Community Literacy of Ontario

Our Voice

Contact Hours

Community Literacy of Ontario has gathered information from agencies on strategies to increase contact hours in community literacy agencies. Many thanks to those agencies that shared their innovative ideas on this important topic! Always remember to keep the students' goals in mind when trying new activities. When in doubt about contact hours, consult the LBS Guidelines or ask your MTCU consultant for advice.

⇒ Recruit a "supply tutor" who fills in for tutors who are sick or on holidays
⇒ Set up a book club for students supervised by staff or a volunteer
⇒ Have tutors assist learners to get an email address through Hotmail or Excite, and then ask the tutors to work with the learners on basic email techniques.
⇒ Train a volunteer to conduct a small group session for both tutors and students on how to search the Internet. Tutors can then use the information obtained during the search to reinforce vocabulary and writing skills
⇒ Offer students the opportunity to take on extra work supervised by staff, volunteers or peers
⇒ Recruit two tutors for each learner so they can offer the student more hours and fill in for each other when one is not available
⇒ Offer a general interest workshop at your agency for all students to attend (resume writing, job search techniques, keeping a job, etc.)
⇒ Start a student reading circle supervised by staff or a volunteer
⇒ Offer flexible programming that uses various teaching methods that learners can relate to (classroom, one-to-one, small group, peer tutoring, computer-based and training modules linked to the LBS levels)
⇒ Offer a highly supportive, friendly and comfortable environment so that students will enjoy coming to your program and will refer family and friends
⇒ Offer small group instruction in addition to one-to-one tutoring (use CLO's *"Small Talk – A Resource Guide for Using Small Groups"*!)
⇒ Use AlphaRoute and other computer-based learning for both one-to-one and small group instruction
⇒ Support learners with computer-based learning, interactive software and the Internet—most learners really enjoy this!
⇒ Start a student computer club supervised by staff or a volunteer
⇒ Offer an "open night" at your agency each month—an evening when any student can come by with homework, forms or letters they need help with and receive support from staff, volunteers or peers
⇒ Hold a workshop about plant safety and upgrading at the local plant

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Success & Innovation

By Susan Taylor, The Learning Centre for Georgina

The Learning Centre for Georgina (LCG) is one of three community-based agencies delivering LBS Programs in York Region. Located in Keswick, LCG services the Town of Georgina, a large geographic area that includes Keswick, Sutton and Pefferlaw. Like many other small community-based LBS agencies in rural areas, the LCG Board and staff have struggled with responding to the many changes that came with program reform, and particularly with achieving the contact hours contracted in our Business Plan. By 1999, it became apparent to the Board and staff that innovation would have to be the name of the game!

In February of 2000, the Learning Centre for Georgina established *"The Learning Lab"*, a computer lab for our learners, which is used for teaching reading, writing, spelling, math and basic computer skills for literacy purposes. Our first step was to complete some interior site renovations to open up space for *"The Learning Lab"*. These renovations were completed in the fall of 1999, and the hardware and software were installed in early 2000. New computer tables and chairs in the lab have created an atmosphere that is inviting to learners.

An Instructional Assistant works 35 hours per week in the *"Learning Lab"* to assist with student assessments, training plan development, delivery of training, and progress reviews. He has participated in technical training regarding the operation and management of literacy specific software, and has become an integral part of the operation of the Learning Centre. As well, we have some tutors who have shown interest in learning about using the software with learners, and they have begun to assist learners in the lab.

We use two "high end" literacy software programs in our computer lab. Both *Destinations 2.0* and *SuccessMaker* are extremely popular with our students. A person is able to walk in off the street, fill out a Student Intake Form, have a computer assessment of literacy skills completed and begin working on computer assigned work, in areas of greatest weakness, all in the same day. As learners' goals and needs are clarified over the following weeks, so can the program be adapted to best meet their objectives. Learners get immediate feedback regarding their assignments and the program management system allows them to see the progress that they have made in an easy to understand format. A staff person is always available to monitor learner progress, to assist learners individually as they need help, and to provide additional practice exercises from paper-based resources as appropriate.

