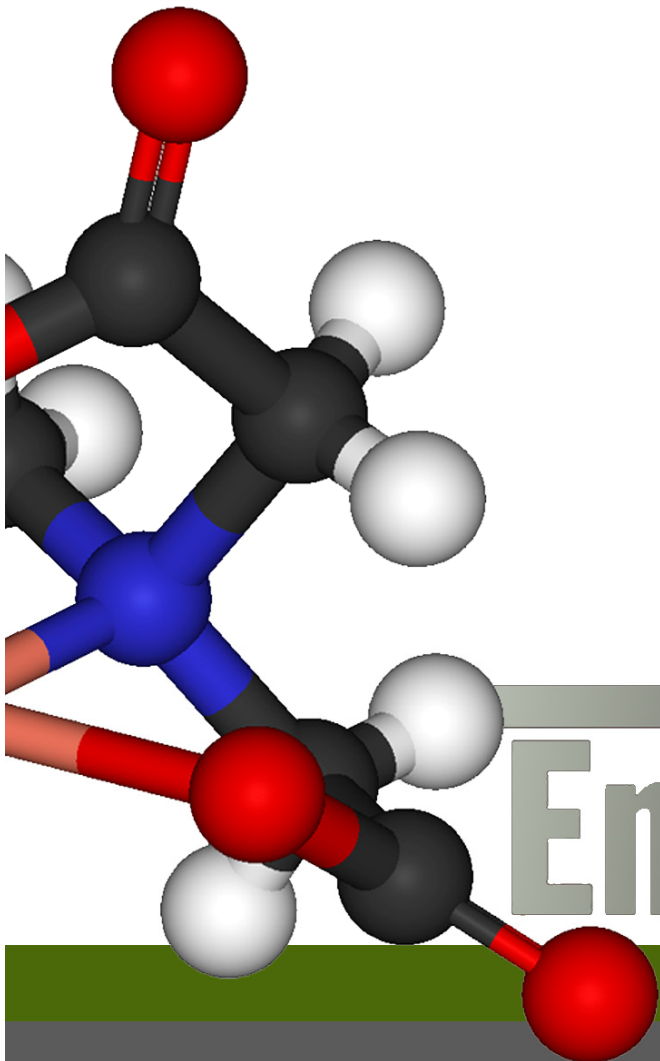


Coordinating to Bring
Low-Literacy and
Marginalized Clients
Employment



Employment

Labour Market Partnership Project

Host: Literacy Link South Central

Partners: Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington

Quality in Lifelong (QUILL) Learning Network

Tri-County Literacy Network

Peel-Halton-Dufferin Adult Learning Network

Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA) – Hamilton

Literacy Link Niagara

February 2014



**EMPLOYMENT
ONTARIO**

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Introduction

Recent studies including, **People without Jobs, Jobs without People**, by Rick Miners and **Menial No More**, produced by Essential Skills Ontario state that Canada can anticipate a significant deficit in workers in the future. In addition, new research from Georgetown University suggests that the recession is coming to an end (in the United States), but only for those individuals who have a professional level of education. Those who have less than a grade 12 education are still mired in the recession and are likely to remain so.

During the next twenty to thirty years there will be an acute labour shortage in the Canadian labour market. With the aging population, there will be a significant decline in the proportion of our population in the prime working years (15 to 64 years) by 2031. This is due to the progressively lower birth rates in Canada over the last 40 years and the impending retirement of those in the baby boom generation. It is projected that this shortfall could range anywhere from 200,000 to 1.8 million people across Ontario. This is a labour shortage.

The requirements of the labour market are also changing. With the emergence of the knowledge economy, the proportion of the labour force requiring some form of education or training beyond high school is increasing dramatically. It is estimated, that by 2031, Ontario will need 77% of its workforce to have post-secondary credentials (for example, apprenticeship, university, college, industry, and professional). Right now, Ontario stands at approximately 60%, with 25 to 34 year olds at just over 66%. If nothing is done to combat this, Ontario will experience a situation where large numbers of people are looking for work but cannot find work as they lack the required skills. At the same time, a large number of jobs will be unfilled as there are no skilled workers qualified to fill them.

A number of strategies have been suggested to meet the demand for workers, such as increasing immigration. Another recommended strategy is to maximize the utilization of every person of working age to ensure that every adult Canadian is working to his or her potential. Unfortunately, there are many individuals across Canada who are not working to their potential. They may not even be aware of their potential.

This Labour Market Partnership (LMP) proposal focused on these individuals in the Western Region of Ontario – individuals who have less than a grade 12 level of functional ability and who struggle to find jobs with their skill levels. In Ontario, there are many programs that have been designed to address the needs of this target group. However, we saw a need for community coordination in order to effectively use this range of community programs to achieve an effective outcome for lower-skilled Ontarians – namely, employment. We needed to move from raising awareness amongst Employment Ontario agencies to the next step(s) of collaboration and integration if we wanted to see systemic success.

By drawing upon the service planning experiences and expertise of Regional Literacy Networks in the Western Region, this Labour Market Partnership proposal researched and conducted different strategies in each of the Regional Network areas. There are seven Regional Literacy Networks in the Western Region. Each network has built different local relationships with different agencies that they can leverage to support the attainment of this project goal: To effectively increase the supply of workers in the Western Region of Ontario and connect these workers with gainful employment.

Ten different strategies were piloted as part of this project, focused on how the Regional Networks can further coordinate local services to enhance employment outcomes for lower-skilled Ontarians. In addition, through this Labour Market Partnership, we proposed to work with Community Literacy of Ontario (a provincial umbrella group

for community-based literacy programs with significant experience in delivering online training). The following table outlines a brief description of each of the strategies:

Regional Network	Brief Description of Proposed Strategies
<p>Literacy Link South Central (serving Elgin, Oxford, Middlesex, Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk Counties)</p>	<p>Strategy 1: Work with Employment Services job developers to explore ways to connect lower skilled literacy learners with the targeted wage subsidy service offered through Employment Services.</p> <p>Strategy 2: Leverage resources from two other contracts - Providing Educational Interviews to Ontario Works Recipients and Developing Curriculum for Single Males on Ontario Works (18-29 years of age) - and combine them with local Employment Services to develop strategies to bring young single males through literacy to employment.</p>
<p>Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington</p>	<p>Strategy 3: Document the current approach by Employment Ontario partners to labour adjustment situations and investigate the development of a new, responsive, collaborative model of labour adjustment among Employment Ontario partners.</p> <p>Strategy 4: Identify and implement supportive coordination strategies, including assessment and referral protocols and tools, to facilitate effective client pathways and outcomes.</p>
<p>Quality in Lifelong Learning (QUILL) Learning Network (serving Grey, Bruce, Huron, Perth Counties and South Georgian Bay)</p>	<p>Strategy 5: Conduct a literature review and research on how multi-service centres in other jurisdictions in the province successfully serve clients without a grade 12 education and help them to gain meaningful employment. After the literature review and research has been completed, 4 meetings will be hosted with service providers to discuss the literature review and best practices, examine systemic linkages, and find solutions that are workable within each program's capacity.</p>

Regional Network	Brief Description of Proposed Strategies
Tri-County Literacy Network (serving Chatham-Kent, Sarnia-Lambton, and Windsor-Essex)	Strategy 6: Explore how the strategies identified in the 2009-2010 EONDF Linking Adult Literacy to Poverty Reduction project, including Bridges out of Poverty, can and have been implemented to facilitate learner and client success.
Peel-Halton-Dufferin Adult Learning Network (PHDALN)	Strategy 7: Conduct research to identify the industry sectors in and near Dufferin County that would most benefit from an employment skills training program for entry level workers not requiring a post-secondary education credential. This project will also identify the parameters of a community partnership with Employment Ontario programs (Literacy and Basic Skills, Employment Services) and others required to develop a skills training program that would prepare underemployed adults for the identified employment opportunities and will examine the program characteristics that would need to be established to increase the likelihood of success for participants with low educational attainment.
Adult Basic Education Association (serving Hamilton)	<p>Strategy 8: Consider and report on how to effectively use Labour Market Information to bridge Literacy and Basic Skills with Employment Services and, ultimately, employment.</p> <p>Strategy 9: Create a specific employment version of the Educational Pathways Assessment that is customizable to each client/employment goal and to create an information/ referral tool that both Literacy and Basic Skills and Employment Services can utilize. The target audience would be those that have less than grade 12, looking for employment, and have a specific employment goal.</p>
Literacy Link Niagara	Strategy 10: Review the role of frontline practitioners in assisting lower-skilled clients in moving towards employment, including the identification of tools and supports that frontline practitioners need.

Strategy #1: Targeted Employment Support for Job Seekers with Low Literacy Skills

Literacy Link South Central (LLSC)

As part of a large Labour Market Partnership (LMP) Project, Literacy networks throughout the Western Region of Ontario researched support opportunities for individuals who have less than a grade 12 level of functional ability and who struggle to find jobs with their skill level.

The LMP project involved 10 distinct strategies. The goal of the project was to address barriers preventing individuals from successfully connecting to the labour market. Our long-term objective is to enhance the support for unemployed workers in the Western Region of Ontario and increase their chance of connecting with gainful employment.

The focus of this particular strategy was to provide enhanced support for a specific target client group that faces serious barriers to employment. Our target – was job seekers with a solid history of work, but who have lost their jobs and are being passed over for new employment. These job seekers have experience but not the minimum Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) or General Educational Development (GED) that are so often required in today's labour market.

We refer to these clients as both

- “job seekers with low literacy skills”
- “experienced workers with low literacy skills”



A good example of a client we were considering would be someone who

- left school with a grade 10 education
- worked for 20+ years in a factory before losing their job to downsizing

These clients were an excellent choice for this strategy's focus as we knew they

- had many of the skills necessary for them to contribute to the workforce
- would need additional support with their Literacy skills
- are often not considered for the jobs they need because of their lack of education

Within the first months of the project, Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) built a foundation of support that included

- forming an Advisory Committee made up of both Job Developers and Literacy and Basic Skills practitioners
- hiring a Project Coordinator, Project Clerical Support, and an External Evaluator
- having the External Evaluator work with the Advisory Committee to establish success indicators

Partners

Advisory Committee Members

Literacy Link South Central extends thanks to the members of Literacy and Employment Service (ES) communities who volunteered to sit on the Advisory Committee for this project. Their roles and responsibilities included

- participating in bi-monthly meetings and online discussions
- providing local knowledge, relevant background and expertise related to the focus client group
- providing concrete recommendations for consideration by project staff



The Committee

Alison Sims, Nokee Kwe Native Education Centre

Andrew McMurray, Goodwill Industries

Carol Stewart, Employment Sector Council of London Middlesex

Diana Timmermans, Employment Sector Council of London Middlesex

Emily Davies, ATN Access for Persons with Disabilities

Gord Fansher, Hutton House

Ray LeBlanc, London Employment Help Centre

Summary of Revisions in Project Strategy

This strategy began with the hypothesis that we could work with Job Developers to move experienced workers with low literacy skills to employment more quickly through the use of targeted wage subsidies. As feedback was gathered from Employment Services (ES) it became clear that this hypothesis was not reasonable. While wage subsidies were available to support some clients in our target group, it wasn't a viable enough option to be considered a solution. The focus of our project changed, and, with approval from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), refocused on what Literacy and Employment Services could do together to support these clients without using subsidies.

Original Project Strategy Summary

Work with Employment Services Job Developers and Literacy practitioners to explore ways to connect lower-skilled literacy learners with Individualized Training Incentives offered through Employment Services.

The purpose is to get meaningful, long-term employment for these lower-skilled individuals. We envision that ES and Literacy Services will jointly support the clients.



Revised Project Strategy Summary

Work with ES Job Developers and Literacy practitioners to explore ways to bring unemployed low-literacy learners with a work history, but who require significant upgrading, to employment more quickly. In many cases these learners don't meet minimum job requirements and need to pass the General Educational Development (GED) to receive their High School equivalency or complete credits and get their High School Diploma. This takes time and many of these learners need to work now.

Pre-revision Activities

a. Meetings with Community Partners

We began with the hypothesis that we could use targeted wage subsidy programs (through Employment Services) to provide access or open doors to employment for lower-skilled Literacy clients. Following this hypothesis, project staff met with the Job Developers Network of London /Middlesex to outline the strategy and gather their feedback.

Participants indicated that the way we envisioned Job Developers using the Training Incentives was not correct. Job Developers focus Training Incentives on clients who are "job ready", and whom they believe should have no further need for support from Literacy.

Project staff were told that the Job Developers work with employers who are interested in employees that are ready to do the job with minimal training. Therefore, Job Developers don't make incentive offers for Literacy clients who still need upgrading prior to being what they (and the Employer) consider "job ready." Members of the Job Developers Network further suggested that the idea of partnership with Employment Services (ES) at the Job Developer level would be less effective than partnering with ES at the Intake and Counseling level where educational needs are identified and goals are set.

To ensure a balanced reaction from our available networks of Job Developers, we met via teleconference with Lisa Savoy, the Chair of the Job Developer Network of Norfolk, Brant, Haldimand and Oxford Counties. We discussed this strategy and requested her feedback. Much of the information shared by Lisa reflected what had been communicated by the London / Middlesex Network. This indicated a lack of buy-in from the partners we had originally intended to work with to complete this strategy.

To gain a different perspective, project staff met with Ontario Works (OW) to

- learn how they use incentives during their support of clients who wish to get employment
- outline the vision for the strategy

While OW staff also discouraged relying solely on the use of Training Incentives to bring our target client group to employment, they were supportive of Literacy partnering with Employment Services (ES) and OW to offer additional support.

Suggestions for support included

- offering the literacy specialist perspective on the creation of Training Plans
- being available as a resource for Job Coaches and Case Workers to help identify programs that would be most effective for clients

Following discussions with the Job Developer Networks and OW, we met with a Goodwill Job Developer to review their process for

- supporting clients
- building relationships with employers



We were looking for new ways to support this client group either with or without the use of Training Incentives. One key learning from this discussion was that there is a gap in the understanding of processes and available resources through ES to support Literacy learners. Gaining a deeper understanding of the path through ES that an experienced job seeker with low-literacy skills travels would provide opportunities to identify

- new areas for partnership
- ways to support this client

b. Early Literature Review

In the early stages of this project, material was gathered for a literature review. Referencing a combination of national and international articles and reports, we reviewed the use of subsidies to employers to further focus on the needs of downsized workers in manufacturing fields. Several early themes were identified, including that:

- a. Many evaluations show subsidies to private-sector employment have both large dead-weight and substitution effects. In other words, the subsidies themselves really didn't have any impact on a position being filled.
- b. The use of wage subsidies can often lead to "creaming," or the connecting of only the most skilled job seekers with employers to ensure that employers are content with the match.



Revising the Focus

It was becoming clear that a change in focus was needed for this strategy, as our original hypothesis upon which we based this project had been disproven. Based on the research completed and feedback received in the project thus far, Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) decided to formally revise the focus of this strategy to

- decrease the focus on the use of training incentives
- increase the focus on other support that could be provided by Literacy practitioners

The project plan originally included identifying specific workers and having them partner with employers via a pilot project. As the project was restructured to centre on research rather than piloting actual low-literacy worker and employer matching, the Work Plan and Evaluation Framework needed to be completely rewritten. **Please see Appendix 1 & 2.**

Each was revised to indicate that we were pulling back from our original intention to pilot an initiative and focusing instead on research and relationship building. As part of that relationship-building, project staff decided to speak to those staff at different levels within Employment Services (ES) across several organizations, and to programs outside the Literacy/ES community.

To that end, we met with representatives from the Centre for Lifelong Learning to discuss how the employment-specific language training offered in their ESL program could form a basis for a Literacy-to-employment training model. We also met with Cherie Gibson of the March of Dimes to discuss their Working Fundamentals program. We discussed how their approach supports clients moving to employment, noting that their focus client group is those with disabilities.

Success Indicators of Revised Focus

The project team determined that the success of the newly revised project would be indicated by:

- a. An increase in understanding of the opportunities, supports, challenges and changes required to best support this client group.
- b. A strengthening of relationships and understanding between Employment Services and Literacy Service providers, focused specifically on how clients in this target group are supported by Employment Services.

Post-revision Activity

a. Literacy Client Profile Survey

To ensure that we had a clear vision of the barriers facing current Literacy learners who fit the client profile, a survey was sent to the Literacy programs across Literacy Link South Central's (LLSC) 6-county support area. **Please see Appendix 3.** After collecting baseline demographic information about learners who might fall within the focus client group for the project, survey participants were asked to consider those client's connections to Employment Services. The survey results are summarized on the following page.



Literacy agencies responding to the survey - 9

Estimated percentage of Literacy learners within those 9 agencies that could be considered experienced workers with low literacy skills - 42.8%

Estimated percentage of those above learners who are currently connected to Employment Services as well as to their Literacy program - 29.22%

The most prominent fields in which those learners in the target demographic have a work history

- factory (100%)
- construction (77.8%)
- food service (77.8%)
- manufacturing (55.6%)
- the farm / agriculture, mechanical / automotive, and customer service fields (44.4%)

Participants identified the top barriers preventing those clients who aren't accessing support from ES from doing so as the client

- has other more immediate needs to resolve before accessing ES (e.g. shelter, mental health, etc.) - 77.8%
- doesn't want to go through the various requirements and stages of ES - they "just want a job" - 77.8%
- doesn't think they can handle Literacy and ES at the same time - 66.7%
- is waiting to complete their upgrading before accessing ES - 55.6%

When asked what participants thought Employment Services (ES) and Literacy Services could do to better to support this particular client's journey to employment, the responses included

- offer flexible programming hours and classes/workshops for clients
- acknowledge that not “one size fits all”
- recognize client literacy issues early in the process
- benefit from better management of client needs through increased partnership between ES and Literacy
- build workshops into Literacy programming to introduce learners to the supports ES can provide

b. Consultation and Outreach

To better understand the journey of an experienced job seeker with low-literacy skills traveling through Employment Services, project Staff began an outreach campaign with two focuses:

1. Facilitate connections between Literacy and ES agencies.
2. Identify key moments along the ES path that would impact clients within the target demographics.

