

More Success Stories

Experiential Learning in LBS

Volume 2: March, 2019

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In this issue:

Literacy and Poverty Initiatives Employment Readiness Training
Essential Skills & Soft Skills Office Administration
Customer Service Social Enterprise
Digital Literacy ...and more!

Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) is a provincial network of community-based Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies. We are located in Barrie, Ontario. You can learn more about our organization by visiting our website and following us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

As part of our 2018/2019 business plan, Community Literacy of Ontario continued its research into experiential learning opportunities in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs.

During our research and key informant interviews, we wrote eight new experiential learning success stories. CLO is pleased to share these success stories in this newsletter:

MORE Success Stories: Experiential Learning in LBS



You can also access CLO's experiential learning resources produced in 2017-2018:

1. CLO, with our partner CESBA, developed and delivered a webinar called: **“HANDS ON, SKILLS UP! Employment-Related Experiential Learning in Ontario’s LBS Organizations”**. Click [here](#) to access the recorded version of our webinar.
2. We wrote ten experiential learning success stories. CLO shared these stories in this newsletter, **“Success Stories: Employment-Related Experiential Learning in LBS”**. Click [here](#) to access last year’s newsletter.
3. CLO compiled all of our research into a report called **“HANDS ON, SKILLS UP! Employment-Related Experiential Learning in Literacy and Basic Skills Research Report”**. You can access our research report [here](#).

Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

Personal Support Worker Program



The Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board (ALCDSB) is a school board program that offers Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programming as well as Personal Support Worker programming to the counties of Frontenac, Hastings, Prince Edward and Quinte West.

Thanks to Karen Mayer, Teacher and Coordinator, for sharing experiential learning in the ALCDSB's **Personal Support Worker** (PSW) program with us.

What?

The Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board's **Personal Support Worker** program is run as a day program. Students get high school credits for it. It combines Health Technology Curriculum (3 courses) and 3 placements (3 co-op credits). To get the PSW Certificate, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education Curriculum has been linked to the PSW curriculum. If a student achieves 70% in each unit, they get a PSW certificate as well. Day school credit pays for the teaching. The student fees cover clinical instructors, textbooks etc.

Some of the PSW programs have Literacy and Basic Skills programs on site, so students can go to LBS for extra help. Pre-PSW courses also exist in LBS and need to be updated to meet new curriculum standards.

ALCDSB also works with lots of English as a Second Language students, some of whom are also pursuing PSW certification. Karen's PSW program encourages ESL and Canadian students to work together to prepare a cultural meal. This activity promotes team building and learning to work with other cultures. Everyone benefits. PSW students get experience working with people who don't have strong language skills, which benefits them in the "real world."

When?

When Karen first began teaching the PSW program, she noticed that the curriculum had some experiential learning components. She found that learners responded well to these parts of the curriculum. For example, one experiential activity was called "aging as a journey," in which students are assigned ages and medical challenges and then participate in a relaxation exercise to consider what a patient in this scenario might be experiencing and how they might work with that individual from a PSW perspective.

As Karen continued her own journey to improve her education by earning subsequent degrees, she used her practicums and research time to develop additional experiential learning projects for PSW students to work on. An example of an experiential learning project Karen developed is an interview in which students “wear” a variety of tools that mimic communication disorders. For example, students will wear a pair of glasses that are painted to mimic a visual disorder. Students also wear gloves with popsicle sticks inserted to mimic arthritis and tactile losses as well as ear plugs to mimic hearing difficulties. They then have to interview another student to get to know them and write out their story.

Karen finds that integrating experiential learning opportunities into the PSW program results in increased student understanding at a more visceral level. Take bathing clients as an example. As a teacher, you can talk about how important it is to keep patients covered and how important it is to talk to them to help patients feel more comfortable during their bathing experience, but when students are actually working with a classmate and simulating the bathing experience, they develop a more fulsome understanding of how vulnerable this activity can be for a patient.

How?

Karen integrates experiential learning by using a flipped classroom. She assigns a chapter or two before students come to class. They do the reading on their own. They also have a workbook that goes with the textbook that asks specific questions about the chapters they read (30-40 questions).

In the classroom, they do role play and case scenarios, so the students are working with the information in a more tangible way. Students interact with each other, gaining teamwork skills and learning how to be productive with different personalities.

Flipped Classroom

A flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning that reverses the traditional learning environment by delivering instructional content, often online, outside of the classroom. It moves activities, including those that may have traditionally been considered homework, into the classroom. In a flipped classroom, students watch online lectures, collaborate in online discussions, or carry out research at home while engaging in concepts in the classroom with the guidance of a mentor.

Source: Wikipedia

Lessons Learned

Karen says that throughout her career teaching PSW, she has learned to employ different teaching strategies. When she first started teaching, she was the authority on the topics(s) and activities were definitely teacher-led. She learned, however, that just because she was sharing information did not mean that students were actually learning. She learned to integrate more experiential learning, which is better suited to how students learn. As a result, she is confident that PSW students in her program learn more, learn deeply, and transfer their learning to real-life situations.

Karen has also learned that using experiential learning means she spends less time in front of the students because the students are more actively involved in their learning. Experiential learning is 100% better for students and for teachers.

Impact

According to Karen, integrating experiential learning into PSW programming has positively impacted students and community partners. Students are more engaged and learn more. They also have better job prospects when they have completed the program because local facilities that hire PSW's are keen to have students who have graduated from Karen's program. Not only do graduating students have the necessary knowledge and skills to be a PSW, they have also learned how to problem solve and work effectively with others.

One of Karen's favourite sayings to her students is "*Go to three other sources before you come to me.*" As a result, students learn to help themselves and help one another, and these attributes transfer outside of the classroom to helping PSW patients, making students from Karen's program desirable employees.

Quote

This quote by Maya Angelou sums up experiential learning for Karen: "People will forget what you said and did, but they will never forget how you made them feel."

Dryden Literacy Association

The Dryden Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program

Dryden Literacy Association (DLA) offers the Literacy and Basic Skills program and provides a variety of helpful programming tailored to community needs.

Thanks to Wendy Olson, Program Manager, for telling us about an amazing experiential learning partnership that the Dryden Literacy Association is involved with, called “**The Dryden Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program**”.

What?

The Dryden Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program is a unique programming model that provides wrap-around community support to Indigenous mother-lead families in the Town of Dryden, located in northwestern Ontario. The goal of the program is to help women living in poverty move forward in their lives and achieve economic independence. Using a case management module, participants receive supports such as housing, education, childcare, social service supports, job readiness training, career planning and more.

The Dryden Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program is based on the Homeward Bound programming model, which is delivered through WoodGreen. In Dryden, they modified the model to localize it for their needs, and put the focus on Indigenous women.

“The program model is grounded in Indigenous culture and values; it is an example of thinking differently about how to respond to ‘need’; and it brings service providers together in a broad, system change initiative. Homeward Bound helps inadequately housed mother-led families to obtain stable housing and to prepare to enter the workforce through job readiness and educational upgrading. It provides a range of wrap-around services including childcare over a four-year period.” (Source: Community Hubs Ontario).

The Dryden Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program is lead by the Dryden Native Friendship Centre, Kenora District Services Board and Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services. It has the following program partners: Dryden Literacy Association, City of Dryden and Confederation College. It is also supported by an advisory group.

Dryden Literacy Association has a key role in Phase One of this innovative Homeward Bound partnership. They assist with educational assessments, provide literacy instruction, support for obtaining prerequisites required for college entrance, academic upgrading to prepare for post-secondary, and help participants to develop a personalised plan for their future educational goals, including ongoing support once participants are attending college. Dryden Literacy Association embeds experiential learning into the programming, including learning about creative technologies by having the students design and develop their own projects using Cricut machines and the Cricut website.

DLA also brings in community speakers on a variety of topics, including personal health and well-being (Health Unit, mental health issues, etc.) and employment preparation (representatives from various College programs and trades).

They provide skills training and upgrading to help prepare clients for post-secondary education and/or employment. The curriculum is delivered via a blended learning model and incorporates the community into the program.

Dryden Literacy Association offers classroom literacy instruction to participants using a blended learning model through E-Channel. They build the digital skills of participants via laptops and tablets.

Programming for the Dryden Indigenous Homeward Bound Program participants is offered in a highly supportive, wrap-around environment, where people are supported to succeed!

When?

Planning and community consultations for the Dryden Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program began in 2015.

Why?

In Dryden, there was a clear need to support Indigenous women to access community services, build their skills and find employment, in manner that was grounded in Indigenous beliefs and culture. Needs were clearly identified by local demographics and community consultations.

How?

There is no core funding for this initiative, hence, this is the reason that there are so many partners involved, who each contribute in diverse ways. Seed dollars came from Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres. There are many various funding initiatives involved, for example, to cover the cost of housing and child care.

