingly frustrated, Delia dropped out in 9th grade. Bored, she felt she simply "wasn't getting it." Delia reported that she had a lot of trouble spelling and didn't like to write. She said "no" when asked if she had received additional help for her problems in school.

Currently, Delia takes the bus to her job at Green Thumb Nursery, where she pots plants and tends the plant stock. Despite her warm smile and good social skills, she is frustrated with doing the same things at work day after day. She doesn't want to leave her job, but she would like to be able to do some different tasks, which might include reading labels, writing reports, etc. She wants better opportunities at the nursery, and she believes that this will be possible if she can improve her reading and writing skills.

Recently divorced, she is generally happy with the quality of her life and her relationship with her two teenage children. However, Delia realizes the need for a better paying job; so far she has been unable to take advantage of opportunities to advance at the nursery because of her limited reading and writing skills. Delia shared this information with the CLC's receptionist, who then made an appointment with Joel, the literacy coordinator.

Alex and Delia are representative of many of the adults who enroll in literacy programs, hoping to improve their reading and writing skills and thereby improve the quality of their lives. There are many more adults with learning disabilities who differ from Alex and Delia in important ways. Each adult learner is unique; each will have his or her own learning strengths and weaknesses. But, regardless of who the learners are or how their learning disabilities affect their lives, they are individuals who struggle daily to be successful.

Characteristics of Adults with Learning Disabilities

There is no single cause of learning disabilities and, therefore, no single set of characteristics. When considering adults with learning disabilities, it is important to recognize that a wide range of learning, social, and behavioral characteristics exist. Although these characteristics are not directly related to a lack of training or experience, a learning disability may have prevented an individual from profiting from these sources of information.

It is common to describe the specific problems encountered by adults with learning disabilities, but it is equally important to note the positive characteristics of each person in order to increase the likelihood of success, not only in literacy programs, but in life in general. It is also important to understand that no individual will demonstrate all the characteristics associated with learning disabilities. In addition, individuals without learning disabilities may on occasion demonstrate some of these characteristics.

Adults with learning disabilities can be and often are successful when their disability is recognized. Therefore, understanding the characteristics of learning disabilities should be approached by literacy programs as an opportunity to change perceptions and actions that could contribute to the needless failure of many adult learners.

The following characteristics are organized by deficit area: reading, writing, listening, speaking, mathematics, thinking, and "other."

Reading Difficulties

The most prominent characteristic associated with learning disabilities is difficulty in learning to read. The term "dyslexia" is often used to denote a reading problem, although in reality it is a disorder that interferes with the acquisition and processing of language and affects a variety of performance areas (refer to pages 15-16 for a definition of dyslexia). In addition to the characteristics associated with dyslexia, an individual with learning disabilities may demonstrate some or most of the following reading characteristics:

Characteristics of Reading Difficulties	Examples
Does not read for pleasure	➤ Engages in leisure activities other than reading magazines or books, claiming to prefer pursuits that are more active ➤ Does not read stories to his or her children
Does not use reading to gather information	➤ Cannot easily use materials like newspapers and classified ads to obtain information
Has problems identifying individual sounds in spoken words	➤ Does not attempt to sound out words in reading or does so incorrectly
Often needs many repetitions to learn to recognize a new or unused word	➤ May encounter a newly learned word in a text and not recognize it when it appears later in that text
Relies heavily on context to read new or unused words	➤ When attempting to decode a word, says a word that may make sense in the text but may not be related phonologically (for example, from context guesses "car" when the word is actually "automobile")
Oral reading contains many errors, repetitions, and pauses	➤ Reads slowly and laboriously, if attempts to read at all ➤ May refuse to read orally
Efforts in reading are so focused on word recognition that they detract from reading comprehension	➤ Loses the meaning of text but understands the same material when it is read aloud
Has problems with comprehension that go beyond word recognition; may have limited language skills that affect comprehension	➤ Does not understand the text when it is read to him/her
Has limited use of reading strategies; is an inactive reader, not previewing text, monitoring comprehension, or summarizing what is read	➤ When prompted to do so, does not describe strategies used to assist with decoding and comprehension of text
Practices reading rarely, which may compound reading difficulties; lacks complex language and word knowledge	➤ Recognizes and uses fewer words, expressions, and sentence structures than peers

Writing Difficulties

Many individuals with learning disabilities have difficulties with written expression. These problems often are found in combination with reading and spoken language difficulties. Writing difficulties often continue after other learning problems have been resolved. "Dysgraphia" is a term sometimes used to refer to writing problems. An individual with learning disabilities may demonstrate some or all of the following characteristics in writing:

Characteristics of Writing Difficulties	Examples
Has difficulty communicating through writing	➤ Rarely writes letters or notes ➤ Needs help completing forms such as job applications
Written output is severely limited	➤ Struggles to produce a written product ➤ Produces short sentences and text with limited vocabulary
Writing is disorganized	➤ Omits critical parts or puts information in the wrong place ➤ Writing lacks transition words
Lacks a clear purpose for writing	➤ Does not communicate a clear message ➤ Expresses thoughts that do not contribute to the main idea
Does not use the appropriate text structures	➤ Uses sentences that contain errors in syntax or word choice ➤ Fails to clearly indicate the referent of a pronoun
Shows persistent problems in spelling	➤ Spells phonetically ➤ Leaves out letters ➤ Refrains from writing words that are difficult to spell
Has difficulties with mechanics of written expression	➤ Omits or misuses sentence markers, such as capitals and end punctuation, making it difficult for the reader to understand the text
Handwriting is sloppy and difficult to read	➤ Has awkward writing grip or position ➤ Letters, words, and lines are misaligned or not spaced appropriately
Demonstrates difficulties in revising	➤ Is reluctant to proofread or does not catch errors ➤ Focuses primarily on the mechanics of writing, not on style and content

Listening Difficulties

Individuals with learning disabilities also may have problems with the processing of oral language. An individual with learning disabilities may demonstrate some or all of the following characteristics in listening:

Characteristics of Listening Difficulties	Examples
Has problems perceiving slight distinctions in words	➤ Misunderstands a message with a word mistaken for a similar word (for example, misunderstands "Pick up the grass" for "Pick up the glass")
Has a limited vocabulary	➤ Recognizes and uses fewer words than peers when engaged in conversation or when gathering information by listening
Finds abstract words or concepts difficult to understand	➤ Requests repetitions or more concrete explanations of ideas ➤ Frequently asks for examples
Has difficulty with nonliteral or figurative language, such as metaphors, idioms, and sarcasm	➤ Does not understand jokes or comic strips
Confuses the message in complex sentences	➤ May eat lunch first if given the direction, "Eat lunch after you take this to the mailroom."
Has difficulty with verbal memory	➤ Does not remember directions, phone numbers, jokes, stories, etc.
Has difficulty processing large amounts of spoken language	➤ Gets lost listening in group presentations, complaining that people talk too fast

Speaking Difficulties

An individual with learning disabilities may have problems producing oral language. These may include one or more of the following characteristics in speaking:

Characteristics of Speaking Difficulties	Examples
Mispronounces words	➤ Adds, substitutes, or rearranges sounds in words, as in phemomenon for phenomenon or Pacific for specific
Uses the wrong word, usually with similar sounds	➤ Uses a similar-sounding word, like generic instead of genetic
Confuses the morphology, or structure of words	➤ Uses the wrong form of a word, such as calling the Declaration of Independence the Declaring of Independence
Has a limited vocabulary	➤ Uses the same words over and over in giving information and explaining ideas ➤ Has difficulty conveying ideas
Makes grammatical errors	➤ Omits or uses grammatical markers incorrectly, such as tense, number, possession, and negation
Speaks with a limited repertoire of phrase and sentence structure	➤ Uses mostly simple sentence construction ➤ Overuses and to connect thoughts
Has difficulty organizing what to say	➤ Has problems giving directions or explaining a recipe; talks around the topic (circumlocutes) but doesn't get to the point
Has trouble maintaining a topic	➤ Interjects irrelevant information into a story ➤ Starts out discussing one thing then goes off in another direction without making the connection
Has difficulty with word retrieval	➤ Cannot call forth a known word when it is needed and may use fillers, such as um, and you know ➤ May substitute a word related in meaning or sound as in boat for submarine or selfish for bashful ➤ May use an "empty word," such as thing or stuff ➤ May describe rather than name, as in a boat that goes underwater or describe a submarine
Has trouble with the pragmatic or social use of language	➤ Does not follow rules of conversation such as turn-taking ➤ Does not switch styles of speaking when addressing different people

Mathematics Difficulties

In some instances, individuals with learning disabilities have normal or above-normal mathematics skills. For others, mathematics is the primary area of disability or an area of disability in addition to other problems, such as reading disabilities. "Dyscalculia" is a term occasionally used to refer to problems in mathematics. An individual with learning disabilities may have one or more of the following characteristics:

Characteristics of Mathematics Difficulties	Examples
Does not remember and/or retrieve math facts	➤ Uses a calculator or counts on fingers for answers to simple problems (e.g., 2 x 5)
Does not use visual imagery effectively	➤ Cannot do math in his or her head and writes down even simple problems ➤ Has difficulty making change
Has visual-spatial deficits	➤ Confuses math symbols ➤ Misreads numbers ➤ Doesn't interpret graphs or tables accurately ➤ Has trouble maintaining a checkbook.
Becomes confused with math operations, especially multi-step processes	➤ Leaves out steps in math problem-solving or does them in the wrong order ➤ Cannot do long division except with a calculator ➤ Has trouble budgeting
Has difficulties in language processing that affect the ability to do math problem solving	➤ Does not translate real-life problems into the appropriate mathematical processes; avoids employment situations that involve this set of skills

Thinking Difficulties

Although adults with learning disabilities do not have global difficulties in thinking, they may have specific problems in cognitive processing. These may include one or more of the following characteristics:

