

Partnership Success Stories

Literacy and Basic Skills Agencies and Ontario Works

November, 2019

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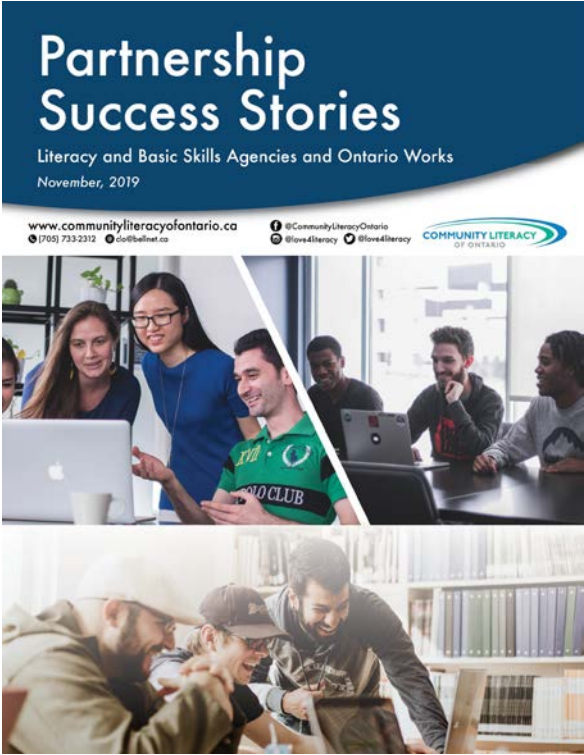
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Acknowledgements

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Our heartfelt thanks to the LBS educators who shared their success stories with us!	Elizabeth Debergh, Wellington County Learning Centre Helen Mcleod, Hamilton Literacy Council Judy DesRoches, Barrie Literacy Council Lesley Hamilton, Trent Valley Literacy Association Shannon Lee & Heather Barker, Community Learning Alternatives Tamara Kaattari, Literacy Link South Central Tracy Callaghan, Adult Language and Learning Vandra McQuarrie, Literacy Nipissing
Funder	Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
Date of Publication	November 2019

This Employment Ontario service is funded in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario through the Canada-Ontario Job Fund Agreement.



The opinions expressed in this report are the opinions of Community Literacy of Ontario, and do not necessarily reflect those of our funders.

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](#).

We know that Ontario's community-based Literacy and Basics Skills agencies develop a wide variety of creative partnerships to best serve adult learners in their communities.

As part of our 2019/2020 business plan, Community Literacy of Ontario researched eight success stories on effective partnerships between Literacy and Basic Skills agencies and Ontario Works. We hope that these stories increase knowledge and understanding of the many creative ways in which LBS agencies across the province are working with Ontario Works to provided support to adult learners.

CLO is very pleased to share these success stories in this newsletter:

Partnership Success Stories **Literacy and Basic Skills Agencies and Ontario Works**



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Adult Language and Learning



Adult Language and Learning

Adult Language and Learning (ALL) is a Literacy and Basic Skills agency serving Chatham Kent.

Thank you to Tracy Callaghan, Executive Director, for sharing ALL's partnership success story with us.

Tell us about a successful initiative that occurred between your LBS agency and Ontario Works

Adult Language and Learning (ALL) is a Literacy and Basic Skills agency serving Chatham Kent. Thank you to Tracy Callaghan, Executive Director, for sharing ALL's partnership success story with us.

Adult Language and Learning has several successful initiatives related to working with Ontario Works clients. However, many of them may not have come to pass if it weren't for what may be their most successful initiative – co-locating with many other local agencies. The Executive Director of the Adult Language and Learning Program took a significant risk and leased a building. Once there, they leased some of their extra space to key community partners, such as Ontario Works, Contact North, and local employment services. They also use additional space in order to offer a meeting room to be used by community partners on a regular schedule to provide additional wraparound supports that clients may require. The Local Planning and Development Board is also on-site as a tenant which makes it much easier for the staff of the Adult Language and Learning Centre to access local labour market information.

The Adult Language and Learning Centre doesn't just offer services related to Employment Ontario though. Their one-stop hub of activity also has language services for newcomers as well as on-site licensed childcare services, which enables them to further meet the needs of clients.

