Toolkit of Resources

to Support Service Delivery
for Hard-to-Serve Clients
in Literacy and Basic Skills Agencies

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Acknowledgments

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Community Literacy of Ontario would like to thank Joyce Bigelow and staff from Connections Adult Learning for the research and development of this timely and informative resource.
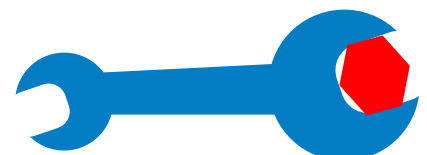
The *Toolkit of Resources to Support Service Delivery for Hard-to-Serve Clients in Literacy and Basic Skills Agencies* was circulated in March 2016 and is freely available on Community Literacy of Ontario's website. All information and web links provided in this toolkit were accurate at the time of publication.

Toolkit for Working with Hard-to-Serve Clients

Introduction

Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) has been asked by its members to provide support to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies that are delivering services to clients facing a multitude of challenges. These clients are often referred to as "hard-to-serve" or "vulnerable".

To meet our members' request, CLO has produced this special resource, a toolkit of resources, tips and sample tools that are currently being used with success in LBS agencies across the province. This toolkit is intended to enhance the capacity of LBS practitioners to meet the needs of hard-to-serve clients. To provide tips and tools that have proven to be effective, these resources have been obtained through discussions and research with agencies who are dealing with these "hard-to-serve" or "vulnerable" clients on a daily basis.

So take some time, grab yourself a beverage and read through this toolkit. Visit the recommended resources and think about how they could be used in your program with vulnerable clients. Consider adapting and using the sample tools to make them work to your clients' advantage. Happy reading!

> **toolkit** /ˈtuːlˌkɪt/
> noun
>
> 1. a set of tools designed to be used together or for a particular purpose
> 2. software designed to perform a specific function, especially to solve a problem
>
> **from Dictionary.com**

What is a Toolkit?

Our toolkit is made up of a number of tools – tips, sample tools and resource suggestions – to help you solve problems when working with hard-to-serve learners.

As you know, many great ideas, approaches and tools come directly from the literacy field. The ideas in this toolkit are no exception. They were developed or suggested by LBS practitioners and drawn together into this kit by Community Literacy of Ontario.

We hope that this toolkit provides literacy practitioners with information, strategies, sample tools and suggested resources that you might find useful in your literacy agency.

What is a "Hard-to-serve" Client?

This toolkit has been developed to enhance the capacity of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) practitioners to understand and meet the needs of hard-to-serve clients. But, just what do we mean by "hard-to-serve"? These are the adults who face multiple barriers that hinder their ability to reach their training goals. It is not that the clients themselves are difficult; rather that their personal circumstances often require more intensive and multifaceted training and supports to help them move on to their goals. The hard-to-serve are the vulnerable adults discussed in Essential Skills Ontario's 2015 Service Providers' Perceptions of the Challenges of Delivering Services to Vulnerable Adults in Ontario survey.

And the Survey Says...

In 2015, Essential Skills Ontario conducted an online survey of people representing organizations from across the Employment Ontario network. The majority of respondents were from Literacy and Basic Skills delivery agencies. The *Service Providers' Perceptions of the Challenges of Delivering Services to Vulnerable Adults in Ontario* survey highlighted these observations pertaining to this client group:

- Having less than high school education is the most common feature of vulnerable or distant-from-employment clients
- A large proportion of clients belong to two or more vulnerable groups
- The most cited source of income for vulnerable clients is Ontario Works (OW) with Ontario Disability Support Plan (ODSP) being the second most cited source of income
- A significant percentage of clients are long-term unemployed (for six months or more)
- Low motivation among vulnerable adults is a major challenge in service delivery, with the suggestion that this may stem from other barriers, which make it difficult for clients to prioritize skills training
- Service providers are overwhelmed by the complex nature of service delivery to vulnerable clients. The majority of respondents (82%) find service referral challenging in some way.

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Employment Ontario Suitability

Hard-to-serve adults are also the learners that are considered most "suitable" for Literacy and Basic Skills services by Employment Ontario. According to the *Literacy and Basic Skills Service Provider Guidelines (June 2015) "t*he Suitability/Learner Profile measure considers identified learner barriers to achieving learning goals…[ensuring] that the service providers are providing services to clients who are most in need of LBS services." "Suitability criteria include:

- Learning performance: characteristics of a learner, which may affect learning performance, such as language, disability, education level.
- Motivation and study habits: characteristics of a learner which may result in motivational challenges or study habit issues, such as length of time away from formal education, history of interrupted education.
- Demographics: characteristics of a learner which have been identified as barriers to learning such as age, level of education attained, source of income support."