Lessons Learned

Wendy noted that many valuable lessons were learned by being part of such an innovative project, including:

- Providing wrap-around supports greatly enhances the ability for people to succeed
- Offering practical programming and experiential learning opportunities more effectively engages participants
- Engaging strong community support is key to success
- Service coordination becomes more effective and efficient between entry to program and exit to the next phase as supports are continuous
- Community based agencies, although often small, can play in the “big leagues” and be involved in large community initiatives and truly make a difference in the lives of people and their communities

Impact

Many impacts have been already noticed from this unique project, including:

- The women enrolled in the Dryden Urban Indigenous Homeward Bound Program experienced a high level of success. For example, seven of the participants have already moved on to college and are in their second semester! The other two participants are still transitioning, and are taking part-time college courses until their program of choice opens up, most likely this coming September.
- Because of the success experienced, a new intake will occur in spring 2019.
- The wrap-around aspect of this initiative has led to more access of local services by participants.
- DLA’s community profile was augmented.
- The role and abilities of Literacy and Basic Skills programming were clearly displayed in the community.
- New partnerships were developed.
- Community wide planning occurred with LBS as an integral part of success.

Quote

“This program is a direct result of community planning via local service providers for the needs of local individuals. Transitions between and amongst partners with multiple services supporting learning and living will help sustain our community, have greater success and ensure the long term growth of our local people.”

Grand Erie District School Board, Bridges to Success Literacy Program

Targeted Training Workshops



Bridges to Success (BTS) is a Literacy and Basic Skills program that is run through the Grand Erie District School Board in Brantford. BTS serves learners who wish to upgrade their skills to get their Ontario Secondary School Diploma, to obtain their GED or to develop skills for employment and for use in daily activities.

Thanks to Robyn Cook-Ritchie, Program Coordinator of the Bridges to Success program, for sharing this success story with us.

What?

Currently, Bridges to Success offers a series of targeted training workshops. In addition to teaching literacy, numeracy and soft skills, the workshops integrate experiential learning in the following ways:

Get SET for Office Administration

- Learners apply for a job at Bridges to Success.
- They then go through a mock interview for the job.
- The last two days of class are completely experiential. On Day 1 all learners have a staff meeting. They take minutes during the meeting where they learn about the tasks that they need to accomplish in the BTS office. After the meeting, the participants discuss amongst themselves the schedule for the two days to make sure everyone has an opportunity to complete each task. The tasks include real things BTS really needs done, such as printing materials from a USB, copying and collating those materials, taking two phone messages, and completing an inventory of the storage cabinet.

Budgeting

- Learners bring in their actual bills/receipts/stubs etc. and construct an actual budget.
- They monitor their spending during the workshop series in a log to help them monitor and adjust their budget.

Family Literacy

- Learners develop real chore schedules for their children, with their children.
- They create real meal plans and spend a session with their children creating a personalized cookbook with healthy recipes.
- Learners have an opportunity to sign up for a library card after learning about all the services offered to adults, children and families at the library.

Digital Basics

Learners in this series are usually on the employment path.

- Learners apply for an actual job on Indeed.

Customer Service

Bridges to Success would like to get access to the abandoned movie theatre next to its office to give learners an “experiential” opportunity to apply customer service skills and practice AODA compliance.

In the meantime, BTS is doing customer service in-house:

- Learners use a cash register and scanner.
- Learners use email to respond to customer service inquiries.
- AODA training is integrated into this workshop. Part of the practice day is set aside so that learners can practice seating people appropriately. For example – seating someone who is blind according to AODA standards.

When?

The Bridges to Success Literacy and Basic Skills program has been offering experiential learning for the past five years.

Why?

Bridges to Success has always looked for opportunities to incorporate experiential learning. True to adult learning principles, they see experiential learning as an opportunity to make learning as real as possible for adult learners. BTS believes that by integrating experiential learning into their programming, they increase learner engagement and make learning more meaningful.

How?

BTS uses its Literacy and Basic Skills funding to provide experiential learning opportunities.

Lessons Learned

Don't underestimate the value of experiential learning. Even providing small experiences for learners can really engage them and show them the practical application of what they're learning.

Find out what other experiential learning opportunities are available in other LBS agencies and/or community organizations. Use this information to plan your own experiences.