The main reason that ALL took on the risk of leasing an entire building is because they wanted to reduce the barriers that many members of their community experience when trying to engage in learning programs. Having a multi-service site means that clients who come for one type of support may be able to access other supports just by making one trip. The staff of ALL also coordinate the provision of supports with other funders.

Who are the partner(s) involved in this initiative?

Currently, the following partners share space with the Adult Language and Learning Program:

- Welcome Centre
- Workforce Planning Board
- Employment Resource Centre through Ontario Works
- Contact North
- Goodwill Employment Centre

And it's not just employment and learning programs that provide supports on-site. Legal services, dental screening clinics, and other types of services that people need come and use their space regularly.

Why did this initiative happen?

While it is not unusual to find a community-based adult literacy program has co-located with other agencies, it is rare to find a community-based adult literacy program that takes on the leadership role for arranging for the space and bringing on other services to co-locate with.

What motivated the ALL to take on this significant task? According to their Executive Director Tracy Callaghan,

"With a multi-funded agency approach, we kept seeing client needs that were disrupting learning. There were childcare and transportation issues. We moved downtown about three years ago so we could be central. By bringing multiple services here – we've made it possible for our clients to continue their learning. Wraparound service referrals are a lot more successful."

Challenges with attracting and retaining adult learners is a common story across Ontario. Many of the adult learners who reach out to literacy programs have other things going on in their lives besides the need to upskill/improve their education. Unfortunately, many of these issues (legal, housing, financial and food security) can be so overwhelming that it can be difficult for adult learners to maintain their connection to adult literacy programming. ALL's leadership in developing a multi-service facility assists in reducing the barriers that get in the way of learning.

How did you make this partnership work?

Creating a multi-service environment takes more thought than a desire to reduce barriers. It requires a high profile and relationship building. And, it doesn't hurt to receive funding from multiple levels of government and ministries, which ALL does. Tracy Callaghan attributes the success of Adult Language and Learning to insisting that adult literacy be considered at many levels of community engagement, even if that means sitting on a LOT of committees such as the Local Immigration Partnership and strategic planning for the municipality, as well as conducting tours of the building for other community agencies. Being visible pays off and brings adult literacy and learning into the spotlight.

Of course, creating a one-stop shop doesn't come without its challenges. To mitigate some of the risks, ALL needs to be very flexible. *"We don't just do things one way. We are flexible to meet community needs."* Being flexible and doing things on demand is important. They schedule staff so that there is flexibility. They don't just do assessments one day a week; Adult Language and Learning does them whenever a potential client walks in their door.

What have been some of the impacts of implementing this initiative?

By creating a one-stop hub that is flexible and welcoming, there have been positive impacts. Learners benefit from fewer barriers and improved access to wraparound services.

ALL has benefitted because the profile of literacy has increased considerably. The community benefits from positive partnerships that make the best use of available resources.

Quote

"If it is to be, it is up to me"

This quote appropriately summarizes the initiative that Adult Learning and Language demonstrated!

Barrie Literacy Council



The Barrie Literacy Council (BLC) is a Literacy and Basic Skills agency that serves the City of Barrie and surrounding area.

Thank you to Judy DesRoches, Executive Director, for sharing BLC's partnership success story with us.

Tell us about a successful initiative that occurred between your LBS agency and Ontario Works

While the Barrie Literacy Council doesn't have a formal partnership with Ontario Works, they do serve these learners often. In fact, **38% of their learners report OW as their source of income and 26% report the Ontario Disability Support Program as their source of income.**

Of the learners receiving Ontario Works support, 29% are referred to the Barrie Literacy Council by their OW worker. Of those receiving ODSP, all learners are self-referred, usually hearing about BLC through word of mouth.

Who are the partner(s) involved in this initiative?

The Barrie Literacy Council works directly with the learner's OW case worker. When Ontario Works refers a learner, they will need to report their training hours. BLC staff report their training hours and the learner's progress to the OW case worker on behalf of the client.

When a learner is referred, they will get an immediate response and an appointment. The Ontario Works case worker will also get immediate contact (phone or email) with the date and time of the learner's appointment so the worker can support the client from their end as well.

OW workers are very aware of the Barrie Literacy Council and other resources in the community and they often refer clients.

Why did this initiative happen?

