

April 29, 2020

## Delivering LBS Programming during the COVID-19 Pandemic - CLO's Community-based Snapshot

On April 3, 2020, Community Literacy of Ontario informally reached out by email to our community-based member agencies to see how they were coping in the early stages of working remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We reached out and you hugged us back! We were very surprised to receive responses from 39 agencies who shared their current working realities with us. CLO wants to share the aggregate information with all of you in hopes that you will also be inspired.

Community-based programs know how to pivot and how to work in the most difficult of times and situations. This synopsis of responses showcases how adaptable, creative and dedicated community-based programs are as they deal with the restraints imposed due to COVID-19.

The overwhelming majority of respondents (87%) are offering programming remotely and another 5% are exploring options of how to offer programming.

### Communication with Staff / Learners /Volunteers

Our members are keeping in close contact with learners, volunteers and staff. Predominantly, communication is taking place by telephone, closely followed by email, texting, social media and Zoom. Other means of communication are through agency websites, signs on office doors, and Facebook/ Messenger.



### Programming:

Community-based agencies continue to offer a large selection of programming based on learners' needs and goals:

- Math classes
- Writing/spelling/grammar classes
- Mental health check-ins -- tips for getting through all of this
- Workshops for Employment Services clients who are still being referred
- Digital literacy class
- GED exam prep

- OSSD college level credits
- “Meet and Meditate” groups with learners
- Workshops and classes online to deal with different topics that could help clients/learners during this time

## Program Delivery/Support Methods

It appears that there are a multitude of ways that our members are remotely providing programming to learners in their agencies. It must be noted that most are using multiple approaches and combinations of approaches (e.g., telephone, emailing or mailing activities to learners and then supporting over the phone). Every learner’s situation is different and therefore a variety of delivery options are required.



The top 10 program delivery/support methods, in order of popular responses are:

- Phone Support / Lessons
- Emailing activities/support
- [Zoom](#) – individual/group
- [Learning Hub](#)
- Mail - sending resources/materials
- Porch deliveries/pickups of paper materials for those wanting to continue their training without internet
- [Skype](#)
- [FaceTime](#)
- [Messenger](#)
- [Facebook](#)

The following methods were also identified:

- [Google Classroom](#)
- Texting
- [Aztec](#) computerized skills remediation
- [Moodle](#)
- [Google Forms](#)
- [Good Learning Anywhere](#)
- [Textnow.com](#) to call and text learners
- [Google Hangouts](#) video-chat



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- [Litmos](#) platform to create a structured training base upon which to attach training modules and track learner progress.
- Agency website
- [Laubach Literacy Ontario](#) can provide weekly activities for learners
- [Showbie](#) app for combining assignments, feedback and communication

## Challenges/Concerns

CLO also heard about challenges and concerns that are faced by our members at this very difficult time in history.

From the administrative agency perspective, the biggest concerns are not meeting ministry-mandated targets/learner numbers and there is also considerable concern about continued funding and funding levels that are tied to these pre-COVID-19 targets.



Relative to remote program delivery, the most frequently mentioned concerns were:

- Poor rural internet service and a lack of access to internet across the province
- Learners don't have access to computers/laptop/tablet/devices
- Learners have Digital literacy skills that are too low to access online learning / workshops
- Internet charges/ phone data plans are expensive

You also identified the following concerns:

- Some learners can't cope with continuing with their program and cope with the pandemic as well
- Lack of motivation for learners when working at home
- Not marketing or recruiting new learners
- Learners have low skill levels overall
- Rebuild of services, flexibility and recalibrating targets based on this disruption
- Other challenges when working at home – young children, interruptions, part time jobs
- Online learning isn't the preferred method of delivery style for community-based learners
- Some learners need significant support for online learning
- Some learners struggle with mental illness
- The learning curve is a steep one with regards to managing in these times. Particularly in HR and finance. We are offered many resources to assist us in this time; however, being inundated with so much "help" (webinars, resources etc.), it is very hard to keep up.
- When staff are accustomed to in-person lessons and interactions, the online world is foreign and humans can be stiff in their style. Add to that the fear of technology and wow – things come to a total stop.

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## Tips and Strategies:

Earlier on, we mentioned the adaptability and creativity that shine in Ontario's community-based agencies. The following tips and strategies shared in response to our outreach email are perfect examples of how our members are being flexible in meeting the needs of learners during this unique time. There are lots of them, so get comfortable and happy reading!

The two most popular strategies, receiving multiple mentions, were:

- Meet with staff individually or as a team, as often as needed (daily, 2-3 times per week), to touch base, discuss the hurdles they are facing, and troubleshooting creative options for delivery, conduct wellness checks. Zoom / video conferencing are good options for these meetings
- Keep in contact with learners on a regular basis (weekly/bi-weekly) by phone/email to see how they are coping and if they need anything.



