

continue with their studies in secondary, college level and post-secondary education.

To emphasize the importance that education plays in everyone's life, a communications strategy will be developed that explains to all offenders the importance of education to their successful reintegration into society.

Literacy programs already in place in our federal penitentiaries have turned out to be very successful. CSC is working to co-operate with the provinces to maintain course quality and to obtain provincial accreditation. It must be understood that inmate literacy should lead to job training or a pursuit of higher levels of education.

In this regard the CSC also plans, in coming years, to emphasize inmate participation in obtaining a grade ten education while continuing to promote the achievement of grade eight as a priority. In addition, the service will establish a global strategy of surmounting the learning disabilities of inmates.

In conclusion, I therefore believe that the federal government, through the intervention of CSC, is promoting the social reintegration of inmates through adult basic education. The results are a clear indication of the efforts that have been made in this area. I can assure you that the correctional service will continue its work in this regard.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support the motion proposed by my hon. colleague. I would initially like to review the problem of literacy quickly.

Many will recall that literacy has been noted by Southam and a number of other researchers to affect roughly 25 per cent of Canadians. We are told that there are approximately five million functionally illiterate Canadians today. It is important to spend a few seconds on what is meant by functional illiteracy. It means that a person is unable to read, write or compute at a level satisfactory to be able to give all himself or herself to society or to take away from society, from his or her community, as much as he or she would if the literacy rate were higher than it is now.

As I indicated we have roughly five million functionally illiterate people in Canada. They come from a variety of groups. For example, there are older Canadians who are involved in a disproportionate number because they

did not have the same kinds of opportunities that we had. They were needed to go to work earlier than we were.

There are also aboriginal people who have not had the same opportunities as other Canadians, and of course that situation is being corrected rather rapidly.

There are new Canadians, some of them already literate in a language other than English or French and some of them who need special assistance in this area.

There are people with learning difficulties and learning handicaps. There are also Canadians who at one time in their lives were functionally literate, but because society has changed so rapidly and there are more demands being made in the field of reading, writing and computing, they are no longer considered functionally literate. However, today we are talking specifically about our inmate population.

I want to say a few words about this particular population. According to certain media reports there are roughly 12,000 people in our federal penitentiaries, and the rates of illiteracy vary according to the source. I have read that it is from 40 per cent up to 75 per cent. I have heard today 65 per cent. In other documentation I have seen 50 per cent. I think we could agree that it is a high rate, higher than the national average, and clearly we need to do something special about it.

I have also been told by these same sources that only 500 people a year were participating in literacy programs a few years ago and perhaps 150 of those 500 had completed the programs. Those numbers have improved during the last few years, but there is still a lot of room to move.

Let me quote from a special report about literacy entitled "Breaking Down Invisible Walls":

In a society where non-readers are on the fringes, unable to participate fully, literacy training can go a long way in keeping ex-inmates out of prison.

We have to realize that literacy is one thing that can contribute to rehabilitation. It cannot do it all, but clearly it can contribute.

Literacy is not only reading, writing and computing. Those are important by themselves obviously in a society such as ours, one which is changing remarkably quickly and where those demands are in fact increasing on a daily basis, but we are also talking about life skills: