

Curriculum Resource

Building Your Skills Through Volunteering

This resource shares how you can build your skills through volunteering and provides a problem-solving approach to obtaining volunteer experience.

Building Your Skills Through Volunteering has been developed to support adult learners with Level 1 skills as they work towards their individual goals of work, further education and training, apprenticeship or independence. It has links to both the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework and the Skills for Success model.

OALCF Alignment

Competency	Task Group	Level
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B2. Write continuous text	1
Competency B - Communicate Ideas and Information	B3. Complete and create documents	2
Competency E - Manage Learning	N/A	1
Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

Goal Paths (check all that apply)

- Employment
- Apprenticeship
- Secondary School Credit
- Postsecondary
- Independence

Embedded Skills for Success (check all that apply)

- Adaptability
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Creativity and innovation
- Digital
- Numeracy
- Problem Solving
- Reading
- Writing

Notes: B3.2a

COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO

Building Your Skills Through Volunteering

Introduction

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) is pleased to share our “Building Your Skills Through Volunteering” Resource. To help meet the needs of underrepresented groups, CLO has been funded by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development to develop seven curriculum resources that meet the needs of underrepresented learners, introduce the Government of Canada’s **Skills for Success** model, and align with the **Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework**.

Adult learners in Ontario’s Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs typically face multiple challenges besides low levels of literacy. From CLO’s perspective, underrepresented learners are the adult learners in LBS programs who face additional barriers that make thriving in Ontario more difficult. Factors include but are not limited to:

- Poverty
- Disabilities
- Mental health issues
- Age-related challenges
- Learners who are Indigenous persons, visible minorities, or immigrants
- Gender inequality
- Sexual orientation discrimination
- And other socio-economic inequities

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Building Your Skills Through Volunteering has been developed to support adult learners with Level 1 skills as they work towards their individual goals of work, further education and training, apprenticeship or independence. It has links to both the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework and the Skills for Success model.

In May 2021, the Government of Canada introduced an update to its Essential Skills model. The updated model has been renamed “**Skills for Success**”. Information about the Skills for Success model is available on the government’s [Skills for Success website](#).

While developing our resources, CLO looked at the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation’s (SRDC) research on the Skills for Success model. Literacy practitioners will be interested in the SRDC’s [Skills for Success Implementation Guidance Final Report](#) as it supports implementation of the individual skills in the model. The SRDC’s research report to support the launch of [Skills for Success: Structure evidence and recommendations – Final Report](#) is also recommended reading.

For Practitioners – More on the Skills for Success

While there are **nine Skills for Success**, in this resource, CLO focusses in part on entry level skill components of [Problem Solving](#). The information from this section is from the [Skills for Success website](#).

Problem Solving

Problem solving is your ability to identify, analyze, propose solutions and make decisions. Problem solving helps you to address issues, monitor success and learn from the experience.

Every day you use information to make decisions, solve problems and take actions. This can include thinking about different ways to complete a task and choosing the best solution or deciding what to do first when several activities are competing for your attention. The ability to think, make decisions and solve problems effectively improves the way you carry out activities and meet goals and deadlines at work or in other daily life situations.

Strong problem-solving skills will help you gather the right information, identify and solve problems, and make better decisions.

As you learn from these experiences, you will strengthen your problem-solving skills and more quickly and effectively adapt to change.

Problem Solving: Entry Level Proficiency

You can make decisions or solve problems when there are limited or familiar variables, all of the information is provided, and the stakes are low with few consequences. You can use your general knowledge and skills to process information, do simple or routine troubleshooting if needed, identify the decision or solution, and confirm the issue is resolved.

Practitioners can read about the definitions, components and proficiency levels for the **nine Skills for Success** on the Government of Canada's website. For more information about the proficiencies, you can also read the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation's (SRDC) [*Skills for Success Implementation Guidance Final Report*](#).



Building Your Skills Through Volunteering is designed for Level 1 learners in Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills program.

Literacy practitioners can verbally share the content with learners with Level 1 skills. Learners with higher skill levels could use this resource independently.

Building Your Skills Through Volunteering

Building Your Skills Through Volunteering contains six sections:

1. Overview of Volunteering
2. The Benefits of Volunteering
3. Building Your Skills
4. Ways to Find Volunteer Opportunities
5. Case Study – Building Skills Through Volunteering
6. Supporting Activity

Section 1 – Overview of Volunteering

Volunteering is very popular in Canada. **Over 24 million Canadians volunteer!** That's a lot of people!

There are many ways to volunteer. All are important and help other people. Here are a few examples:

Regular or occasional volunteering

- You could volunteer once a week at a soup kitchen
- Or you could drop off food at a soup kitchen once per year

In person or virtual volunteering

- You could help at a homeless shelter
- Or you could volunteer online for a homeless shelter by helping them with their social media

Helping to provide services or fundraising

- You could help in the office of the Canadian Cancer Society
- Or you could get involved in fundraising for cancer

Volunteering alone or as part of a group

- You could volunteer on your own
- Or you could volunteer with family and friends or with people from work or school

Formal and informal volunteering

You can get involved in **formal volunteering**. This means you are volunteering with an organization.

Formal volunteering includes activities such as:

- helping a Food Bank to collect donations
- raising money for the Terry Fox Run
- getting involved as a hockey coach

You can also get involved in **informal volunteering**. This means that you arrange to help someone on your own. You could help friends, neighbours or other people. However, informal volunteering does not include helping family. During COVID19 many people were involved in informal volunteering. We helped each other to get through the pandemic.

Informal volunteering includes activities such as:


- shoveling snow for a neighbour with a disability
- helping a senior to go grocery shopping
- having coffee with a lonely person who needs some company

Every year in April, [Volunteer Canada](#) holds National Volunteer Week to celebrate Canada’s volunteers.

Here is a picture from April 2022. We think it’s true!

Volunteers Bring Heart to Canada’s Communities.





Something to Think About...

Think about a time when you volunteered or when you helped others. What did you enjoy? What didn't you like?

Share your thoughts with another learner or practitioner.

Section 2 – The Benefits of Volunteering

There are many benefits to volunteering. Here are just a few:

Through volunteering you can:

- help other people in your community
- be part of creating a more caring community
- increase your self-confidence
- meet new people
- gain new ideas
- learn about your community
- have fun
- explore your interests
- gain new skills – for home and work
- develop job connections
- build your resume



Something to Think About...

Think about a way that volunteering could help you.
Share your thoughts with another learner or practitioner.

Did You Know

There are many people who volunteer in adult literacy. Some of the people working in literacy programs started as volunteers.



Section 3 – Building Your Skills

Volunteering is a great way to build your skills! There are two main types of skills we all need: hard skills and soft skills. **Both hard and soft skills are very important!**

Hard skills

- Hard skills are specific skills and knowledge.
- Examples of hard skills include knowing how to:
 - operate a skill saw
 - bake bread
 - write a social media post
 - drive a forklift

Soft skills

- Soft skills are the skills that help you work well with others at home, in the community or at work. They are ways you behave, feel, think and work with others.
- Examples of soft skills include:
 - creativity
 - collaboration
 - adaptability
 - patience
 - kindness
 - reliability
 - problem solving

You can decide for yourself what skills **you** want to build. Here are examples of some of the skills you could gain through volunteering. Examples of both hard and soft skills are included. All these skills are in demand by employers!

Charity Thrift Shop Helper

- Pricing
- Retail skills
- Patience

Social Media Volunteer

- Digital skills
- Creativity
- Photography

Girl Guide Leader

- Health and safety
- Activity planning
- Kindness

Online Support Group Assistant

- Digital skills
- Facilitation
- Patience

Food Bank Warehouse Helper

- Organizing
- Inventory
- Reliability

Fundraising Event Volunteer

- Teamwork
- Organization
- Problem solving



Something to Think About...

Think about one skill you'd like to gain from volunteering.
Share your thoughts with another learner or practitioner.

Section 4 – Ways to Find Volunteer Positions

So, you have thought of a skill you would like to develop. Let's find a great place to volunteer and gain new skills.

Here are some ways to find volunteer positions:

- Think about where you could learn the skills you want to gain. For example, you want to work as a cook one day. Where might they accept volunteers to help with food preparation? This could include:
 - soup kitchens
 - homeless shelters
 - fundraising events where food is served.
- Brainstorm places to volunteer by asking your friends and family. Tell them what skills you want to gain. You can also ask your literacy practitioner for ideas.
- Search the internet.
- Contact your library and ask the librarian for help.
- Contact your community Volunteer Centre, if there is one. They can link you with useful organizations where you might volunteer. Click [this link](#) to see if you have a Volunteer Centre in your town or city.
- Visit the websites and Facebook pages of possible organizations to learn more.
- Make contact when you find a volunteer opportunity that you are interested in. You can phone, email or visit places to get more detailed information. Ask some of these questions to start with:
 - Can you send me information on this volunteer position?
 - How often will I have to volunteer? (Weekly? Monthly? Once in a while?)
 - What skills will I learn?
 - Do you give work references to your volunteers?



Something to Think About...

Think about one skill you'd like to gain from volunteering.
Share your thoughts with another learner or practitioner.

Section 5 – Case Study: Building Skills Through Volunteering

Let's look at how Jing built his skills through volunteering!

Jing is looking for a better job. He has worked at a few different jobs. Jing has worked in a warehouse and as a cleaner, but Jing has always wanted to work in a restaurant. He knows that there are many jobs available in restaurants. Jing doesn't have any service or cooking skills. He hopes he can gain some skills through volunteering. Jing is going to use problem solving to find out where to volunteer.

STEP 1: Identify the need

- Jing wants to work at a restaurant, but he doesn't have experience. He needs to have skills for his resume. A job recommendation would also help. Volunteering could help him get both skills and a recommendation.
- Jing needs to find a place to volunteer to help him gain some service or cooking skills. He wants to have a better resume and maybe even a job recommendation from volunteering.
- Jing wants to learn these skills:
 - How to use serve food and drinks to customers
 - Basic food prep skills

STEP 2: Gather information

- Jing talks to his family and friends about good places to volunteer.
- He asks his literacy practitioner for ideas.
- Jing also searches the internet for ideas.

STEP 3: Explore possible actions

- Jing learns about two different organizations that might suit his needs:
 - Out of the Cold. This organization provides meals for homeless people in his community.
 - Food Banks. This organization provide take home food for low-income people.

STEP 4: Decide the best action to take

- Jing contacts both Out of the Cold and the Food Bank to learn more.
- Jing compares the two organizations, considering four different areas.
 - 1. When he can volunteer**
 - The Food Bank offers year-round volunteer opportunities.
 - Out of the Cold needs volunteers only in the winter.
 - It is December now. Jing can start at either place.
 - 2. Experience of the organization**
 - Both Out of the Cold and the Food Bank have many years of experience.
 - They both also have a lot of experience working with volunteer. Jing thinks experience with volunteers is important.
 - 3. Training**
 - Both Out of the Cold and the Food Bank have volunteer coordinators to support and train volunteers.
 - Jing needs to learn new skills through training. So, Jing thinks training would be helpful.
 - 4. Job Related Experience**
 - Out of the Cold has volunteers do jobs like table service and food prep.
 - The Food Bank does not have tasks related to work at a restaurant.
 - Jing wants experience to get work at a restaurant. So, Out of the Cold would be better for that.
- Out of the Cold has some advantages. Jing decides he will volunteer for Out of the Cold.

STEP 5: Act

- Jing contacts the volunteer coordinator at Out of the Cold to start volunteering

STEP 6: Did it work?

- Jing has been volunteering for six months. He is very happy with his volunteer placement at Out of the Cold.
- Jing has learned many new skills. He learned how to work with others, communicate and collaborate better. He had practice problem solving.
- Jing would like to learn more, though. A team at Out of the Cold does more cooking. To learn new skills, Jing would like to volunteer for that team. Next week, Jing will ask his boss if he can.
- Jing has met a few restaurant managers. He could ask them for a job when he is ready.
- The volunteer coordinator has written a job recommendation for Jing. This will help when he tries to get a job.



Something to Think About...

Do you think Jing made a good choice? Why or why not?

Share your thoughts with another learner or practitioner.



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”

Helen Keller

Section 6 – Supporting Activity – Building Soft Skills

The following activity incorporates elements of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework's (OALCF) Competencies with Level 1 and 2 Tasks and Indicators. While the activity also contains other Skills for Success, in this resource we are focussing on [Problem Solving](#).