Characteristics of Thinking Difficulties	Examples
Has problems with abstract reasoning	➤ Asks to see ideas on paper ➤ Prefers hands-on ways of learning new ideas
Shows marked rigidity in thinking	➤ Resists new ideas or ways of doing things and may have difficulty adjusting to changes on the job
Thinking is random, as opposed to orderly, either in logic or chronology	➤ May have good ideas which seem disjointed, unrelated, or out of sequence
Has difficulty synthesizing ideas	➤ Pays too much attention to detail and misses the big picture or idea when encountering specific situations at home or at work
Makes impulsive decisions and judgments	➤ "Shoots from the hip" when arriving at conclusions or decisions; does not use a structured approach to weigh options
Has difficulty generating strategies to acquire/use information and solve problems	➤ Approaches situations without a game plan, acting without a guiding set of principles

Other Difficulties

An individual with learning disabilities may have problems in addition to those listed above. These may include one or more of the following characteristics:

Characteristics of Other Difficulties	Examples
Has problems with attention, which may be accompanied by hyperactivity, distractibility, or passivity	➤ Does not focus on a task for an appropriate length of time ➤ Cannot seem to get things done ➤ Does better with short tasks
Displays poor organizational skills	➤ Does not know where to begin tasks or how to proceed ➤ Does not work within time limits, failing to meet deadlines ➤ Workspace and personal space are messy
Has eye-hand coordination problems	➤ Omits or substitutes elements when copying information from one place to another, such as invoices or schedules
Demonstrates poor fine motor control, usually accompanied by poor handwriting	➤ Avoids jobs requiring manipulation of small items ➤ Becomes frustrated when putting together toys for children
Lacks social perception	➤ Stands too close to people when conversing ➤ Does not perceive situations accurately; may laugh when something serious is happening or slap an unreceptive boss on the back in an attempt to be friendly
Has problems establishing social relationships; problems may be related to spoken language disorders	➤ Does not seem to know how to act and what to say to people in specific social situations and may withdraw from socializing
Lacks "executive functions," including self-motivation, self-reliance, self-advocacy, and goal-setting	➤ Demonstrates over-reliance on others for assistance or fails to ask for help when appropriate ➤ Blames external factors on lack of success ➤ Does not set personal goals and work deliberately to achieve them ➤ Expresses helplessness

Consequences of Learning Disabilities for Adults

The consequences of learning disabilities for adults can be both positive and negative. From a positive point of view, a learning disability can lead to experiences that allow an individual to look at the world from novel perspectives, and can enhance his or her life-skill repertoire. From a negative point of view, society's inability to see differences as an asset instead of a liability can seriously impede an individual's success in life.

Possible Positive Consequences

PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

Adults with learning disabilities often seek creative solutions that are "outside the box" and can come up with imaginative answers to difficult problems.

OUTGOING PERSONALITY

As a result of their history of failure, many adults with learning disabilities can develop gregarious personalities to help hide their learning problems.

STRONG COMPENSATORY SKILLS

Individuals with learning disabilities often compensate for literacy deficits by developing strong skills in other areas. These skills may include proficiency in the use of computers or other focused abilities in limited areas.

EMPATHY

Because they can relate to the pain of failure, adults with learning disabilities can often provide strong emotional support to others going though crisis.

PERSISTENCE

Persistence is a hallmark of many adults with learning disabilities who have refused to give up despite their difficulties and frustrations. If channeled appropriately, this experience can contribute to an active sense of dedication and purpose.

Possible Negative Consequences

RESTRICTED EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Educational experiences are frequently not designed to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. Therefore, these experiences may not be

rewarding. For many reasons, including inappropriate instruction, adults may experience repeated failures. Many adults may have dropped out of school before graduation because the system did not meet their needs. Even those adults who complete high school are not likely to go on to college or other types of postgraduate education because they have formed the belief that continued education has nothing to offer them.

LIMITED VOCATIONAL OPTIONS

Individuals with learning disabilities may have difficulty finding and keeping a job. Limited literacy skills, among other factors, may lead adults to limit their choices of employment. Success in certain jobs may be restricted because employers do not understand learning disabilities and their legal obligations to provide appropriate accommodations. Furthermore, given the limited understanding of learning disabilities in the workplace, adults with learning disabilities may be less likely to obtain accommodations for their disabilities than adults with other disabilities.

ISOLATION

When individuals with learning disabilities are school age, the inability of schools to promote a positive understanding of learning disabilities among both teachers and students may result in problems with making and keeping friends. The inability of schools to address communication and social skill problems at an early age may affect their lives as adults, keeping them isolated at work and in the community. Such isolation may contribute to feelings of loneliness.

POOR SELF-CONCEPT

Unfortunately, most organizations in our society view learning disabilities as a problem rather than an opportunity. As a result, individuals with learning disabilities may be made to feel inadequate and incapable, resulting in poor self-concepts. These feelings can be reinforced by the negative reaction of people who do not understand learning disabilities. These difficulties may cause rejection and withdrawal and may result in difficulties forming friendships.

DISSATISFACTION WITH LIFE

No matter how successful, individuals with learning disabilities may be misunderstood and made to feel that their differences are a burden on others. As a result of difficulties in school, relationships, and the workforce, they may be unhappy with their life achievements and opportunities, and they may not know how to go about changing the quality of their lives.

EMOTIONAL OVERLAY

When social organizations do not know how to address the needs of individuals with learning disabilities, a repeated failure cycle (beginning with a lack of academic achievement) may lead to a poor self-concept, a lack of motivation to learn, and increased frustration and anxiety. These factors may limit the willingness of adults to take risks, and can increase their vulnerability. If organizations, families, and friends persist in setting up conditions that lead to failure, individuals with learning disabilities may have difficulties in controlling their tempers and actions.

SOCIAL STIGMAS

Social organizations have a history of punishing those who do not fit. As a result, many adults may be unwilling to admit their difficulties and seek assistance. This unwillingness to ask for help may be due to a fear of failure, ridicule, or not being believed. As a result, adults with learning disabilities may develop negative coping skills and strong reactions of avoidance.

LIMITED AWARENESS OF RESOURCES AND RIGHTS

Only recently have educational organizations placed an emphasis on teaching individuals who have learning disabilities. As a result, adults with learning disabilities may not understand the nature of their disability, and may not have received the information, support, or guidance they need to assist them in educational programs. Adults may not know about their rights, community resources, and educational opportunities that can support their efforts. Consequently, adults may develop fears about learning and feelings of being out of control.

INEFFECTIVE STRATEGIES

Learning occurs everywhere, not just in schools. Opportunities for learning occur in the workplace, at home, with friends, and across many community settings. It is common, when faced with problems and learning challenges, to develop strategies for attacking problems and tasks. However, when no or poor guidance is provided about how to attack problems, ineffective and inefficient strategies may develop.

Because many adults with learning disabilities have not been taught how to approach tasks, they may develop strategies that are only partially successful. In addition, the learning strategies they have developed on their own may be not be effective in every situation. However, because the strategies have become a habit and have led to some success, adults with learning disabilities may be reluctant to change or abandon their strate-

gies. Their fear of failure may make them reluctant to take risks or try new strategies that may help them be more successful. To protect themselves, they may be defensive and avoid situations that could cause them to "fail" again.

Increasing the Success of Adults with Learning Disabilities

Much has been written about the failure of adults with learning disabilities, but it is important to stress that they can achieve their goals. Perhaps every adult with learning disabilities will learn to read and write well. However, with the use of appropriate instruction, far more adults can be successful than in the past.

Recent research shows that there are several avenues for adults with learning disabilities to achieve success. Gerber, Ginsberg, and Reiff (1992) and Reiff, Gerber, and Ginsberg (1997) studied the factors that increase the likelihood of success in adults with learning disabilities. Their research shows that adults with learning disabilities can achieve success if they

- recognize the full extent of their learning disability;
- understand what their specific learning disability is, and how it is manifested in the variety of environments in adult life;
- accept the full range of strengths and challenges associated with their learning disability; and
- develop a plan consistent with the strengths and challenges in order to attain the goals.

Gerber et al. have identified three "internal" components for success and four "external" components that interact with each other to facilitate success. The internal components for success are (1) desire to succeed, (2) goal setting in order to focus energy, skill, and time, and (3) positively reframing the learning disability (in essence, celebrating noted strengths while trying to mitigate or bypass weaknesses).

The four external components for success are (1) persistence, (2) finding a "goodness of fit" (how strengths match up to the challenges of the workplace or other adult environments), (3) learned creativity (using problem-solving skills to adapt to the task or environment, or vice versa), and (4) social ecologies (using social skills to call on a network of social support to accomplish tasks and/or goals).

Bridges to Practice has been written, in part, to help staff in literacy programs to develop policies and procedures which will help adults with learning disabilities to increase their likelihood of success in the areas listed above. However, the first step in helping adults to be successful is to change the way literacy program staff think about learning disabilities. The problems faced by adults with learning disabilities frequently can be attributed to social attitudes about being different.

Literacy programs should be designed with a positive view toward the success of adults with learning disabilities. To accomplish this, program leaders must ensure that disabilities and their impact are widely recognized and positively accepted by practitioners and clients. They also should strive to create a program that forges a partnership with adults with learning disabilities to facilitate their success. The research on the characteristics of successful adults with learning disabilities described earlier points to the following elements that should be part of a literacy program's design:

- an assessment process that is sensitive to learning disabilities and results in information that can be used to understand learning disabilities, access rights, and receive appropriate instruction and accommodations;
- instruction that is appropriate for adults with learning disabilities;
- curriculum opportunities that offer information that adults need to know to be successful across a variety of life situations;
- instruction in legal rights;
- provision of accommodations during instruction related to specific learning disabilities;
- links to other community services to best meet the needs of the adult with learning disabilities;
- provision of continuous ongoing quality professional development opportunities for all program staff, incorporating information on current research on learning disabilities; and
- continuous monitoring of progress leading to improvement of services to adults with learning disabilities.