Key Discussion Points

Through a series of visits to ES agencies and meetings with Employment Counsellors and Job Developers that spanned several months, discussions were held around the

- intake process
- supports clients have access to
- timelines to access service
- expectations clients face when moving through the system



At each meeting, project staff asked Employment Services (ES) representatives to walk them through the client experience. They shared with us from the moment of a first phone call or walk-in to a successful transition away from ES support.

When recreating that client journey, project staff observed

- the environment of the agency
- when and where clients are asked to fill out paperwork
- how quickly clients are able to access in-house support from Employment Counsellors, Workshop Facilitators and Job Developers
- when referrals for Literacy support might be made

In addition to gathering information about the journey of a client, project staff also discussed how supports offered by Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) could be used by ES staff to assist their clients. Information was shared about diverse Literacy programs throughout the community, and LLSC's Information and Referral chart was given to any agencies that didn't have a copy. ES staff were also encouraged to call LLSC directly to seek advice on programming for clients identified as needing support with Literacy.

c. Employment Services Agency Visits

When project staff contacted ES to outline the purpose of the project and ask if they could arrange site visits, the reaction was wholly positive. Project staff were warmly welcomed at each agency, and ES representatives expressed a strong desire to work collaboratively to support experienced job seekers with low-literacy skills. Much valuable learning and a more connected Literacy/ES relationship was gained based on meetings with the following ES representatives:

John Griffiths, the Director of Workforce Development, Employment and Training Services, Goodwill Industries, Ontario Great Lakes

Julie Watson and Tricia Andary, Goodwill Intake Specialists

Louissa Regier, Employment Services Program Manager at the Ontario March of Dimes (via teleconference)

Alison Sims, Career Counsellor/Facilitator at Nokee Kwe

Nadine Lalonde, Job Developer at Collège Boréal

Katya Noel, Employment Counsellor at Collège Boréal

Brian Malott, Resource & Information Officer at Community Employment Services - Fanshawe College

Connie Hoffman - Intake Worker & Administrative Assistant, ATN Access for Persons with Disabilities

Lisa Rusal, Client Services Manager, WIL Employment Connections

Kim Neable, Intake Specialist, Hutton House Learning Centre

Crystal Taylor, Administrative Support at Youth Opportunities Unlimited

Grant Whatford, Employment Services Manager, London Training Centre

Jerry Colwell, Director of Client Services Pathways Skill Development & Placement Centre

Susan Crane, Job Developer at the London Employment Help Centre



To further our understanding of the client experience, project staff also attended 3 group information and intake sessions:

1. Goodwill Employment Centre's Community Training Service group intake session for Ontario Works clients
2. Goodwill Employment Centre's "Discover Your Options" group intake session for Employment Service clients
3. The London Training Centre Orientation Session for new ES clients

Lessons Learned

The 14 Employment Services (ES) site visits and 3 group intake sessions attended by project staff provided valuable insight and information. We now have a much clearer picture of both current processes and places where partnerships can be further developed between Literacy and ES to support experienced job seekers with low-literacy skills. Key points include:

- a. While the path through ES is similar from agency to agency, there are some significant differences. They include, but are not limited to
 - the length of time it takes to get an appointment with an Employment Counsellor
 - how intake is done
 - the in-house supports available for clients
 - the targeted clientele that the agency is "best suited" to support
- b. While all Employment Ontario (EO) funded agencies use the ES Participant Registration form, some have
 - clients fill out the form without supervision
 - staff fill out the form with clients
 - staff fill out the form for clients - decreasing that opportunity to discover undisclosed literacy issues

- c. Most agencies have in-house paperwork completed either by the client or by ES staff that complements or enhances the information required by the ES registration form. Literacy issues are often identified through those forms or through observation during workshops attended by the client.
- d. Some Employment Counsellors would like Literacy support when creating Training Plans for incoming clients. The best model would be to have Literacy staff working on-site with Employment Services (ES) in a consulting role.
- e. There are many specialty programs available through ES in London that might be particularly good fits for our target demographic. However, Literacy agencies may not be aware of them and therefore do not refer their clients. There are also community-based Literacy programs that are geared to bring employment-specific learning to clients, which ES providers are not aware of. The key to getting clients accessing these programs is ensuring that both Literacy and ES staff are aware of the supports offered by each other's agencies. Since some ES staff stated that they have gaps in knowledge about what Literacy delivers in our area, there is clearly a need to support ES and Literacy in knowledge exchange.
- f. When asked about attrition rates for clients in our target demographic, many ES representatives reported lower patience for long-term support within the target group. Experienced workers with low literacy skills who have lost their jobs are in crisis. They want swift intervention, and bounce from agency to agency if the support they need isn't available quickly from the beginning. They will also leave ES/Literacy support behind if employment is obtained, even if their skills still need upgrading.



- g. Many Job Developers where Literacy and ES are co-located believe that the support and partnership necessary to bring the target market of clients to employment is either already in place or is more easily accessed than in those agencies that are not co-located.
- h. Job Developers offer training incentives to employers hiring new workers if the worker is a good fit for the company and the job. Further to that, employers don't know what sort of incentive is being offered (what amount of money or for how long) until after they agree to hire the client. This neutralizes the idea of offering an identified incentive to hire a specific potential employee (like the experienced worker with low literacy skills that we are targeting with this strategy).
- i. Many of the Employment Services (ES) staff that we spoke to believe that finding employers who would be willing to take a risk on a low-literacy worker would be ideal. They feel that the Job Developers are in the best position to make those connections. At the same time, the low-literacy worker's path through ES often includes upgrading to make them "job ready" before getting to the stage where they might work directly with a Job Developer. This would make finding employers for this scenario difficult to realize.
- j. There is great value in learning as much as possible from community partners about their programs and connections, even if their client group is not the same as the one we're focusing on. With the information about challenges and successes gleaned from these partners, we can turn the lens to our own client group. As an example, partnerships have been built between ES teams (like the March of Dimes) and employers that facilitate employers hiring clients that are not necessarily "job ready" - we can learn from those relationships and how they were built.

Recommendations

The second phase of this Labour Market Partnership Project won't include a focus on experienced workers with low-literacy skills. However, the lessons learned, described earlier, have inspired the Advisory Committee and project staff to make several recommendations for next steps. While there are no quick fixes for the issues faced by this client group, it is our belief that if implemented, many of these recommendations would help decrease barriers to employment.

1. Shorten the length of time it takes for clients to move through the Employment Services (ES) system. Ensure that clients begin their ES journey at the agency that is best suited to serve them, rather than having the client “try on” several different agencies before finding one that fits their needs. The Advisory Committee advocates the creation of an Information and Referral chart for ES, much like the one that exists for Literacy agencies.

The chart would outline the unique differences between ES providers as well as

- agency hours
- bus routes
- other information to support effective referrals by Literacy providers

2. Identify those outside the Literacy field who are referring clients to ES and ensure they are given support tools to make effective formal and informal referrals. The Advisory Committee identified several non-traditional points for recommendations to ES, including

- Service Ontario
- libraries
- neighbourhood resource centres
- Ontario's 211 service



The Advisory Committee recommends developing relationships with each of these organizations to facilitate more effective referrals. **Please see Appendix 5.**

3. Have support for ES when making referrals. For referrals to Literacy, agencies are encouraged to call Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) to get recommendations about which Literacy program would suit their clients' needs. The Advisory Committee suggests having a similar support agency for ES, such as the Employment Sector Council of London-Middlesex (ESCLM). This service would allow Employment specialists to provide referral support via phone calls in a similar fashion to the Goodwill "no wrong door" 1-800 #, which is no longer active.
4. Offer Clear Writing sessions to Employment Services (ES) agencies to help them update their informational brochures and workshop training materials. Using clear writing will increase access to information by the experienced workers with low literacy skills. Project staff would ideally like to see time built in to these ES Clear Writing sessions for attendees to work together with the support of a Clear Writing Consultant to modify some of their currently used communication material.
5. Create training for use at Literacy programs outlining what the ES experience will look like. This will help the experienced workers with low literacy skills who are transitioning to ES, to know what to expect and to not be intimidated. Include in this information or training
 - samples of the paperwork that they will be required to fill out
 - customer-service friendly touches like photographs of the agency from both the outside and inside
 - information about the support available at ES agencies
 - names and job titles of the staff that they will encounter
 - workshops available to learners once they become clients of the agency

A second stage of this recommendation would be to partner with ES to create an information session that could be held in a high-traffic area like the public library. This session would outline the support available not only through Employment Services, but also Literacy Services, the Health Unit, housing and other services most often needed by experienced job seekers with low literacy skills.

6. Continue to enhance the relationship between Employment Service (ES) and Literacy Link South Central (LLSC). Through ongoing outreach visits to ES agencies by LLSC staff, ES representatives will feel comfortable calling LLSC to ask questions about literacy support for their clients.

A second stage of this recommendation would be to establish a Literacy and Employment Advocate position. The role of the Literacy and Employment Advocate would be to travel to both Literacy Services and ES to answer questions about each service and offer their support as an on-site reference. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Vision for Employment Ontario (EO) includes the concept of a fully-integrated system that appears seamless from the client perspective. The advocate position would enhance partnerships between Literacy Services and ES, leading to smoother transitions from Literacy to employment for clients.



7. Coordinate ES and Literacy Service hours to allow more learners to access support from both ES and Literacy concurrently rather than sequentially. This is most easily done with programs that are co-located. Through the coordination of service schedules, experienced workers with low literacy skills who leave programming once they achieve employment may be more likely to continue their upgrading.

A second stage of this recommendation would be to research potential incentives for these learners to stay in the program even after obtaining employment.

Achieving Employment Ontario (EO)

Mission and Vision

As this project progressed, our ultimate focus was to increase opportunities for disadvantaged workers in the Western Region of Ontario to connect with gainful employment. Keeping in

mind the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Vision, we focused on research and recommendations that bring lower-skilled job-seekers up to their potential so they can utilize their skills in the workforce once again. With the further understanding that the MTCU Vision for Employment Ontario (EO) includes a fully-integrated system that appears seamless from the client perspective, our research and recommendations focused on changes needed to create a smoother transition from Literacy to employment for clients.

MTCU Vision: “Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life.”

Conclusion

Through this research project, Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) has increased their understanding of the opportunities, supports, challenges and changes required to best support experienced job seekers with low literacy skills. We welcomed the opportunity to share that learning with others in Ontario. To that end, we hosted a webinar on Monday December 9, 2014 to share the results of both this strategy and the second of LLSC's strategies "Literacy and the Young Single Male". Please see Appendix 7 & 8. In the process of working on this project, we also strengthened our relationship with Employment Services (ES) and have already seen the result of that enhanced relationship in an increase in phone calls asking for Literacy programming suggestions for their clients.

It is our hope that through the recommendations outlined in this report we can further develop those relationships, enabling an Employment Services (ES) and Literacy Service collaboration that more thoroughly supports experienced workers with low literacy skills as they move through the Employment Ontario system to employment.



Strategy # 2: Literacy and the Young Single Male

Literacy Link South Central (LLSC)

The goal of this strategy was to leverage resources from two other contracts – **Providing Educational Interviews to Ontario Works Recipients** and **Developing Curriculum for Single Males on Ontario Works** – and combine them with local Employment Services to develop strategies to bring young males through literacy to employment.

Within this project, LLSC's objectives were to:

- a. Research outreach strategies that will bring young single males into literacy programs, as well as issues affecting young single males and their entrance into, and attachment to, employment.
- b. Identify system linkages and supports required to increase the number of young single males moving through literacy programs to employment.
- c. Evaluate this strategy, including, but not limited to, making note of best practices and client success rates.

Since 2007, statistics show an upward trend in the number of single males between 18 and 29 who are accessing Ontario Works (OW) in London, Ontario. At the time the proposal for this project was written, there were at least 2,000 single males on OW who have been on the caseload for longer than 12 months and/or who have less than a grade 12 education. They are often not

- engaged in their community
- equipped to move forward because they lack education and skills
- involved with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs and other Employment Ontario (EO) agencies that could move them closer to employment

Trying to engage youth in learning and employment is not new to LLSC. We have a long history of developing materials and strategies with a goal to move youth towards

employment by building their skills. Most recently, through a 9-month project, Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) talked to young single males on Ontario Works (OW) to find out about their interests and activities, especially as they relate to technology. This informed the content of a set of 4 modules, with accompanying practitioner overviews that speak to the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF). These resources are now being used to provide innovative and integrated programming between some literacy, employment and OW programs.

That project also included a comprehensive Literature Review and several youth focus groups. This provided us with the beginnings of suggested ideas for engaging this hard-to-reach population. But as with any complex social issue, further exploration needed to be done. This, combined with the need we were seeing in our community, positioned us well to undertake this strategy.

The focus of this strategy was on young males that were, when possible, single. By young, we are referring to anyone who fell between 18 and 29 years of age. The focus was on males as this was the population identified as staying on OW longer than their female counterparts. By single, we mean they weren't married and didn't have children. There was no focus other than these criteria. We realize that you can break this target population down further into sub groups, for example, those who have mental health issues, addiction issues, or those who may be newly settled from another country. Although these elements were on our radar during this project, with limited time and resources we didn't address them directly.

This strategy was supported by an Advisory Committee that had representation from

- programs for youth, employment and literacy
- the local Workforce Planning and Development Board
- a consultant "of lived experiences" - meaning in his not-so-distant past he was one of our target population

The Advisory Committee met 6 times during the project in 2013 and individual members were called upon on an as-needed basis throughout the year.

We also engaged employment agencies in a survey to collect information on the perceived needs of the target population as it relates to this strategy. A local employment agency (ATN) and London's youth services and employment agency (YOU) were instrumental in organizing youth focus groups as this is a hard-to-reach population otherwise. The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs in our 6-county service area also participated in surveys.

Activities

Early in the project the Advisory Committee was asked to make assumptions about why young/ single/ males were becoming "stuck" on Ontario Works (OW). These weren't necessarily statements they believed, just comments on why this trend may be occurring. These assumptions helped to focus the project and guide the research and conversations going forward.

The assumptions include:

- a. **Males leave home earlier than females.** Families may be more willing to cut loose a young male versus a young female, or maybe the male youth leave earlier than females in an urgency to experience independence.
- b. **Young men without children are less motivated to succeed** since they have no responsibility or anyone depending on them.
- c. **The target population is comfortable on OW.** The money they receive may be enough to live on, considering that a large group of young men can live together with very little means and "couch surf." We also talked about how there is risk in going off of OW. Once someone becomes comfortable with the rules and expectations of how to get OW financial support, it may seem to be intimidating

and even risky to try to get money through “employment.” The work world comes with a whole other set of rules and a different lifestyle.

- d. **The target population is affected by generational poverty.** Many of our target population come from families who receive OW assistance. An OW funded family situation may be all they know. Concepts from “**Bridges Out of Poverty**” would be largely at play here.
- e. **Many have criminal records that block their ability to work.** Due to this, the youth have no incentive to move forward with any employment goals.
- f. **Media is creating youth apathy.** During this project, it seemed that almost daily reports were coming out about the high youth unemployment rate, with much focus on how youth with university and college educations can’t find work. Those reports would hardly provide motivation for our target population to want to go back to school or use employment agency services. These reports might also cause male youth to experience apathy because they feel an inability to gain employment. For example, when the media states that there are no jobs, that even people with a post-secondary degree can’t get a job, how could a 20-year-old with low skill levels get one?
- g. **Technology is causing lack of socialization** so youth are less likely to participate in community services. Low social skills may also cause them to be less successful in job search and employment.



Technology takes away opportunities to socialize or create an in-person support network, or interact face-to-face and learn from each other’s successes and

challenges. Technology can also be a distraction, preventing students from focusing on learning, on school work, and on a positive path forward.

- h. **The target population self-sabotages.** To what extent is fear of rejection guiding the youth in our target group? Deteriorating self-esteem and confidence cause youth to not set employment and learning goals as they don't foresee experiencing success under any circumstances. One OW caseworker noted that being on OW "sucks the life out of clients" – regardless of why they went on OW in the first place.
- i. **The target population lacks identity.** When you strip work identity away, people have reduced confidence and self-esteem. Also, some of these youth (on the OW system now) have not yet established a work identity.
- j. **The target population, especially those with less than a grade 12, are not interested in education.**
- k. **Employers might be reluctant to hire youth.**
- l. **Females are hired more often than males.** In the recent LLSC youth project, focus group youth said that it's easier for females to get a job. They thought employers hire females first, especially for retail sales and customer service jobs.
- m. **The target population** doesn't want to go to school. Males are less likely to return to school.

Our next step was to use these assumptions to guide the research phase of this project.

To gather feedback and to challenge the assumptions we

- conducted a resource review
- attended topical community meetings (e.g., employment and criminal records)

- surveyed LBS programs
- surveyed employment programs
- conducted youth focus groups and one-to-one interviews (youth engaged in Employment Ontario (EO) programs)
- spoke to youth who were not engaged in EO programs - “at street level”

Challenges

Our first challenge in this project soon became clear. What piece of this social trend should we focus on?

Youth unemployment is currently a global issue. A global economy, technology and countries struggling financially are just some of the contributing factors. Most of these factors are out of Literacy Link South Central’s (LLSC) area of influence. Some other factors that are discussed within the context of youth unemployment include the public education system, government policies and Ontario Works requirements. These are also factors that we can’t affect.

With limited time and resources, we needed to define what we could realistically explore and influence. Considering our involvement in the EO system, we saw that we could focus on youth engagement in employment agencies and literacy programs, and the transition between the two systems.

Another challenge was trying to engage the target population for the purposes of focus groups. This population (and hence the need for this project) is not easy to engage. We relied on our employment agency partners to gather youth in their programs for the purposes of this project.

Lessons Learned

Resource Review

For the purposes of this report we are highlighting findings as they relate to the assumptions highlighted previously.

A comprehensive overview of articles that were reviewed is provided with this report.

A. Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants (Marc Prensky, 2001)

Prensky explored the impact of technology on youth who were raised with it. He states that youth don't have to learn technology; it's an inherent part of their culture. Students now absorb and process information differently than those that have gone before them. He called on teachers to recognize the factors that are different between themselves (Digital Immigrants) and their students (Digital Natives). In fact, he goes further to say, "Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach."

B. Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants: Do They Really Think Differently? (Marc Prensky, 2001)

In this follow up report, Prensky explored how the brain's processes change and adjust according to the stimulation it receives. He related this to the impact of technology on youth brain functions. This article claims that youth today have short attention spans, but only for old ways of thinking.

Through this article he creates a compelling case for the need to make changes to the education system to better fit the learning needs of generations raised with technology.

C. What if? Technology in the 21st Century Classroom (Ontario Public School Board, 2009)

An article written by the Ontario Public School Board asks “How can schools continue to be connected and relevant in the world of the 21st century?”

This article challenges the education system, especially educators, to examine how they use current technologies in the learning environment. It warns us that the integration of technology in schools is not matching the pace of multi-media technology use in the world beyond schools. In a technology-based world we receive constant stimulation from a variety of sources. Youth may feel real learning happens when they are free to access technology on an as-needed basis and then process information in the way they’ve become accustomed to. The article states, “Many students feel, however, that when they come into school they have to “power down” to fit into an environment that offers fewer options for learning than are available in the life they live outside of the school. This can erode students’ perceptions of the relevance of education as they experience it in many schools today.”

D. Good Video Games and Good Learning (James Paul Gee, 2007)

In this article, Gee proposes that classrooms that incorporate the foundational elements of video games may see increased success in learning.

The author states, “Lots of young people pay lots of money to engage in an activity that is hard, long, and complex. As an educator, I realized that this was just the problem our schools face – how do you get someone to learn something long, hard, and complex, and yet still enjoy it? “

He also argues that gaming elements are valuable in the workplace. Gee explains how risk taking and failure are the basis for successful problem solving, and that games often build teamwork and communication.

E. High School Dropouts Returning to School (Melanie Raymond for Statistics Canada, 2008)

High School Dropouts Returning to School explores the role of gender as it relates to leaving and re-engaging in the school system. This report reveals evidence based ideas as to why males (vs. female) drop out of the school system. “Young men cited wanting to work as a reason to leave school more often than young women.”

This research shows that young men with children will more likely work instead of return to their education, so they can earn a living for the sake of their children. This article shows us the importance of making a clear and strong contention between education and work. It also speaks to the value in designing a co-op style program where learning and earning can happen simultaneously.

F. Clearer Sightlines to Employment: What Works for Job-Seekers with Low Educational Attainment (Essential Skills Ontario (ESO) 2012)

This idea of a blended work and education approach was further discussed in a paper put out by ESO in 2012. The author stated “An ‘education-first’ approach is often far too removed from employment for the vast majority of adults for whom high school was not the ‘right fit’ in the first place.”

This could also apply to youth. As our project progressed, it became clear that youth felt that returning to any education seemed like an overwhelming commitment and not part of a clear path to employment.

G. “Canadian youth facing unprecedented challenges finding quality employment” (CIBC, 2013)

CIBC stated that “...one in five youth aged 15-24 not working today has never held a job” and therefore “statistics show that youth who gain work experience and receive on the job training while studying are much more likely to find suitable and sustainable employment.”

Again, this makes a strong case for the value of integrated learning and earning opportunities.

H. Our Voice: Literacy + OW: Best Practices for Serving Ontario Works (OW) Clients (Community Literacy Ontario (CLO), 2013)

Recently, CLO provided a series of tips based on suggested practices by literacy providers, on how to engage, motivate and maintain OW and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) clients. These tips will be good to carry forward, when designing programs to meet the needs of that population.

Suggestions include making sure you offer positive reinforcement and structured learning opportunities where clients feel a sense of accomplishment. The concept of “Gamification,” which is a program design model, can address these suggestions.

Employment Services Survey

Twenty-two employment service providers from London, Ontario and the surrounding area responded to our survey. The questions were designed to address the assumptions that were described earlier, created by the Advisory Committee.

Through the survey, respondents generally agreed on the following:

- a. There is a disconnect between the jobs that youth want and the skills and knowledge that they have.
- b. Having children didn't seem to influence youth participation in programs.
- c. Very few youth at the employment agencies have been involved in literacy programs.

- d. Several of the male youth in their programs had criminal records. One employment service provider added, “The more desperate the circumstances the less likely “right and wrong” will enter into the equation.”
- e. Youth need mentors. It was interesting that in separate responses, this word was continually used.
- f. Financially backed learning opportunities would be beneficial to youth.
- g. Youth were easily discouraged when the road to education and employment seemed long.

Self-Employment

Respondents agreed that they aren't seeing an increase in youth who want to start their own business. This was seen as a good thing since they perceive youth as not having the drive, coordination and overall abilities to be successful in this area. Also, this doesn't fit the goal for youth that want to earn fast money.

One respondent added, “Many tell me they would like to get into skilled trades, but cannot get an opportunity.”

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Survey

Nine LBS practitioners from London, Ontario and the surrounding area responded to our survey. The survey questions were, once again, designed to challenge the assumptions set out previously in the strategy.

Through the survey, respondents generally agreed on the following:

- a. Youth often attend their programs because they have to, usually as a requirement of Ontario Works (OW). Predictably, the youth leave the program when they feel they have met OW requirements. Other reasons for leaving the program are that youth lack motivation and are not able to delay gratification.

- b. This age group is less successful in their program than older age groups. One said that, "...young males tend to be unfocused. This client group appears to be disinterested compared to other client groups. Young males have been disengaged from the regular school system for a number of years."
- c. Youth are unable to see literacy as part of their employment journey.
- d. Participation doesn't seem to be influenced by having children or not. (However, research states that having children might be a barrier to participation in education as the youth parent might feel a need to work instead, to provide for the child.)
- e. Youth lack the ability to communicate for the purposes of job searching. One respondent said, "Many youth have not been taught how to use the phone to contact an employer or how to present themselves in person. They are used to making all their connections through text, Facebook, and Twitter. There is almost a lack of confidence in being able to do anything else." Employment counsellors often agreed that this is a trend they're seeing as well.

Other Recommendations

- a. One suggestion was for the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) field to provide monthly information sessions to Ontario Works (OW) clients.
- b. Several respondents suggested that there's a need for programming where youth on OW can gain work experience and learn at the same time.

Youth Focus Groups

Thirteen youth from the target population participated in (informal) focus groups.



Youth were asked, “Who can you count on?” as a way to find out more about their support

systems. As one would predict, this population have very few supports. One youth replied, “Just my Dad, and my shadow.” A few youth responded that they have family and friends to help them. Interestingly one said his OW caseworker, “because emails are answered promptly.”

Participants generally agreed that being on Ontario Works is depressing. They are embarrassed and often try to hide the fact that they are receiving assistance. They feel that others look down on them.

The reasons many participants left school included, “it was dull,” and “just stopped due to lack of interest.”

We asked youth what they would need to know before returning to school. Not surprisingly, they need to know how more education would be useful to them. One focus group participant noted that returning to high school takes too long. Another group participant stated he might return to his education in a in a couple of years, if he’s not getting anywhere.

Youth expressed a need for (labour market) research to build a case for going back to school. One youth said he wasn’t sure how to find a “real answer” about career opportunities and the corresponding training he should take. One youth stated, “The expectation is that you go to post-secondary for some kind of guarantee of employment at the end, and people are realizing that’s not always the case.”

They often spoke of “cost” as a barrier to further education. Even though most hadn't completed high school, they only thought of post-secondary as an educational option.

Therefore, it's not surprising that money was seen as a barrier to returning to school. One youth noted that he would like to go back to school once he earns the money to do so, and is considering apprenticeship, "since they pay you to do it." Another youth said that he doesn't want to go back to school until he knows what he wants to do, because he doesn't want to waste the money. It's interesting to note that **non-Ontario Works (OW)** focus groups participants had a high school diploma whereas the majority of young men without high school diplomas were on OW.

What this feedback suggests is that these youth need to see a stronger connection between education and employment, for 2 reasons:

- 1) To choose a realistic career based on their skills and knowledge.
- 2) To maintain motivation while in education.

Street Level Conversations

Up to this point in the project, we captured feedback from youth involved in programming (EO services) but we hadn't heard from youth in our community that don't access services that are available to them. To this end, our Advisory Group Consultant (of lived experiences) met with an estimated 80 young men in our target group throughout the city of London. Over the course of a week, he held impromptu conversations at the

- Food Bank
- Daily Meals program (provided by a church)
- Labour Ready (temporary agency) parking lot during the early morning registration period
- Men's Mission (men's shelter)
- London's Central Public Library - outside

The Consultant engaged in casual conversations with the youth in hopes of hearing responses to the survey questions we had around learning and employment.

He reported that many youth had a similar background story. They left home at 17 because their mothers would lose the financial benefits for them once they turn 18. With the lack of income for this child, the family's money would be getting tighter. The youth were pushed to drop out of school for work, or sometimes they left school in hopes of picking up more hours at their part time job. Criminal activity (and charges) were **so** common that when the Consultant asked them if they had a job, their response was commonly "like, a **real** job?"

Based on his findings, we identified 5 challenges and offered corresponding suggestions.

Challenge

Youth are unaware of the literacy and employment services that are available to them.

The youth thought employment services were temporary agencies and they often had preconceived ideas of what they were allowed to access.



Suggested next steps include

- considering to promote programs to people who work with youth such as probation and parole officers or Children's Aid Society
- considering putting information booths outside the probation office
- having more of a visual presence
- remembering that word of mouth is effective way to promote services with youth



Challenge

They only do things that their friends will do.

The Consultant noticed that the youth only talked or engaged with him when a friend came along. The more friends that were drawn to the conversation, the chattier the group was. The more comfortable they were, the more they would talk.

Suggested next steps include

- using a buddy system in programming
- offering an incentive for youth to bring someone else (this also helps to increase their social interactions)

Challenge

They lost interest in school but are interested in learning through a hands-on approach.

Commonly, they didn't like school and are not interested in returning to learn. When our Consultant asked the youth what they would think of learning something in a workbook using a woodworking table as a desk (for example) and then turning around and applying what they just learned on some tool, right in class - many youth would excitedly reply, "There's a place like that? Where?"

Suggested next step is to

- develop a program where youth can learn, work with a hands-on approach and earn money at the same time

Challenge

The youth are not easily approachable and are not very trusting of people they don't know.

This is something that many of us might already know but it's a good thing to keep in mind. Many youth in our target population stated that they only rely on themselves.

Suggested next steps include

- having steps in the intake and program design that helps to build a trusting environment
- reviewing current practices to ensure procedures won't potentially turn youth away (e.g., asking several personal questions and asking about source of funding when first meeting the youth)

It didn't take much for the youth to decide to walk away from these conversations. For instance, when the youth saw that our Consultant was carrying a pen and paper to record conversations, the youth would back off from the conversation saying, "You're just one of **them!**" The Consultant also remarked that as much as we might have stereotypes about youth, they also look at us with stereotypes.

Challenge

These youth have low self-esteem and feel like "just a number" especially since they might belong to several "systems."

Suggested next step is to

- build self-esteem, confidence and a sense of self into programming and content



Knowledge Transfer

The findings from this project were profiled during a province-wide webinar. The webinar included participants from the literacy field, the employment field and a cross-over of both fields.

Evaluation results of the webinar were very positive. Respondents felt it was a worthwhile webinar where they learned new information and usable strategies.

Achieving Employment Ontario (EO) Mission and Vision

According to Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Annual

Report (2011-2012), at-risk youth are under-represented in the labour market. As we have heard through this project, many male youth leave school early. They don't have the knowledge and skills they need to be productive in today's labour force. They often don't make use of the provincial literacy and employment agencies at their disposal. Yet it's these Employment Ontario (EO) services that could help move low-skilled youth along their path to employment.

MTCU Vision: "Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life."

The MTCU report states, "Ontario's competitive advantage is its people. The province is at its best when people have opportunities and tools to reach their full potential." The strategy represented here, through this Labour Market Partnership project, addresses the learning needs of disengaged young males and identifies gaps in our community where EO service providers can provide resolutions. Only through exploring the issues can we create the necessary opportunities and tools to help these youth reach their full potential.

Through targeted marketing, young males will be in a better position to take advantage of EO services. These services would build the skills and knowledge that these youth need to become employable and then successful in finding work. In return, the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs and employment agency programs will have a better understanding of how marketing, program content and design can increase their chances of success with this population.

Ontario would benefit from increasing the skills of this untapped workforce. EO's LBS and ES are in a position to provide undereducated and unemployed youth with services that will decrease the need for youth to be unemployed and ultimately, on social assistance.

The approach used through this project supports Employment Ontario's (EO) efforts to integrate services between literacy and employment. During this project many partnerships were developed and they will be built upon during the next phase. Overall, both employment and literacy providers coordinated efforts to respond to the identified needs of this community-based issue. By building a case for a strong connection between literacy and employment, we not only make youth aware of the connection, but EO service providers as well.

Conclusion

Based on what we read and what we heard, Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) will attempt to engage this population by focussing efforts on **marketing** and **program design**.



Marketing

Youth are often unaware of our services and how they can benefit from them. We hope to design messages that can be marketed to the target population to show them a strong connection between literacy and employment. We also want to let them know that there's a system of services in their community that can help move them closer to employment.

We will explore options for strategic placement of marketing messages. Where are youth most likely to come across our promotional messages or where would they most likely go in search of services? In a report, **Electronic Youth: Creating the Current** (Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board, 2011), youth stated that they seek services through Kijiji. A search of London's Kijiji site resulted in no mention of literacy or employment agency programs (search words included, "literacy," "education," "employment services," and "job search"). We'd like to develop engaging messages suitable for a Kijiji posting.

In a search of local literacy websites and local employment service websites it was interesting to note that the two systems rarely, if at all, cross-post. This could be a good thing to consider, especially for youth who use one service and have need of another.

Several common provincial and federal websites that support youth in their search for employment do not address literacy. When education options were profiled, the websites listed choices for after high school. There are no options for youth that left their schooling early or for youth that feel they need to upgrade their skill before moving on in education or employment.

We hope to develop videos to make youth service providers aware of our services so they can confidently speak about them to their youth clients. This takes our key messages to the places where youth go. We'd also like to create videos for youth and, if possible, use peers in those videos.

Program Design

Combined feedback and research generated three ideas for program development that fit the identified needs.

1. Gamification

Gamification means using the fundamental elements of gaming and applying them in program design. Some of the concepts that apply are

- collaboration
- competition
- ranks
- levels



Gamification is

- becoming a big part of our daily life
- being used to motivate employees and consumers alike
- playing a major role in training

How can gamification program design be used in our programs to engage, maintain and motivate youth? We hope to explore this further.

2. Real Voices

The City of London recently ran a program called Real Voices. This was a youth-lead initiative where older youth helped younger youth create videos. When speaking about this program, the presenter spoke of the leadership skills and confidence developed by the older youth participants. This program sounds like it might be a good fit for the second phase of this strategy so we'd like to explore this possibility further.

3. **Learn and Earn** (co-op style program)

As we heard from several sources, we need a program where learning and working for a wage happens simultaneously. We hope to explore what this could look like with the help of our EO partners, some of who are also employers in this community.

Program Delivery

No matter how engaging the content of a program might be, it would be a huge oversight to not consider other factors such as the

- learning environment
- process we use
- expectations we have of the participants
- way we facilitate

There's little use putting effort into marketing and program content if we turn off the youth after their first visit to the program. For instance, how many programs ask about source of funding during intake? How would this feel to a young man who's at a program for the first time and who's embarrassed about being on Ontario Works (OW)? Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) will explore suggestions for best practices around program delivery for male youth. This will result in a well-rounded approach to youth engagement.

Strategy # 3: Document the current approach by Employment Ontario partners to labour adjustment situations and investigate the development of a new, responsive, collaborative model of labour adjustment among Employment Ontario partners.

Strategy #4: Identify and implement supportive coordination strategies, including assessment and referral protocols and tools, to facilitate effective client pathways and outcomes.

Project READ Literacy Network of Waterloo-Wellington (PRLN)

How can lower-skilled and marginalized workers in Ontario be best prepared and supported by the Employment Ontario (EO) partner services to be successful in employment and education? In **People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People** (2010), Dr. Rick Miner identifies that a more highly educated and trained workforce will be needed to meet labour needs:

- a. The requirements of the labour market are changing. With the emergence of the knowledge economy, the proportion of the labour force requiring some form of education or training beyond high school will increase dramatically. Using a variety of Canadian and U. S. estimates, it is concluded that by 2031 we will need 77% of our workforce to have post-secondary credentials (apprenticeship, university, college, industry, professional).
- b. Two types of new jobs will be created – completely new jobs and jobs that have changed so much that, even if the title is the same, the actual work done and training and skills required will make them new jobs.

- c. We face a future with large numbers of unskilled workers looking for jobs that require skills they don't possess, and a large number of jobs that will go unfilled.

The report, '**From Poverty to Prosperity: Literacy's Impact on Canada's Economic Success**' (Scott & Shillington, 2011), identifies a direct link between literacy skill and income level:

- a. Literacy levels influence the
 - ability to get a job
 - ability to retrain for a job or get a promotion
 - risk of job loss
 - length of time of unemployment and rate of pay
- b. Individuals with low levels of literacy work fewer weeks on average and are more likely to experience periods of unemployment and remain unemployed for longer periods.
- c. People with the lowest level numeracy skills are 5 times more likely to receive Social Assistance Benefits.

Project READ Literacy Network of Waterloo-Wellington (PRLN) has been involved in supporting lower-skilled workers since 1988. PRLN has been

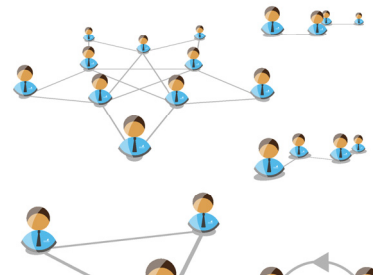
- providing literacy assessments and referrals to local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers
- supporting local service coordination and education strategies and opportunities, including during periods of labour adjustment (see Appendix 1)

Waterloo Region, not unlike other areas of the province, has experienced lay-offs, downsizing and closures across employment sectors. In addition, new companies have opened their doors and need workers.

Periods of labour adjustment provide both an opportunity and a challenge to engage and support lower-skilled Ontarians to successfully transition back to work. The opportunity, as workers leave their jobs, is a natural window to encourage lower-skilled workers to engage in upgrading and retraining – a retooling of their skills to meet the needs of future employment. The challenge is to determine if the current local labour adjustment practices and processes truly support a worker to identify literacy concerns and then to participate in education and retraining.

