

Bridges to Practice – The Learning Disabilities Training Effort for Adults in the U.S.

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What is Bridges to Practice?

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) sponsored the research and development of materials that discuss learning disabilities (LD) in adults and the impact of those disabilities on adult lives. The materials, called Bridges to Practice, are designed to train adult educators, social workers, job counselors, rehabilitation counselors, and others who work in service agencies, to be aware of learning disabilities, know how to screen for them in clients or students, and know how to get assistance for an adult who requires a complete diagnosis and support in the classroom, the job, and the community. Developed as a train-the-trainer program, “Bridges” is attempting to change U.S. society by making LD awareness an issue in all social programs.

Professional development and certification

As trainers provide assistance to others, they receive technical assistance from the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) staff and from other experienced trainers. A certification program has been instituted so trainers can learn more about LD and about training, and can move through the various levels to become recognized as national experts in the field of adults and learning disabilities. Professional development for trainers is part of the activity provided by the National Institute for Literacy; this includes assistance in the use of technology.

The use of accommodations and assistive technology is essential to success for many adults who have learning disabilities. Part of the training is designed to help trainers become more aware of the developing technology that is so important to adults who have learning needs. In order to become recognized as a Master Trainer in Bridges to Practice, for instance, a trainer is expected to be able to discuss the most commonly used technologies and to refer those being trained to resource materials and manufacturers.

Thousands of professionals have been trained in the U.S. at this point and there are currently 60 people in the certification program and another 100 who expect to start their training soon. It is a slow process, but change is in the wind and the adults with learning disabilities who have received assistance as a result of this project are finding new success in their lives.

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