Determining When to Disclose One's Learning Disabilities

Self-disclosure is a critical issue for adults with learning disabilities. An adult may find it helpful to reveal his or her learning disability for many reasons, including the following:

- It may be needed so that the adult can access rights provided by Section 504 and the ADA. These laws protect only those adults who have documented disabilities.
- It helps provide a context for employment, community involvement, and personal relationships. Self-disclosure can help employers, colleagues, and family members better understand and support the efforts of adults with learning disabilities.
- It can be a mechanism for establishing independence that is central to the adult years. Adults who disclose their learning disabilities in appropriate contexts can gain the kind of counsel and assistance that will allow them to function in more self-sufficient ways.
- It is consistent with the concept of empowerment for people with disabilities. Openness about one's learning disabilities can demonstrate self-acceptance, a growing self-esteem, and a willingness to take charge of one's own life.
- It requires introspection, which is key to an adult's ability to adjust to a variety of environments and circumstances.
- It is part of the larger picture of self-advocacy. Adults who are able to reveal their learning disabilities are more likely to be able to speak out in their own behalf and to persist in getting the services and assistance that are within their rights.

Although the benefits of self-disclosure can be great, there are also risks. How and when to self-disclose is a matter of real importance, and it is crucial for adults with learning disabilities to think through the many issues involved. Adults considering self-disclosure need to understand what learning disabilities are in general and specifically how they themselves are affected. They need to understand the difference between learning disabilities and mental retardation so that they can deal with the tendency to confuse the two conditions. Most importantly, the adult with learning disabilities should know that the decision to self-disclose is his or hers alone.

Legal Issues Related to Adults with Learning Disabilities

A learning disability that substantially limits a major life activity is a disability protected by federal and state laws, just as is a physical or sensory disability. Accordingly, the legal rights of qualified adults with learning disabilities become an important consideration for them and for the programs and practitioners serving them. However, in order for adults with learning disabilities to assert their rights, they must provide legal documentation of their learning disabilities. This documentation should include a diagnosis by a qualified professional, a description of the disabilities' impact on the individual's functioning, and recommendations for specific accommodations.

Adults often also need to learn how to become advocates for their rights. The characteristics of a good self-advocacy curriculum are described in *Guidebook 3*: *The Planning Process*. In addition, the bibliography in *Guidebook 1* lists further resources that address this important topic for adults who may benefit from self-advocacy training.

The information provided in this section is an overview of the legal issues surrounding the topic of disabilities. It is intended to provide an awareness of legal terminology and a basis for continuing further investigation and study.

A Learning Disability is a "Disability"

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (PL 101-336) defines an individual with a disability as a person who

- has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more "major life activities";
- has a record of such an impairment; or
- is regarded as having such an impairment.

Specific learning disabilities are examples of mental impairments. Major life activities include functions such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, **learning**, and working. Thus, an individual who has a learning disability may be entitled to certain rights and responsibilities. Legal protections exist for individuals with disabilities to ensure equal opportunity. Because rights and responsibilities are mandated, equal opportunity is guaranteed and not just expected.

Important Federal Laws

Much of the progress made in assuring civil rights protections for adults with learning disabilities has been achieved by guarantees provided for in federal law. The legal rights concerning learning disabilities are found in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 (PL 105-17, formerly PL 94-142), the Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 (PL 105-17)

IDEA is an education law that applies to young people with disabilities from birth to 21 years of age (defined as up to the 22nd birthday) who require special education and related services. The sections pertaining to school-age students also apply to young adults under the age of 22 who have not obtained a regular high school diploma. All education programs that receive federal funds, which includes all public schools, must adhere to the provisions of this law.

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112), Section 504

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states that "No individual with a disability in the United States shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be

subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance or any program or activity conducted by an Executive agency." A "program or activity" is defined as including all of the operations of a local educational agency, system of vocational education, or other school system. Section 504 applies to entities that receive federal funds.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (PL 101-336)

This federal legislation requires that "No qualified individual with a disability shall, by reason of such disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of a public entity or be subjected to discrimination by any such entity."

The ADA is divided into five sections (known as "titles"):

- Title I prohibits employment discrimination.
- Title II deals with discrimination in public settings.
- Title III protects the rights of persons with disabilities in privately operated settings.
- Title IV requires telephone companies to install telecommunications relay services for persons with speech and hearing impairments.
- Title V includes a number of miscellaneous provisions.

Title II mandates that a public entity, including its educational programs, shall make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, or procedures when modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of a disability. Title II also requires the provision of accessible facilities and auxiliary aids and services by public programs. Title III generally applies to private schools or other places of education, but does not apply to religiously controlled educational entities.

Rights and Responsibilities of Learners with Disabilities

Students with disabilities

- have the **right** to participate in educational programs without discrimination;
- have the **right** to reasonable accommodations in courses and examinations;

- have the **responsibility** to identify themselves as having a disability and request specific accommodations in a timely fashion; and
- have the **responsibility** to provide documentation concerning their disabilities and the need for accommodations.

Rights and Responsibilities of Literacy Programs

Literacy programs that enroll adults with documented disabilities are **responsible** for ensuring that the courses and examinations are accessible, and for providing reasonable accommodations in the delivery of course materials and in examinations.

Literacy programs have the **right** to identify and establish the abilities, skills, and competencies fundamental to its academic programs and courses, and to evaluate each learner's performance on this basis.

Legal Implications of Serving Adults with Learning Disabilities

Literacy programs may not discriminate against individuals with disabilities when admitting them to a program or providing them with services. When providing services, literacy programs must offer accommodations that will assist adults with learning disabilities to have an equal opportunity to participate in the program.

Adults with disabilities have the right to not be discriminated against when participating in literacy programs. Adults with disabilities also have a right to choose whether to disclose their disability status. If adults expect disability-related accommodations, they have the responsibility to make their disabilities known, to provide appropriate documentation, and to request specific accommodations.

Literacy programs must provide "reasonable accommodations" to qualified persons with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations (sometimes called auxiliary aids and services) are accommodations that make the program accessible to the individual with a disability. Such accommodations must be afforded to a qualified individual with a disability unless the service provider can demonstrate that the accommodation would impose undue hardship on the literacy programs, or constitute a substantial alteration in the nature of the program.

Examples of accommodations that educational programs may provide

for adults with learning disabilities, depending on the particular disability and need for accommodation, include, but are not limited to:

- extended time for completing tests;
- books on tape;
- reduced visual or auditory distractions, such as a private room for tests;
- auxiliary aids and assistive technology, such as calculators, highlighters, and computers;
- large-print materials;
- alternative format for instructions, such as audiotaped instructions in addition to printed instructions for taking a test; and
- note takers.

With specific regard to the General Educational Development (GED) Tests, the following are the principal accommodations indicated as allowable by the GED Testing Service, subject to verification of documented disabilities:

- an audiocassette edition of the test with printed reference copy and extra time for completion;
- use of a scribe;
- extended time for completing the test;
- use of a calculator;
- frequent breaks with or without extended time;
- a private room; and
- a large-print test edition.

Frequently Asked Questions About Legal Issues

Why do literacy providers need to share legal information with learners?

Literacy providers need to understand the legal rights of learners with disabilities and share this information with learners so that together they can make informed decisions which will both facilitate learning and help learners meet with success. This knowledge can provide the basis for setting realistic expectations on the part of learners so that they can make

appropriate requests for assistance. It also can help program providers deliver the types of literacy services necessary to enhance opportunities for the success of adults with learning disabilities. It is important to note that adults who received services under IDEA when they were in school may think that they are entitled to the same level of support or services under Section 504 and ADA. Neither Section 504 nor ADA guarantees the right of an adult to a free appropriate education the way IDEA does for school-age youngsters (and young adults before their 22nd birthday if they have not received a regular high school diploma). Adults do, however, have the right of equal access to programs and services for which they are otherwise qualified, as well as to reasonable accommodations in program activities.

What guidelines should be considered in selecting an accommodation?

Although a menu of accommodations may be generally appropriate to consider in assisting adults with learning disabilities, some programs develop guidelines about when to select a particular modification for a specific person. In general, the selection of a specific accommodation is frequently based on individual disabilities and needs (one size does not fit all) and should

- allow the most integrated experience possible;
- not compromise the essential course or program requirements;
- not pose a threat to personal or public safety; and
- not impose an undue financial or administrative burden on the program.

Can we refuse to serve adults who have learning disabilities?

No. Many programs have established policies and procedures to ensure that staff members do not intentionally or accidentally deny participation in a service, program, or activity simply because of learning disabilities.

Do we need to keep records confidential?

Yes. However, each program needs to develop a plan related to how to achieve this. Programs frequently develop policies, procedures, and practices for ensuring the confidential treatment of all disability-related information. Disability-related information is often stored in locked files with limited access. It should be shared only when the need to know

directly relates to some specific aspect of this confidential information, and the person with a disability has signed a release.

Do we have to obtain the learner's consent to begin a formal process confirming or ruling out learning disabilities?

Yes. The law requires informed consent to obtain records as well as to conduct testing that is not a uniform procedure for all learners. If screening is uniformly administered to all learners and is part of the usual intake procedure of a program, it is not necessary to obtain informed consent. However, if screening is done selectively for certain learners or if certain learners are referred for diagnostic testing, informed consent must be obtained. Literacy programs should have or should develop policies, procedures, and practices for obtaining the informed consent of persons suspected of having a learning disability.

The number of organizations that can provide additional information about legal issues surrounding learning disabilities is increasing. The Resources for Learning section provides a list of some of the groups that we can be contacted for more information about the rights and responsibilities of persons with learning disabilities under the law.