Looking at the Detailed Service Quality Ontario Rollup (December 2015) suitability factors statistics, one notes:

- almost 50% of clients are either on OW/ODSP or have no source of income
- more than 50% of clients have been out of education for more than 6 years and almost 40% have been more than 6 years without training
- more than 50% of clients have had a history of interrupted education

Considering all these factors, we have focused our toolkit on five key areas:

- Not Ready to Work with Employment Services
- Lack of a High School Diploma
- Returning to School
- Learner Persistence
- Community Service Referral Sources

Each topic area will focus on addressing key challenges most often associated with serving hard-to-serve clients. Suggestions and resources are provided throughout to enhance your capacity to serve this often challenging client group.

Not Ready to Work with Employment Services

In this section of the toolkit, we will offer some help in working with those on Ontario Works (OW), those on the Ontario Disability Supports Program (ODSP), or those with no source of income. As it is not the job of Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers to get clients jobs, we are particularly focussing on those clients who are not yet ready to work with Employment Services.

To start us off, here are a few tips from the staff at Kingston Literacy and Skills:

- "Often, it is a self-esteem issue, and a sense that they are not able to get and keep a job. By helping them to **increase both their academic skills and self-esteem**, they will often recognize they can work without our intervention. Also, just by our **always having the expectation of them that they will be moving on to further education or employment,** it helps them recognize that if we believe they can, they obviously can."

- "If a student really has no idea what area of employment they are interested in, we usually **give them a bit of time**, then when they are more stable academically **recommend something like Career Cruising**, if they still have no idea what they want to do. Once a student has a sense of what area they would like to work in, it is easier for them to get motivated about their schoolwork. It is important **not to rush** this though, and to **allow students a chance to explore**."

- "We have **solid partnerships with some really good Employment Service agencies**, and sometimes ask them to help our students figure out areas of employment they might get work in."

Working Towards Employment in Steps

Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) developed a set of seven workbooks that embed Essential Skill activities within employment-readiness tasks. The topics of the seven *Connecting Literacy and Employment through Essential Skills* (2011) books reflect the steps people take when looking for a job.

1. Essential Skills to Identify the Job Searcher
2. Essential Skills to Identify the Job
3. Essential Skills to Research Your Occupation
4. Essential Skills to Search for Jobs
5. Essential Skills to Market Yourself with a Resume and Cover Letter
6. Essential Skills to Market Yourself at the Interview
7. Essential Skills to Maintain Employability

LLSC recommends that the resources be used as an ordered series from 1 to 7, but that if someone doesn't need the information in every workbook, they can choose the pieces that are right for them. They also recommend that the resources be used in a facilitated group setting, as many exercises include working with other people.

These resources help learners improve both their employment search and maintenance skills while strengthening their Essential Skills. They are excellent when used along with referrals to Ontario Employment Services where the LBS skills training can receive application. The *Connecting Literacy and Employment through Essential Skills* (2011) series is freely downloadable.

A Unique Resource

More and more Employment Service agencies are providing workshops to assist clients with job search. YouTube and other Internet video sources provide tips and instruction on work-related information. Many workplaces are now training their staff using videos, online tutorials, webinars and podcasts. However, many adult literacy learners are not ready for this type of learning. Because of this, Project READ developed a curriculum designed to teach the skills for extracting information from films, broadcasts and presentations.

A3 and The Employment Path Instructor Manual and Learner's Workbook covers more than how to view an online video or listen to a podcast. It also looks at evaluating and using the information in these formats, including: strategies for finding main ideas, listening carefully, understanding figurative language, separating fact from opinion, using thinking styles, using memory and taking notes. Both the instructor's manual and workbook are available for free download.

Why Would I Get a Job When I Am on OW/ODSP?

One challenge that is often voiced by LBS providers is that many OW and ODSP clients feel it is not worth their while to work, especially in entry-level jobs. One way to counteract this feeling is to help the learner to research the benefits of working while on OW and/or ODSP. For example: help them to find, possibly download, and read information sheets published by the Ministry of Community and Social Services (MCSS) about earning while on benefits. At the time of publishing this toolkit, the following articles were available:

- As an Ontario Works client: When you earn money while on Ontario Works
- How Ontario Works can help you: Employment activities
- ODSP employment supports: Preparing for work, finding work and advancing my career

> "Many folks on OW/ODSP are not aware that they are capable of so much more. There are a number of them that have had unfortunate life and school experiences which disrupted their success. It is our role to encourage and assist those with the capability to manage full time employment or college. Conversely we need to help others find purposeful roles – part time or volunteer in our communities and to develop sound skills to do those jobs well and with great pride." A Kingston Literacy and Skills Practitioner

Tips for Success

Community Literacy of Ontario collected information about effective resources, strategies, and partnerships to engage Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program clients in Literacy and Basic Skills programming.