The Employment Ontario (EO) network of providers and programs are all mandated to provide service as part of labour adjustment. These providers and programs include

- Employment Services (ES)
- Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)
- workforce planning
- Apprenticeship
- Second Career
- Self-employment



The 3 questions to consider are:

1. How do the providers and programs collaborate in an adjustment situation with Local Adjustment Committees and Action Centres?
2. Do all partners have a consistent knowledge of labour adjustment?
3. Are there opportunities to improve collaboration and responses in adjustment situations so that laid-off workers are encouraged to have literacy and skills assessments, participate in upgrading and successfully return to work?

The strategies in this project were targeted to answer those 3 questions.

Partners

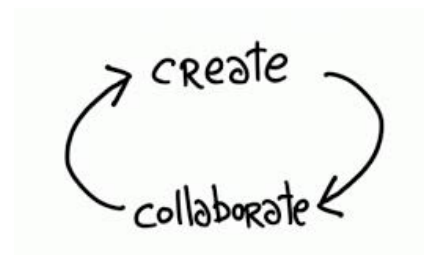
An immediate and ongoing partnership developed with the local Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Advisor, Joan Robinson. The goal of the AAP is to work with employers, employees and communities to develop strategies to cope with company downsizing or plant closures. Connecting individuals with the relevant and appropriate Employment Ontario (EO) services that will help them regain employment is an integral part of the service.

Fully understanding the current labour adjustment processes was important to this project. Project staff prepared and shared 2 progress reports on the key informant interviews and the challenges and questions stakeholders had about labour adjustment.

Discussions considered

- opportunities to clarify the process of adjustment
- expectations of all stakeholders
- possible pathways for service

In addition, a larger meeting took place with Anne Ramsay (Project READ Literacy Network - PRLN), Joan Robinson (AAP), project staff, and other Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) staff to discuss the reports in-depth and to plan for a community presentation. We collaborated on the content of the meeting, the venue and identified stakeholders who could be in attendance. A decision was made for AAP advisors to present at a scheduled, upcoming meeting of the local Community Employment Linkages Committee (CELC) where EO service partners, program funders and other community organizations would be in attendance. Additional adjustment stakeholders were identified and invited by Project READ Literacy



Network (PRLN).

This meeting took place in September 2013. Joan Robinson presented on the current process and protocols of labour market adjustment including the Rapid Response and Training Service (RRTS) protocol and tiered response, including the

- role of Employment Ontario (EO) partners
- role of Action Centres
- role of the peer helper
- expected timelines (see Appendix 2,3)

The RRTS is activated in two instances:

1. When the company lay-off will impact 50 or more employees.
2. Where the lay-off will have a major impact on the community.

A successful, collaborative partnership developed with the Literacy Service Planning Waterloo Region Committee (LSP), representing local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers, by attendance at their scheduled monthly meetings. A project update was included on the monthly agenda and as a group, the LSP providers were able to discuss and share their labour adjustment involvement including challenges, successes and recommendations.

The members of the Waterloo LSP table provided consultation and support to plan a community-learning meeting in December 2013 to share project findings.

Activities

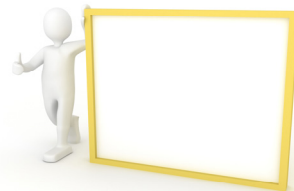
a. Background Research

An Internet search was completed to gather background information and gain insight into current labour adjustment research and tools. There are a number of documents that serve as labour adjustment templates and best practise guidebooks for employers, Action Centres and workers. Two specific examples are:

1. The Mining Industry Human Resources Council produced the **Mining Workforce Transition Kit – A Tool to Support Employees at Mine Closure** with funding from the Canadian government. This 5-module, step-by-step transition guide follows the labour process and offers supports for employers and workers. There are specific templates for the transition (local adjustment) committee (module 3) and also for the Action Centre Team (module 4). Module 4 is a guidebook for establishing, running, promoting and winding down an Action Centre and includes information on services needed including
 - income supports
 - employment
 - literacy
 - retraining information

2. The Workforce Development Board in Peterborough produced a second guide, **Surviving a Lay-off: A Guide for Employers**, with funding from Employment Ontario (EO). This guide:
 - a. Introduces employers to collaborative labour adjustment programs and practices in Ontario, noting that employers have a critical role in ensuring positive outcomes.

 - b. Provides best practices on
 - planning for closure
 - notifying impacted workers
 - notifying the province
 - suggesting adjustment responses



The CAW (Canadian Auto Workers) Adjustment Tracking Project published research reports in 2010 (**Preliminary Findings**) and 2012 (**Finding Their Way**), which are the

findings of a longitudinal study of 260 laid-off CAW automobile industry workers from 3 different communities.

The goal of the preliminary research (2010) was to

- assess utilization of Action Centres and effectiveness of services
- look at employment outcomes
- look at health and well-being benchmarks

The second phase (2012) followed the same workers and further researched

- what had worked well
- shortfalls
- impacts on families
- what happened for the workers

Author Sam Vrankulj found:

- a. There was a high degree of engagement with the Action Centres with most accessing support in employment preparation, retraining (most through Employment Ontario's Second Career program), and gaining essential social supports.
- b. The resources and partnerships with service providers were important to success, as well as the peer helper model at the Action Centres.
- c. Employment outcomes were generally good as some workers were recalled. Of those working in other areas, many were in the situations of precarious employment and working in the service sector and were concerned with ongoing financial stability.

Both reports noted that more vulnerable workers, "...older workers, immigrants, workers from racialized communities, those with lower levels of education, English

language literacy and women had higher incidence of negative health and well being outcomes “ (Vrankulj, 2012).

b. Key Informant Interviews

Twenty-one in-depth, confidential interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. People were chosen for their knowledge of and experience along the continuum of labour adjustment.

The goals of the key informant interviews were to better understand

- past and current practices
- what assessment tools are currently used
- how Project READ Literacy Network (PRLN) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers could be involved

Questions addressed their experience with labour adjustment, and where and how LBS and the local literacy network could be involved in adjustment (see Appendix 9).

As the interviews progressed, themes emerged that reflected confusion with current practices including

- the role of the Employment Service (ES) provider
- how providers get involved in adjustment
- concerns about cost and capacity
- type and amount of reporting
- levels of assessment
- general expectations from MTCU

There were questions concerning the ways Action Centre staff and peer helpers worked with service providers and what all stakeholders could expect from each

other. Interviews were conducted with, Laid off Workers, Employment Ontario agencies Employment Services Providers and individuals, including

Lutherwood

The Working Centre

Northern Lights

YMCA of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo

Conestoga College

Carol Simpson, Workforce Planning Board

Judi Riddolls, Guelph-Wellington Business Enterprise Centre (Employment Ontario - Ontario Self Employment Benefits contract holder)

Frank Curnew, Waterloo Region Labour Council

Jane Tuer, Project READ Literacy Network

Arnie Francisco, experienced Local Adjustment Committee Chair

Action Centre Coordinators and staff including peer helpers

Joan Robinson, Adjustment Advisory Program Advisor

c. Review of Employment Assessment and Screening Tools

Both screening and assessments tools offer a way to better understand the interests, needs and goals of the worker.

Screening tends to be a brief overview that may be completed in a survey where the worker self identifies their situation or possibly in a conversation where behaviours could be observed. Screening is often the first step and quickly identifies needs and options, and supports referrals for service.

Assessments may be the next step, marking an investment for the worker and the provider that result in a personalized learning and employment plan.

Assessments take time to complete and they incorporate written tools and in-person interviews that consider many areas, including

- work history
- education and training history
- certifications
- job seeking skills
- job skills
- employment readiness
- language skills
- available supports
- goals
- barriers



In addition, testing may be used to measure and demonstrate skills, aptitudes and preferences. Employment Services (ES) offer assessment of employment or employability skills. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) offer assessments identifying literacy and essential skills.

In key interviews, ES providers and the Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Advisor discussed the use of screening and assessment tools. The Labour Adjustment Needs Survey (see Appendix 4) is an example of an AAP screening survey that would be completed by impacted workers at the initial meeting. Completion is voluntary and the results are compiled and used by the Local Adjustment Committee to better understand the demographics and self declared needs and goals of workers. Generally, ES providers complete assessments when workers attend their locations and register for EO services or assisted services.

These assessments have no prescribed methods. When present at the Action Centres, Employment Services (ES) staff generally are offering a screening service, many utilizing informal conversation that highlight the workers'

- current situation

- ideas for next steps
- possible support or referrals

d. Attended Monthly Literacy Service Planning (LSP) Waterloo Region Meetings

The LSP Waterloo Region is a local committee, facilitated and supported by Project READ Literacy Network (PRLN). At this table, participating Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers and Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) staff, focus on local planning and coordination of LBS services and programs.

Members include Project READ Literacy Network and

Waterloo Region District School Board, Essential Skills Upgrading – serving Waterloo and Cambridge

Waterloo Catholic District School Board, St Louis, Core Essentials – serving Cambridge and Kitchener

The Literacy Group – serving Cambridge and Kitchener

Conestoga College – serving Cambridge, Waterloo

MTCU Employment and Training Consultant

e. Community Learning Meeting

Labour adjustment stakeholders were invited to a community meeting on December 6, 2013 to learn about the project purpose, findings and next steps.

Discussions included

- methods for pre-screening for literacy concerns
- challenges in discussing literacy needs
- opportunities to work collaboratively (see Appendix 5)

f. Assessments of Laid-off Workers: Case Study of Knappe and Vogt, Kitchener, Ontario

In November 2013, Project READ received a request from the Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Consultant at Ministry of Training, Colleges and

Universities (MTCU) to support workers at a local furniture components factory that was shutting down.

Project READ's Executive Program Director provided information and referrals to over 70 employees at an open house event at the factory on November 27, 2013.

As a result of making contact with union and management representatives at the open house, Project READ was asked to coordinate 2 activities:

1. Provide individual assessments to workers.
2. Solicit proposals for on-site training programs from local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies.

After a discussion with LBS representatives, it was cooperatively decided that 2 of the 4 local LBS agencies would submit complementary proposals. The college proposed a GED preparation program and the community-based agency submitted for an Employment Track Express group.

(<http://www.collegeupgradingon.ca/employmenton/ete/studentmanual/etestudentmanual.pdf>)

Proposals were submitted to the company's human resources department in mid-December. Project READ assessed 45 workers for their educational and essential skills at the company's Action Centre in late December 2013. A report on the results of those assessments is available in the Appendices.

This smooth, coordinated provision of support to newly laid-off workers was made possible by the support and communication cultivated during this project among the various partners, including

- Government
- regional network
- company

- union
- local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies

Lessons Learned

Impact of Employment Ontario on Labour Adjustment

In the Province of Ontario, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) responds to downsizing and closures.

Companies initially advise the Ministry of Labour (MOL) and then AAP advisors meet with company and employee representatives to discuss labour market adjustment including

- closure or downsizing
- expected number and type of positions of impacted workers
- projected timelines
- local Adjustment Committee set-up - including
 - AAP advisor
 - company human resources
 - union representation (if unionized)
 - staff representation
- necessity of an Action Centre
- expected budget/cost sharing



The Local Adjustment Committee hires a Committee Chairperson. An initial group meeting is held with impacted employees where a survey is completed to determine

- demographic information
- employees' immediate plans and needs
- perceived barriers to accomplish these goals (see Appendix 3).

When 50 or more employees are affected by lay-offs, the Adjustment Advisory Program's (AAP's) Rapid Response and Training Service (RRTS) will be activated. Led by the AAP Advisor, this initiative works to ensure a swift, appropriate response, bringing resources to help the impacted workers and communities (see Appendix 3).

Historically

The Local Adjustment Committee prepared a request for proposals and then contracted with selected employment service providers on a fee-for-service basis. Providers hired or assigned dedicated staff to provide service at the Action Centre where they

- completed in-depth needs assessments of affected employees
- developed individual action plans
- prepared comprehensive reports for the committee including
 - numbers
 - employee needs
 - agencies or services to be brought in to respond
 - schedule of services

Not all local employment service providers prepared proposals to be the lead agency or participated in labour adjustment.

Currently

In the Waterloo Region, 10 Employment Service (ES) providers are under contract with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to be full suite providers of ES. Labour market adjustment services are an implied part of their paid contractual arrangements. Therefore, there are no additional dollars for this service, no request for proposals, and all full suite providers can participate based on their service capacity. Full suite providers are required to offer 'unassisted' or self-directed resource and information areas as well as 'assisted' services including

- completing in-depth employability assessment
- developing individual employment plans

- supporting career planning and job search services
- making referrals to other programs and services
- providing job matching and job placement including wage incentives and job retention services, for people requiring more supports

Annual business plans are prepared with unassisted and assisted targets in different categories. Quarterly performance reports are completed and organizations are expected to demonstrate that they are either meeting or developing strategies to meet their targets. Successful outcomes include exiting to employment full-time or part-time (the highest percentage) as well as exits to education and training including English as a Second Language and the Second Career program.

Concerns of Key Information Employment Services (ES)

There were several identified concerns of key informant ES providers including:

- a. **Cost** – No additional dollars have been made available to existing ES providers to support an Action Centre.
- b. **Duplication** – Full suite ES providers are funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to offer staffed local Resource and Information Areas (R&I) providing support for self-directed job search. These R&I areas provide
 - computers
 - pre-employment workshops on a variety of topics
 - program information on job search, career planning, academic upgrading and education

This leads to the question - How do Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) funded Action Centres differ from the Resource and Information Areas (R&I)?

c. **Staff Capacity** – As no new staff can be hired or dedicated to Action Centres, it may be difficult to staff Action Centres from the current staff complement. Sending staff to Action Centres could leave agencies short staffed at their contracted sites and at potential risk of not meeting contractual targets.



d. **Assessments** – While historically the selected employment provider would complete comprehensive needs assessments as part of their fee-for-service contract, for Employment Service (ES) providers, comprehensive employment assessments are completed when a person is requiring more supported or ‘assisted’ services. No assessment is completed for people using the R&I or ‘unassisted’ service area. An Action Centre could be considered as an R&I area.

e. **Employment Ontario Information System (EOIS) Database Entry and File**

Retention – People who need assisted service, must complete an EO Participation Registration and be added to the Employment Ontario Information Systems Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS). Access to the EOIS-CaMS is needed to

- search for an existing case file
- create a new case file
- register an employment plan

Data entry is time consuming and is not completed at Action Centres.

Additionally, providers need to create and keep hard copy files at their service locations.

f. **Referrals** – To access other Employment Ontario programs such as the Second Career retraining, Ontario Job Creation, Ontario Self Employment Benefit programs, and wage incentives for job placements, participants must be registered

in the Employment Ontario Information Systems Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS), be part of assisted services and have an open employment plan.

- g. **Less than 50 Impacted Workers** – Looking for clear directions when there will be no Action Centre (less than 50 impacted workers). To provide the best response - How do Employment Ontario (EO) partners find out about lay-offs to best prepare for and develop services? How are impacted workers informed about EO partners?

Concerns of Key Informant Adjustment Committee Chair, Action Centre Coordinator, Staff and Peer Helpers

There were several identified concerns including:

- a. **Reporting** – Changes in the adjustment model leave questions on what reporting is required by stakeholders and who is responsible or best suited to complete reports. Action Centres are required to provide program statistics including client data and follow up, percentage adjusted and financial reports to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).
- b. **Experience in Adjustment** – Previously employment agencies completed request for proposals for Adjustment Committees and were selected based on experience and ability to complete adjustment work. In the new model, Employment Services (ES) providers may not have experience working in adjustment and with Action Centres. Can Action Centres expect the same level of service from all ES providers?
- c. **Value of Peer Helper Model** - While ES in both assisted and unassisted programs services are staffed by trained, professional employment staff providing programs and services, the value of the peer helpers at the Action Centres can't be overlooked.

Peer helpers know the workers and are also impacted workers themselves. They

- provide emotional support
- maintain contact with workers
- offer encouragement, referrals and advocacy

“We are confident in the personalized support offered by the ‘peer helper’ model. We are proud of how ‘worker led’ Action Centres reach out to their laid-off colleagues, drawing them in and guiding them as they struggle through the intimidating job market and often confusing structure” (Pierce and Roberts in Vrankulj, 2012).

- d. **Demographics** – Action Centres aren’t provided with a full contact list of displaced workers. This has a number of impacts
- time and energy is spent in outreach and promotion by the Centre to try to connect with workers
 - staff don’t know who hasn’t connected and while it is a worker’s choice to use the Centre, staff don’t want to make assumptions that the workers who haven’t connected have found work or another source of income
 - vulnerable workers may not be connecting with Action Centres

Research shows that laid-off workers experience negative health and well-being concerns especially, “older workers, immigrants, workers from racialized groups, those with lower levels of education, English language literacy and women” (Vrankulj, 2012).

Concerns for Local Workforce Planning Board

Workforce Planning Boards identified several concerns including:

- a. **Demographics** – There is a lack of shared information on the skills and education of impacted workers from employers and Rapid Response and Training Service (RRTS). While adjustment is often seen as downsizing, there is upsizing when employers are looking for skilled workers (vacancies and

skill shortages). If information about impacted employees was available sooner, there could be opportunities for workers to quickly transition to employment.

Sharing this information would mean quick access to growing employment sectors and better matching skilled workers seeking employment with either existing employers, expanding or new companies investing in Ontario.

- b. **Importance of Timely, Up-to-Date Labour Market Information Shared with Workers** – “Labour market information (LMI) represents a key mechanism by which to facilitate labour market adjustments. Well-organized LMI can reduce job search costs for both firms and workers and help workers reallocate themselves among different employers and industries effectively. Improved LMI can also make the supply of job candidates and the demand of employers more elastic” (Sharpe and Qiao, 2006). It is important to ensure that labour market information is presented at initial worker meetings and is available at Action Centres.

Concerns for Key Informant Literacy Service Providers (LBS)

LBS identified two main concerns.