Impact

Learners respond extremely well to experiential learning. The practical activities are very motivating and help adult learners discover what they like to do and what they might not like to do in terms of employment. Exposing adult learners to smaller experiential learning opportunities takes some of the risk away and reduces the potential for learners to feel intimidated.

Quote

"Some of the most gratifying moments in our program come when we see adult learners applying skills they have learned in real-world settings."

Hamilton Literacy Council

Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training Program



Hamilton Literacy Council (HLC) is a community based literacy organization that offers free one-to-one tutoring and small group classes to English-speaking adults who want to improve their basic reading, writing, math and computer skills. Student goals include employment, further education and increased independence.

Thank you to Helen McLeod, Executive Director, for sharing experiential learning in Hamilton Literacy Council's **Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training program**.

What?

Hamilton Literacy Council's Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training program provides training for workplace essential skills. The program runs two days per week for five to ten weeks. Learners spend two half days in class and then two half days per week in a workplace volunteer position. The program works best for groups of 7-12 learners. Smaller class sizes have been shown to work best due to the need for volunteer mentorship in the workplace placement portion of the program.

The program is currently partnered with the Salvation Army for the workplace volunteer placement. The program was originally designed for people on Ontario Works, but it can be tailored for any referral group. Hamilton Literacy Council has recently collaborated with the Colombian Refugee Association. Many learners in this group have professional designations and simply need English language upgrading and workplace experience in a Canadian workplace to assist with their employment goals.

When?

Hamilton Literacy Council has been offering the Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training program since 2014. In the first iteration of the program, HLC partnered with Mission Services as well as Ontario Works.

Mission Services was awarded grant funding which they shared with Hamilton Literacy Council in order to develop the curriculum and run a pilot program. The workplace volunteer placements were at the Mission Services shops at that time.

Once the curriculum was developed, grant funding was no longer needed for operational costs and funding was only required to cover the cost of an instructors. The volunteer mentorship is provided by the partner organizations (Mission Services and Salvation Army).

Why?

Hamilton Literacy Council started offering the Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training program due to the need they recognized in the community. Through the initial partnership with Mission Services, they were able to develop the initial Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training program which served learners on Ontario Works.

The initial program taught learners workplace essential skills that were specific to their employment goals.

How?

Helen has found that the Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training program is easy to tailor to each group and their specific needs. For example, Hamilton Literacy Council was able to easily tailor the program that was originally designed for people on Ontario Works to also work for refugees with professional credentials. By applying more or less emphasis on different units, the curriculum can be used to serve diverse needs of a wide variety of learners.

The Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training program is split into two parts: half of the time is spent in a classroom setting and the other half is spent in a volunteer workplace placement with a partner organization. With the morning spent in class and the afternoon spent in their workplace placement, learners are able to immediately apply their new lessons from the classroom in real world situations. Learners are able to apply lessons on workplace safety, written, oral and telephone communication skills, conflict resolution, customer service, and more. This programming is offered with core LBS funding.

Lessons Learned

It is important to ensure that communication between the in-class instructor and the volunteer supervisor is thorough, to make sure everything is covered and nothing falls through the cracks. If possible, it would be best to have the in-class instructor also attend the volunteer placement but this may not be fiscally attainable for all organizations. Smaller class sizes of 7-12 learners are easier to organize, as all students need a volunteer workplace placement for the duration of the program. Helen found that a smaller class size was easier for the partner organization to handle, i.e. Mission Services and Salvation Army. Helen also found that a duration of 5-10 weeks had the best results. Classes of longer duration were tested, such as 12 weeks in length. But this longer timeframe was found to be too long and it was more likely that other priorities would come up for learners and they would have to miss classes or leave the program early.

Impact

Follow-up surveys of the Essential Skills & Soft Skills Training program have been very positive. In fact, many learners have continued on to secure employment.

During the program, many learners were reluctant to volunteer because they thought that because they were not being paid, they were being taken advantage of. By the end of the program, learners understood the importance of volunteerism and community engagement. In fact, many learners continued to volunteer!

Quote

"Experiential learning fall within 'The Laws of DEEP (Doing, Effect, Exercise, Primacy) Learning' and I would encourage agencies to dive right in and experience it!"

John Howard Society of Durham Region, Employment and Training Services

Social Enterprise and Ready to Go – Job Skills Development Program for Young Adults



The John Howard Society of Durham Region (JHS) is a non-profit, social service agency. The JHS is dedicated to serving men and women, individuals and families, youth and adults in areas such as counselling, employment, literacy, housing, parenting, addictions, and more. The JHS offers Employment and Training Services (ETS), which *includes* providing Literacy and Basic Skills training and Employment Services, and other training and opportunities, from enhanced individualized learning to preparing for job skill training certifications.