Through conducting Internet research, having discussions with literacy colleagues, hosting two Tweet Chats, holding two webinars, and via social media sharing, we learned about many helpful resources. Based on this research, we created our "*Tips for Success*" guide, which annotates 40 helpful resources for supporting OW and ODSP clients in your literacy program.
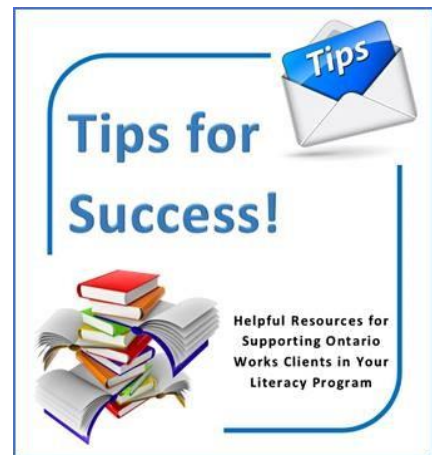
You can download "*Tips for Success*" at: www.communityliteracyofontario.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/Tips-for-Success-2016.pdf

Other Resources

- Our Choice, Your Future - Employment Video Series (2014-2015) Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA)
- Targeted Literacy Programming and Outreach for Young Single Males on Ontario Works (2013) Literacy Link South Central

Lack of High School Diploma

As we said earlier, a majority of Literacy and Basic Skills learners do not have a high school diploma. Certainly completing high school is an excellent choice, but is it always the best choice? There are other alternatives, depending on the overall goal. Some of the following tools highlight those choices and provide help for learners to make informed choices.

Ontario's Pathways to Post-Secondary Education for Adult Learners Poster and Guide
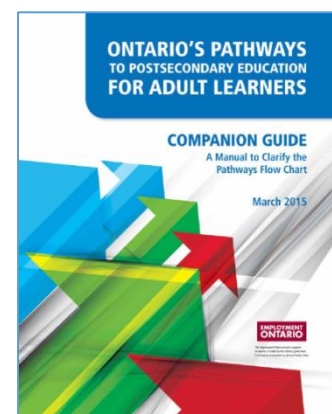
Ontario's Pathways to Post-Secondary Education for Adult Learners poster and guide were produced in 2015 by the Literacy Network of Durham Region (LiNDR). The colourful poster provides an easy-to-follow flow chart of four routes to post-secondary education:

- Ontario Secondary School Credit Program

- Academic and Career Entrance Program (ACE)

- General Educational Development (GED)

- Mature Student Status
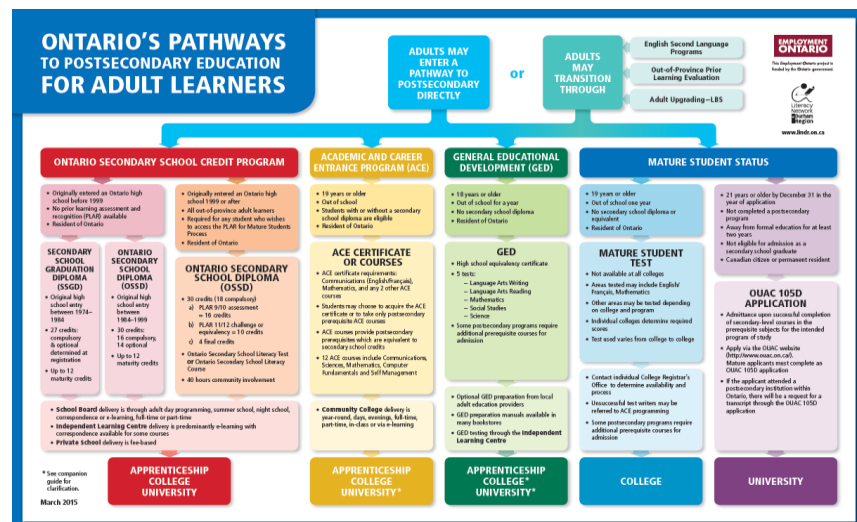
There is also a 41-page _Companion Guide, A Manual to Clarify the Pathways Flow Chart_. The second section of this manual discusses adults who are transitioning to one of the pathways through programs such as Literacy and Basic Skills.

The ledger-size poster and its companion guide are available for free download at www.lindr.on.ca/pathways.htm.

Pros & Cons of Ontario Pathways to Postsecondary Education for Adult Learners

The following quick sheet, Pros and Cons of Ontario Pathways to Postsecondary Education for Adult Learners, was developed by Connections Adult Learning.

Pros & Cons of Ontario Pathways to Postsecondary Education for Adult Learners

Track	Pros	Cons	Considerations
OSSD	- recognized/ understood throughout Canada - can be done in classroom, by correspondence or online	- if entered secondary school 1999-2000 or later, they will need 30 credits to graduate – they may be able to gain some credits through PLAR and Challenge but they will need to complete at least 4 credits - if entered secondary school between 1984-1985 to 1998-1999, they will need 30 credits to graduate - they may be able to gain some credits through life and work experience - if they entered secondary school between 1974-1975 to 1983-1984, they will need 27 credits to graduate – they may be able to gain some credits through life and work experience	- will the student be successful with the OSS compulsory credit requirements? - does the student have prior learning to be eligible for most or all of the 10 possible senior equivalent credits? - will need to write OSS Literacy Test or take OSS Literacy Course and complete 40 hours of community service if entered secondary school 1999-2000 or after - make sure courses are taken at the level needed to meet prerequisites for college or university programs