The Barrie Literacy Council found that learners receiving Ontario Works may have a different set of needs. For example, often there is a tendency for learners on OW to have lower self esteem and more limited expectations of themselves due to receiving social assistance, and other challenges they have faced. BLC found that it is important to not enforce the labels that may come with receiving social assistance and to encourage learners to believe in themselves. Many Ontario Works clients feel they “have” to come to the Barrie Literacy Council, so it is up to BLC staff to try and turn that around into the learners “wanting” to come.

What were some of the lessons you learned along the way?

Consistent and clear communication is key for both building a trusting relationship with the learner as well as providing wraparound care with the OW case worker. Learners need to be able to trust that the Barrie Literacy Council is on their side and is looking out for their best interests. Releases are obtained at referral and learners are aware of communication, sometimes asking the Council to contact their worker for a specific issue.

It is best if lessons are in support of the goals the learner is trying to achieve. For example, if the learner wishes to get a job as a bartender, they would practice learning to read by studying for the Smart Serve test.

The Barrie Literacy Council found that the medium of communication is important to learners. Many learners did not like taking phone calls due to anxiety, while many others could not afford a cell phone plan to be able to make calls. With this information, BLC got funding for a cell phone for the office so they could communicate via text message with the learners. Many learners use Wi-Fi text messaging services and free public Wi-Fi when they cannot afford a cell phone plan.

What have been some of the impacts of implementing this initiative?

The Barrie Literacy Council has learned the importance of warm handoffs between service organizations whenever possible. By introducing the learner to the program or service they are being referred to, including important information such as who they will be speaking to, the location, and setting their first appointment, there is a much greater chance of the learner following through on the referral. In addition to this, clear communication between all service providers ensures that a learner doesn't slip through the cracks.

BLC staff found that a reminder phone call or text the day before the learner's appointment has increased attendance.

Quote

"Our immediate goal is to increase the learner's confidence. Once that is done, they can tackle anything! Many learners will update their goals after a few months with BLC because they realize they are capable of so much more than they originally thought!"

Community Learning Alternatives



Community Learning Alternatives (CLA) is a Literacy and Basic Skills agency that serves the City of Belleville and surrounding counties.

Thank you to Shannon Lee, Executive Director and Heather Barker, Program Coordinator, for sharing their partnership success stories with us.

Tell us about a successful initiative that occurred between your LBS agency and Ontario Works

Community Learning Alternatives has struggled to connect with Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) in the past and had very low referrals. However, in the past two years, CLA has set their focus on building relationships with OW and other programs. As a result, they have experienced a great increase in learner referrals. Community Learning Alternatives collaborated with community organizations to build a OW/LBS Working Group with “everyone at the table” and scheduled regular monthly meetings to ensure all organizations were up to date on the services offered and the services needed by all others.

This Working Group was spearheaded by Michael Andrews, the Executive Director at LOCS. (LOCS, or Literacy Ontario Central South, is a regional literacy network). CLA is an active partner in the Working Group. Everyone is at the table for regular Literacy Service Planning meetings in Hastings County, and the OW/LBS Working Group grew of out this. The group consists of OW, ODSP and adult education partners, including CLA and the LBS program at Loyalist College.

Community Learning Alternatives did not have this type of face time with OW workers in the past and this has been a great improvement to CLA’s learner referral numbers as well as the success of the programs they are offering.

Michael Andrews of Literacy Ontario Central South has also spearheaded another successful initiative with a program in the Peterborough area called “CERP” (or the Community Employment Referral Program). Community Learning Alternatives signed on as a service delivery partner for CERP in the Hastings area, with Ontario Works Hasting County as the lead on the project. The program is currently in the pilot/testing phase before it will be rolled out when Ontario Works is ready. At that time, other community partners will also be encouraged to get involved. The CERP program has a website and a private and secure database that all service providers can access to track the client’s referrals and progress.

Community Learning Alternatives also offers programs on topics like voting and elections, G1 test preparation, and a new program that will be starting in the fall: *Transit for Everyday Life*. This program teaches non-riders how to read bus schedules, how to plan a route, time management, personal safety, and more. Learners will learn how to plan a multi-system route using GO Transit, TTC, Via Rail and more.

Ontario Works identified the need for mentoring for its clients. Community Learning Alternatives found that the definition of mentor used by OW has a lot of overlap with how CLA serves learners every day. CLA encourages, supports, refers, assesses, sets goals, trains and connects with learners. By using the language that OW has identified as a need makes a clear connection to CLA as a viable referral for OW clients.