Systems and Program Change

A critical part of creating successful literacy programs is altering the way program leaders and practitioners think about change. Because all aspects of society can have an impact on the life of an adult, the mission for change is broad. Several interfacing systems, rather than one system, should be the target for needed change; *i.e.,* the social, educational, economic, judicial, and political support structures that affect individuals with learning disabilities.

To the practitioner, the notion of systemic change can be overwhelming. Therefore, the opportunity to create change must begin with those systems, or those aspects of an individual system, over which practitioners have direct control. Most certainly, practitioners have direct control over their own actions and their interactions with adults who have learning disabilities. From this perspective, personal growth through professional development is an important factor in systemic change. It is essential that practitioners commit to developing actions based on (1) understanding learning disabilities in adults, (2) valuing each learner, (3) creating partnerships with learners, and (4) creating a best-practices approach to assessment and instruction.

Practitioners are also in the position to influence the people with whom they work and to begin to shape the policies and procedures that define their programs. For this kind of program change to occur, dialogue among program staff is critical. Practitioners must use a shared knowledge base and work toward a shared vision. For this reason, professional

development opportunities must be designed to foster interaction among practitioners.

Gradually, practitioners can begin to move out of their own programs and begin the work of shaping other parts of the system that affect adults with learning disabilities. If all practitioners (whether they are working in a national agency or in a local literacy program) begin to work together to create change at the level at which they have control, then systemic change can occur.

The following assumptions about systems change can be used to guide program staff's thinking about improving services to adults with learning disabilities:

- Change is a process, not an event.
- Change is rooted in a shared vision of the need to change, and a clear understanding of the needs and goals of adults with learning disabilities.
- Change, and the goals for change, are defined at multiple levels within a system and are played out in each level; change is both a top–down and a bottom–up process.
- Work at change involves ensuring that people at different levels within the system understand their roles and responsibilities.
- Shared as well as unique actions are expected of those at each level.
- Commitment, leadership, communication, and compromise are required at all levels.
- Equal attention must be given to the processes of planning, implementing, and evaluating actions and outcomes.
- Success is not contingent on a single person, group, or political agenda.
- Research-based practice in learning disabilities, appropriately adapted and translated for use with adults, is used to guide the formulation of policy, procedures, and actions.
- High-quality conversations about improving the life of those with learning disabilities are consistent, persistent, and pervasive.

Creating a Shared Vision and Developing an Action Plan

To develop a literacy program that is appropriate to the needs of adults with learning disabilities, program leaders must engage their staff members and other stakeholders within the larger community of service providers to review the literacy services currently being offered. Together, they may identify components of the program which could be improved to be more responsive to the needs of persons with learning disabilities. As they engage in this process of self-examination and strategic planning, they will be well served by creating a vision centered around the following program features.

Integrate Services with All Literacy Services

Services for adults with learning disabilities should not be thought of as a separate set of policies, procedures, and practices to be used with a few adult learners. Rather, it is more productive to conceptualize services for adults with learning disabilities as an integral part of *all* services that are provided to *all* adults who enter literacy programs. Once this perspective has been adopted, then all services can be systematically modified to address the significant number of adults in literacy programs who may have learning disabilities.

Ensure that Services Reflect Best Practices

It is true that many practices suggested in *Bridges to Practice* are built around practices that are good for all learners who may be struggling with literacy. However, it is also true that best practices related to serving adults with learning disabilities are based on the premise that good practices are already in place in adult literacy programs. Therefore, when adults do not learn, even though usually effective practices are in place, then more structured, direct, and intensive instructional practices are needed. These practices should be implemented and blended with appropriate legal accommodations and instructional adaptations, as necessary.

Adult literacy services that are appropriate for adults with learning disabilities are characterized as follows:

- Accommodations are provided to ensure access to services that would otherwise be available if learning disabilities were not present.
- Accommodations are provided based on the determination of learning disabilities by a formal diagnostic evaluation performed by a psy-

chologist or other qualified professional (*e.g.*, clinician or diagnostician who is licensed to administer psychoeducational test batteries).

- Practitioners are involved in advocacy and creating linkages to community resources. These linkages (including helping the adult obtain testing for confirming or ruling out learning disabilities) should promote understanding and change. This process increases the chances of success for adults with learning disabilities.
- Assessment practices allow for intensive probes to identify performance patterns. These patterns can indicate that an adult is processing information (*i.e.*, acquiring, storing, retrieving, expressing, and performing) differently from other adults. In other words, just providing more practice, independent learning activities, and presentation that include little interaction, guidance, or feedback will not significantly enhance performance. (For further information on the assessment process, refer to *Guidebook 2: The Assessment Process.*)
- A carefully thought-out process for screening for learning disabilities is embedded in the overall assessment process. This process should involve a review of multiple information sources that eventually leads to a decision to discuss the possibility of learning disabilities and the potential advantages and disadvantages of seeking formal diagnostic testing by a qualified professional. (For further information on the assessment process, refer to *Guidebook 2: The Assessment Process*.)
- Staff are trained and have the resources to plan, select, and implement a variety of curriculum options, including self-advocacy. (For further information on the planning process, refer to *Guidebook 3: The Planning Process.*)
- Individual and group instruction incorporates research-based principles for teaching individuals with learning disabilities. (For further information on the teaching/learning process, refer to *Guidebook 4: The Teaching/Learning Process.*)

Initiating Change

The following five steps are critical to initiating the change process:

1. Bring all stakeholders together to create a shared vision and develop an action plan.
2. Enlist administrative support.

3 Provide meaningful and ongoing professional development opportunities.

4 Identify resources.

5 Continuously monitor and improve the change process.

These five steps are described in greater detail below.

Step 1: Bring the Stakeholders Together

There are many specialized programs available to persons with disabilities in various public and private community organizations. Unfortunately, the potential impact of these programs is often weakened because they do not connect with other local programs to create a more comprehensive network of services. Adults and literacy programs need to enlist the assistance of a broad base of community organizations for two major reasons:

- The more that groups are enlisted as partners in the change and development process, the more likely systemic change will occur. Literacy providers are in a unique position because they can bring a variety of these stakeholder groups together to create a shared vision and to develop an action plan to bring about change.
- The resources and costs needed to provide appropriate services can be significant. Literacy practitioners are in a position to understand the needs of adults with learning disabilities and to locate community resources that are free or available at a reasonable cost. In addition, literacy practitioners can work with other community organizations to arrange collaborative partnerships that can create access to resources and advocate for changes in policies and procedures that could improve access for adult learners.

By developing community linkages, literacy programs may be able to

- help adults who desire testing to confirm learning disabilities to gain access to formal and professional diagnostic testing administered by a psychologist;
- obtain training opportunities needed for family, community, and employment success that are beyond the mission of the literacy program;
- obtain social and emotional support for adults to discuss issues involving living with learning disabilities; and

- promote advocacy by assisting in securing civil rights protections and appropriate accommodations for learners.

The following state and community services may assist adults with learning disabilities. Contact information for many of these organizations can be found in the Resources for Learning section in this guidebook.

CHILDREN AND ADULTS WITH ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDERS (CHADD)

This group can provide information, support, and advocacy for persons with learning disabilities who have been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). They may also be able to connect adults with learning disabilities specialists and, in some cases, to arrange for lower-cost diagnostic testing or other services.

DEPARTMENT OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION OR DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

This is a federally supported, state-run agency that provides employment services to adults with disabilities. Policies related to testing and services vary from state to state. Services provided may include covering costs for literacy training, diagnostic testing, job training, or college courses. Diagnostic testing for learning disabilities to determine eligibility for support can be provided as part of entrance into programs.

DISABILITY COUNCILS

Many communities have representatives from a variety of community groups working together to coordinate policies and services and to advocate for people with disabilities.

EMPLOYER-SPONSORED JOB-TRAINING PROGRAMS

Many businesses sponsor literacy or job training. Their personnel departments may have individuals who coordinate or deliver these training activities.

HOSPITALS

Some large hospitals collaborate with community agencies to provide diagnostic testing for learning disabilities. Some literacy groups have cultivated these relationships because hospitals regularly deal with Medicaid regulations and procedures, which allow for payment for diagnostic testing. While most literacy programs do not have the infrastructure to access these funds, large hospitals do.

INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS

These programs may pay for some literacy services.

INTERNATIONAL DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION

This group, formerly known as the Orton Dyslexia Society, can provide information, support, and advocacy for persons with learning disabilities. They may be able to connect adults with learning disabilities specialists and, in some cases, to arrange for lower-cost diagnostic testing or other services.

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION (LDA)

This group can provide information, support, and advocacy for persons who have or may have learning disabilities. There are LDA chapters in most states. They may be able to connect adults with learning disabilities specialists and, in some cases, to arrange for lower-cost diagnostic testing or other services.

MEDICAID/MEDICAL INSURANCE PROGRAMS

Some medical programs may pay for literacy services and diagnostic testing. Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) services may be available. The Health Care Finance Administration (HCFA) is responsible for Medicaid and has policies for covering the expenses of some diagnostic testing.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Most universities, colleges, and community colleges have testing and other services for persons with disabilities or suspected disabilities. Faculty may also be willing to collaborate in providing free or reduced-cost testing and other services as part of psychologist and teacher training efforts. For example, groups of programs can arrange to have graduate students perform testing under the supervision of a psychologist.

PRIVATE PSYCHOLOGISTS

The yellow pages include the names of certified psychologists who can provide formal diagnostic testing and may arrange follow-up services. Some psychologists work with community agencies, and a group of local organizations might be able to contract for testing at a reduced cost.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Some private schools offer services and diagnostic testing for adults with learning disabilities, and may be willing to make flexible payment arrangements for adults with limited resources.