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ACE Certificate	- recognized by all Ontario Community Colleges as equivalent to OSSD for purposes of registering in college certificate or diploma program - recognized by Apprenticeship as meeting the academic requirements to register - only 4 credits – may only need to do the English credit to get into a college program - can be done online or in classroom	- not well known by all employers and therefore may not be seen as meeting hiring and/or promotion criteria	
GED	- don't need to take any credit courses - high school equivalency certificate provided by Ministry of Education - recognized/understood by numerous agencies throughout Canada & U.S.	- 1 ½ days of tests in 4 areas - $100 initial fee plus rewrite fee for any test failed - not accepted by all employers or community colleges or universities - need to be very self-motivated	- only 1 ½ days to write the test but preparation is both intensive and extensive - may still need to take OSSD or ACE courses to get into specific college or university program
Mature Student Status	- relatively quick way to gain entrance into college or university provided your English and/or math skills are good	- write an academic achievement test - fee to write test	- students may be required to successfully complete prerequisite courses (OSSD or ACE) to get into program - may be limited to part-time studies in general program at universities until they achieve a certain number of credits at 60% or higher

Developed by J. Tysick from content sourced from: Ontario's Pathways to Post-Secondary Education for Adult Learners www.lindr.on.ca/resources/PathwaysCompanionGuide.pdf

Returning to Education

Often returning to any kind of education, whether Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) upgrading, returning to high school for credit programming or moving on to post-secondary education, can be a decision full of obstacles for which the learner is not prepared. Helping learners to address these challenges will increase their ability to stay on track and to succeed.

One way to look at the various positives and negatives and the various forces affecting a proposed change like returning to school is a Force Field Analysis. This can help learners look at the big picture, analyze all the forces and weigh the pros and cons. Once they know the obstacles, they can develop strategies to reduce them and they can seek or strengthen supporting forces.

The following visual might be helpful in explaining these concepts:

Force Field Analysis can be used to develop an action plan to implement change. Specifically, it can . . .

1. Determine if a proposed change can get needed support
2. Identify obstacles to successful solutions
3. Suggest actions to reduce the strength of the obstacles

Iowa State University
www.extension.iastate.edu/communities/force-field-analysis

RETURNING TO SCHOOL FORCE FIELD ANALYSIS

FOR (PROS) — Returning to school — AGAINST (CONS) — POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
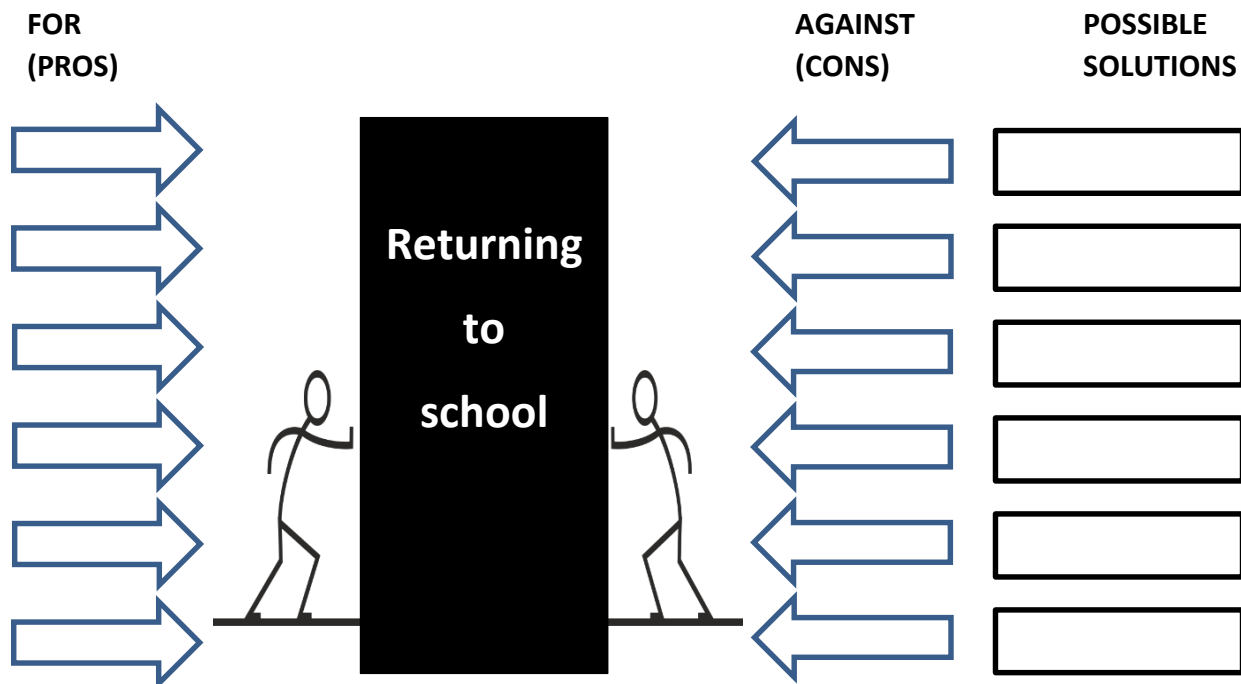
Helping learners see the benefits to attending upgrading programs can come from testimonials from other learners. These can come from learners in your program or from videos such as the *Learning to Earning* videos (2015) from Tri-County Literacy http://tcln.on.ca/videos. These real stories about returning to school for upgrading showcase how and why literacy/adult upgrading can be part of one's future success. The four videos are of various lengths and are intended for different audiences which make them useful for a variety of purposes.