Who are the partner(s) involved in this initiative?

Hastings County Ontario Works is the host and leading the Community Employment Referral Program. Many other organizations are involved, including:

- Employment Services
- The Local Training Board
- Hastings County
- Mental Health
- ODSP
- Adult Education (public and Catholic school boards)
- The LBS program at Loyalist College

How did you make this partnership work?

The new focus on building strong and consistent relationships made a huge difference in the number of referrals from Ontario Works as well as the success of the programs being offered.

Ontario Works did an internal review to determine the priority needs of their clients. They shared the priorities and a “perfect world” program that would address client needs. In many cases, Community Learning Alternatives already provided what OW was looking for. CLA re-packaged their existing programming to meet the specifications set out by OW.

By working closely and communicating effectively with OW, CLA did not need to create any new programming and did not need any additional funding to provide these services.

What were some of the lessons you learned along the way?

Community Learning Alternatives broke their existing programs down into smaller packages to make it easier for learners and to meet the specific needs of the Ontario Works clients. This was a very easy and no-cost way to serve Ontario Works clients better and ended up increasing their referral numbers from OW workers.

CLA suggests that other LBS agencies use the language/terminology that Ontario Works is providing and then repackage their LBS programming to fit the specific needs. This helps when an agency is pitching their programming to their local OW office and makes it much easier for OW workers to explain the offerings to their clients. This results in clearer communication and increased referrals.

Community Learning Alternatives found great success in working with OW because they proactively filled the gaps of child care, bus passes, and other roadblocks to ensure that clients were able to attend the LBS classes. Clear and consistent communication was a key component of this partnership.

CLA has also found that using more specific language than just “*Literacy and Basic Skills*” resulted in more learners accessing the programs. This includes using Ontario Work’s terminology as well as emphasizing terms like “*Lifelong Learning*” or “*Digital Literacy*” rather than just “*literacy*”.

What have been some of the impacts of implementing this initiative?

Community Learning Alternatives relies heavily on partner referrals and word of mouth rather than advertising, so it was very important to build these strong relationships with other community organizations.

Developing an active partnership with Ontario Works and others, provided Community Learning Alternatives with more opportunities and invitations to pitch their programs and services.

Their partnership with Ontario Works also resulted in more learner referrals and community recognition of their services by the other organizations.

Quote

“We used clear and consistent communication between Community Learning Alternative and Ontario Works staff. This facilitated partnership development, and it was easier to identify and mitigate roadblocks as quickly as possible.”

Hamilton Literacy Council



The Hamilton Literacy Council (HLC) is a Literacy and Basic Skills agency that serves the City of Hamilton and surrounding area.

Thank you to Helen Mcleod, Executive Director, for sharing HLC's partnership success story with us.

Tell us about a successful initiative that occurred between your LBS agency and Ontario Works

Hamilton Literacy Council provides Budgeting Workshops to Ontario Works (OW) clients who are entering apprenticeships. As well, they partner with their local Mission/Shelter and do other important activities to support learners living in poverty.

Hamilton Literacy Council offers half day workshops that focus on budgeting and financial literacy for OW clients who are entering apprenticeships. Helen runs the workshops every six weeks with 10-25 participants. Before the workshop, Helen is in contact with the OW worker to get information about the participants so she can tailor the workshop to their needs. This will include the number of participants, their ages, what trade or apprenticeship they are going into, their existing skill level, and more.

Topics that could be covered in the workshop include the perils of payday loans, understanding a pay stub, cheque writing, and other financial skills, as well as more advanced topics like budgeting when doing seasonal work.

Hamilton Literacy Council is also planning a program for seniors on social assistance in partnership with St. Matthew's House in Hamilton which will focus on budgeting and financial literacy for seniors living on social assistance. This will be delivered as part of their regular small group program.

Who are the partner(s) involved in this initiative?

The Adult Basic Education Association (the Regional Literacy Network in their area), received funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation to develop Financial Literacy Training. The Adult Basic Education Association partnered with the Hald-Nor Credit Union and Catholic Family Services and together they developed a financial literacy program specifically designed for individuals on social assistance, and the working poor. Ontario Works was very interested in this programming, and connected with the Adult Basic Education Association who in turn asked the Hamilton Literacy Council to deliver the workshops.