- a. **Identifying Literacy early in the adjustment process** – Impacted worker’s initial needs are to clarify what is happening with the company and what financial assistance and supports they are entitled to. For many, their immediate goal is to get another job. Sharing information about the essential skills needed for the current labour market and the opportunity to participate in an easily accessible ‘skills checkup’ may plant seeds for upgrading.
- b. **Referrals to Literacy programs** – In Waterloo, Wellington and Dufferin for the period of April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013 data shows only 18 reported referrals

from Employment Services (ES) to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS). The number of ES assisted clients for the same period was 8,929 (WFPB, 2013). This raises questions about

- how literacy pre-screening could be adapted
- how LBS programs are being explained
- how this impacts referrals for programming

Recommendations

These recommendations are made recognizing there is not a cookie cutter response to labour adjustment. Each situation will present unique challenges and opportunities for partnership with stakeholders. Stakeholders include

- impacted workers
- employers
- Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) advisors
- Adjustment Committees
- Action Centre Chair
- staff
- peer helpers
- EO partners - including
 - ES
 - LBS
 - self employment
 - Apprenticeship
 - Second Career
 - Workforce Planning Boards
 - Labour Councils
 - municipalities



Recommendations are grouped into 3 categories: Communication, Collaboration and Training.

Communication

a. There needs to be clear and ongoing messaging from Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) to adjustment stakeholders

- in person
- in print
- online

Communication needs to focus on how the Employment Services (ES) contracted model impacts the historic work and understanding of Adjustment Committees, and Action Centres – Chairs, staff and peer helpers and other stakeholders.

b. Communication needs to clarify the role, responsibilities and expectations of the peer supported Action Centres and of the ES and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers in the areas of

- needs employability assessment (move to assisted service and Employment Ontario Information Systems Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS) data entry
- reports
- service locations - (staff capacity)
- protocols on how ES and LBS keep Action Centres updated on worker/learner status to meet adjustment percentages
- follow up (who does what and when)

c. There needs to be a review of labour adjustment and Employment Ontario (EO) materials to reconsider using the word 'literacy', renaming and focusing on skills check up, Essential Skills and upgrading.

Collaboration

The initial meeting with impacted workers needs to include

- the Workforce Planning Board for labour market information
- Project READ Literacy Network (regional literacy network) - representing local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) service providers, for Essential Skills and opportunities for enhancing skills/ to demystify literacy
- other Employment Ontario (EO) partners and adjustment stakeholders

Training

- a. Opportunity for LBS to support and train Employment Services (ES) frontline workers, including Resource and Information Areas (R&I) staff, in pre-screening for literacy and understanding literacy programming and literacy assessment.
- b. Opportunity for ES and LBS providers to participate in peer helper training as they are able to support literacy pre-screening, talk about literacy, understand all programming and assessment.
- c. Opportunity for frontline ES and peer helpers to experience an in-depth literacy and essential skills assessment.

Challenges

a. No Common Employability Assessment Tool or Process

During key informant interviews, ES providers shared that there are many ways employability assessments are completed and while they would support incorporating some type of literacy pre-screen, it would need to be simple and flexible.

At the December 2013 community meeting, EO partners and stakeholders discussed ways they currently screen or assess literacy needs. Processes developed would support Employment Ontario (EO) partners more broadly in their day-to-day work in EO, potentially resulting in more frequent and more effective referrals. Project READ Learning Network (PRLN) shared a sample pre-screening tool that has been used with the local Ontario Works office (see Appendix 7).

Recommendation: That a small work group form, including Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers, to discuss and design a practical pre-screening tool for literacy and to support implementation.

b. Role of Service Canada Employment Insurance

In a downsizing and lay-off situation, Employment Insurance regular benefits provide temporary financial assistance to impacted workers. To be eligible for regular benefits, workers must show that they are, 'unemployed, able and willing to work and actively looking for suitable work.'

Workers can participate in training programs, including skills upgrading, either on their own initiative or with direction from Service Canada. However, "If you are taking a training course on your own initiative ... you must show, without a doubt, that taking a course is not an obstacle to your active job search or to your acceptance of appropriate employment" (Service Canada, 2013). Generally, Service Canada considers a course of 10 hours or less per week, held in the evening and not at a university level as acceptable for a worker to continue to receive benefits, as it wouldn't interfere with job search.

When literacy concerns have been identified for an impacted worker, providers recognize that focussing on upgrading best prepares the worker to be successful in pursuing further training or returning to the workforce.

Recommendation 1: That the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) advocate for Service Canada to recognize the need for increased hours (greater than 10 hours per week) of training for workers participating in literacy and basic skills upgrading and that increased training should not impact EI benefits.

Recommendation 2: That MTCU work with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers to prepare information slides for the Service Canada mandatory worker information sessions. This information needs to better reflect the most effective ways to promote upgrading and skills check-ins to best engage learners, utilizing sensitive language. Supporting notes should be prepared to accompany the slides for effective presentation and explanation. Information on local LBS providers should be available for interested workers (see Appendix 6).

Knowledge Transfer

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU)

A written progress report was completed and shared with Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Advisor in June 2013. The purpose of the report was to share initial findings on observed state of labour adjustment in Waterloo Region as identified by key informant interviews. Findings were discussed focussing on ways that MTCU could

- communicate and address provider concerns
- clarify misunderstandings
- clarify Ministry expectations
- clarify the process of labour adjustment

This report was later redrafted to include a recommendation for a joint community meeting with AAP to support the project and clarify concerns and challenges for Employment Ontario (EO) partners regarding engagement in labour adjustment and to suggest a pathway for adjustment.

A second meeting was held to review the progress reports and plan a community meeting specifically for the Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Advisor to address labour adjustment. Those in attendance were the project consultant and

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Management

AAP Advisor

Employment Training Consultant

Executive Director of Project READ Literacy Network - Anne Ramsay

Literacy Basic Skills Providers (LBS)

Progress reports and project updates were shared monthly at the Literacy Service Planning Waterloo Region meetings. These were opportunities to highlight suggestions on ways Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) could work more closely together, including

- labour adjustment experiences
- literacy assessment and screening
- increasing an understanding of shared performance measures
- reporting requirements in Employment Ontario Information Systems Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS) and referrals protocols

Opportunities for Community Learning

Joan Robinson, AAP Advisor, attended the regularly scheduled Community Employment Linkages Committee (CELC) meeting in September 2013 to specifically explain and clarify adjustment services and MTCU expectations. This presentation was

in direct response to the Labour Market Project (LMP) progress reports and recommendations made to MTCU.

CELC is a Waterloo Region employment-planning table with representation from ES and LBS, program funders and community organizations. At the September meeting, 2 Action Centre chairs were also invited to attend. A presentation was made on the flow of labour adjustment, the role of Action Centres and peer helpers. There was an opportunity for discussion and also recommendations from the floor for more streamlined service. (See Appendix 3.)

A community service learning session was held December 6, 2013 to share project findings. Labour Market Partnership project staff and Project READ Literacy Network staff, invited Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers, Action Centre Chairs, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) staff and other adjustment stakeholders to

- attend to hear the findings of the report
- learn about literacy pre-screening
- experience part of a literacy assessment
- discuss ways to work better together on behalf of the impacted worker both in adjustment situations and in daily work with clients (see Appendix 5)

Fourteen Employment Ontario (EO) partners attended the December 6th Community meeting, not including 3 PRLN staff. Eleven attendees completed pre- and post evaluations, a completion rate of 79%. Results of the evaluations showed

- 75% of attendees had a good to excellent understanding of the project post evaluation compared with 45% in the pre-evaluation
- 100% of attendees rated their understanding of the importance of coordination needed between LBS and ES providers during labour adjustment situations as good to excellent post evaluation compared to 64% in the pre-evaluation

- 64% of attendees rated the understanding of literacy assessment tools as good to excellent post evaluation compared with 46% pre evaluation
- 100% of attendees rated their awareness of EO programs and services available to laid-off workers as good to excellent in the post-evaluation compared with 91% in the pre-evaluation
- 91% of attendees rated their understanding of referral processes for Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Employment Services (ES) as good to excellent post evaluation compared with 73% in the pre-evaluation
- 82% of attendees rated their interest in learning about LBS programs and services as good to excellent
- 75% of attendees felt the session would have a good impact on a client's access to LBS and ES programs
- 75 % of attendees rated their satisfaction with the project's outcomes as good to excellent (see Appendix 8)



Achieving Employment Ontario (EO) Mission and Vision

The Vision of EO is to build and support a highly skilled and educated workforce in the province by offering a comprehensive, coordinated service to all Ontarians to meet their employment and training needs. Services are available to support both the demand

MTCU Vision: "Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life."

side (the employer) and supply side (the job seeker) of employment. Client satisfaction and service excellence are cornerstones of all EO programs ensuring staff are knowledgeable and competent and providing consistent, high quality services and programs that are

- accessible
- individualized
- focussed on client need
- offered in a timely manner

The results for customers are that they get effective, relevant skills training, employment and career planning services, where and when they need them.

The Employment Ontario Service Promise is to

- ensure the highest quality of service and support to help individuals and employers meet career or hiring goals
- provide opportunities to make it easier for individuals to improve their skills through education and training
- ensure that no matter which Employment Ontario (EO) office an individual enters, he or she will get the help required
- work with employers and communities to build the highly skilled, highly educated workforce Ontario needs to be competitive (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities - MTCU, 2013)

In addition, participant or learner suitability for eligibility for Employment Ontario (EO) programs ensures that services are available to vulnerable Ontarians who are at risk of continued or long-term unemployment or being marginalized in the labour market.

Coordinated labour adjustment strategies support the EO Vision and Mission by providing

- information to impacted workers on current labour market opportunities and needed skills
- information and assessment on skill identification
- employment services
- information and referral options to meet individuals goals and needs

In adjustment, there are additional stakeholders, including Adjustment Committees and Action Centre Chairs, Coordinators and peer helpers. These stakeholders work in a collaborative manner when supporting adjustment of displaced workers. Peer helpers, hired from the workplace being adjusted provide individual support to workers at the Action Centre. To build upon the role of peer helpers, it was suggested during this project that helpers receive training in literacy pre-screening and making effective referrals to support impacted workers to make successful transitions.



Conclusions

The labour market is not static; there will continue to be worker lay-offs from company closures and downsizing as well as opportunities for employment from growing industries in Waterloo Region. As a main stakeholder in the work of labour adjustment, Ontario's Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) and Rapid Response Training Service (RRTS) initiative provides coordination and immediate response to announced lay-offs, by connecting individuals with the relevant and appropriate Employment Ontario (EO) services and partners that will help them regain employment.

To successfully re-enter the workforce, impacted workers need to understand the current labour market and realistically look at how their skills, experience and education are marketable and transferable to current and future jobs. As Miner (2010) points out, future jobs will require a more educated and skilled workforce. However, it can be both difficult for service providers to screen for literacy issues and for workers to disclose literacy challenges. While admission can be embarrassing and stigmatizing for the worker, there is a cost to not honestly identifying literacy concerns. Workers can be trapped in a cycle of low skilled, precarious employment and periods of unemployment, exhausting severance and employment insurance payments and falling into social assistance (Scott & Shillington, 2011).

How can literacy networks and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers support a more successful labour adjustment result for impacted workers to ensure lower-skilled and marginalized workers can more quickly be identified and access programs and services? This project has identified key areas and points of connection where collaboration is possible. Recommendations include:

- a. **Local Adjustment Committees** – Literacy Networks or LBS providers become active members on adjustment committees to provide information and ensure LBS services are included in adjustment strategy.
- b. **Initial meeting with impacted workers** – Literacy Network attends with other Employment Ontario (EO) partners to present information about essential skills in the new labour market, planting seeds for workers to access a ‘skills checkup’ to identify their strengths and skills gaps.
- c. **Action Centres** – Literacy Network participates in peer helper training to
- provide a pre-screening tool and identify literacy concerns
 - share ways to talk about literacy to engage workers
 - provide an overview of literacy providers
 - help identify pathways to retraining and education
- d. **Action Centres** – Literacy Network can provide an opportunity for peer helpers to experience a literacy assessment. This will help to build understanding to better support impacted workers through the process.
- e. **Employment Services (ES)** – Literacy Network and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers offer training to frontline ES staff including Resource and Information Areas (R&I) staff to
- provide a literacy pre-screening tool to identify literacy concerns
 - share ways to talk about literacy
 - provide an overview of literacy providers
 - provide opportunity for ES and LBS to work concurrently to support lower-skilled workers

- f. **ES** – Literacy Network and LBS providers to work with ES to develop workshops that can be offered as part of the R&I programming to link literacy to employment success. Topic areas could include
- Essential Skills and Skills Checkups
 - Pathways to Retraining and Education
 - Are you ready for a Second Career?
- g. **Employment Services (ES) and Service Canada** – Literacy Network provides information on common messaging about identifying literacy needs and accessing Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs and services for laid-off workers attending ongoing Service Canada information sessions.
- h. **Ontario’s Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) and ES** – Literacy Network can be a point of connection to LBS services and programs in labour adjustment situations without Action Centres (with less than 50 impacted workers).

When all labour adjustment partners clearly understand the labour market process and work collaboratively, lower-skilled and marginalized workers will have the best result in a labour adjustment situation.



Strategy #5: To look at how programs in multi-service centres work together and to host a service coordination event in Grey and Bruce counties where multi-service centres don't exist.
QUILL Learning Network (QUILL)

QUILL Learning Network's strategy in this Labour Market Partnership project was to look at how programs in multi-service centres work together. A smaller part of this project was to host a service coordination event in Grey and Bruce counties where multi-service centres don't exist. The outcome of this event was to draw programs together to build solid service coordination practices. Both strategies are summarized in this report as Part A – Multi-Service Centre Strategy and Part B – Social Networking for Social Services.

Part A - Multi-Service Centre Strategy

The QUILL Learning Network region hosts a number of multi-service centres that are made up of a diverse group of programs serving the residents of the area. Most of these centres grew from a 1 or 2 program centre into a multi-program centre as opportunities arose. Because they had a solid foundation in the community other programs were drawn to them, seeing the advantage of serving clients in a one-stop centre. For example, when Contact North was searching out sites for their centres, Conestoga College and the Centres for Employment and Learning recognized the benefit and offered them space. The situation has provided residents the benefit of accessing training both in person and online.

Understanding that programs want to provide the best service for their clients, this strategy proposed to look internally at the processes and procedures of multi-service centres in the QUILL region. Moving clients with less than a grade 12 education efficiently and effectively through the Employment Ontario (EO) system to gain meaningful employment needs programs to ensure that they are working together to best service clients. This includes agency

- processes
- procedures
- plans to best serve those clients

This strategy included a literature review and research on how multi-service centres in other jurisdictions in the province successfully serve clients without a grade 12 education and help them to gain meaningful employment. Upon completion of the review and research, 3 meetings were hosted with service providers to

- discuss the literature review
- discuss best practices
- examine systemic linkages
- find solutions that are workable within each program's capacity

Partners

The partners who provided expertise in this project included

Partners in Employment (Employment Services - ES)

Conestoga College – Stratford Campus (ES & Literacy and Basic Skills -LBS)

Adult Learning Programs of Perth (LBS)

Avon Maitland District School Board (Adult Ed, ES & LBS)

vpi, inc. (ES)

Adult Learning Centres – Grey, Bruce, Georgian (LBS)

Contact North, Stratford and Kincardine

Lake Huron Learning Collaborative, Kincardine

Other partners were invited to attend the focus group meetings but didn't respond. We will give more details in the section, "Lessons Learned".

Invitees included staff from

- Probation and Parole
- Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP)
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
- Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB)
- Chamber of Commerce
- Ontario Works
- Economic Development

Activities

At the beginning of this strategy, QUILL did a comprehensive literature review and created a list of best practices which was shared with the project participants at the focus groups. More than 107 resources were compiled, and of those, 43 were used for the final report. Personal contact was made with 12 key informants of which 50% responded by one-to-one interviews or emails, sharing best practices for multi-service centres.

Upon completion of the literature review, 3 focus group meetings were hosted.

a. May 21, 2013 Focus Group Meeting

At this first meeting, project participants were asked to "map" the current multi-service centres and other programs and services that serve clients without a grade 12 education to help them gain meaningful employment. Small groups worked on this task and the results of the mapping were captured.



After mapping the current system of programs and services, the group identified the strengths and opportunities for improvement of this system. The responses are noted in the table below.

Strengths	Opportunities for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very collaborative • variety of venues, resources • convenience for clients • choice, 2 locations to get service from • diversified funding • people working in the agencies are experienced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accessing services is difficult because of rural area (especially transportation) • having limited resources to service areas (rural) • getting the message out • offering limited hours of service • confusing clients - working with more than one agency • determining if 2 agencies provide the same service • dealing with individual agency expectations - we all have our own master and expertise • managing client expectations • making sure we're coordinating, not competing

They were then introduced to the best practices of multi-service centres.

- a. Ensure that appropriate agencies are co-located to match user needs.

- b. Implement effective planning and organization strategies for the centre as a whole.

- c. Look for ways that resources can be shared and/or pooled among all the agencies.
- d. Ensure that there is ease of accessibility of services.
- e. Secure commitments from partnering agencies.
- f. Have a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities among partner agencies and their staff.
- g. Encourage communication and information sharing among agencies.
- h. Collaborate on activities and ventures when feasible and appropriate.
- i. Ensure that there is a link to employers and/or employment opportunities.
- j. Implement protocols that enhance referrals and information exchange about shared clients.



b. June 21, 2013 – Focus Group Meeting

The group reviewed the 10 best practices presented at the previous meeting and then talked about what’s happening in our communities in multi-service centres (what we are doing well/best practices) and opportunities for further change.

The group started by reviewing best practices and then identifying what is currently happening and opportunities for further action. See the table below for responses for each of the multi-service centres.