Some additional tips can be found in the following "Returning to School as an Adult" handout tool:

Returning to School as an Adult

Are you ready to go back to school or training?

Going back to upgrade your skills is a big decision. There are many reasons why adults may want to return to school. For example: planning a career change; needing to upgrade skills to get a job or promotion; getting a high school credit or diploma; starting a college or apprenticeship program; or enrolling in an adult literacy program to learn or improve skills.

There are a few things you might want to consider before going back to school:

- Figure out your reasons for returning to school.

- Make a list of the pros and cons – the "forces" for and against returning to school.

- Think about the time commitment and energy involved in taking classes.

- Find out if there are any expenses and what supports are available.

- Look into different programs to find the right fit.

- Decide whether you would rather go part time, full time, or take online classes.

Before You Start

You may feel nervous or uncertain about going back to school; it may feel like you are in unknown territory. Get as much information as you can before you start classes, to make you feel more comfortable.

- Schedule a classroom visit or attend an admission event for adult learners.

- Make an appointment with one of the instructors who support adult learners. They can help you decide if this is the right decision for you and help you with the registration process.

- Make a list of any previous schools or learning centres you attended, and if possible, order a copy of your transcripts.

- Register for classes.

Facing the Challenges

You may face many challenges that younger students don't:

- You often have to plan ways to juggle a job, family, and school responsibilities.

- You may worry that you don't have good study skills and that you will fail.

- You might have to consider how you can afford to go to school.

- You may be intimidated by the thought of being in a classroom.

- You may need to figure out your transportation.

Despite all these challenges, many adults decide to attend school and succeed.

Making It Work

Here are some tips to help you be successful in your learning.

- Try a casual lower-pressure program, where you can work at your own pace and get one on one instruction.

- Determine your learning style. This will help you and your instructor figure out how you learn best.

- Start on a part-time basis rather than being overwhelmed with going every day.

- Think positively. Find things you have in common with other learners and celebrate the differences.

- Have a quiet place at home to study. Get help if you need it. Don't get stressed if you can't finish.

- Talk with your family about how going back to school will affect home life and changes that might occur. Create a school schedule so everyone knows when you are at school and working at home. Do your homework while your kids are doing theirs; it will help keep you all on track.

- Make time for yourself.

- Expect to feel some stress. Learners of all ages do. Talk with your instructor about it.

- Keep focused on your short and long-term goals.

- Don't get discouraged or give up. Take it one challenge at a time.

Learner Persistence

Motivation and "stay-with-it-ness" seem to be major challenges for learners in LBS programs. So how can we improve learner persistence?

Strategies to Support At Risk Students Checklist

Literacy London has put together the following list of Strategies to Support At Risk Students. This helpful checklist addresses possible early reasons for exit and some steps you can take to reduce the risk of early exit.

Strategies to Support At Risk Students

Learner: _____   Staff: _____   Date: _____

Possibility of Early Reasons for Exit

☐ Enrolled involuntarily (requirement for income support, probation/parole)
☐ Shows lack of interest in learning
☐ Effort required to achieve goal is not evident
☐ Reports financial, childcare, transportation issues
☐ Is frequently absent
☐ Does not accept responsibility for consequences of own behaviour
☐ Exhibits disruptive behaviour
☐ Exhibits negative attitude toward policies, work assigned, other learners, tutors and staff
☐ Reports legal, health, addictions, emotional, work issues
☐ Reports life changes (divorce, baby, death, move, marriage)
☐ Has history of starting/stopping programs or jobs

Steps Taken to Reduce Risk of Early Exit

☐ Received clear orientation to program policies
☐ Received, and agreed to, written program expectations
☐ Curriculum ensured success early in the learning process to build confidence
☐ Given ongoing opportunities to provide feedback on training program, goal setting
☐ Given regular, positive feedback for appropriate learning behaviour
☐ Given verbal attendance warnings
☐ Given written attendance warnings
☐ Received information on wraparound services, as required, to support successful outcomes
☐ Program modified/accommodations made to assist with retention
☐ Staff spent extra time meeting with learner to address concerns
☐ Goals and timelines set were clear, reachable and measurable

Potential Barriers to Learning Chart

Spending some time discussing learners' issues and their challenges/barriers is another way to help learners continue with their learning. Connections Adult Learning has created a list of Potential Barriers to Learning that can help learners consider in what areas they are facing roadblocks. After discussion with their practitioner, some potential supports/solutions that might be explored can be entered in the second column.

