

# Building Connections Between LBS Agencies and Employers:

# Strategies & Promising Practices

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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

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LBS practitioners provide an important link between adult learners, employment and prospective employers. In addition to forging functional relationships with local employers, LBS practitioners also create strong relationships with Employment Services (ES), regional networks, provincial support organizations, and others. The following are the strategies and promising practices shared by LBS practitioners in CLO's [Building Bridges Report](#).

## Working with or Referring to Employment Services

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Making connections with Employment Services is a strategy that many LBS practitioners reported using. Many employment programs have supports for adult learners facing multiple barriers and will support learners with their individual employment goals. Employment services can support learners with job search skills training, attending job fairs, and more. A strong referral relationship with a local Employment Services office can provide many high value services to adult learners with employment goals.

## Offering Short-Term or Targeted Training

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LBS practitioners work to identify the specific needs of adult learners who have employment goals and create short-term targeted training that suits both the learner's goals and the needs of prospective employers. LBS practitioners must be aware of each employer's needs, regional industry changes, and create programming that supports adult learners with employment goals. This means that LBS practitioners provide highly targeted work-related training programming that suits these ever-changing requirements.

## Networking

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Networking with community members and organizations is an integral part of serving adult learners with employment goals. These relationships may include different individuals in different regions, but Chambers of Commerce, involvement in planning tables, and committees were reported as successful ways to advocate for adult learners. As well as with building relationships with local employers, LBS practitioners work to raise awareness of LBS programming and how it can help bridge the gap between adult learners and their employment goals.

## Promoting Volunteer Opportunities and Job Trials

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For many adult learners with employment goals they may not have work experience, or the right type of work experience. So while they may have completed the necessary training, on the job experience would greatly benefit their employment goals. To this end, LBS practitioners will connect with local businesses to provide volunteer opportunities, short-term work placements, and other workplace experience opportunities. These short-term placements benefit adult learners as well, because they can try out a new type of work to find out if it is a good fit for them, without the commitment of employment.

## Access to Technology

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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.*

*A multi-barriered learner would meet for one hour, one-to-one because she was so anxious. We took our time and built a relationship of trust with this learner. We focused on basic math, reading and writing that would be beneficial to her on a personal level: writing letters to extended family, writing about her family history, writing funny stories that were exaggerated. Then we moved to math, and practiced money math. Finally we suggested the “Let’s Get Real” program to see the types of work she may want to do.*

*We also meet with employers to ask them about their place of work and how they managed to get the job they have... what was their work history? Seeing that even employers have work history and have done quite a number of jobs, she realized that getting to her dream job is about taking steps to get there. Now she wanted to work! So we connected her with Employment Services in order to get her a resume and networked connection by ES to a potential part-time job.*

*To date, this client now has 2 part-time jobs in retail. It was amazing to see her smile and her increased confidence in her abilities. She works 4 half-days which fits with her barriers. It is important to see her as a success and reduce the stigma associated with not having a full-time well-paying job.*

*- 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](http://www.communityliteracyofontario.ca).