Best Practice: Ensure appropriate agencies are co-located to match user needs

Currently Happening	Opportunities
Lake Huron Learning Centre	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all Employment Ontario (EO) agencies • distance education • speech pathologist • financial literacy • economic development • Service Canada is close by • robotics team • Employment Services (ES) • adult learning • English as a Second Language (ESL) • General Educational Development (GED) • college programs • guest speakers • art • drop in resource centre • test centre for Bruce Power • Community Living • interagency meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding • transportation • clothing closet • personal counselling • library of resources <div data-bbox="987 764 1192 890" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="938 968 1149 1157" data-label="Image"> </div> <div data-bbox="1089 1310 1349 1444" data-label="Image"> </div>
Centre for Employment and Learning	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact North • Partners in Employment (PIE) • Adult Education • Employment Services (ES) • legal clinic • probation/parole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • transportation • financial • food • clothing • customer service training (marketing)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English as a Second Language (ESL) • General Educational Development (GED) • computer courses • Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) • Cooperative Opportunities Providing Education (COPE) • Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW) • Reach for Success • Service Canada • space for community groups • workplace training • art • special interest classes • Huron Business Development Corporation (HBDC) 	 <p style="text-align: center;">Service Canada </p>
Conestoga College	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact North • adult learning school • Employment Services (ES) • academic upgrading • General Educational Development (GED) • Choices for Change • Stratford/Perth Shelterlink • school/college work initiatives • Discover your Future • Employment Ontario (EO) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • personal counselling • legal help • health services • financial services <p style="text-align: center;">EMPLOYMENT ONTARIO</p>

Education and Employment Resource Centre	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partners in Employment (PIE) - Employment Services (ES) • Adult learning - Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) • small business/ self-employment • Ontario Works (OW) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clothing • probation/ parole • personal counselling • art

The other best practices that multi-service centres are currently doing well include

- having open space
- doing personalities work
- thinking about the whole - joint ownership
- wearing several hats - multi-tasking
- understanding the referral process and who should go to each service and what each of us gets
- coordinating services to benefit clients and ourselves
- providing a continuum of services
- using common referral forms
- having a common website
- marketing all services in one flyer
- linking to other groups on website
- having one voice
- having collaborative funding - one organization got funding that supports all agencies
- doing assessments for other agencies
- sharing confidentiality/ release of information forms
- having informal shared case management
- collaborating on group events and information sessions
- co-locating with each other at an event (job fair)
- sharing resources such as the computer lab, boardroom

- having in place a Memorandum of Understanding (College)
- covering staff at lunch or when sick
- providing orientation to other services
- being client service representatives
- holding quarterly meetings for the centre as a whole
- allowing suggestions to be shared which leads to action - continuous flow of ideas
- having all staff trained in Bridges out of Poverty - able to address needs

Each of the multi-service centres in attendance at the meeting then met as a small group to talk about each of the best practices opportunities for the centre. A table outlining the responses from each of the centres is attached in the appendix.

c. September 20, 2013 – Focus Group Meeting

The group reviewed the 10 best practices presented at the May 15, 2013 session and then each multi-service centre identified its top 2 best practices to share with others (see chart below).

Multi-Service Centre	Best Practices
Education and Employment Resource Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offers flexible hours of operation – evenings and Saturdays by appointment • links to employers and/or employment opportunities (attend local business meetings, making connections to learn about gaps)
Centre for Employment and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintains physical one-stop multi-service (purpose) centres with in person services • offers virtual services (LBS, ES, ESL) • provides a video orientation/info session (if no staff is present or between workshop dates)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offers evening hours, weekends for exams • has a customer service charter • links to other services • maintains website • takes services off site - mobile (employers, partners, action centres, referral agencies) • is open to new ideas • shares funding - each agency in the centre funds a portion of the reception person (Client Service Representative)
Stratford Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • walks people down the hall • uses a common referral form • has joint case conferencing • pools resources • has access to multiple services at different stages of client development

Opportunities for Further Action

As a final step of this phase of the project, the multi-service centres identified what opportunities/actions they will move forward with (see chart below).

Multi-Service Centre	Actions
Education and Employment Resource Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have regular bi-monthly meetings with all agencies working in the building • create a common brochure/card which outlines all the services in the building • make better use of TV mounted in the centre, promoting community agencies outside of the centre • improve accessibility – resource centre open earlier, evening, weekend or Saturday

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve customer service – provide training to all staff, share front desk duties, share the workload • recruit new agencies to come in, even if just for one day per month
Centre for Employment and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate and improve partnerships (develop evaluation process) • host multi-service site meetings (each physical centre, action plans, prioritize change) • work more with employers (curriculum development, job postings) • use common calendars and communication (communication protocols, newsletter) • host orientation for new staff (employee spotlight – where they talk about their job, what they like about it)
Stratford Campus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • host formalized meetings between services • develop and use joint marketing tool • hold more inclusive and collaborative open houses • wear nametags • provide video orientation

Evaluation

A full evaluation was carried out for this strategy. The report states that the

- participants in the session were satisfied with the session and felt that it enhanced their level of knowledge of multi-agency centres and community programs and services
- presentation on the Best Practice Guide was well received and was a comprehensive document that provided useful content they can use in their work
- 10 best practices were noted as a significant learning for many of the participants

In terms of feedback, a few participants noted that they would like to have seen more agencies in attendance, with a wider representation. Page 2 of the evaluation report also provides a list of further information that participants would like about multi-agency centres.

The participants evaluated the session in 2 ways: Best Practice Guide presentation and the overall session. The results of the evaluation are presented in the appendices.

Lessons Learned

Programs are looking for ways to best serve their clients. This project

- increased the knowledge of the participants on working together in a multi-service centre
- identified opportunities of collaboration between organizations under one roof to increase effective/efficient service to clients
- identified future projects and collaborations that could be added to their services

Challenges

There was 1 major challenge in this project and it was not overcome. As identified under the section on partners, more programs were invited to participate than did. Focus groups were held in a central location in Huron County forcing some programs to travel to participate. In this rural region many programs are offered through itinerant services, with staff working in different communities on a daily or weekly basis. It was difficult for these programs to participate in the focus groups because they just don't have the capacity to allow staff to attend as they might have to defer seeing a client/s. It is felt that if Phase 2 is funded, it would be easier for more programs to participate as the meetings will be held in the centres and not in a central location. This will allow us to set meetings at more convenient times.

Knowledge Transfer

QUILL has shared all the information from this project with the participants. An overview of the project's outcomes and objectives was delivered in the webinar series in December 2013. Project information is on Literacy Link South Central's website and contains the **Best Practices Report**. Once updated, the QUILL website will host information from the project. There is a plan to host another one-day Social Networking for Social Services event in Grey and Bruce counties and this information will be shared at the event.

Achieving Employment Ontario (EO) Mission and Vision

Learners with less than a grade 12 education are the beneficiaries of this project with program deliverers examining their systems that assist clients in finding and keeping work. This fit perfectly into EO's Vision which is "The integrated training and employment system will strengthen Ontario's economy by providing seamless customer service, removing barriers to training and strengthening links to employment.

The integrated training and employment system will continuously improve Ontario's skilled labour supply to support economic growth and investment. "(Barb Simmons, Service Delivery Branch, October 16, 2013 to LBS Support Services)

This strategy assisted participants in strengthening seamless customer service by looking at the processes and procedures within their organizations as well as those as part of a multi-service centre. Fine-tuning these processes and procedures will remove barriers for the clients and should assist them in reaching their employment goal sooner

MTCU Vision: "Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life."

Conclusion

This strategy benefited all participants and in turn will increase efficient and effective services to clients.

Part B – Social Networking for Social Services

A second part of this strategy was to assist with service coordination in Grey and Bruce counties where multi-service centres don't exist. QUILL hosted a networking event, Social Networking for Social Services.

Organizing partners included

- Owen Sound and area Family YMCA Employment Services
- Bruce County Ontario Works
- Four County Labour Market Planning Board
- Grey County Ontario Works
- vpi, inc.

The event had more than 35 participants from programs across Grey and Bruce counties including

- probation and parole
- housing
- children's services
- 211
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA)
- school boards

Activities

The day was set up in 3 sections

1. Social networking - speed Networking, with participants networking for 5 minutes and then moving to another participant.
2. Information about labour market needs in the region, delivered by Four County Labour Market Planning Board; a presentation on a new crisis response team by CMHA; and an overview of 211 and Bruce Grey United Way services.
3. After lunch, participants broke into teams and did an exercise on case management.

Lessons learned

The event was a great success with participants wanting it to be hosted annually.

The next session is scheduled for May 5, 2014.

Participants were very pleased with the networking and the opportunity to meet people and hear about programs that they weren't familiar with and to reacquaint themselves with those they were familiar with. Participants were asked to list who they wished they had spoken to and those agencies will be sent personal invitations for the next session indicating that they were missed at the event.

Challenges

Challenges were more about the venue than about the event.

The speed networking was very loud and needs a larger venue.

As participants were moving quickly through the networking session there needs to be more time allowed for that activity.



Achieving Employment Ontario (EO) Mission and Vision

This one-day event fits right into the Vision of EO of providing a seamless customer service experience. The community partners that attended this event increased their knowledge of services that were provided in the community.

MTCU Vision: "Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life."

Conclusion

As stated previously, community partners want to serve their clients effectively and this event supported their work and increased their knowledge of other partners. It was a great success and will be hosted again in 2014.

Strategy #6: Explore how the strategies identified in the 2009-2010 EONDF Linking Adult Literacy to Poverty Reduction project, including Bridges Out of Poverty, can and have been implemented to facilitate learner and client success. **Tri County Literacy Network (TCLN)**

This strategy allowed Tri County Literacy Network to explore and understand the impact of the Employment Ontario Network Development Fund (EONDF) project and be able to share the results with others.

Through this project we

- prepared and implemented a survey
- gathered strategies from Windsor-Essex Employment Ontario programs

- developed a list of the top 10 strategies
- compared strategies to the best practices list
- held a focus group to discuss strategies
- summarized focus group information
- presented the strategies via a province-wide webinar
- created the final report and submitted to Literacy Link South Central

Partners

Through our survey to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS), Employment Services (ES) and Employment and Social Services (ESS) staff who attended the **Bridges Out of Poverty** workshops, we gathered information on the effectiveness of the strategies they used.

Pathway To Potential (P2P) participated in the Roundtable Discussion and provided copies of their publication, **Reality Check**. There is considerable feedback in the survey related to this organization in terms of poverty reduction in Windsor-Essex. Pathway To Potential was also active on the organizing committee for the Linking Adult Literacy to Poverty Reduction project in 2009-2010.

Activities

January to April 2013

- a. prepared and implemented survey
- b. gathered strategies from Windsor-Essex Employment Ontario programs

May and June 2013

- a. completed an extensive analysis of the online survey
- b. compared the top 10 strategies to the best practices list



June to October 2013

Tri County Literacy Network prepared, promoted and held a Roundtable Discussion in Windsor at the Windsor Public Library on October 10, 2013 with facilitator, Jen Kirkham. The facilitator prepared a PowerPoint presentation for the Roundtable Discussion. The agenda included welcome and introductions, background to the project, online survey results, discussion and suggested future actions or next steps. There were 15 participants registered and 14 attended from 7 agencies, representing Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Employment Services (ES), Employment and Social Services (ESS) and Pathway To Potential (P2P).

November and December 2013

- a. prepared and delivered a webinar giving an overview of our project to 50 participants – 60% LBS, 20% ES and 20% LBS-ES providers
- b. prepared and submitted the final report

Lessons Learned

The survey was distributed April 8 to 10, 2013 to the Windsor-Essex Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Employment Services (ES), Employment and Social Services (ESS) and Pathway To Potential (P2P) providers who participated in the **Bridges Out of Poverty** training in November 2009 and/or April 2011.

There was a

- 70% response rate from LBS (7 out of 10)
- 60% response rate from ES and ESS (39 out of 65)
- 61% overall total response rate (46 out of 75)

Considering that the training was held in 2009 and 2011, the response rate is very positive.

At an individual level, both ES/ESS and LBS providers identified that staff who help facilitate client/learner success should demonstrate strong

- relationship-building skills
- communication skills
- problem-solving skills

At a community level, both ES/ESS and LBS identified the importance of

- coordinated community information and referral protocols
- professional development with community organizations
- information sharing about agency programs with community organizations

At a program level, LBS identified numerous strategies that help facilitate learner success, including instruction in

- essential skills
- problem solving
- financial literacy
- health literacy
- community resources and how to access them

Specific strategies discussed in the open answer sections of the survey that are worth noting are

- an LBS program that has a mentoring program
- an ES/ESS program that invites local agencies to their monthly staff meetings



The top 10 strategies in the Individual Action and Community Engagement areas as identified by the LBS and non-LBS service providers and the top strategies identified by LBS service providers in the Program Elements area are identified below. There is a good representation of strategies being implemented across the 3 areas/levels of best practices. The 3 areas or levels of best practices are:

- a. **Individual Action (IA)** – what you can do.
- b. **Program Elements (PE)** - what Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs can include in program delivery to assist and support learners/clients to move out of poverty.
- c. **Community Engagement (CE)** - how agencies can engage with others in the community to increase knowledge of LBS programs and strengthen LBS program support for people’s next steps.

Top 10 Best Practices

1. My agency shows that it values staff who demonstrate strong relationship building skills. **(Individual Action - IA)**
2. My agency shows that it values staff who demonstrate strong communication skills. **(IA)**
3. My agency regularly participates in professional development opportunities that include community organizations. **(Community Engagement -CE)**
4. My agency provides regular updates to all relevant community agencies. **(CE)**
5. My agency participates in coordinated activities designed to improve the community information and referral protocol. **(CE)**
6. My agency demonstrates that it values staff with strong problem-solving skills. **(IA)**
7. My agency takes action to increase staff awareness of the impact of poverty on learners/clients. **(IA)**

8. My agency encourages individuals to become involved in and collaborate with others on issues related to poverty and poverty reduction. **(IA)**
9. My agency takes action to make staff aware of poverty reduction practices within the local community and beyond. **(IA)**
10. My agency is up to date in the poverty reduction strategies in our community. **(CE)**

Other Best Practices identified by Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) as part of the Program Element (PE) section included

- professional development on topics such as
 - communication skills for personal growth and classroom instruction
 - relationship building for personal growth and classroom instruction
 - problem-solving skills for personal growth and classroom instruction
 - up-to-date information and community resources
 - current strategies to improve literacy programs
- program delivery such as
 - problem-solving skills
 - how to access community resources
 - Essentials Skills



As a result of the Roundtable Discussion, we learned reasons why some strategies were not being implemented to the same extent as others, as well as why there was an increase or decrease in implementation of some strategies over time (2009 to 2013).

We also discussed potential solutions related to these findings and next steps. The evaluation summary from the Roundtable Discussion indicated that the most significant learning they took away from the session revolved around the importance of having

knowledge/awareness of other agencies in the community (62.5% of the responses indicated this).

Lessons learned from the project are:

- a. The strategies identified through this project do make a difference in the lives of clients/learners.
- b. There needs to be clearer link made between literacy and poverty, learning and employment.
- c. Poverty training needs to be provided to frontline staff and staff need to be involved in discussions about how to better meet the needs of clients/learners. This needs to happen on an ongoing basis.

Knowledge Transfer

Information was shared on the results of the survey at the Roundtable Discussion. The summary of the Roundtable Discussion notes and evaluation summary were shared with the participants after the session.

The evaluation feedback from the Roundtable Discussion indicated that participants

- had an average increase in knowledge of 3.6 out of 4
- felt the strategies discussed will facilitate learner and client success to a great extent (average 3.6 out of 4)
- are using or will use some of the strategies in the future (90%) – none stated they will not implement the strategies
- valued “to a great extent” identifying local strategies as a way to increase learner and client success (100%)

Results of the survey, Roundtable Discussion and the project as a whole were shared during the webinar on December 11, 2013. The evaluation feedback from the webinar indicated that those who participated

- had an increase in knowledge
- were likely to implement the strategies
- were satisfied with the webinar

The pre and post online surveys can be used in other communities to determine the impact of “**Bridges Out of Poverty**” training at the individual, program and community level.

Achieving the Employment Ontario Mission and Vision

MTCU Vision: “Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life.”

The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Vision of Employment

Ontario (EO) is “that there will eventually be a comprehensive system that, in addition to breaking down barriers between ‘programs’, will also better integrate the supports that clients/learners require to succeed”.

In exploring the strategies from this project we have learned that one of the key strategies for learner and client success is providing them with current information on community resources. As a strategy already in use, this indicates that there is effective integration among Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS), Employment Services (ES) and Employment and Social Services (ESS). This is a direct tie to MTCU’s EO Vision. The support of EO’s Vision is also apparent in that survey respondents indicated the positive impact of these strategies.

1. LBS providers are able to
 - better meet the needs of clients/learners
 - make appropriate client referrals
 - use poverty reduction strategies

2. Non-LBS providers are able to

- make more referrals
- make appropriate referrals
- provide more complete and accurate community information to assist clients
- better meet the needs of clients/learners and have more positive feelings for clients/learners
- participate more actively in poverty reduction activities

Challenges

It was challenging to develop a survey that was not too long so that people would be willing to complete it; but long enough to gather the information we hoped to gain.

We had to go through the entire registration list for the workshops in 2009 and 2011 to confirm who was still employed at each agency and confirm contact information. There were a number of people who were no longer working at some agencies so we could not include these people in the survey.

We decided to add a section in the survey for people to indicate if they were interested in a follow-up interview. Three were interested but we were only able to reach one. This person did provide good information on best practices which helped in developing the Roundtable Discussion.

Conclusion

We analyzed the survey results in discussion with the evaluator and by documentation of the results. The analysis shows positive gains, especially for the LBS programs, and shows some areas that still need work. The analysis is very detailed showing percentage increases and decreases in all aspects of the survey. The Roundtable Discussion assisted in understanding the results and provided solutions/suggestions for further improvements.

Next steps recommended at the Roundtable Discussion include:

- a. Creating better connections between community partners.
- b. Providing poverty training in the community for frontline workers (local training).
- c. Inviting a speaker on Circles.
- d. Increasing the understanding of what “literacy” is (awareness campaign on the connection between literacy and poverty reduction).
- e. Developing a partnership between Tri-County Literacy Network, Pathway To Potential and Windsor-Essex Employment and Employment and Social Services (ESS) (previously Ontario Works) to follow-up on the awareness campaign for the community and poverty training/ Circles information for frontline staff (further information on Circles is available at www.lambtoncircles.com/about-circles).

Strategy 7: Clearer Sightlines to Employment in Dufferin County

Peel-Halton-Dufferin Adult Learning Network (PHDALN)

In Dufferin Countyⁱ, as is found in many parts of Ontario, there is a lack of occupational-specific skills development programs for participants in the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) system and to a lesser extent Employment Ontario (EO) clients, in general. The development of such a program would lead to better opportunities for job-seekers, especially those who do not have a high school diploma.