Implementation of *"The Learning Lab"* has provided an opportunity for students to access training on a flexible schedule that meets their various needs. As well, students can attend more frequently than they were able to with our previous, more traditional one-to-one tutoring program. In addition to meeting once a week with a tutor and attending a weekly small group session, students are now able

to schedule several sessions per week to use our literacy specific software programs. This means that learners can now attend LBS training for up to 25 hours per week. This is a phenomenal change from our traditional program of two-hours per week with a tutor.

One of our primary goals for the Computer Assisted Interactive Learning Lab was to increase our student "contact hours" in the LBS Program, while maintaining a level of service that met learners' needs and assisted learners to achieve their goals. To date, we have exceeded target expectations, realizing dramatic increases in student attendance. Our monthly contact hours have increased an average of 300% in a month-to-month comparison with 1999 statistics. As well, we have learners who are moving through our program within a shorter timeframe and progressing on to further training or employment.

"The Learning Lab" continues to grow. We are now completing further renovations to create a second small lab, in which we will set up five additional computers that we have received from the "Computers for Schools" Program. We are pleased to be involved as one of six research sites with the AlphaRoute Research Project, and have several students now accessing AlphaRoute from both on-site and off-site computers. In addition, we are using the lab for some ESL and GED Preparation Training, and for some fee-for-service programs for children and for adults.

**Visitors are always welcome to LCG and to *"The Learning Lab"*
Please feel free to call Susan Taylor at (905) 476-9900
E-mail: staylor@lcgeorgina.org**

More Innovative Ideas!
## Program Read's New Small Group Class

By Betty Ffrench, Program Read

At Program Read, Sault Ste. Marie, we are pleased to meet a need in our community by offering a new class for mental health service consumers. We collaborated with staff from the Canadian Mental Health Association's local clubhouse to write a successful proposal to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for $18,700 in funding for an instructor and resources. Program Read provides the instructor, assessments and volunteers, and CMHA provides facilities and staff support. Although Program Read does not count these contact hours, we are operating according to LBS guidelines, and hope that MTCU will support the program at the end of the Trillium funding period.
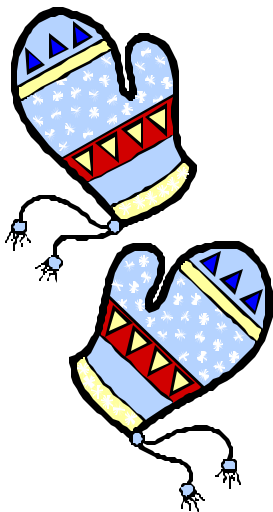
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More on Contact Hours

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⇒ Offer a supervised "open computer time" when students can receive support to work on learning activities and visit learning or job search sites on the Internet.
⇒ Recruit tutors who are specifically committed to tutoring at least four hours per week
⇒ Set up a small group targeted to Ontario Works clients
⇒ Offer students the chance to attend two one-to-one sessions per week
⇒ Recruit a volunteer to work with a small group of students to teach basic computer skills. Book each student for computer time when they can practice these skills
⇒ Train a volunteer to support a small group of learners to practice filling out job applications, compiling a resume, and matching career skills with advertised positions.
⇒ Hold a small group workshop on the writing process for learners who want to gain confidence in writing. Then work out strategies for each individual to begin the writing process. Encourage learners to help each other.

Strategies for recruiting learners!

As part of the discussion on contact hours, some agencies forwarded us excellent strategies for learner recruitment.

⇒ Recruit an "outreach tutor" in different parts of your service area who supports current tutors and recruits new tutors and students
⇒ Use a very visual poster with graphics and just a few simple words to market your agency
⇒ Get a local business to sponsor a weekly advertisement about your program in the TV Guide
⇒ Hold an annual book sale and have student volunteers market your agency by selling items they have made during learning activities
⇒ Maintain a very strong community presence (sit on various boards, get involved with service clubs, have a booth at community fairs, conferences and events and give presentations whenever possible)
⇒ Set up a "book corner" of second hand books for the community in general. When community members donate or pick up books, talk to them about your program.
⇒ Place brochures in the waiting rooms of optometrists, doctors, lawyers, pharmacies and community agencies
⇒ Develop excellent partnerships with Ontario Works, Employment Insurance, the Workers Safety Insurance Board and the Ontario Disability Support Program
⇒ Create business cards for students to give out