PROGRAMS SUPPORTING WELFARE REFORM

Many individuals on welfare may have learning disabilities. A number of agencies addressing welfare are supportive of efforts to identify adults with learning disabilities and find appropriate interventions to help them move to self-sufficiency.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Special education services provided through IDEA may be available for young adults under 22 without high school diplomas. These services can include diagnostic testing.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI)

This program can provide direct income to persons with disabilities. Diagnostic testing to determine eligibility for support is also provided.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

This program can provide for job training and job coaches.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Vocational programs have education and training services that can meet the needs of adults with learning disabilities. These programs may need information about accommodations and how to provide better instruction in mixed-ability classrooms.

Programs that provide testing may have a psychologist test adults with learning difficulties. However, the psychologist may determine after testing that the difficulties are not severe enough to quality for the learning disabilities diagnosis. For others, the severity will be sufficient to qualify for this diagnosis. The psychologist's report will provide documentation that enables the adult to become qualified for the rights to protections as a person with a disability, including the right to accommodations in testing and in the workplace. More information on issues related to obtaining formal diagnostic testing is included in *Guidebook 2: The Assessment Process.*

Step 2: Enlist Administrative Support

Literacy teachers and tutors cannot effect broad-sweeping change by themselves. They may be able to make some changes in the way they work with adults with learning disabilities, but they need the support of program administrators, from the chief executive officer level to the literacy program leaders, to make the change process successful.

Program leaders can bring together the various community stakeholders, encourage the creation of a shared vision, and work toward identifying

agencies to which learners can be referred for issues such as diagnosis of learning disabilities, vision and hearing screening, employment support, and health care. Program leaders can also ensure that literacy program staff have the opportunity to meet frequently and engage in meaningful dialogue about the change process and their progress toward their stated goals.

Step 3: Provide Meaningful and Ongoing Professional Development Opportunities

Literacy programs should have a vision about the nature of, practices for addressing, and legal issues associated with learning disabilities. This vision is most effective when shared by program staff and a variety of community organizations, and requires an investment in high-quality professional development opportunities focused on improving services for adults with learning disabilities.

Staff should select program and professional development activities based on a long-term commitment to increase the success of adults with learning disabilities. Most practices require an initial investment of three to five years to introduce a practice to the staff in a literacy program. After a practice is in place, continued success of the practice requires an ongoing investment of resources and staff time to update and review the practice and to ensure that it stays effective.

Step 4: Identify Resources

To effect change, literacy program leaders and staff need to work with other stakeholders to identify resources which will allow for increased contact time with learners, frequent high-quality professional development opportunities, specialized program staff (lead teachers or learning disabilities specialists), and other elements which will improve the quality of services provided to adults with learning disabilities.

Step 5: Continuously Monitor and Improve the Change Process

After developing an action plan, literacy program staff need to continuously monitor their progress toward goals and adjust the plan, as appropriate. To assess the process effectively, program staff should consider the following questions:

- What are the criteria for evaluating the change process? (For example, how will success be measured?)
- Who will provide the evaluation input?

- Who will review the results?
- How will the results be used?
- Who will monitor the desired outcomes?
- How will new ideas and needs be incorporated?
- How will the need for continuous improvement be communicated and encouraged?

Indicators of High-Quality Services

Literacy program staff can evaluate their progress toward developing high-quality programs by ensuring that the programs have the following characteristics on this checklist:

the program has a philosophical commitment to serving adults with learning disabilities.

Staff understand learning disabilities and their impact on the lives of learners.

- ❑ A written definition of learning disabilities has been adopted for guiding program decisions and services.

Staff and adults with learning disabilities can describe the adopted definition and associated characteristics of learning disabilities.

- ❑ Written policies, procedures, and actual practices are not based on, and do not reinforce, generalizations and stereotypes about learning disabilities.
- ❑ Written policies and procedures ensure careful decision-making about services related to learning disabilities and do not reinforce premature decision-making.

Staff understand the law and the legal requirements related to adults with learning disabilities.

- ❑ Written policies and procedures detail how legal rights for adults with learning disabilities are assured.
- ❑ Written policies and procedures describe how program staff will keep adults with learning disabilities informed of their legal rights and about how to advocate for those rights.

Staff and adults with learning disabilities can describe the legal implications related to providing services to adults with learning disabilities.

- ❑ Written policies and procedures ensure that legally required accommodations are offered to adults with learning disabilities at each step of the program.

Staff work to create community linkages and systems change that will increase the success of adults with learning disabilities.

- ❑ Written policies and procedures define the range and role of community resources and how staff and adults with learning disabilities access them.
- ❑ Written policies and procedures define the program staff's perceived roles and responsibilities in systems change.

Staff development plans ensure that practitioners can effectively use and maintain the practices that have been selected to improve the quality of services for adults with learning disabilities.

- ❑ Written plans describe short- and long-term staff development plans that will result in the creation of policies, procedures, and practices that will improve and maintain the quality of services for adults with learning disabilities.
- ❑ Ongoing evaluations of staff reflect accurate understanding of learning disabilities and implementation of adopted policies, procedures, and research-based practices.
- ❑ Written policies, procedures, and practices are reviewed and revised annually to ensure that best practices related to learning disabilities continue to shape program services.

Resources for Learning

Agencies Within Each State

Literacy programs may want to connect with the following agencies, many of which are based in each state. Note that names of state agencies vary in each state. For state government agencies, try your state government's information number. Government numbers are often listed in a special section of your local phone book.

STATE OFFICE OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION

Often based within each state's department of education, but sometimes under another state agency, such as the board for community colleges or the department of workforce education.

STATE LITERACY RESOURCE CENTER

The phone number should be available from the state office of adult basic education.

GED TESTING OFFICE

Often can be found within the state department of education. Or, get your state's number from the GED Hotline at (800) 626-9433.

STATE OFFICE OF REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

Sometimes listed with the state name first; for example, the Massachusetts Office is called "Mass Rehab."

JOBS PROGRAM

Often part of the state welfare, employment, or transition agency.

PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY

These agencies often are listed within children's services or child welfare departments.

CORRECTIONAL EDUCATION

Sometimes under the state's department of education; sometimes under the state's department of corrections. The state director of adult basic education or the literacy resource center (both listed above) can give you the numbers for state and local prison education programs. Or, get your state's number from the Correctional Education Association, 8025 Laurel Lakes Court, Laurel, MD 20707, (301) 490-1440.

INTERNATIONAL DYSLEXIA ASSOCIATION

Call (800) 222-3123 to find out about state chapters.

LEARNING DISABILITIES ASSOCIATION

Has state and local chapters in every state. You can look on their web page (listed below) or call their national office at (412) 341-1515 for more information.

National Resources

AFL-CIO, Department of Education
815 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
Phone: (202) 637-5143
Fax: (202) 637-5058

Alliance for Technology Access (ATA)
2175 East Francisco Blvd., Suite L
San Rafael, CA 94901
Phone: (415) 455-4575
E-mail: atainfo@atacess.org

American Association for Adult and Continuing Education
1200 19th Street, NW, Suite 300
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 429-5131
Fax: (202) 223-4579

American Association of Community Colleges
One Dupont Circle, Suite 410
Washington, DC 20036-1176
Phone: (202) 728-7851
Fax: (202) 833-2467

American Association of Retired Persons
Institute of Lifelong Learning
601 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20049
Phone: (202) 434-2470
Fax: (202) 434-6499

American Council on Education
The Center for Adult Learning and Educational Credentials
One Dupont Circle, Suite 250
Washington, DC 2006-1193
Phone: (202) 939-9475
Fax: (202) 775-8578

American Library Association
Reference and Adult Services Division
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: (312) 280-4395
Fax: (312) 944-8085

American Society for Training and Development
1640 King Street, Box 1443
Alexandria, VA 22313-2043
Phone: (703) 683-8160
Fax: (703) 548-2383

American Vocational Association
1410 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: (703) 683-3111
Fax: (703) 683-7424

Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
243 South Wabash
Chicago, IL 60604
Phone: (312) 922-5909
Fax: (312) 922-1769

Council for Learning Disabilities (CLD)
P.O. Box 40303
Overland Park, KS 66204
Phone: (913) 492-8755

Distance Education and Training Council
1601 18th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009-2529
Phone: (202) 234-5100
Fax: (202) 332-1386

Division of Adult Education and Literacy Clearinghouse
U.S. Department of Education
600 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202-7240
Phone: (202) 205-9996
Fax: (202) 205-8973

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career and Vocational Education
Ohio State University
1900 Kenny Road
Columbus, OH 43210-1090
Phone: (800) 848-4815
E-mail: ericacve@magnus.acs.ohio_state.edu

General Educational Development Testing Service (GEDTS)
American Council on Education
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 250
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (800) 626-9433 or (202) 939-9490
E-mail: ged@ace.nche.edu

HEATH Resource Center
National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20036-1193
Phone: (800) 544-3284 or (202) 939-9320
E-mail: heath@ace.nche.edu

International Dyslexia Association (IDA)
The Chester Building
8600 LaSalle Road, Suite 382
Baltimore, MD 21286-2044
Phone: (800) 222-3123 or (410) 296-0232
E-mail: info@interdys.org

International Reading Association
800 Barksdale Road
P.O. Box 8139
Newark, DE 19714-8139
Phone: (302) 731-1600

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)
West Virginia University
918 Chestnut Ridge Road
P.O. Box 6080
Morgantown, WV 26506
Phone: (800) 232-9675 or (800) 526-7234
E-mail: jan@jna.icdi.wvu.edu

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)
4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1349
Phone: (412) 341-1515
E-mail: ldanatl@usaor.net

Learning Resources Network
1550 Hayes Drive
Manhattan, KS 66502
Phone: (913) 539-5376
Fax: (913) 539-7766

National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium (NAEPDC)
444 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 422
Washington, DC 20001
Phone: (202) 624-5250
Fax: (202) 624-8826

National Center for Law and Learning Disabilities (NCLLD)
P.O. Box 368
Cabin John, MD 20818
Phone: (301) 469-8308