We proposed to conduct research to identify the industry sectors in and near Dufferin County that would most benefit from an employment skills training program. The focus would be for entry-level workers not requiring (or not immediately requiring) a post-secondary education credential.

In addition, we set out to identify the parameters of a community partnership with EO programs (LBS, Employment Services - ES) and others required to develop a skills training program that would prepare unemployed and underemployed adults (especially young adults) for the identified employment opportunities.

Finally, we planned to examine the program characteristics that would be needed to increase the likelihood of success for participants with low educational attainment. Our research looked at the feasibility of some of the approaches outlined in recent Essential Skills Ontario (ESO) publications in their Becoming State of Art series of research briefs, including

- a. **Industry Shared Approaches: Aligning Literacy and Essential Skills with Economic Developmentⁱⁱ**

- b. **Clearer Sightlines to Employment: What Works for Job-Seekers with Low Educational Attainment?ⁱⁱⁱ**

Our objectives in this strategy were to:

1. Assess the readiness of Employment Ontario (EO) service providers to deliver programs for adults with low educational attainment. The programs would be structured around a demand-side approach that is geared to the immediate labour market needs of employers.

2. Educate community stakeholders about the need for greater service coordination to develop pathways that would support this approach to programming.

3. Determine which elements of the approach outlined in recent research could be feasible for local EO service providers to deliver this type of program in a demonstration project, which could be phase 2 of this project.

We chose this approach and this set of objectives for a few reasons:

1. Most importantly, we must strive to bring supply and demand side needs closer together. Finding an approach that meets job seekers' near-term employment goals with local employers' hiring needs is essential for a labour market development system.
2. We were also very interested in researching how able our service providers are to adopt program designs that have been researched and proven effective for adults with lower educational attainment.

At the local level, this strategy will improve service planning and coordination including

- spurring discussion about improving client pathways
- spreading labour market information
- increasing knowledge about referral options for EO clients

Our preferred approach in pursuing this strategy was one which coordinates multiple organizations in Dufferin County to efficiently create the most direct pathways to in-demand entry-level positions. This broad coordination would enable an individual to find out about these types of programs from various points of entry in the community. Aside from published data and labour market information, we also were prepared to embrace other forms of intelligence about what local employers are and will be looking for in entry-level positions.

As mentioned above, some of the theoretical grounding of our strategy came from recent publications about workforce development. In particular we were interested in how it describes the shift from sequential to integrated models of workforce development. This is why we focused so heavily on the community-wide service coordination piece of the strategy.

We wanted to know if we could adopt elements from other jurisdictions that have bridged the divide between work-first and adult basic skills through hybrid models that blend adult learning with more clearly defined and immediate employment opportunities. As summarized elegantly in the publication, “employment & training systems have learned that, in order to increase client persistence in literacy & basic skills delivery, there needs to be a clearer sightline to an immediate job and a chance at a career.”

In short, we were asking the question “What works for job seekers with low educational attainment in Dufferin County?”

Partners

Our strategy included two sets of partners: planning and delivery. Planning partners provided insight, advice and feedback as the project activities proceeded. Delivery partners worked with us on the actual activities.

The primary planning partners included

- Georgian College (Orangeville Campus)

- Upper Grand District School Board (Dufferin Continuing Education)

- Centre for Career and Employment Services

All of these organizations were project committee members. They made connections with local key informants and provided other support in gathering information.

Secondary, but essential, planning partners included

Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

County of Dufferin Community Services

These organizations provided important local insights at key points of the project.

Our primary delivery partner was Centre for Career and Employment Services (CCES).

CCES played a central role in the strategy's two main activities – the service coordination event and the employability training pilot.

In addition to official project partners, we formed several service coordination relationships with the following organizations

Community Living Dufferin

Family Transition Place

Dufferin Child and Family Services

County of Wellington Settlement Services

Canadian Mental Health Association (Trellis)

Supportive Housing in Peel

Peace Ranch

Humber College - Orangeville Campus

Employment Access (Coalition for Persons with Disabilities)

Contact North

Orangeville and Area Small Business Enterprise Centre

Activities

Our strategy centred around two major activities:

1. A community-wide service coordination event.
2. An employability training pilot program.

Neither activity was considered at the outset of the project, but both emerged as key activities as the project unfolded through our research and through discussions with local service providers.

As our understanding of how to develop solid pathways to employment for lower skilled youth and adults grew, we increasingly became convinced of the need to increase the scope of organizations that could potentially play a role. While our primary project partners had good linkages with a few organizations in the community, there were many more where there was only a slight awareness and very limited interaction.

Two elements were significant in helping us figure out what could be done to increase service coordination.

1. The memory of a community-wide information sharing event that took place several years ago.
2. The soon-to-be-opened multi-service centre in the heart of Orangeville.

Several years ago, an event labelled Engage, Share, Network was held in Orangeville that coincided with the launch of Employment Ontario (EO). This event featured

- panel presentations
- networking
- agency displays

It was designed as a one-time event meant to increase information about programs and services in Dufferin for those in attendance. The event was well received and so our project committee thought we could

- revive the brand
- refresh the concept
- use it as a launching point to greater service coordination in Dufferin

Our version of Engage, Share, Network was held on June 20, 2013 in Orangeville.^{iv} Fifty people representing over 20 organizations attended the full-day event. This event served to bring multiple and diverse stakeholders together to discuss the employment and training needs of clients and residents as well as how services and programs could become better connected to achieve better outcomes for these clients.

Many interesting ideas and concepts were exchanged during the event including several suggestions that provided a road map for the next steps in building greater service coordination. One of those suggestions was that we should have a space for service providers to connect, chat and keep one another updated on what's happening with their programs.

Survey results told us that there is great interest in developing deeper connections among service providers. We will be formally launching a new Engage, Share, Network committee at a meeting to be held in early 2014.

This new committee will aim to create a permanent community-wide table to improve service coordination and partnerships across various social service sectors (employment, training, mental health, youth and disabilities). We expect to learn if the online communication platform we chose (Facebook) works as a way to keep informed about service providers.

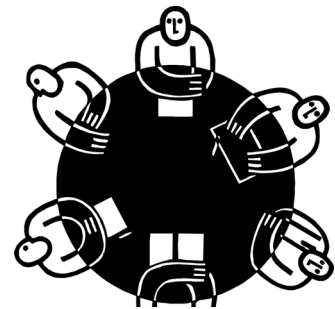
In the midst of our discussions around the feasibility and readiness of Employment Ontario (EO) service providers to deliver a program that better meets the labour force needs of local employers, the Province of Ontario announced the Youth Employment Fund (YEF). We immediately realized the merit of actually testing feasibility rather than merely speculating about it.

The YEF gave us an opportunity to accelerate our plans to identify pathways into entry-level positions for underemployed individuals. We quickly made plans to deliver a 1 month skills training program for YEF participants in advance of a 4-month work placement at in-demand positions in Dufferin County – namely, in hospitality, recreation and food service.

All our service coordination activities from the spring event immediately paid off.

We formed a committee of

- job developers
- employment counsellors
- curriculum developers
- trainers
- potential referral partners



Most of the committee members had attended the Engage, Share, Network event in June.

Discussions with local employers generated an impressive list of potential positions ideal for young adults with limited employment experience. Youth were screened for the Youth Employment Fund (YEF) eligibility and suitability and a pool of candidates were identified as potential participants in a short-term employment skills training program.

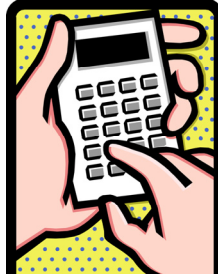
Meanwhile, curriculum developers were identifying the skills and requirements common to many of the jobs available across the retail, food services and hospitality and tourism sectors.

This led to the development of a modular curriculum consisting of

- technical skills
- employability skills
- occupational certifications^v

Topics included

- money math
- computers
- customer service
- teamwork
- Workplace Hazardous Materials Information Systems



In addition, we planned for the provision of key wraparound supports such as employment supports and team counselling.

With a short lead time, our team was able to deliver a 30-hour training program to 6 clients (ages 17 – 28) that covered some of the curriculum developed. These clients were initially turned down by employers for the Youth Employment Fund (YEF) generated positions, and so this training program served as an excellent next step to prepare those clients for the next round of YEF job placements. Participants responded enthusiastically to the program.

Our evaluation will continue into 2014, but there is consensus that participants benefited and there is certainly a need to keep running this program as a pre-YEF intervention.

What started as a feasibility study turned into a full blown pilot program by the end of the project. Our project committee now has the task of sifting through the data collected and analyzing recent experiences to develop a plan on how to sustain the work that was done.



Lessons Learned

There were many lessons learned throughout the course of executing this strategy. Some of these lessons were directly related to our strategy and others simply came about during the project activities.

- a. We learned quite a bit about service coordination. Results from our large community event confirmed our belief that basic knowledge about other providers can be gained through simple discussions. Addressing more complicated issues (such as moving people with barriers into sustainable training and employment) will take much more time, creativity and energy. In addition, local community organizations claim to have good service coordination, but evidence is harder to come by. This may be a result of people not knowing what excellent service coordination looks like.

- b. Another insight from the service coordination event was that even in small communities there are many service providers to keep track of. The decision to bring organizations together without prescriptive solutions was rewarded as the solutions we were interested in hearing emerged voluntarily from the participants. The format of the event contributed greatly to this. Momentum was created and there is genuine interest in moving forward. Our planning committee is certain that the format and approach we took would be just as effective in other communities. For regional organizations, we recommend working with local informants to do on the ground work related to community consultation / service coordination events.

- c. Our project team increased its understanding of the local labour market in Dufferin County. There are some local industries (for example, equestrian-related services, outdoor recreation and tourism) that may have good potential for employment for lower skilled adults. These types of industries and jobs rarely make the national and provincial reports about areas with skills shortages and

potential for employment growth. This speaks to the need for an effective placed-based strategy for local labour market development programs. We strongly believe that this placed-based approach to gathering intelligence about the local labour market is transferrable.

- d. In addition to opportunities, we heard about potential barriers. Lack of local transportation (and its impact on clients participating in services and in employment) is the major issue cited. There is however strong willingness to address this issue collaboratively. The lack of industry / occupation diversity in the local labour market also poses a problem for clients who aspire to more meaningful and sustainable local employment.
- e. Single men are emerging as a new group that is experiencing challenges in the labour market. That demographic group accounts for 47% of the Ontario Works case load. Policy and program responses have been slow to get underway as the issue is still below the radar.

Challenges

This project did come with some challenges – some we anticipated and some that emerged as our ambitions increased.

As we speculated about in the “**Lesson Learned**” section, there may not be widespread understanding about what excellent service coordination looks like. This issue is a contributing factor to the challenge that we experienced as we tried to discuss possible solutions at the service coordination event.

There is some resistance to think holistically about a segment of the community (that is, lower skilled adults) and design programs for their needs as opposed to meeting individual client needs within the existing structure of current programs.

Our hope for subsequent community consultation meetings is that by hearing many voices talking about the needs of this client group, it will

- foster greater attention to client needs
- motivate organizations to commit to some programming changes

Our recent experiences with the pilot training program has already helped in this regard.

We also experienced the challenge of having our assumptions tested and having to decide how to interpret new or unexpected information. For example, some of our initial thoughts about specific labour market sectors that would be good opportunities for Dufferin did not materialize in our canvassing of local employers.

There are also systemic challenges with service coordination in Employment Ontario (EO). It's

- not always immediately apparent where the natural intersection points are between programs and services
- not entirely understood which clients benefit from accessing more than one service
- difficult to know why some people who should fit in programs don't access the system at all

Only when collaborative programs like our pilot training program are put into place do we allow ourselves a chance to really see how service coordination in EO can work.

Knowledge Transfer

Locally, the main knowledge transfer opportunity was the service coordination event that we held in Orangeville. Due to the high turnout and wide distribution of organizations represented, we achieved a high impact of knowledge transferred.

Our knowledge transfer activity outside of the local community took place in the form of a 1-hour webinar delivered in December 2013. Feedback was very positive about this webinar.^{vi}

Achieving Employment Ontario (EO)

Mission and Vision

MTCU Vision: “Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's

This strategy explores the feasibility of developing employment skills training programs that would

- make services more effective to meet job seekers’ career goals and local employers’ hiring needs
- provide opportunities for individuals to improve skills directly related to local employment needs
- use an approach that coordinates multiple organizations in Dufferin County to efficiently create most direct pathways to in-demand entry level positions
- enable an individual to find out about these type of programs from various points of entry in the community
- rely on local labour market information and other timely intelligence of what local employers are and will be looking for in entry level positions

While these characteristics describe the existing EO system in a nutshell, we sought to add considerable value to the system by purposely blending different program and service elements in order to create something new in the community to fill an identified gap.

Conclusion

Our strategy has provided a clearer sightline to employment in Dufferin County. We now know what it takes. Through the serendipity of the launching of the Youth Jobs Strategy, we were able to give ourselves a glimpse of what an enhanced pathway to employment through excellent service coordination looks like.

Although, the pilot program should best be described as employment readiness as opposed to full scale occupational training, it marks an important first step in the development of this much needed pathway. It provided an opportunity to test the readiness of local Employment Ontario (EO) service providers to build a program together in direct response to demand-side needs while taking into consideration the strengths and weaknesses of the local labour pool.

We look forward to building and sustaining this giant leap forward in 2014 in phase 2 of this labour market partnership project and through regular service planning and coordination activities.



End Notes

¹ Dufferin is made up of 1,486 square kilometers and is home to 56,881 people (2011 Census). There are eight local municipalities, including the Townships of Amaranth, East Garafraxa, the Town of Grand Valley, Melancthon, Mulmur and the Towns of Mono, Orangeville and Shelburne.

¹ <http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/content/becoming-state-art-industry-shared-approaches>

¹ <http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/content/becoming-state-art-clearer-sightlines-employment-2012>

¹ See appendix documents for additional information about this event.

¹ We thought Facebook might be a good place to start, so we created the "Dufferin Community Connections" group.

¹ See appendix for a full description of the training program.

¹ A recording of the webinar can be viewed at <http://www.llsc.on.ca/what-we-do/projects>

Strategy # 8: Consider and report on how to effectively use Labour Market Information (LMI) to bridge Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) with Employment Services (ES), and ultimately employment.

Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA)

The most important starting point for the ABEA was to consider the knowledge base of LMI within LBS programs. In our discussions with LBS frontline staff we found very little understanding of LMI or awareness as to where best to locate LMI information.

Through this project, working with Workforce Planning Hamilton (WPH), we were able to create a tool (see Appendix A and B), webinar, and face-to-face training around LMI to support LBS frontline staff to integrate LMI as they develop learner plans and support learners along their paths (see Appendix C and D).

With the increasing need to bridge clients from upgrading to employment, LMI has become more important for program planning and delivery. However, LMI can be complex to use and not all frontline staff are comfortable exploring LMI.

This project relied on feedback and input from frontline staff of Hamilton ES and LBS managers; LBS frontline staff from both Hamilton and Niagara; WPH and ABEA.



Activities

January - April 2013

- a. Developed pre-survey questions for Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) frontline staff.
- b. Developed focus group questions for managers' meeting and LBS frontline staff meetings.
- c. Held focus groups with Employment Services (ES) and LBS managers.
- d. Held focus group LBS frontline staff.
- e. Sent questions to Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) to be used with their frontline staff.

May - June 2013

- a. Completed first draft of the training tool.
- b. Met with Workforce Planning Hamilton (WPH) to go over suggested changes/additions.

July - October 2013

- a. Revisions were completed on the training tool based on feedback from the June meetings. This was done to ensure the training and resources were relevant to practitioners in their day-to-day work with learners and for ease of use.
- b. WPH and ABEA met again to review changes and to discuss how best to implement the training both face to face and using Centra (webinar).
- c. One face-to-face session and one webinar session were completed and evaluated.

November- December 2013

- i. Workforce Planning Hamilton (WPH) and Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA) met to determine any recommended changes to the training and the tool.
- ii. Follow-up discussions were held with the Literacy Community Planning (LCP) table.
- iii. Follow-up discussions were held with the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) frontline worker group – response was very supportive and positive.
- iv. The tool was disseminated to LCP managers.

Lessons Learned

A. The pre-survey of LBS frontline staff gave us the focus for the project development. From the survey we learned that

- 77% aren't familiar with using and interpreting NAICS
- 35% aren't familiar with using and interpreting NOCs
- 88% aren't comfortable with interpreting common economic indicators or how they relate to one another
- 58% aren't comfortable with interpreting labour market trends through graphs
- 70% aren't familiar with labour market trends in Hamilton over the past 5 – 10 years

Conclusion – training needs to be provided to help frontline staff use Labour Market Information (LMI) in their classrooms.

B. The Employment Services (ES)/Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Manager meeting suggested that clients want/need information about

- identifying transferable skills
- learning about career navigation
- learning how to complete credits
- finding relevant information for their goals
- dealing with both current and long-term career needs

The format for information needs to be short, clear, to the point, and available both online and in hardcopy.

Labour Market Information (LMI) has a long-term role with clients but in the short term, LBS clients are more concerned about getting credits than getting jobs and ES clients are more concerned about getting jobs rather than upgrading.

Conclusion: It is difficult to get clients to see beyond immediate need and consider long-term outcomes. Materials and training need to be developed that encourages long-term thinking.

C. Any resources or training developed needs to react specifically to practitioners' day-to-day work with learners and include quick reference tools.

Challenges

The only challenge we faced was in speaking to a Literacy Community Planning (LCP) member after the training. The evaluation results of the frontline staff were very positive. However, one LCP member stated that neither she nor her staff found the information applicable to LBS and that it wasn't necessary for them to understand LMI since ES are available to support their staff with LMI.

We found it difficult to help this manager understand the relevance of their staff knowing more about Labour Market Information (LMI) and using it with learners. There was a discrepancy in what the manager stated and what the frontline staff stated. Frontline staff, not only through the evaluation but also in a follow-up OALCF frontline worker meeting, stated they understood the purpose of the tool and training and saw the tool as a support to their work.

We requested a follow-up meeting with the manager and staff as we move into Phase II – so that before we move forward with providing information to others in the western region we could see what gaps might exist in the information or how to better explain the purpose of LBS using LMI with learners. To date, the manager has not been receptive to a meeting. We are attempting further discussions with this manager.