Potential Barriers to Learning

Learner _____

Issues	Comments/Possible Supports
❑ Medical Health	Support Examples: local health unit, local health clinics, Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0007, www.mayoclinic.org
❑ Mental Health	
❑ Addictions	
❑ Disability(ies)	
❑ No source of income	
❑ Budgeting	
❑ Debt	
❑ Class scheduling	

Issues	Comments/Possible Supports
❑ Course offerings	
❑ Location	
❑ Technology	
❑ Transportation	
❑ Child care	
❑ Family responsibilities	
❑ Language	
❑ Not enough time	
❑ Work responsibilities	
❑ Just need a job	`
❑ View on Learning	

Ongoing Client Questionnaire

Connections Adult Learning (CAL) also finds it helpful to check in regularly with learners during the training period to get the learners' opinions on how the program is going. This is a copy of CAL's Ongoing Learner Questionnaire:

Ongoing Client Questionnaire

Please take the time to answer these questions. Your answers will help to improve our programs.

Today's Date: _____

Name of Program: ❑ Computer Training

   ❑ Literacy & Basic Skills

Site: ❑ Northbrook   ❑ Sharbot Lake

How long have you been a part of this program? _____

How often do you attend? _____ Hours per week

---

1 Do you feel that you are working towards your short and long-term goals?

   ❑ Yes   ❑ Mostly   ❑ A little   ❑ Not at all

   If not, what goals would you like to achieve? _____

   _____

2 Have you helped decide the steps in your Training Plan?

   ❑ Yes   ❑ Mostly   ❑ A little   ❑ Not at all

3 Are you satisfied with the plan developed for you?   ❑ Yes   ❑ No

4 Do you know what to do if you are unhappy with any part of our services?   ❑ Yes   ❑ No

5 Are the place, timing and quality of your training okay?   ❑ Yes   ❑ No

6 Do you need information or help in any of the following areas? (Please check all that apply)

   ❑ Counselling   ❑ Finances   ❑ Job search skills

   ❑ Other community services   ❑ Other educational programs

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7 Are you satisfied with other issues such as confidentiality, privacy, individual respect, etc.?

   ❑ Always   ❑ Often   ❑ Rarely   ❑ Never

8 What resources or activities have been included in your program? (Please circle all that apply)

❑ Resource books/Textbooks/Workbooks   ❑ Newspapers
❑ Information sheets   ❑ Computers
❑ Internet   ❑ Local resources
❑ Real-life activities, role-play or placements   ❑ Peer work/groups
❑ Other: _____

9 What else would you like included? _____

10 Does the centre have enough suitable resources?   ❑ Yes   ❑ No

   If not, please specify_____

11 Do the activities match to your interests and goals?   ❑ Yes   ❑ No

12 Do you feel you are making progress?

   ❑ Always   ❑ Often   ❑ Rarely   ❑ Never

   How do you know you are making progress? _____

   _____

13 Apart from your lessons, would you like to take part in other activities, such as:

a) Meetings to talk about our programs   ❑ Yes   ❑ No   ❑ Don't know
b) Peer tutoring   ❑ Yes   ❑ No   ❑ Don't know
c) Writing or newsletter groups   ❑ Yes   ❑ No   ❑ Don't know
d) Board of Directors   ❑ Yes   ❑ No   ❑ Don't know
e) Other, please explain _____

14 What things have changed in your life as a result of coming to our centre? _____

_____

15 What suggestions do you have to improve the program?

_____

16 Have you, or would you refer anyone to our centre?   ❑ Yes   ❑ No

   Why? _____

17 Any final comments?_____

_____

Name (optional) _____

Training Session Recap

After learner plan reviews, Kingston Literacy and Skills (KL&S) sends the student an online survey to reaffirm what was discussed in the session. Some of the questions help determine if further supports are necessary and help the learner to feel that they have a voice if there are problems:

- I know that if I need information about community services or programs, KL&S staff are happy to help me. (yes/no)
- I know that if I am having difficulty getting to my classes, I should discuss it with my teacher. (yes/no)
- I know that if I have any concerns or questions, I can always ask a staff member at KL&S. (yes/no)

> "In terms of teaching: Keep instruction brief with learner involvement (not just teacher directed). Not just oral – use a PowerPoint or a whiteboard. DEMONSTRATE ALWAYS."
>
> A Kingston Literacy & Skills Practitioner

Building the Soft Skills

Certainly helping learners build their own "soft skills", such as self-management, goal setting, organization, time-management and problem solving, will help them carry through or persist in their learning along with other things in life. Laubach Literacy Ontario (LLO) has produced five modules to assist learners with various aspects required to manage their own learning. All modules in the series focus on different aspects of soft skills. The modules are:

- Managing Myself Module A
- Managing Myself Module B
- Personal Learning Styles and Goal Setting
- Organization and Time Management
- Problem Solving

Each module has a Practitioner Overview and PowerPoints. There are Learner Workbooks with copies of the slides and activities for each session. There is also a draft Learner Plan Template outlining suggested Milestones from the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework and a sampling of the Learning Activities.