Detailed information about the components and proficiency levels for all of the **nine Skills for Success** is available on the Government of Canada's [Skills for Success website](#).

Instructions for Practitioners

After sharing the content from this resource with the learner(s), you can ask them to complete the following activity. This activity is suitable for an individual learner or for a small group of learners. This activity reinforces the importance of soft skills and encourages learners to identify how volunteering can improve soft skills.

The OALCF Competency, Task Group and Level indicators, and Skills for Success components and proficiencies can be used to discuss performance, determine skill progression and identify some possible next steps to further develop learner proficiency.

Tasks 2 - 4 incorporate elements of the following [OALCF Competencies](#):

Competency B: Communicate Ideas and Information

- Task Group: Communicate ideas and information (B2)
 - B2.1 Write brief texts to convey simple ideas and factual information

Competency E: Manage Learning

E.1 Set short-term goals, begin to use limited learning strategies, and begin to monitor own learning

Tasks 1 - 4 also incorporate various skill components and elements of Entry Level proficiency (Skills for Success) from the skill of Problem Solving.

Problem Solving: Entry Level Proficiency

You can make decisions or solve problems when there are limited or familiar variables, all the information is provided, and the stakes are low with few consequences. You can use your

general knowledge and skills to process information, do simple or routine troubleshooting if needed, identify the decision or solution, and confirm the issue is resolved.

A blank sheet of paper and pen are required for this activity. A copy of the Problem Solving Components Chart will also be required.

ACTIVITY

Task 1 – Self-Reflection

Ask the learner(s) to think about their soft skills. You can provide the examples from Section 3 – Building Your Skills (creativity, collaboration, adaptability, patience, kindness, reliability, working with others, problem solving) and any others that you think are important like time management and interpersonal skills, etc. Remind the learner(s) that soft skills are extremely important in all areas of our lives. Allow several minutes for this task.

Task 2 – Identify a soft skill for improvement

Ask the learner(s) to write down **one** soft skill that they would like to improve to help them reach their LBS program goal.

Task 3 – Identify volunteer positions that use this soft skill

Ask the learner(s) to write down two volunteer positions that might use the soft skill that they chose for improvement.

Task 4 – Identify 2 ways that volunteering might help improve the soft skill

Ask the learner(s) to write down two ways that these volunteer positions might help them improve the soft skill that they chose.

Task 5 – Problem Solving Components Chart

Practitioner assistance may be required to support the learner(s) with lower skill levels as they complete the chart.

This chart can be adapted to reflect the Problem Solving skill components to suit individual learner’s goals and skill levels. The full components list is available on the [Skills for Success website](#).

The wording of the skill components has been simplified in the following chart to better meet the needs of adults in Literacy and Basic Skills programs.

Ask the learner(s) to complete the Problem Solving Chart using checkmarks to show how they used Problem Solving when they identified the soft skill for improvement and how volunteering could help with that improvement.

Practitioner instructions to learner(s):

Earlier, we discussed different soft skills, and we learned about problem solving. In our activity, you chose a soft skill that you would like to improve. You also named two ways that volunteering might help improve that soft skill.

The questions in this chart are about ways you might have used problem solving to complete the activity. Place a checkmark beside each question to show how you used problem solving in the activity.

When you thought about a soft skill to improve and ways volunteering might help with that improvement, did you...	A lot	A little	Not at all
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify a soft skill that you would like to improve? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think about what needs to be improved in this soft skill? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think about volunteer positions where you would practise this soft skill? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify different ways that volunteering could help improve this soft skill? 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think about looking for volunteer opportunities to build your skills in your future? 			

This chart incorporates elements of the following OALCF Competencies and Task Groups:

Competency B: Communicate Ideas and Information

Task Group: Complete and create documents (B3)

B3.2 a Use layout to determine where to make entries in simple documents

Competency E: Manage Learning

Task Group: No Task Group

E.1 Set short-term goals, begin to use limited learning strategies, and begin to monitor own learning

This chart encourages self-reflection and reinforces some of the Problem Solving skill components used in the first 4 tasks.

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The opinions expressed in this resource are the opinions of Community Literacy of Ontario, and do not necessarily reflect those of our funders.