Knowledge Transfer

In October, we held one face-to-face training session and one webinar. The purpose of the training was to give

- a better understanding of Labour Markets and what affects them
- a greater knowledge of how to use LMI in the classroom to better assist learners
- an enhanced ability to bridge learners to employment

The sessions included

- a review of the tool components
- tours of common websites for LMI (Working in Canada, Ontario Job Futures, HRSDC)

- activities that considered
 - labour market information mismatches – a discussion about learners experiences
 - interrelated labour markets – a small group discussion based on an article
 - case studies

In November, we continued the training discussion at our Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum (OALCF) Frontline Worker Group meeting. The feedback was very positive. They saw a lot of benefit to this training because it helped them become more familiar with Labour Marketing Information (LMI) resources and how to use it in the classroom. They had some suggestions for Phase II, including

- adding more website navigation tools to the poster
- having a career exploration task developed to use with learners to help get learners using the tool and to consider their options

In the follow-up survey, 83% stated they had used the tool when working with learners and 100% intend to use the tool within the next 6 months.

In December, we offered an information session about the tool to English as a Second Language (ESL) and Employment Services (ES) providers in Hamilton and Waterloo region. They reported that they were either not using LMI resources available to them or using them very little. For one who had used them a little, she reported that the information session explained some components of the resources that she hadn't used before. Participants also commented that this type of training would be helpful for practitioners outside of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) as well.

A language practitioner commented that schools are now organizing programs more toward employment. This tool and training will help instructors shape their classes to client's employment needs and give them the skills they need to help their clients find work.

In December, we participated in a joint webinar presentation with Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) to a province-wide audience as part of the series of webinars presented by project partners.

Achieving Employment Ontario (EO) Mission and Vision

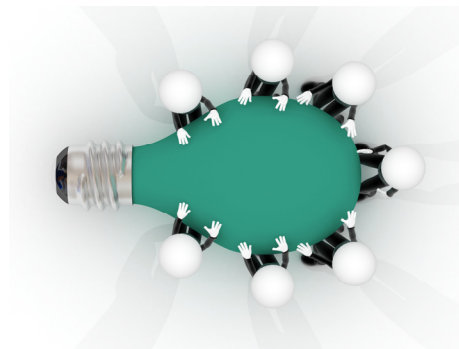
This strategy meets Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities'- EO's expectations by supporting Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) frontline staff knowledge base of Labour Marketing Information

(LMI). As frontline staff become more comfortable with incorporating LMI in their classrooms and/or training plans, we will be

- ensuring LBS clients are moving towards employment
- supporting seamless transition to employment by bridging LBS to Employment Services (ES)

This strategy also reinforces the vision of MTCU-EO in the value and importance of collaboration. Projects like this allow more intense facilitated discussion, information sharing, best practice development and partnering.

MTCU Vision: "Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life."



Conclusion

Through this project, we learned that while LMI is recognized by most as a valued and important part of program delivery, not all LBS frontline staff are comfortable using it. One program suggested that since ES has expertise in LMI it wasn't necessary for LBS programs to understand or use LMI. This suggests to us that more awareness of how to use LMI in the classroom is essential to not only program delivery but also to learner success. By moving this project into phase II, we will be able to increase that awareness to a greater number of programs.

We also learned that this tool has value for English as a Second Language (ESL) and ES providers. This gives us reason to open the training in Phase II to a larger audience outside of LBS.

Strategy #9: Create a specific employment version of the Educational Pathways Assessment (EPA) that is customizable to each client/employment goal and to create an information/referral tool that both Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Employment Services (ES) can utilize. The target audience is those with less than grade 12, looking for employment, and have a specific employment goal.

Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA)

ABEA has been providing program and client supports in Hamilton for 30 years. During that time we have developed an expertise in assessment and information/referral. Through the years, we have designed, developed and adapted our assessment tool to remain current and relevant to the goals of funders and clients.

While the Educational Pathways Assessment (EPA) was updated a few years ago, we felt that it needed to focus on an action plan that could be used by clients, Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Employment Services (ES) as part of successful client goal attainment.

Through this project, the EPA was renamed “The Educational Planning Assessment Tool (EPAT)” to better distinguish its purpose from the assessments completed at the program level. We will discuss the revisions to the tool later in this report.

This project relied on feedback and input from frontline staff of both ES and LBS in Hamilton and Niagara, network staff with assessment experience (ABEA, Project READ and Literacy Link Niagara) and Workforce Planning Hamilton (WPH).

Activities

January - April 2013

- a. Partnered with Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) to get feedback on the development of the tools through their Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)/Employment Services (ES) roundtables.
- b. Scheduled 3 focus groups (face-to-face and distance) with partners.
- c. Developed a list of resources that were researched for use in the tools (see Appendix A).

We were already using NOC, NAICS and Essential Skills profiles as part of our assessment and information/referral process. For this project we also researched various resources for current and local LMI as well as self-assessment tools. These included

- apprenticesearch.com
- HRSDC – Literacy and Essential Skills (Tools and Resources)
- Ontario Job Futures

- Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (employment profiles)
- Ontario Skills Passport
- Working in Canada

Utilizing these tools, in combination with current practices, has resulted in a comprehensive assessment and information and referral template to help clients move toward realistic and gainful employment goals.

May - June 2013

- a. Continued to partner with Literacy Link Niagara to get feedback on the development of the tools through their ES/LBS roundtables.
- b. Completed 3 focus groups (face-to-face and distance) with partners.
- c. Drafted the revised assessment and information/referral tool based on focus group feedback.

Assessment Tool Content (see Appendix B)

The assessment tool includes

- contact information
- full employment goal profile (including NOC, NAICS, NOC description, for trades whether it is a compulsory and/or Red Seal trade, employment potential, average wage, education and other requirements)
- 3 employment questionnaires for interests, skills and knowledge and work habits to ensure that the employment goal is congruent with the client in these areas (these result in a listing of the major group matches and transferable skills)
- education details and preferences

- Essential Skills results (this template can be used with a variety of assessment tools that result in Essential Skills levels (i.e., CAMERA)
- educational plan with specific actions, community referrals and timelines

Information/Referral Tool Content (see Appendix C)

The Information/Referral Tool includes

- introduction/instructions
- client contact information and background (in brief)
- community referral resources
- referral sheet in categories with hints as to when to refer (i.e., LBS – refer clients who require upgrading based on literacy screening, report difficulty with reading, writing and/or math or are unsure of their skills)

Utilizing these tools, in combination with current ABEA assessment practices, has resulted in a comprehensive assessment and information/referral template to help clients move toward realistic and gainful employment goals.

July - October 2013

After making revisions from the partner feedback, we began piloting the revised assessment tool and information/referral tool. We continued to make small adjustments to the tools as necessary.

November- December 2013

- a. Presented revised assessment tools and information/referral tool to 2 employment services agencies and the LBS OALCF Frontline Worker Group.
- b. Scheduled to present the revised assessment tools and information/referral tool to the Literacy Community Planning Table in January 2014.
- c. Completed client evaluation of assessment tool and action plan (Appendix D).

Lessons Learned

1. As we did our research, we realized that while there is an extensive list of Labour Market Information resources available for use online, it is critical to select tools that are easy to access, user-friendly, and adaptable to the assessment tool and process.
2. From the focus groups we have not only implemented many changes to the templates, we also received valuable feedback around the benefits of such tools (see Appendices E-G).

Assessment Comments

Representatives from Employment Services commented that they do not have the time to do this type of in-depth analysis and assessment with their clients. They reported that having an assessment would

- save them time
- eliminate gaps in information
- confirm/support their action plan with the client
- be helpful to all clients pursuing Second Career or incentive training plans

They also strongly agree that receiving an assessment

- enhances relationships between LBS and ES
- enhances referrals from ES to LBS
- decreases barriers for client transition between LBS and ES
- increases effectiveness, efficiency and customer satisfaction

They agree that it also increases the potential of clients gaining employment and retaining employment with the right interventions.

Some Quotes from the Focus Group

“If they had all gone through an assessment we would have had more successes.”

“It would make my job so much easier.”

“This assessment will save staff time. We do not have the knowledge or the time to do it in depth.”

“If we could, we would send at least 20-30% of our clients.”

Representatives from Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)

LBS representatives find the action plan with the client’s entire pathway to be very helpful because it allows them to see the plan at a glance. It also allows them to start to make linkages to the next step before the client gets there and to create bridges for the client.

They report that having an assessment by another agency/network

- saves them time
- makes it easier to create the learner plan
- ensures the client is appropriate for the program
- makes the intake more of a visit than an assessment

Specifically, time would be saved

- at intake (30 min to up to 2-3 hours)
- during lesson plan development
- during CaMS inputting
- at exit (for transition)



Most importantly, it saves time out of the classroom so that instructors can focus on teaching or supporting learners.

They reported that between 10-20% of clients referred by others or self-referrals have to be redirected because they are not appropriate. In many cases, this means 2-3 hours of time out of the classroom to make connections for referrals.

In terms of using Labour Market Information (LMI) to develop learning activities and tasks for learners, they reported that it is sometimes difficult to focus on employment goals if there is another goal path before it (i.e., credit). This assessment tool could offer them the information to make it easier for them to incorporate employment-specific tasks and connections into the upgrading program.

Information and Referral Tool Comments

Employment Services (ES) identified that they were not comfortable making direct referrals to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS). They felt that in order to make appropriate referrals to LBS they need

- frontline training
- ongoing networking opportunities
- a list of agency contact information (and someone to keep it current)
- one point of contact for LBS programs
- web-based information (searchable)

They need the tool to be quick to implement (less than 15 minutes). This could possibly be used at a follow-up meeting with a client. They already have an existing referral form but this is only used to send a client from one ES agency to another. They would like one form that allowed for all types of referrals.

Similarly, LBS representatives reported that they were only somewhat comfortable making referrals to ES and not comfortable using Labour Market Information (LMI) to make referrals.

They felt that this tool could be useful for walk-in clients. They agreed with their ES counterparts that in order to make appropriate referrals to ES they would need

- ongoing networking opportunities
- a list of agency contact information
- one point of contact for all programs to make warm referrals

They also agreed that using the tool should take no more than 15 minutes and they could actually hand the client the form for their reference.

3. As with any new tool, we are learning that it takes time to tweak the tool to be efficient and effective for both clients and assessors. We are keeping a log file of any notable training tips so that a support document can be shared with those previously trained to use the Employment Pathways Assessment (EPA) who will now need to training to use the Employment Planning Assessment Tool (EPAT).
4. Through discussions with Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) frontline staff, this project made us aware of a greater need for ongoing dialogue to help move ES and LBS into a more cohesive working entity. Although some collaboration occurs and ongoing contact is maintained, there are still gaps in knowledge of frontline staff to make appropriate referrals, and/or to understand that ES and LBS can work in tandem to achieve seamless client pathways and success. Further discussion needs to occur to
 - i. help establish when LBS should be referring clients to ES
 - ii. encourage communication needed between LBS and ES when working in tandem with a client

- iii. use effective and efficient documentation/paper trail/follow up with clients who are working in tandem with ES and LBS
- iv. ensure data integrity is maintained

Challenges

There were two challenges we faced during this project.

1. We wanted to use online employment surveys as part of the assessment but at times, found the site to be 'down', making it difficult to complete reports for clients.
2. Completing evaluation call backs with clients was difficult. It is a general practice of Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA) to do follow-up calls with all clients we assess. Staff made a maximum number of 3 calls per client. If we were unable to reach the client upon the 3rd attempt we closed the file. We would like to have had more feedback but clients are often transient, or once in a program, don't see the need to return our calls. We were able to get a 41% response rate.

Knowledge Transfer

To date, we have completed 2 outreaches to Employment Services (ES) and 1 with the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) Frontline Worker Group. We will be presenting the revised assessment tool to the Literacy Community Planning (LCP) Table in January 2014.

Feedback from those who have seen the tool has been very positive. One local agency is looking at ways to incorporate the Educational Planning Assessment Tool (EPAT) as part of their Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) services using ABEA as the assessment provider. Should this occur, it means this agency can

focus on delivery of services and ongoing assessment, rather than on placement assessment, resulting in greater effectiveness and efficiency.

In December, we participated with Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) in a webinar to share the information learned through this project with practitioners across the province.

This project will not be moving into Phase II, so the value of this project will be specific to Hamilton and those networks with assessors trained in the use of the Educational Pathways Assessment (EPA) through a previously funded MTCU project (2009).

Our next step with knowledge transfer will be to update the previously trained and approved assessors in the use of this newly revised and current assessment tool.

Achieving Employment Ontario (EO) Mission and Vision

This strategy ties to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Vision by ensuring that clients are moving towards employment that matches their interests and skills.

MTCU Vision: "Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life."

It ensures that clients are choosing employment goals in the context of current and local labour market information so that the job future is embedded into the action planning process. These tools support seamless bridging between Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Employment Services (ES) and support the integration of services through increased understanding and use of Labour Market Information (LMI) for clients and practitioners of both LBS and ES.

This strategy also reinforces the Vision of MTCU-EO in the value and importance of collaboration. It is only through supportive use of agency expertise that MTCU-EO will achieve its highest level of effectiveness and efficiency.

Conclusion

It is clear that the more relevant and applicable an assessment tool is, the broader the audience that benefits from its use. As seen in the feedback of this project, both ES and LBS see greater efficiency and effectiveness when the Education Planning Assessment Tool (EPAT) is used. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs know that the client sent to them is a good fit for their program and has a higher chance of being successful in the program. As stated by Employment Services (ES) providers, there would be more client success if assessments were completed.

The EPAT supports the work of MTCU-EO, the LBS programs and most importantly the clients of ES and the learners of LBS.



Strategy #10: Tools for Transitions

Literacy Link Niagara (LLN)

Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) received funding to review the role of frontline practitioners in assisting lower-skilled clients in moving towards employment, including the identification of tools and supports that frontline practitioners need. To complete this project, LLN took a community action-research approach. LLN staff connected with both practitioners and learners to identify the types of tools and processes that will best support these transitions.

This project is one strategy of several that was researched by adult regional literacy networks in Ontario. The collection of these projects is called the “Coordinating to Bring Low Literacy and Marginalized Clients Employment” project and is coordinated by Literacy Link South Central (LLSC).

In recent years, LLN has completed a number of projects that have tried to connect literacy and employment practitioners to create seamless transitions between services.

We wanted to complete this strategy to

- focus on the relationships between literacy practitioners and learners with employment goals - the lines between the role of literacy practitioner and employment counsellor are often blurry
- explore the current and potential impact of the literacy practitioners role in relation to learner employment goals.



Partners

A chart of partners and their roles in the project is below.

Partner	Role(s)
Niagara Literacy and Basic Skill programs	<p>Participated in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • focus groups about practitioner role in relation to learners with employment goals • survey to determine tools/processes that would assist practitioners to serve learners with employment goals • one goal facilitated discussion with Employment Ontario Employment Services (ES) about roles in relation to learners with employment goals <p>Provided feedback on job profile tool.</p> <p>Hosted focus groups for learners with employment goals to understand learner experience (3 programs).</p>
Niagara Employment Ontario Employment Services programs	Participated in One Goal facilitated discussion about roles in relation to learners with employment goals.
Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA)	Provided some questions for May focus group with programs.
Niagara Workforce Planning Board	Provided data for job profiles.

Activities

As part of this strategy, Literacy Link Niagara (LLN)

- a. conducted a literature review of tools that could be used in the classroom to assist practitioners or to train practitioners to serve learners with employment goals
- b. held a focus group with literacy practitioners to discuss the role of the literacy practitioner in relation to learners with employment goals as well as tools that would help a literacy practitioner support these learners
- c. created local job profiles using labour market data for emerging jobs that learners might be interested in- requested at May focus group and through survey to programs
- d. held a facilitated discussion with Employment Ontario Employment Services and Literacy programs to discuss roles in relation to learners with employment goals

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned through this project include

- a. programs have different approaches to learners with employment goals
- b. some practitioners have different levels of comfort and knowledge of job market when working with clients with employment goals
- c. many literacy and employment staff are confused about where one job stops and the other one starts
- d. literacy programs are concerned about different expectations and targets between literacy and employment programs specifically when a learner is expected to be employed

- e. many learners with employment goals have not completed labour market research to determine if jobs are available

Challenges

Job Ready

Practitioners in the May focus group and through a follow-up survey stated that they want to know what “job-ready” means to Employment Services.

Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) hosted a facilitated discussion for literacy and employment service staff to discuss the definition of “job-ready” as well as the roles of literacy and employment service staff in relation to learners with employment goals.

At the end of the session, it was determined that “job-ready” means different things for different clients. The focus was shifted to referral protocol to help determine when and where each client should transition to another program.

LLN has committed to enhancing current literacy referral protocol by the end of the 2013-14 and to developing new literacy-employment referral protocol with programs in early 2014-15.

Different Expectations

It was identified by literacy practitioners that they are concerned about the different targets and timelines for learners to reach employment by Employment Services.

Many programs feel that these timelines do not allow learners to reach sustainable employment and push many into low-income, low-skilled jobs. This issue was discussed at the One Goal facilitated discussion day, but Employment Services cannot change their targets. Literacy Link Niagara will continue to facilitate dialogue if concerns continue to be voiced.

Knowledge Transfer

Literacy Link Niagara has shared information and tools with local literacy programs throughout the project. Because the project relied heavily on program input and was often at the direction of the programs, they were involved every step of the way.

Literacy Link Niagara

- has shared information that is relevant to Employment Services including notes and next steps from the One Goal facilitated discussion day with Employment Services via email
- was part of a webinar series about the Labour Market Strategies on December 17, 2013
- will be compiling a local mini-project report to share with all partners involved in the project

Achieving the Employment Ontario Mission and Vision

This strategy ties to the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities' - EO's Mission and Vision by

- providing LBS practitioners with research and tools to help learners transition to employment and/or Employment Services
- facilitating dialogue to support seamless transitions between LBS and ES providers

MTCU Vision: "Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life."



Conclusion

Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) will continue to support and explore the relationship between literacy practitioners and learners with employment goals. It is important that Employment Services be included in the discussion to ensure that roles are clearly defined and that learners transition at key points in their pathway.