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
381 Park Avenue South, Suite 1401
New York, NY 10016
Phone: (888) 575-7373 or (212) 545-7510

National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS)
1291 Taylor Street, NW
Washington, DC 20542
Phone: (800) 424-8567 or (202) 707-5100
E-mail: nls@loc.gov

Office of Vocational and Adult Education
U.S. Department of Education
600 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202
Phone: (202) 205-5451
Fax: (202) 205-8748
Email: ovae@inet.ed.gov

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
1331 F Street, NW
Washington, DC 20004-1107
Phone: (202) 376-6200

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, Inc. (RFB&D)
20 Roszel Road
Princeton, NJ 08540
Phone: (800) 221-4792 or (609) 452-0606
E-mail: info@rfbd.org

RESNA Technical Assistance Project
1700 North Moore Street, Suite 1540
Arlington, VA 22209
Phone: (703) 524-6686
E-mail: ifloyd@resna.org

Teachers of English to Students of Other Languages
1600 Cameron Street, Suite 300
Alexandria, VA 22314-7864
Phone: (703) 836-0774
Fax: (703) 836-7864

Toll-Free Numbers

American Association for Vocational Instructional Materials
(800) 228-4689

An operator is available from 8 a.m.–5 p.m. ET Monday–Friday, who provides information on educational materials (software, videos, manuals), including a Performance Based Teacher Education catalog. The catalog includes a listing of Category L Modules that deal with teaching students with special needs. Products are available for purchase.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Hotline
(800) 949-4232

The ADA Hotline provides technical assistance, information services, and outreach regarding the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). This number connects the caller to one of 10 sites based on the caller's location. Hours of operation vary depending upon the time zone (Monday–Friday). Operators are equipped with a listing of LD associations and can answer questions about how ADA protects individuals with LD. An answering machine is available during non-business hours, and follow-up calls are placed the next working day.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
(800) 669-3362

EEOC's voice mail system directs all calls from 7 a.m.–5:30 p.m. ET Monday–Friday. Operators accept orders for publications, fact sheets, posters, and a resource directory for people with disabilities, including learning disabilities (LD). They do not answer questions relating to employment but can give referrals to local EEOC offices.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, & Vocational Education
(800) 848-4815

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education is located at the Center for Employment, Education, and Training at Ohio State University. From 8:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. ET Monday–Friday, representatives are available to provide information on ERIC Digests, annotated bibliographies, and assorted publications, some with information on LD. ERIC does not answer specific questions on disabilities, local programs, or jobs.

Federal Student Aid Hotline
(800) 433-3243

The hotline accepts calls from 8 a.m.–8 p.m. ET Monday–Friday, and provides information on eligibility, benefits, applications, and other questions about Federal Student Aid. Voice mail directs calls during business hours.

General Educational Development (GED) Hotline
(800) 626-9433

General Educational Development (GED) Hotline has a 24-hour operator service that provides information on local GED classes and testing services. They have an accommodations guide for people taking the GED who have a learning disability.

International Dyslexia Association (IDA)
(800) 222-3123

Formerly the Orton Dyslexia Society, IDA has a 24-hour voice mail service that receives information requests. From 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. ET (Monday–Friday) at (410) 296-0232, IDA staff direct people to appropriate materials about the issues of dyslexia and make referrals for testing and tutors. Information is given on publications about dyslexia, local branches of IDA, and workshops and conferences.

Job Accommodations Network (JAN)
(800) 526-7234

JAN has a free consulting service from 8 a.m.–8 p.m. (Monday–Thursday) and 8 a.m.–5 p.m. ET (Friday) that provides information on equipment, methods, and modifications for disabled persons to improve their work environment. All information is specific to the disability, including LD.

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
(888) 575-7373

NCLD's voice-mail system directs all calls, and an operator is available from 9 a.m.–5 p.m. ET Monday–Friday. The caller is directed to information about program areas, membership, and can get information sent directly from NCLD's Information and Referral Service.

National Center for Research in Vocational Education
(800) 762-4093

An operator is available from 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Pacific Time (PT) Monday–Friday, who provides information on products, electronic services, and vocational education. A catalog and newsletter are also available. The Office of Student Services produces materials on learning disabilities and a sub-catalog for "Special Populations."

National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) Hotline
(800) 228-8813

Literacy Hotline has a 24-hour, bilingual (Spanish/ English) operator service that provides information on: literacy/education classes, GED testing services, volunteer opportunities, and a learning disabilities brochure.

National Library of Education at the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement
(800) 424-1616

U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement has an operator available from 9 a.m.–5 p.m. ET Monday–Friday and provides information on statistics on education and schools, publications, references to other agencies, and references to a specialist on learning disabilities.

National Library Services for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
(800) 424-8567

Voice mail system that directs all calls 8 a.m.–4:30 p.m. ET (Monday–Friday). Operators provide information on audiocassette, large print, and braille books and magazines for recreational reading. Callers with learning disabilities must meet certain guidelines to use these services.

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, Inc. (RFB&D)
(800) 221-4792

Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, Inc. has core office hours from 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m. ET (Monday–Friday) with extended hours to 9:00 p.m. when necessary. Operators provide information on: over 80,000 recorded textbooks (on 4-track cassette or computer disk) and other classroom materials, from 4th grade through postgraduate levels, available for loan; the application process and fees; and the certification process. Callers with learning disabilities are eligible to participate, but must complete the certification requirements.

Social Security Administration
(800) 772-1213; (800) 325-0778 (TTY)

Representatives answer calls from 7 a.m.–7 p.m. (Monday–Friday) ET and provide information on a wide range of Social Security and Supplemental Security Income matters. A limited number of automated services are available 24 hours a day. Bilingual (Spanish/English) services are also available.

Interesting Web Pages

Alliance for Technology Access (ATA)

http://www.ataccess.org

ATA is a network of community-based resource centers, developers, and vendors dedicated to providing information and support services to children and adults with disabilities, and increasing their use of standard, assistive, and information technologies. The 42 non-profit centers can be found all across the country in 29 states and territories. The web site includes a list of approximately 60 developers and distributors of assistive

devices and software and a description of their product lines; success stories from children and adults with disabilities who have benefited from using assistive technology; and an online version of ATA's newsletter.

Division of Adult Education and Literacy Clearinghouse U.S. Department of Education

http://www.ed.gov/offices/OVAE/division.html

This site provides useful information about OVAE's programs, grants, and events.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

http://ericacve.org/

ERIC/ACVE provides comprehensive information services in: adult and continuing education, career education (childhood through adult), and vocational and technical education. The web site allows you to search ERIC/ACVE's database of journal articles. You can read full-text versions of ERIC/ACVE Digests and other ERIC publications and you can order single copies online. There are links to other ERIC clearinghouses and related journals.

International Dyslexia Association (IDA)

http://www.interdys.org

This extensive web site offers a list of assistive technology products and services, links to related organizations, conference and seminar information, summaries of recent research in dyslexia, order information for IDA books and *Annals of Dyslexia*, links to legal and legislative sites, and a bulletin board.

Job Accommodations Network (JAN)

http://www.janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/english

JAN is an international toll-free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations and the employability of people with functional limitations. The web site includes a description of JAN's services, links to employment and disability resources, electronic versions of JAN's annual and quarterly reports, and a bulletin board.

Laubach Literacy

http://www.laubach.org

This web site describe's Laubach Literacy's national and international programs and provides links to literacy/adult education web sites. New Readers

Press publications are not listed, but you can request a catalog via e-mail.

LD OnLine: Learning Disabilities Resources

http://www.LDOnLine.org

This colorful web site is a service of The Learning Project at WETA, Washington, DC, in association with The Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities. The site includes: weekly links to current articles about learning disabilities; definitions of and FAQs for LD and ADD/ADHD; a monthly focus topic; an online store that offers book and video products, book reviews, and links to publishers; and extensive links to LD topics.

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)

http://www.ldanatl.org

LDA's web site includes: fact sheets on various LD-related subjects; online catalog of LDA and other publications, including a section on adults (but you must order through the mail); calendar of events; and links to state LDA home pages.

Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. (LVA)

http://www.literacyvolunteers.org

This web site includes: links to LVA events, publications, and news releases; an online catalog of LVA publications; links to LVA affiliates; and information about volunteering.

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL)

http://hugse1.harvard.edu/~ncsall

NCSALL is a collaborative effort between the Harvard University Graduate School of Education and World Education. The web site includes a description of NCSALL's research projects; an online version of the journal *Focus on Basics*; and links to practitioner leaders in the Practitioner Dissemination and Research Network.

National Council for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)

http://www.ncld.org

NCLD provides free information on learning disabilities and resources available in communities nationwide to parents, professionals, and adults with learning disabilities. NCLD's Information & Referral Service is the only nationwide, computerized resource clearinghouse committed solely to LD. They also develop and support innovative programs, semi-

nars, and workshops which assist individuals with LD, and conduct public outreach and legislative advocacy.

National Institute for Literacy

http://novel.nifl.gov/

NIFL's web site is called LINCS (Literacy Information aNd Communication System). The site brings "all adult literacy-related resources, expertise, and knowledge to a single focal point." Includes policy updates, grants and funding sources, calendar of events, publications list and online ordering, and fact sheets on literacy-related subjects.

Outreach and Technical Assistance Network (OTAN)

http://www.scoe.otan.dni.us/

The Outreach and Technical Assistance network is a California Department of Education, Adult Education funded project designed to provide technical assistance, communication linkages and information to adult education providers.

President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities

http://www.pcepd.gov

The President's Committee is a small federal agency whose Chairman and Vice Chairs are appointed by the President. This site includes links to potential employers, descriptions of current projects, fact sheets and ADA brochures, and a directory of state liaisons to the committee.