LLO says the modules may be used individually or partnered with other modules into a series. Each module has several sessions which you can also mix and match to develop your own workshop(s) according to the needs of the learners.

All the various parts of the modules may be downloaded free of charge from the Laubach Literacy of Ontario bookstore in the LLO Publications section at www.laubach-on.ca/bookstore/llo-publications. You may also order them already printed for a small cost.

Best Practices

In 2015, the Western Region MTCU office identified programs that they considered champions in, among other areas, Completion of Goal Path and Learner Progress. The Western Region support organizations collaborated to interview these champions and, based on the information and insights shared by these champions, created Tip Sheets, transcripts and recordings of the interviews. We particularly recommend the Best Practices Tip Sheet for Learner Progress for some pointers on learner persistence. You can access these helpful resources online via the website of the Learning Networks of Ontario.
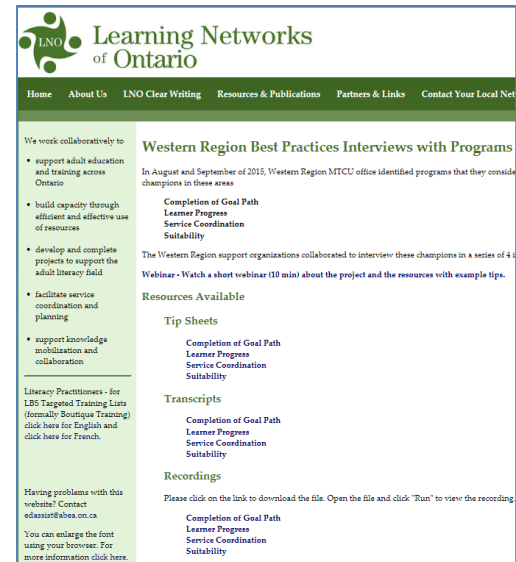
Another example of using best practices is Prince Edward Learning Cente's (PELC) highly successful "Community Connects" project. The goal of the United Way funded project was to improve retention for LBS learners who are considered at high risk of dropping out. To gather best practice strategies, PELC used three of Community Literacy of Ontario's (CLO) *Our Voice* newsletters: Vulnerable Populations (January 2015), Youth - Young Adults and Literacy (October 2014) and Literacy + OW: Best Practices for Serving Ontario Works Clients (October 2013). PELC used the following CLO identified strategies as best practices when working to support retention:

- Reduce physical barriers related to basic needs
- Offer wraparound services
- Formally connect academic and non-academic outcomes
- Offer contextualized literacy programming
- Provide ongoing motivation
- Set realistic expectations

Clear Goals and Learner Plans

Kingston Literacy and Skills (KL&S) finds that it is important that the learners have clear, SMART goals. They use a SMART Goals handout to help them discuss how having these goals makes it easier to plan and achieve the steps to their learning and overall goal.

In your small group intake session, one of the things you will be asked to provide is your SMART goal. What is a SMART goal? It is a goal that is:

Specific
Measurable
Achievable
Realistic
Time specific/sensible

"GOALS ARE DREAMS WITH DEADLINES."
~ Diana Scharf Hunt

Specific: Try to be as specific or exact as you can be. For instance, if you say you want a job in computers, that is a bit vague. It could mean programming, selling, networking, designing or working on one in an office. The clearer you are about this, the easier it will be to figure out the steps to take to achieve your goal.

Measurable: It is good to have an idea of the steps you will need to take to reach your goal. Sometimes goals can seem out of reach, but if you break them down into specific steps, it is easier to believe you can achieve them. What are the steps you need to reach your goal?

Achievable: It is great to have exciting goals, but as adults, we also have to be sure these goals are realistic. Are you going to be able to complete the steps you have thought about to reach your goal? If not, maybe it is possible to pick a related, but more realistic goal. An example of this would be a 60 year old person with a Grade 6 education deciding they want to be a medical doctor. A more achievable goal might be to become a Personal Support Worker.

Realistic: Again, it is great to have exciting goals, but are they realistic? Wanting to be a mega movie star within a year when you have no acting experience, no contacts, and no funds is not too realistic. Getting a role with a local theatre group might be more realistic, and finding work that can pay your living expenses in the meantime a nice sideline.

Time specific/sensible: In the example given for achievable goals, that 60 year old might be able to become a doctor, BUT it would probably take about 15 years (high school, university undergraduate degree, Medical School, internship, residency). Does it make sense for them to go to all that trouble for a career that might only last them a few years? Probably not. Let's keep our goals specific and sensible.

You don't have to have all the answers when you come to your intake appointment, but please think about these points, and come to your session ready to plan ahead!