Thank you to Christina Barrow, Director of Employment, Training & Housing Services, for sharing some of experiential learning activities occurring at the John Howard Society of Durham Region.

What?

The John Howard Society of Durham Region is a large multi-service agency offering a wide array of services to their community. The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program is offered in Oshawa, and itinerantly in other JHS offices as needed. They are co-located with Employment Services and many effective partnerships have occurred.

The LBS program has operated a snack bar in their classroom as a small social enterprise for many years. The learners manage the snack bar, and are responsible for a variety of tasks that build their skills and confidence. For example, the learners manage the sales, track the cash count, do the monthly financial reconciliation, and order supplies (hot and cold beverages and snacks) and monitor the stock. All profits from the snack bar are used for classroom events, as determined and planned by the learners.

JHS Employment and Training Services offers a variety of innovative programming. For example, they deliver a Skills Link program, “Ready to Go – Job Skills Development for Young Adults”, which provides four weeks of either customer service or skilled trades stream training. Embedded in this training is a week of essential skill building facilitated by the LBS instructors.

Another example is that JHS Employment and Training Services is currently exploring a partnership with their Local Employment Planning Council and other LBS providers to offer point of sale training to interested learners.

They have developed links with local employers and plan to facilitate employer-based focus groups to ask “Where are the gaps in your workplace?”. Employers have often noted that foundational skills, soft skills and employee retention are areas of need. Staff from JHS Employment and Training Services will sometimes go into the workplace to train employees in foundational skills.

Christina notes that the JHS Employment and Training Services staff do not just teach in the classroom, they go where the need is, and this could include the work place, library, social services, etc.

When?

Experiential learning via the snack bar has been offered for 15+ years.

Other experiential learning activities are more recent, and have been offered for the past five years. JHS Employment and Training Services really began to ramp up experiential learning in their agency when the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) and the new performance management system was introduced.

Why?

The LBS and Employment Services staff work as a team. They have a great passion to serve and support learners, and they know from long experience that hands-on, experiential learning works best. They also find that working as a team leads to inspirational ideas, innovation and new ways of thinking.

LBS staff listen closely to their community and to adult learners, and experiential learning, working in partnership with community services, and innovative programming meets many of the needs identified. And, this approach has also filled their LBS classroom!

How?

The learning initiatives offered by JHS Employment and Training Services are funded in large part by LBS core funding. However, because additional resources are needed, they pull together bits and pieces of funding to supplement, and also rely on resources from their partners and other in-house JHS programs.

The snack bar is self-supporting and requires no external funding.

Lessons Learned

Christina mentioned that many important lessons have been learned along the way, including:

- Actively listen to the learners and solicit their feedback often.
- Ask evaluation questions beyond what is required by MTCU; also ask questions that are of specific interest to you and your learners.
- Actively listen to your community, your stakeholders and your partners.
- Conduct holistic assessments, so you can better understand the needs and overall patterns and supports required.
- Ask your partners for support, because they often have access to additional resources.
- Build an organizational culture of innovation. Christina has worked hard to create a culture where their organizational response typically is *“Sounds like a great idea; let’s try it!”*

Impact

There have been many positive impacts from offering experiential learning, including:

- Learners are meeting their goals
- Their LBS classroom is meeting and exceeding their numbers
- New partnerships have been developed
- Additional respect and profile for their agency has been created in their community
- Staff have learners to be adaptable, flexible and innovative
- Learners are acquiring soft skills and life skills in addition to more traditional literacy and numeracy skills

Quote

“Our experiences have shown us that when learners are motivated and immersed in their learning experiences, they are more likely to retain what they have learned and will successfully transition to their next steps. Our team recognizes that learners have very individualized needs and we remain committed to fostering an environment that is responsive to those needs.”

Learning Centre for Georgina

Digital Literacy



Learning Centre for Georgina is a not-for-profit adult learning centre that offers academic upgrading, computer literacy, financial literacy and basic skills training. LCfG offers Literacy Basic Skills (LBS) and Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) Programs, which provide the support and training required to help achieve life and learning goals, as well as college entrance. LCfG as also started offering a math class specifically to assist parents to help their children, recognizing that not all families can afford tutoring.

