



## **ABC Life Literacy Canada announces Catalytic Funder to Support UPskill, a Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills Initiative**

*Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life join UPskill to advance Canadians' literacy and essential skills through workplace training*

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**Toronto, ON (February 16, 2016)** — ABC Life Literacy Canada (ABC) launched UPskill on Essential Skills Day in the fall of 2015. Now, in support of UPskill, Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life have joined the movement to create an enterprise that will advance the literacy and essential skills of all Canadians. Their commitment of \$200,000 to UPskill will provide ABC the opportunity to develop and implement resources and tools for businesses to “up-skill” their employees.

UPskill is a social enterprise that addresses literacy and essential skills needs as they pertain to business. The nine essential skills are the building blocks for all learning; they are: reading, writing, numeracy, document use, oral communication, working with others, computer use, thinking skills and continuous learning. When essential skills are improved, employees are more capable to meet job demands and are better prepared to assume greater responsibilities. Employees who undergo literacy and essential skills training increase their self-confidence, acquire new skills, are better prepared to seek promotion opportunities and believe they are valued by their workplaces.

“We are thrilled Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life have committed to providing UPskill with the catalytic funding needed for liftoff,” said Gillian Mason, President, ABC Life Literacy Canada. “With this support, UPskill will advance business training strategies and ensure literacy and essential skills training is integrated into all levels of job training. The fast pace at which business and technology is changing means that learning no longer happens just in school. It is critical that Canadians have access to literacy and essential skills training and support at work, and UPskill is the vehicle that will make this happen.”

A recent ABC survey of more than 800 employers found that retaining skilled employees was a pressing concern. Globally, the supply of workers with the appropriate skill set—technical skills and the literacy and essential skills needed to apply them—is growing exponentially. To maintain Canada’s economic competitiveness on a global scale, it is critical to address the growing skills shortage and invest in literacy and essential skills training.

“We’ve been supporters of ABC and its goals for a fully literate Canadian population for many years,” says Dave Johnston, President and Chief Operating Officer, Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life. “Now ABC is uniting a coalition of exceptional organizations in their own right, providing a high-calibre response to an acute—if silent—need in Canadian society and industry. We add our support to ABC’s leadership

knowing that investments in literacy and essential skills carry over into all facets of personal well-being, and by extension, the well-being of our society.”

“Forty percent of Canadians do not have the literacy and essential skills they need in order to be successful in the workplace,” says Jim Warrington, Board Chair of ABC Life Literacy Canada. “This results in decreased productivity, health and safety concerns, paperwork and document-use problems and leadership needs. To address these growing concerns, it is urgent that Canadian businesses make investment in literacy and essential skills training an immediate and ongoing priority.”

ABC recognizes that creating change requires a collaborative approach among multi-industry stakeholders to achieve and multiply impact. UPskill has support from over 30 private sector, union and non-profit organizations and stakeholder groups, united in the belief that UPskill is a long overdue and critical workforce initiative.

On March 10, ABC and Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life will formally launch UPskill at an event at Boeing Canada in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Boeing Canada’s leadership and investment in literacy and essential skills training is a beacon for business leaders across Canada. Boeing Canada’s commitment exemplifies a workplace model that acknowledges the importance of embedding literacy and essential skills training into business culture.

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### **About ABC Life Literacy Canada**

ABC Life Literacy Canada is a non-profit organization that inspires Canadians to increase their literacy skills. We mobilize business, government and communities to support lifelong learning and achieve our goals through leadership in programs, communications and partnerships. ABC Life Literacy Canada envisions a Canada where everyone has the skills they need to live a fully engaged life. For the latest news and information on adult literacy please visit [www.abclifeliteracy.ca](http://www.abclifeliteracy.ca), follow us on [Twitter](#) or join our [Facebook](#) page.

Visit [upskill.ca](http://upskill.ca) for information, resources and tools to help make essential skills training a priority in workplaces across Canada.

### **About Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life**

Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life offer a broad portfolio of financial and benefit plan solutions, and serve the financial security needs of more than 12 million people across Canada. Responsible and ethical management is an intrinsic value of the companies and is essential to long-term profitability and value creation. As an Imagine Caring Company supporting the principles of corporate citizenship and benchmarks for community investment established by Imagine Canada, the companies donate a minimum of one per cent of average pre-tax profits to non-profit, charitable and community organizations each year.

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