Roads to Learning

http://www.ala.org/roads

Roads to Learning is funded by the Emily Hall Tremaine Foundation and administered by ASCLA, a division of the American Library Association. Its purpose is to "encourage linkages among libraries, community organizations, and service providers to improve service to learning disabled people, their families, professionals, and other interested people." The web site includes a list and description of LD organizations, publication resource list, and information on subscribing to its listserv PLLD-L.

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Glossary

Accommodations	Techniques and/or materials which legally must be allowed or provided to individuals with disabilities to complete school or work assignments with greater ease and effectiveness. Examples include spell checkers, tape recorders, and extra time for completing assignments.
Advance organizer	Concise overview or summary of a larger body of information that is used to gain prior knowledge before reading or listening to the larger body of information.
Assistive technology	Equipment that enhances the ability of individuals with LD to be more efficient and successful. Examples include use of an overhead projector by a teacher and use of computer grammar checkers.
Attention deficit disorder (ADD)	A disorder characterized by severe and persistent difficulties in one or more of the following areas: attention, impulsivity, and motor behaviors. These difficulties can lead to learning and behavior problems at home, school, or work.
Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)	ADD with hyperactivity, or excessive and exaggerated motor activity.
Auditory	Having to do with the sense of hearing.
Auditory discrimination	The ability to differentiate between speech sounds.
Auditory memory	The ability to remember information which has been presented orally.
Auditory perception	The ability to recognize sounds.

Automaticity	Automatic and correct responses to stimuli without conscious effort.
Basic skills	The fundamental academic skills related to reading, writing, listening, and mathematics that must be mastered for an individual to be successful in daily living tasks.
Best practice	Making good decisions about how best to help an individual learn.
Cognitive skills	Skills that are used for thinking, comprehending, analyzing, or evaluating.
Connected instruction	A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves showing the adult how information in and between units and lessons is linked to learning and to the adult's goals.
Content mastery approach	Teaching method wherein the learner receives intensive instruction in topics that are needed for daily living, such as obtaining insurance, getting a driver's license, doing taxes, and procuring health care services.
Coping strategy	A method or behavioral strategy that helps an individual succeed despite learning or other disabilities.
Critical content	Specific information that the learner needs to master for a given task, such as the skills needed to pass a driver's test.
Critical questions	Questions that the instructor should pose that will lead to discourse on learning and help the learner identify goals.
Cue-Do-Review	To help ensure learning, the teacher should CUE the learner, explaining the level of instruction, DO the activities in partnership with the learner, and REVIEW the learning at the end of each level.
Decoding	A process of recognizing unfamiliar written words by sequentially segmenting the sounds represented by the letters of the word and then by blending the sounds into a meaningful word or syllables which are then combined into words.
Diagnosis	Confirmation of the existence of a condition by someone qualified to reach such a conclusion. For example, a licensed psychologist can make a diagnosis of a learning disability.
Diagnostic tests	An aid to assessment that yields information concerning the learner's weaknesses in areas such as reading or math; composed of several parts, including personal history and psycho-educational tests.

Direct instruction — A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, characterized by high rates of teacher control during initial stages of information acquisition followed by careful performance monitoring as the learner gradually assumes control over application. Instruction is structured, modular, and sequential (simple to complex and concrete to abstract). Direct instruction stresses practice and mastery, and provides a high level of success experiences and positive feedback to the student.

Dyscalculia — Difficulty in performing mathematical functions, reasoning, word problems, or in aligning columns of numbers or distinguishing numbers or operational symbols such as + (plus sign) and – (minus sign).

Dysgraphia — Difficulty in writing well, as marked by slow writing rate, limited vocabulary, poor grammar, poor sentence structure, incorrect use of punctuation, poor penmanship, or trouble organizing and sequencing ideas on paper.

Dyslexia — A specific language-based disorder characterized by problems in learning to read, write, and spell.

Dysnomia — Difficulty in remembering names or other words that are needed for oral or written language.

Encoding — In spelling, a process by which students segment sounds of a word, translate each phoneme into its corresponding letter, and then spell the word. Encoding requires predictable sound–symbol correspondences and phonic generalizations (spelling rules).

Enduring instruction — A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves acknowledging and committing the time necessary to ensure that the information is mastered by the learner and used to increase success in life.

Evaluated instruction — A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves adapting instruction based on assessing the adult's progress and response to previous attempts at instruction.

Explicit instruction — A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves providing detailed explanations and models about how to approach, think about, perform, and evaluate learning and performance.

GED tests — General Educational Development Tests: five tests in the areas of writing skills, social studies, science, interpreting literature and the arts, and mathematics; successful completion of these tests results in the award of the high school equivalency diploma.

Generalizable instruction	A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves using activities before, during, and after information has been mastered that ensures continued application of the information by the learner to increase life success outside of the literacy setting.
Graphic organizer	Visual depiction of the organization of information used to enhance the comprehension of information. Graphic organizers can be used in advance, during, and/or after presentation of information.
Hyperactivity	Excessive or exaggerated motor activity, as evidenced in an individual's inability to sit still.
Impulsivity	Acting on impulse with no prior consideration of the consequences of one's actions.
Incidence	The number of new cases occurring in a population during a specific time interval
Independent practice	The learner works independently or with other learners to practice new skills or strategies.
Individualized education plan (IEP)	A specifically tailored program designed to meet the distinctive needs of students diagnosed with a disability.
Informative instruction	A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves making sure that adults learn how they are being taught, what is expected during the instructional situation, and how they can improve learning and performance.
Instructional adaptation	Alternative techniques and/or materials that are provided for an individual by a literacy practitioner to increase the effectiveness of instruction.
Integration	The process in which the brain groups, organizes, reserves, and reconstructs information.
Intensive instruction	A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves maintaining a high degree of learner attention and response during ongoing instructional interactions that are scheduled as frequently and as close together as possible.
Kinesthetic	Learning by doing.
Laterality	A complete awareness of both sides of the body.

Learning disability — A variety of neurological disorders, including differences in one or more of the basic processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language. Learning disabilities are lifelong conditions that are not related to visual or auditory deficiencies. Learning disabilities are not the result of delays in mental development.

Learning modalities — The means through which information is perceived, such as visual, auditory, or kinesthetic means.

Learning strategies — How a person approaches learning; includes how a person thinks and acts before, during, and after a task and how a person evaluates the impact of the strategy on learning and performance

Learning styles — The learning process that uses one's preferred modality (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic).

Literacy — An individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and to communicate and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, and to achieve one's goals and develop one's knowledge and potential.

Metacognition — The ability to perceive or gain awareness about one's own thoughts or learning process and, acting upon this awareness, to choose appropriate learning strategies.

Mnemonic — Pertaining to memory.

Mnemonic device — A method of remembering information by linking key information to a word or phrase that reminds the learner, such as using the word GAIN to help a person remember the routine for mailing a package: Gather materials, Address envelope, Inspect address for accuracy, Notify mailroom to pick up package.

Morpheme — The smallest unit of meaning in a word, including prefixes, root words, and suffixes. They can be free-form (as in the word pin) or bound (as in the s in pins).

Multisensory learning — An instructional approach that combines auditory, visual, and tactile elements into a learning task. Moving one's finger under each syllable of a word as the word is read and sounded out would be multisensory learning.

Norms — Standard test scores generally based on a national cross-section of representatives.

Orthography — The total writing system of spoken language. The term also refers to the established spelling rules of a written language.

Perception	A process involving the reception, selection, differentiation, and integration of sensory stimuli. The teacher of dyslexics must teach the student to attend actively and consciously to aspects of the perception process until it becomes automatic.
Phoneme	The smallest unit of speech that serves to distinguish one utterance from another in a language or dialect (as in the /b/ of bat and /m/ of mat). English is made up of 44 phonemes.
Phoneme awareness	Awareness of the phonological structure of words is exemplified by the ability to manipulate or separate the sounds within words (e.g., which sounds come first or last; which words rhyme; which sounds are the same or different), implying metalinguistic knowledge.
Phonemic segmentation	The process of sequentially isolating the speech sounds which comprise a spoken word or syllable.
Phonetics	The study of speech sounds, how they are produced (articulatory phonetics), how they are perceived (auditory phonetics), and what are their physical properties (acoustic phonetics).
Phonics	A teaching approach that gives attention to letter–sound correspondences in the teaching of reading and spelling. Phonics is a teaching approach and should not be confused with phonetics.
Phonological awareness	Speech sound awareness is the conscious awareness of the sounds of language; the ability to reflect on the sounds in words separate from the meanings of words.
Phonology	The sound system of a language; the part of grammar which includes the inventory of sounds and rules for their combination and pronunciation; the study of the sound systems of all languages.
Process-sensitive instruction	A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves reshaping the activities within the instructional sequence to take into consideration various cognitive barriers that might inhibit learning.
Reliability (of tests)	The accuracy or precision of a measurement instrument; consistency among measurements in a series.
Remediation	The repeated instruction of skills not learned in the usual time or the usual manner.

Screening instrument — Initial test(s) in a sequence of tests; usually quickly administered. The results are used to determine whether further testing is necessary and possibly to guide the selection of other tests to be administered.

Screening process — A process of collecting information through a variety of sources over time that would lead to the conclusion that an individual might be significantly at risk for a specific condition such as a learning disability

Self-advocacy — The ability of individuals with learning disabilities to explain their disabilities effectively, to request legal accommodations, and to act independently.

Structured instruction — A key principle of LD-appropriate instruction, involves systematically teaching information that has been chunked into manageable pieces

Syllabication — Breaking a word into its syllables.

Tactile — Relating to the sense of touch; tactile learning is learning by touching.

Think aloud — A metacognitive strategy in which the teacher or tutor models thinking, describing thoughts, as he/she reads the text or completes a task.

Validity (of tests) — Indication that the instrument really measures what it claims to measure.

Visual — Of or relating to the sense of vision.