Thank you to Kirsty King, Executive Director, for sharing experiential learning in Learning Centre for Georgina's Computer Literacy programs.

What?

Learning Centre for Georgina's Computer Literacy programs are offered at an introductory level and an advanced level. The programs run one day per week, from 6pm – 8pm. The programs are 4 weeks long for the advanced, and 8 weeks long for the introductory.

In the introductory program, learners learn basic computer and digital literacy skills. The advanced program offers specialized skill upgrading for learners who wish to pursue a promotion or new job where more computer skills are needed. This program is also useful if their current job is integrating more computer based work. In the advanced program, learners will practice with common office programs such as Word, Excel, email, and more. Learners will practice writing memos, checking email, filling out spreadsheets, and more.

When?

The Learning Centre for Georgina has been offering the computer literacy program since the end of 2017. Before that time, LCfG utilized the Mobile Adult Learning for computers (MAL) program. It had limited course times and was a cost to LCfG. In 2017, LCfG was awarded an IT Refresh grant and were able to get new computers so they would be able to offer the programs themselves. There is no charge for learners to take the programs and all instructor expenses are covered from LCfG's core budget.

Why?

The Learning Centre for Georgina saw a need and an interest in the community for computer skills training. Many learners worked during the day, so classes were scheduled in the evenings one day per week so that learners were not overwhelmed with the course.

During community meetings and networking opportunities, LCfG has received many referrals of new students. It is through these strong networks within the community that LCfG is able to connect with new learners as well as assist current learners with other areas of support.

The Learning Centre for Georgina recently moved locations to a pedestrian friendly plaza and have seen an increase in learners due to the foot traffic.

How?

The Learning Centre for Georgina utilized creative and budget friendly methods to promote their programs; a staff member's daughter is a graphic designer so she designed lively posters and they used budget-friendly printing services to get them printed.

Before offering programs, Kirsty had the entire staff trained with Mental Health First Aid as well as CPR training so they felt comfortable and confident in addressing other areas of support that might arise. Kirsty encouraged all staff to remember how difficult it can be for a learner to come to the centre, so staff have cultivated a judgement free space, full of encouragement for all learners to meet their goals.

With the computer literacy programs, Kirsty found that the learners were more mature and usually had grandchildren, or are adults in the workplace finding changes that are challenging, so they introduced personal benefits of computer use like how to use Skype to chat with their family members. Personal benefits like this helped to keep learners engaged and practicing with their computers at home in between the once per week classes.

Lessons Learned

Kirsty understood that there was a variety of demographics using The Learning Centre for Georgina's services. To Kirsty, it was of utmost importance to recognize and offer assistance with other areas of need that learners may be experiencing. Kirsty directed two co-op students to compile a thorough binder of all social and community services available so that assistance could be offered quickly and efficiently when the need arose. Through networking, cross referrals between community organizations have ensured that learners are receiving wraparound care throughout the community.

Through this learning experience, The Learning Centre for Georgina donated 30 Christmas dinners to people in need in winter 2018. Staff collaborated with their local United Way chapter to provide everything needed for a turkey dinner and gift cards to 30 families. Upon request, families also received a new bike, or bikes, depending upon the number of children in their family. Remaining bikes were donated to local schools for children in need.

Impact

Learners from the computer literacy program have achieved their goals of getting jobs and promotions and learners have even sent in thank you notes for the staff letting them know how helpful the program was for them.

Kirsty notes that the overall environment at The Learning Centre for Georgina is one of excitement and hope and she often hears instructors and learners laughing and enjoying themselves as they work through the program material.

Learners often return to visit with staff due to the friendly environment and the relationships built during programming. Kirsty recognized how much The Learning Centre for Georgina means to learners and now provides graduation certificates that get signed by all of the staff as a tangible means of saying “congratulations” for the learner to remember how successful they have been.

Quote

“An investment in knowledge pays the best interest” - Benjamin Franklin

Timmins Learning Centre

UP Skills for Work



The Timmins Learning Centre (TLC) provides learner-centred literacy, numeracy and essential skills programming for individuals and families in the Timmins area. They are currently developing new experiential learning programming, which they hope to offer to the community/clients in 2019.

Thank you to Michelle Goulet, Executive Director, for sharing experiential learning in ABC Life Literacy Canada's UP Skills for Work course with us.

What?

Timmins Learning Centre is currently offering the ABC Life Literacy Canada's UP Skills for Work course. This course is based on soft skills training, motivation, accountability, and attitude.