Our members also suggested that agencies can:

- See which tutors are available to continue to connect with their learners (and which learners can continue to work).
- Ask [AlphaPlus](#) to provide training on Google Not-for-Profit and Google Classroom.
- Provide work packages (in line with the work that learners were doing within their training plans) to all classroom learners via email and connect with them online or via telephone to review these packages. Schedule extended lesson times with them when they are requested.
- Ask all instructors to create Facebook accounts for work to communicate with learners directly.
- Don't expect tutors to create materials –send them material created by groups like LLSC, CLO or other official sources (e.g., Public Health).
- Have the Learning Hub instructor and agency instructor talk and work together.
- Do porch or office drop off / pick up of materials and resources.
- Consider the CERB 75% wage subsidy for staff.
- Conduct a technology audit of our learners (access to a smartphone, tablet, laptop, etc.).
- Contact your community partners (employment service providers, Chamber of Commerce, etc.), to let them know you are still here for our learners and the community.
- Informed the ministry and receive approval for your contingency plan.
- Ask your Board of Directors to consider approval for all staff wages to continue to be paid at the hours they were working before the shut-down.
- Survey tutors to determine if they are working with their student and what exactly they're doing.
- Put a Safety Protocol together that once you can reopen, staff, tutors, students and all visitors will be expected to follow.
- Train volunteers to use virtual platforms.

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- Send a newsletter to learners and volunteers which will include learner/ volunteer stories about how they have kept themselves busy during this time.
- Sort through the many online resources that your support organizations have put together.
- Direct learners to the selected webpage hosting an exact activity to ease confusion.
- For learners that do not have a computer or internet, refer them to community services that can help with that.
- Have learners check in on one another. There are studies that suggest if we have someone for which we are responsible we are less apt to focus inward. So far, in the beginning stages of this endeavour, this seems to be helping and alleviates some of the burden on staff.
- Offer mental health days, when needed.
- Provide your ETC with an update weekly and chat by phone every two weeks.
- If possible, have access to your work phone extension and access to all of your computer programs, CaMS, email, etc.
- Contact volunteers to keep them connected with the agency.
- Encourage instructors to take whatever training they think they might need (CLO's website is one of our main referrals)
- Reach out to an ODSP worker to discuss the 'possibility' of setting up of temporary internet for some learners.
- Meet with your Board of Directors board by teleconference.
- Intentionally limit social media messaging to prevent adding to the overwhelming amount/content circulating(!)
- Put a notice out to any learners who are parents that if they are struggling with some of the concepts their children are working on, to get in touch and you will do what you can.
- Converted your computer lab to online learning and register new clients on a weekly basis for computer/ digital literacy via telephone appointments.
- Continue to explore and think outside the box to see how you can support the needs of your current clients as well as looking at the opportunities of reaching a new audience that can be found in your virtual community.
- Try to find a way to supply learners with chrome books and laptops with installed programs and prepared documents prepared by instructors that can be accessed offline.
- Gain remote access to all the office laptops, tablets and computers. This makes it possible to maintain social distancing (either in different rooms or offsite), yet you can see where a learner might be stuck. Since you can see in real time what they are doing or not doing, it is easier to help them solve the problem. Accessing computers is through **TeamViewer**.
- Encourage online brainstorming. Meet online, chat, exchange ideas, vent, and be surprised. The feeling of oneness is enhanced through crisis, if we can communicate without risk. Meeting in-person should not happen.



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- Meet online (G Suite Hangouts).
- Teach learners about discernment and finding resources from reliable sources.
- Mail letters and activities with return stamped envelope to your Main Office for weekly pick-ups (for those learners with low technology skills).
- Talk on the phone with each learner to provide connections to community agencies.
- Send numeracy exercises to learners who request them.
- Use telephone tutoring - have learners read to tutor/ instructor, take pictures of math or written work. Learners and tutors connect with each other by phone and then view/discuss websites at the same time. The learner can then go ahead and do the work. If it's a writing task, they can copy and paste their paragraph(s) in an email so their tutor can give feedback by email or phone or both.
- In the case of learners without a computer and/or access to Internet and/or who lack the skills to navigate these sites, mail them some writing/reading exercises and scanned or mailed copies to their tutors. The tutors and learners can then connect by phone and conduct their session that way.
- Create duplicate workbooks with notes and page references for tutors and learners.

### Other Agency Activity

In some agencies, we have been told that in addition to providing programming, staff are also:

- Updating their job handbooks, lesson and organizational planning.
- Prepping for training so they offer courses more frequently when they are back to “normal”.
- Creating some new courses.
- Cleaning files on the computer
- Preparing the year-end report
- Getting safeguards in place
- Taking training and professional development.
- Continuing to explore the different e-learning platforms and alternate platforms that can be used to support our learners.
- Figuring out how to assess, intake, register and train all remotely, but what a neat opportunity to develop these skills now, so that we can reach out to remote communities in our catchment area and have access to those learners who cannot drive in to see us!

### In Conclusion

Community Literacy of Ontario would like to thank the many agencies who responded to our outreach email. We hope that by sharing the highlights of your responses, that others will be encouraged and inspired by the community-based spirit. We wish you good health and well-being, and continued success as you support the learners in your communities in new and different ways.

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