Visual discrimination — Assuming normal visual acuity, the ability to distinguish slight differences in stimuli, especially in letters and words, which have graphic similarities.

Visual perception — The ability to recognize visual stimuli. Individuals with this learning disability may have problems with such activities as reading, writing, tracking, recognizing people or items, or reading a map or graphic display.

Word attack skills — The ability to decode words using knowledge of the sound–letter correspondence of the language.

Word decoding — A process used to identify words through sounding out letters, letter patterns, or blended sounds.

Important Definitions of Learning Disabilities

The following definitions are important for several reasons. The U.S. Office of Education's definition is the basis for determining learning disabilities among school-age children. The Learning Disabilities Association of America's definition reflects the views of one of the largest advocacy groups for learning disabilities in the country. The Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities' definition was acceptable to federal agencies on the committee, except for the U.S. Department of Education. The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities' more recent LD definition was acceptable to most advocacy and professional organizations. And finally, Rehabilitation Services Administration's definition is one of few attempts to formulate a definition that focuses on work.

The 1977 U.S. Office of Education

The term "specific learning disability" means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning disabilities which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, or mental retardation, or emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or

economic disadvantage. (U. S. Office of Education, [1977]). Definition and criteria for defining students as learning disabled. *Federal Register*, 42:250, p. 65083. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.)

The Learning Disabilities Association of America

Specific Learning Disabilities is a chronic condition of presumed neurological origin which selectively interferes with the development, integration, and/or demonstration of verbal and/or nonverbal abilities. Specific Learning Disabilities exist as a distinct handicapping condition and varies in its manifestations and in degree of severity. Throughout life, the condition can affect self esteem, education, vocation, socialization, and/or daily living activities. [Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (1986). ACLD Description: Specific Learning Disabilities. *ACLD Newsbriefs*, Sept./Oct. (166), 15. Note: The Association for Children with Learning Disabilities is now the Learning Disabilities Association of America.]

The Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities is a generic term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities, or of social skills. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction. Even though a learning disability may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (*e.g.*, sensory impairment, mental retardation, social and emotional disturbance), with socioenvironmental influences (e.g., cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction, psychogenic factors), and especially attention deficit disorder, all of which may cause learning problems, a learning disability is not the direct result of those conditions or influences. (Interagency Committee on Learning Disabilities. (1987). *Learning disabilities: A report to the U.S. Congress.* Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health, p. 222.)

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities is a general term that refers to a heterogeneous group of disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of listening, speaking, reading, writing, reasoning, or mathematical abilities. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual, presumed to be due to central nervous system dysfunction, and may occur across the life span. Problems in self-regulatory behaviors, social perception, and social interaction may exist with learning disabilities but do not by themselves constitute a learning disability. Although learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions (for example, sensory impairment, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance) or with extrinsic influences (such as cultural differences, insufficient or inappropriate instruction), they are not the result of those conditions or influences. (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (1988). *Collective perspectives on issues affecting learning disabilities: Position papers and statements.* Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.)

Rehabilitation Services Administration

A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the central nervous system processes involved in perceiving, understanding, and/or using concepts through verbal (spoken or written) language or nonverbal means. This disorder manifests itself with a deficit in one or more of the following areas: attention, reasoning, processing, memory, communication, reading, writing, spelling, calculation, coordination, social competence, and emotional maturity. (Rehabilitation Services Administration. (1985, January 24). *Program policy directive*. Washington, DC: U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services.)

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Senior Developers and Guidebook Authors

Academy for Educational Development
Mary Ann Corley, Ph.D.
Neil Sturomski, M.S.
John Tibbetts, Ed.D.

University of Kansas
B. Keith Lenz, Ph.D.
David Scanlon, Ph.D.
Daryl Mellard, Ph.D.
Hugh Catts, Ph.D.

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Content Contributors
Gary Adams, Ph.D.
Barbara Ehren, Ph.D.
Jan Hartleban, Ph.D.
Eve Robins, B.S.
Barbara Wilson, B.A.
Glenn Young, M.P.A.

Consultants
Patricia Anderson, Ph.D.
Patricia Bourexis, Ph.D.
Paul Gerber, Ph.D.
Jane Fell Greene, Ed.D.
Andrew Imparato, J.D.
Bill Langner, M.Ed.

Patricia Latham, J.D.
Joseph Torgesen, Ph.D.
Laura Weisel, Ph.D.
Barbara Wilson, B.A.

Editors
Gary Adams
Mary Ann Corley
Barbara Ehren
Jan Hartleban
Kirsten McBride
Cheryl Wurzbacher

Staff at the National Institute for Literacy
Andrew Hartman, Director
Susan Green, Project Officer
Glenn Young, LDTD Hubs Project Officer

Staff of the National Adult Literacy and Learning Disability Center, Academy for Educational Development
Ivan Charner, Vice President, AED
Mary Ann Corley, Director, NALLD Center
Eve Robins, Senior Program Officer
Adrienne Riviere, Program Officer
Charlotte Baer, Consultant
Charles Mitchem, Consultant
Robert Thewes, Consultant
Belinda Bates, Program Associate
Kimberley Maddox, Program Assistant

Staff at the Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities, University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning
Don Deshler, Center Director
B. Keith Lenz, Development Director
Daryl Mellard, Screening Practices
David Scanlon, Intervention Practices
Hugh Catts, Intervention Practices
Juliana Rose, Field Test Coordinator
Belinda Schuman, Clerical Staff
Jacyntha Sterling, Clerical Staff
Julie Tollefson, Page layout
Judy Petry, Department Liaison
Alicia Bartol, Research Assistant
Steve Garrison, Research Assistant
Amy Keefe, Research Assistant
Wendy Kim, Research Assistant
Noelle Kurth, Research Assistant
Sean Lancaster, Research Assistant
Amy Luebbers, Research Assistant
Aroop Pal, Research Assistant

Staff of the Learning Disabilities Training and Dissemination Hubs
Janie Johnson, Kay McVey, Marsha Taylor, and Patti White from the Arkansas hub
Maureen Crowley, Allyne Pecevich, Sheila Petruccelli, Louise Mastin, and Evelyn Beaulieu from the New England hub
June Crawford, Linda Church, and Kathy Kuy from the Laubach Literacy Action/Literacy Volunteers of America hub
Dan Fey and Beth Blanchard from the Seattle Private Industry Council hub

Field-Test Sites
Adult Learning Center, Lawrence, Kansas
Laubach Literacy Council, Kansas City, Kansas
Learn to Read Volunteers of Miami, Florida
Learning Disabilities Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Literacy Action Center (Greenwood Library), Seattle, Washington
Maryland Correctional Institute (Correctional Education), Jessup, Maryland
Maryland Correctional Institute for Women (ABE), Jessup, Maryland
Maryland House of Correction (Educational Dept.), Jessup, Maryland
Project LEAD, Miami, Florida
Renton PIC Program, Renton, Washington
Renton Technical College, Renton, Washington
Ronald Hubbs Center for Lifelong Learning, St. Paul, Minnesota
Seattle Central Community College, Seattle, Washington
Seattle South Community College, Seattle, Washington
Seattle Vocational Institute, Seattle, Washington
Wilmar Adult Basic Education, Wilmar, Minnesota

Professional Reviewers
Patricia Anderson
Wilson Anderson
Linda Andresen
Cheryl Ashe
Don Deshler
Barbara Donald
Paul Gerber
Noel Gregg
Fran Holthaus
Sheldon Horowitz
Cheryl Keenan
Joan Knight
Karen Liersch
Cindy Magness
Margo Mastropieri
Cecil Mercer
Nancie Payne
Allyne Pecevich
Michelle Perry
Allan Quigley
Arlyn Roffman
Jovita Ross-Gordon
Stephen Steurer
John Tibbetts
Joseph Torgesen
Peter Waite

National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center Advisory Board
Patricia Anderson
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G. Reid Lyon
Patsy Medina
Larry Mikulecky
Alba Ortiz
Arlyn Roffman
Jovita Ross-Gordon
Stephen Steurer
Joseph Torgesen
Peter Waite

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Mary Ann Corley
B. Keith Lenz
David Scanlon
Daryl Mellard
Hugh Catts
Neil Sturomski
John Tibbetts

Critical Questions for Adult Literacy Programs

To develop an adult literacy program that is responsive to the needs of adults with learning disabilities, literacy program staff may find it helpful to use the following critical questions as a framework for discussing and planning services. Each of the five guidebooks will provide information that can be used to help practitioners answer these critical questions:

- What makes adult literacy services sensitive to the needs of adults with learning disabilities?
- What is the nature and impact of learning disabilities on adults?
- How does the law affect the quality of life of adults with learning disabilities?
- What linkages to other community agencies are critical for literacy programs to increase the success of adults with learning disabilities?
- How can literacy program staff ensure that systemic change will increase the success of adults with learning disabilities?
- How can literacy program staff ensure that assessment practices in adult literacy programs increase the success of adults with learning disabilities?
- How can the choice of curriculum and curriculum materials affect the success of adults with learning disabilities?
- How can instructional planning become more sensitive to the needs of adults with learning disabilities?
- How can literacy program staff ensure that instruction increases the success of adults with learning disabilities?
- How can literacy program staff ensure that accommodations and instructional adaptations are appropriately selected and used to increase the success of adults with learning disabilities?

GUIDEBOOK 1
Preparing to Serve Adults with Learning Disabilities

GUIDEBOOK 2
The Assessment Process

GUIDEBOOK 3
The Planning Process

GUIDEBOOK 4
The Teaching/Learning Process

GUIDEBOOK 5
Creating Professional Development Opportunities

National Adult Literacy and Learning Disabilities Center
Academy for Educational Development
1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20009-5721
(202) 884-8185 • (800) 953-2553 • Fax (202) 884-8422
E-mail: info@nalldc.aed.org • Web site: www.ld-read.org