TLC also offers their own **Learning Series**, which is a series of monthly workshops with various guest speakers, topics, and hands on activities. Topics that have been covered are food literacy, goal setting, cultural awareness and more. Michelle also teaches a one-on-one digital skills program which allows learners to learn by using a computer as they progress through the course.

When?

The ABC Life Literacy Canada's UP Skills for Work course started in July 2018. Timmins Learning Centre started offering their monthly learning series in February 2018. Michelle's one-on-one digital skills program also started in 2018.

Why?

Timmins Learning Centre started offering their experiential learning programs for three main reasons. First, as part of a marketing strategy and awareness campaign for the Centre. Secondly, to build more collaborative partnerships in the community, which would increase referrals and public access. Third was to meet the community needs for more education and literacy training on certain topics, and increase skills for the workforce.

Timmins Learning Centre saw a need for "Life Literacy" skills in their current learners. They saw common issues or questions about issues like the landlord tenant board, food literacy, and other topics. This led them to offer the monthly learning series.

The series also proved to be a great introduction to other community services. Through this learning series, the learners came to know more about the services offered by various community organizations, and their comfort level for accessing needed services increased.

As well, TLC is now seeing larger numbers of seniors signing up for computer training.

How?

The monthly learning series is free for learners and \$5 for the general public. TLC will waive the fee on a case by case basis so that finances are not a barrier to access education. The sessions are each on one topic with one expert speaker such as a psychotherapist explaining personal goal setting, or an Indigenous Cultural Awareness talk with an Indigenous speaker. Each session will have between 10-20 attendees. Kidd Operations (a local mining company) have now sponsored the series, which pays the expert speakers for their time.

The monthly learning series is held over lunchtime and provides a light lunch for attendees. For a nutrition lesson, attendees were taught how to prepare tortillas in several different ways. They learned new cooking techniques and tried new types of food. This allowed attendees to feel confident purchasing these new items at the grocery store and confident in their new culinary skills.

The ABC Life Literacy Canada's UP Skills for Work course runs once per month with a minimum of three people to run the course. The course is three days long, for two hours each day, for a total of six hours. Life Literacy provides a \$50 honorarium for each time an organization provides the course. LBS agencies would need to register with ABC Life Literacy Canada online. Then, they will send you the course workbooks. Once a host organization sends their surveys back, ABC Life Literacy Canada will release the honorarium. LBS core funding covers the cost of the instructor for this course; as well as providing for additional learning tools and learning plans for each participant.

The ABC Life Literacy Canada's UP Skills for Work course is mostly discussion-based as opposed to acting out scenarios. Michelle has very diverse learner groups with a variety of goals, from employment to increased independence, so acting out scenarios are not always relevant to the whole group.

Lessons Learned

When delivering the ABC Life Literacy Canada's UP Skills for Work course, Michelle recommends talking about core values and what's important to each learner. Michelle will then use real-life experiences from the learners, which helps them to understand the lesson quicker and remember the lesson better because of the personal content. Michelle recommends that life experiences around conflict resolution and understanding situations from another person's point of view are great ways for learners to develop empathy and respect in the workplace. For example, a topic to explore might be why a manager's decision may seem unfair at first.

From an organizational standpoint, Michelle urges others to remember:

“Just because you build it, doesn't mean they come! You can have an amazing program that will benefit everyone, but you still need marketing, partnerships, and time devoted to help it grow. There were some workshops we had to cancel for low registration numbers. But instead of looking at it as a fail, we analyzed different factors, made improvements, and tried again. We HAVE to work together - I couldn't do this without partnerships - relationships with other service providers, agencies.”

Constant improvement is key. Timmins Learning Centre conducts surveys to gauge the effectiveness and enjoyment of the workshops. Instructors also follow up with participants to see what they liked by means of informal interviews. TLC's goal is to help make people's every day lives, interactions, and tasks easier, more enjoyable, and done with more confidence. This is only possible through soliciting constant feedback on how TLC is performing.

While job seekers are applying for jobs, they upgrade their skills at the Timmins Learning Centre. TLC provides letters of completion for job seekers which proves to employers that the learner is an eager and inspired candidate. But, Michelle notes that organizations need to build relationships with a variety of community agencies, not just employment agencies. For example, with Timmins Learning Centre's new level of community awareness, Michelle was approached by a mining company asking if they could sponsor their Learning Series!

