

Building Connections Between LBS Agencies and Employers:

Challenges in Connecting Employers to Learners

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Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills programs serve many adult learners with employment goals. To support these learners, LBS programs often build relationships with local employers in order to connect learners with employment opportunities. Supporting adult learners with employment goals has long been a top priority and keen focus of literacy educators.

Because of the importance of supporting learners with employment goals, Community Literacy of Ontario has researched and published three factsheets to take a closer look at the barriers, challenges, and promising practices involved in supporting learners with employment goals.

CLO's Connecting LBS Agencies and Employers Factsheets cover the following topics:

- 1. Barriers to Employment Faced by Learners**
- 2. Challenges in Connecting Employers to Learners**
- 3. Strategies & Promising Practices**



Introduction

Adult learners with employment goals can face many different barriers while completing their LBS training, or while attempting to connect with employers and secure employment. Adult learners can also face multiple barriers, a mix of the following, along with other barriers that may not be included in the list. The following are the most commonly reported barriers to employment faced by adult learners in CLO's Building Bridges Report [Building Bridges Report](#).

Mental and Physical Health

Mental and physical health can sometimes be a significant barrier for adult learners with employment goals. To be able to achieve their life stabilization goals, LBS learners facing physical and/or mental health issues often require additional supports and flexibility. This could mean that a person cannot commit to full time work, or needs time off to attend medical or therapy appointments, which limits their ability to gain or retain employment. Without both in place, mental and physical health becomes a particularly challenging barrier preventing LBS learners from connecting with employers.

For example, mental and physical health issues mean learners need accommodations. They are unable to do certain types of work, or are unable to work full-time.

Lack of Education or Skills

A common requirement for employment is a Grade 12 education but many LBS staff reported that a lack of education was a common barrier for adult learners. Therefore, completing a GED or grade 12 equivalent is a goal that many adult learners work towards when they have employment goals. In addition to educational attainment, learners can also experience skills gaps such as essential skills, soft skills, digital literacy, and life skills. These social and life skills are required for employment and can impact a person's ability to retain employment if they are lacking in these skills.

For example, a credential (Grade 12) is required as standards change in the workplace, even though the learner has been employed in that job for years. They will lose their job if they do not get their Grade 12 diploma quickly.

Poverty

The most reported barrier for adult learners is poverty. It is a significant obstacle when connecting learners to employers, especially if the learner faces multiple other barriers as well. Poverty impacts all areas of a person's life, including their basic needs like housing and food security. For a learner with employment goals, it can be difficult to secure child care or transportation which are often necessary to gaining employment.

For example, an older single learner is living in poverty, facing hunger due to rooming in a multi-family home when food banks do not allow more than one "house" to register.

Childcare

For many parents, childcare can be difficult to attain for many different reasons and this can become a significant barrier for adult learners with employment goals. Parents can encounter many issues, such as the available childcare options being prohibitively expensive, a lack of childcare centres in the area, no spots or subsidized spots available, or childcare is not available during the learner's work shifts – such as overnight or shift work. This is especially true for single parents.

For example, there is no shift work focused childcare centre recognized by Ontario Works in an area with a hospitality focus (requiring evening and weekend work).

Access to Technology

Access to technology and low digital literacy skills create a significant barrier to adult learners with employment goals. People with lower digital literacy skills and a lack of access to digital technology will have a more difficult time securing employment because most job postings, applications, and communication with prospective employers happens online.

If a learner can't afford a computer and home Internet, or cannot gain access to a computer at a library, they cannot build their digital skills and connect with potential employers. Poverty can factor into a person's ability to afford a computer and Wi-Fi, while rural areas may not have public computers available.

Transportation

Rural areas and smaller towns often have little or no public transportation, or transportation between cities. Even in cities where public transportation is available, their routes and schedules do not always meet the needs of shift workers or parents who need to make additional lengthy trips for childcare, or pay additional fees for longer days of childcare.

This issue is compounded by poverty. Without the ability to purchase and maintain a vehicle, many learners are limited to subsidised public transit through Ontario Works or bus tickets available through their LBS program – but these may not always be available and are therefore not a reliable means of transportation to a job. Because transportation is most often the responsibility of the employee, it can become a significant barrier for adult learners.

For example, looking for work in a rural area limits your choices unless you have a vehicle for transportation. Distance and lack of mobility are barriers.

One of our adult learners was a 24-year-old who had not completed high school and had little work experience. We supported him to acquire credits to complete high school in our LBS program, and when he was ready, he undertook a placement in a local brewery in the kitchen. To get to work, we helped him find funding to purchase a bicycle so he could ride to work – a few km out of town. He received co-op credits while working and getting paid, and completed his high school.

He continued to struggle with mental health, and we assisted his employer in connecting him with ongoing counselling. He is in year 2 of employment, working there through COVID, with the brewery and is a valued member of the team.

- Success Story from an LBS Program

Rural Issues

Rural living can compound and complicate many of the barriers described previously. In rural areas these barriers can be more prevalent and more difficult to overcome. Lack of transportation, fewer jobs available, and a lack of support services and internet availability are common in rural areas. These barriers are often linked to each other, such as poverty, a lack of childcare, and a lack of transportation. It is difficult for adult learners to overcome several significant barriers when attempting to secure employment.

In addition to these barriers, learners in rural areas have also identified the challenge of “reputation”. The close-knit nature of the communities in rural towns means that everyone knows everyone else and gossip and private information can be spread quite quickly. Because of this, some LBS learners have struggled with moving past their past transgressions, or even rumours and opinions that have spread in their community.

Conclusion

The Factsheets to Help Build Bridges Between Employers and LBS were researched and written by Community Literacy of Ontario. CLO is a provincial network of community-based Literacy and Basic Skills agencies. We are located in Barrie, Ontario. You can learn more about our organization by visiting our website and by following us on Facebook and Twitter.

We hope that this series of three factsheets capture the barriers to employment faced by learners, the challenges in connecting employers and learners, and the strategies and promising practices currently being used by Ontario’s Literacy and Basic Skills programs. To learn more, read our full report: [Building Bridges for the Future Workforce](#).

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Our factsheets can be freely downloaded from CLO’s website at: www.communityliteracyofontario.ca.