KL&S practitioners feel that clear learner plans help learners continue to work towards their learning goals. "When it is possible, we give a student a very clear learner plan that outlines the steps they need to achieve their goals, so that they can 'follow along' and understand their progress. For students with clear goal paths, we have rubrics in English outlining the specific assignments and activities they will engage in (understanding that additional material may be added if they have areas of weakness)."

"During their intake appointment (after assessment, but before classes start), we work through the following form with the student and highlight during that session any barriers and solutions to them that may be helpful. During the initial learner plan review a couple of weeks later, we let the student know that at any time, if they are having difficulties that could impact on their ability to learn effectively, they can always ask a staff member for guidance."

Goal-Directed Learner Plan

Name: _____   Date: _____

SMART Goal Statement
(**S**pecific **M**easurable **A**ttainable **R**ealistic and **T**ime-specific)

When I am all done my training, both at KL&S and after, I would like to be a...

_____

Goal Path (next step goal, achievable after your upgrading program at KL&S):

☐ Employment   ☐ Apprenticeship (includes PSW)   ☐ Secondary School (includes College Prep)   ☐ Post Secondary   ☐ Independence

☐ I visited _____ educational institution/agency website

☐ I visited Essential Skills Profile website, and looked at the E.S. profile for _____

Steps towards achieving smart goal and time frame		
Step #	**Action**	**Expected Start Date**
Step 1		
Step 2		
Step 3		
Step 4		

Additional supports required to overcome barriers:

☐ Transportation   ☐ Childcare   ☐ High School Transcript

☐ Employment Counseling   ☐ Counselling (Other)   ☐ Other issue

Strategy to address barriers: _____

_____

Short Term Goal Statement: I will know I am ready for my next step when I...

- have solid sentence, paragraph, correspondence and essay writing structure and reading skills (English)

- can add, subtract, multiply, and can do long division, fractions, decimals, percents and Metric (Math)

- can type up a basic assignment, navigate on the Internet, and send an email (Computers)

- have exhibited excellent and consistent attendance and can work independently

- completed at least these required Milestone Tasks_____

_____ and my final Culminating Task.

Additional areas of personal interest: _____

Comments or notes: _____

_____

_____

I understand and agree with the plan we have outlined together:

_____   _____
            (Name)   (Name)

_____   _____
            (Date)   (Date)

Community Service Referral Sources

As we said in the introduction, many Literacy and Basic Skills practitioners find it difficult and time consuming to locate other services in their communities that can help support learners to persist and succeed at learning.

Perhaps the most useful information service in the province is 211 Ontario. "211 is the source Canadians trust when seeking information and services to deal with life's challenges. 211's award-winning telephone helpline (dial 2-1-1) and website (www.211ontario.ca) provide a gateway to community, social, non-clinical health and related government services." (www.211ontario.ca/basic-page/about)

Connections Adult Learning worked with the other agencies in their community to create an interagency directory for referral information between front-line staff. Blank forms were circulated amongst the agencies and a final directory put together. Each year the electronic version is returned to each agency for updates and a new version gets circulated. Keep in mind that when you develop your own directory, you can add as much or as little detail as you think is relevant. This is a sample based on the Connections Adult Learning interagency directory:

Agency Name	Services Provided	Service Area	Contact Name	Phone/ Fax	Email
ABC Transportation Service	ABC links residents of South, Central and North XXXX Community Services who require transportation with volunteer drivers who will take them to and from their destinations.	The whole of South, Central and North XXXX Townships	Hugo Freely, Coordinator	Ph: 111-111-1111 FAX: 222-222-2222	ABC@ABC.ca
Youth Temporary Housing	Support for youth needing temporary housing For a full list of programs and services please see www.YTH.ca or call 1.800.333.3333	ABC & DEF Counties	Justin Time, Regional Support Coordinator	333-333-3333 1-800-333-3333	JT@YTF.ca
EFG Women's Program	EFG provides mobile outreach counselling and court support for women subject to domestic abuse.	South County	Ivanna Help, Community Counsellor	1-877-444-4444	IHelp@EFG.ca

COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO

Kingston Literacy and Skills (KL&S) maintains regular contact with other community agencies by hosting events where agencies can come and introduce their programs and services. Sometimes these are for staff only, sometimes these are for students and staff. "In this way, the other agencies get to know us, so that when we make referrals, they know we have a clear understanding of their programs and services, so it is likely it is a suitable referral." KL&S staff

We are all well informed about community programs and services, and are happy to help students connect with other agencies. We also inform them that we all sign confidentiality agreements, so we will not share their information without their consent. That is really important because students are more likely to ask for help if they know their business remains private.

Kingston Literacy and Skills Practitioner

Conclusion

It is challenging for Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) service providers to meet the many diverse needs of the often "hard-to-serve" clients. There is no "one size fits all" tool or resource. Sometimes it's a combination of tools and supports. This toolkit provides a great sampling of the many resources that are currently available to get you started in the right direction.

We would like to know if there are other resources that you think should be shared with the LBS field. Please share any thoughts, tips or resources by emailing Community Literacy of Ontario at info@communityliteracyofontario.ca.