Impact

People are talking about TLC in the community, people are approaching TLC to volunteer, or to access services, and to thank us for being in the community. People are even offering TLC money because of their increased community awareness and the recognition of the impact literacy training has on the community.

Quote

“People come to us because they want a change in their lives. They want to achieve something. And no matter what the learning style, there is something beautiful and magical about having people participate in hands-on activities, and seeing that connection be made between things they are learning and how it will impact their every day lives. It removes their experience from being one gathered from a text book, and makes it a reality, where they can see and feel their progress!”

YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka, Learning Services

Introduction to Computers and Introduction to Office Administration



YMCA Learning Services provides Literacy and Basic Skills programming in the Muskoka and Parry Sound region. This program offers a variety of training opportunities via one to one tutoring or in small group formats. It operates as part of the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka.

Thanks to Rebecca Smith, Program Coordinator, for sharing experiential learning activities in the YMCA's Community Literacy Program with us.

What?

YMCA Learning Services tries to embed some form of experiential learning in all of its learning opportunities.

One of their most popular programs is “**Introduction to Computers**”. Staff encourage the students to explore computer hardware and software, and to play, make mistakes, and press that button! This program includes the following components:

- Gaining a basic computer knowledge, from the parts of the computer, to opening and closing files
- Learning about the internet and how to get involved with social media
- Gaining knowledge about how to email, deal with spam, safety and privacy issues
- Learning how to navigate Microsoft Word, Excel and Power Point

Another very success initiative offered by YMCA Learning Services is their “**Introduction to Office Administration**” program. In this program, they teach practical office administration skills and embed experiential learning throughout. For example, a mock office space was set-up in the classroom, and students were given real life tasks – answering emails, ordering supplies, responding to phone calls.

Their “**Introduction to Office Administration**” program was developed in partnership with Georgian College in Bracebridge. Students from Huntsville took the bus to the college weekly (paid for by training support funds) in order to use the college facilities. 10 students from Huntsville travelled to Bracebridge and five Bracebridge students travelled to Huntsville, in order to create a combined class.

YMCA Learning Services also worked closely with Employment Services (with whom they are co-located). Employment Services ran a special class specifically for their participants where the students were taught resume writing, job search skills, mock interview skills and more. They also learned soft skills such personality dimensions. There was an extremely positive response to the “**Introduction to Office Administration**” class. Students retention was excellent, and 13/15 students graduated!

As well, based on demand, YMCA Learning Services offers **specialty classes** that increase the skill base of those with goals of seeking employment (or greater independence), or to increase skills needed in their current job. These classes have included:

- English as a Second Language (ESL)
- Personal Budgeting
- Cash Handling
- Using your Smart Phone
- GED/ACE Preparation
- G1 Test Preparation
- Smart Serve

When?

The YMCA Learning Services has been embedding experiential learning into it's programming for the past seven years.

Why?

YMCA Learning Services finds that students learn best by experiential learning. It's what sticks with students and helps them learn and retain knowledge. Practical applicability is more engaging for most students.

How?

Most of these initiatives are covered by LBS core funding. However, YMCA Learning Services receives a yearly donation from the Muskoka Novel Marathon fundraising event. They have used these funds to upgrade their computer lab and to hire an extra Instructor to facilitate their growing ESL class.

Lessons Learned

Rebecca noted that many valuable lessons were learned, including:

- Take a highly practical and learner-centered approach to all learning activities.
- Be sure to gather and incorporate student feedback into the programming. This continuous improvement will make the learning experience better each time and students appreciate it when their voices are heard.
- Develop a strong partnership with employment services, they can provide considerable support to students with employment goals.
- Be creative in your partnerships. There are probably more community partners out there than you may be imagining!

Impact

Rebecca noticed the following benefits by offering experiential learning:

- Higher student retention and engagement
- New partnership development
- Less stigma attached to experiential learning programs, compared to traditional literacy programming
- Access to new resources
- Easier, less intimidating transition for clients from classes to Employment or Independence

The “**Introduction of Office Administration**” program has just ended; so Rebecca is looking forward to the 3-month follow-up to see the results!

Quote

“At the YMCA Learning Services, we believe that the most powerful and natural way of learning is through experience. We provide our students a safe and supportive environment to try practical tasks they will find in the workplace or in the community first-hand. They are encouraged to experiment, play and make mistakes! Through experiential learning, people are given the skills and confidence to be successful in any environment.”