How did you make this partnership work?

These workshops are not part of the Hamilton Literacy Council's regular programming, and they are therefore not something the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities provides funding for.

As such, Helen volunteers her time to provide the workshops. It takes her relatively little time to consult with the OW worker ahead of time and to then create a customized curriculum, so Helen ends up volunteering a few hours each time the workshop is delivered.

This initiative started in 2017 and will continue with Helen volunteering her time. Financial literacy and budgeting will become part of the learning plans in the soft skills section for all their clients. It is very beneficial and simple to add these new teachings into current curricula.

What were some of the lessons you learned along the way?

Helen learned how incredibly resourceful people are when living on Ontario Works or on the Ontario Disability Support Program. They are true miracle workers and survivors.

Helen also learned about all of the local supports like food banks, clothing supports, breakfast clubs, and more. Because the clients use these resources all the time, they will actually update agency staff so they have the most up to date information when referring other clients.

Clients share tips and tricks and various resources with each other. It is a sharing and helping community who help each other succeed.

What have been some of the impacts of implementing this initiative?

The clients keep community support information available at Hamilton Literacy Council current, since they bring updated information, resources and first-person experience with social supports like food banks, etc.

This initiative has solidified strong links between all local social and employment agencies, and it has led to more wraparound care. It has also made it easier to refer clients to the right agency.

Quote

“Upgrading literacy and basic skills often leads to increased financial prosperity. It is rewarding to be able to help those on social assistance put in place a financial plan for the time when they transition off assistance and become financially independent; the icing on the cake so to speak.”

Literacy Link South Central



Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) is Regional Literacy Network serving the City of London, and the counties of Oxford, Elgin, Middlesex, Brant, Haldimand and Norfolk.

Thank you to Tamara Kaattari, Executive Director, for sharing LLSC's partnership success story with us.

Tell us about a successful initiative that occurred between your LBS agency and Ontario Works

Literacy Link South Central has been providing Educational Interviews to Ontario Works (OW) clients in London, Ontario since 2013. Their Educational Interview project is a partnership between the regional literacy network and local adult literacy providers.

Caseworkers from Ontario Works identify individuals they think would benefit from talking about education – because they have less than a Grade 12 level of education, or they have skills that are below Grade 12 level, or they are uncertain about their next steps in education.

When a referral is made to Literacy Link South Central, LLSC staff refer the client out to one of their partners for a 1-hour educational interview. The interview is a one-on-one conversation between the OW client and a trained Educational Interviewer. The Interviewer has a variety of self-inventories and short assessment tools to use during the interview, depending on the client's goals. After the interview, the Interviewer completes an Educational Goal Report and sends it to LLSC for review. Staff of LLSC review the plan, make recommendations if required, and when the Report is complete, it is sent to the client and to the OW caseworker. This way, the caseworker can discuss the recommendations with the client at the next scheduled visit, or the client can act upon the recommendations even before they meet with their caseworker.

Who are the partner(s) involved in this initiative?

This initiative is a partnership between Literacy Link South Central, local adult literacy programs, and the London Ontario Works office.

Why did this initiative happen?

The partnership was developed because navigating the adult literacy system in London was challenging. At the time the partnership evolved, there were 11 adult literacy programs in London, many with specialized niches. And there were approximately 100 OW caseworkers at any given time – depending on staff turnover. It did not seem reasonable to expect caseworkers to understand the adult literacy system in addition to all the other wraparound supports that are available in the community related to health, housing, food security, employment, etc.

By implementing Educational Interviews, the process for making referrals became more streamlined for Ontario Works caseworkers. There was only one place to refer to – Literacy Link South Central.

How did you make this partnership work?

The City of London uses a purchase of service arrangement to ensure it has the necessary supports in place in the community for Ontario Works clients. The City issues a Request for Proposals every five years or so and invites community partners to respond. Each Educational Interview costs \$275. Of this amount, \$75 goes to Literacy Link South Central for arranging the interviews, cultivating a community of practice among the Educational Interviewers, scheduling convenient meeting places so that accessing the Interviews is easier for OW clients, regularly training OW staff in adult literacy, and reviewing every Educational Goal Report that is written. The adult literacy provider that does the actual interview and writes the Goal Report receives \$200.

What were some of the lessons you learned along the way?

Literacy Link South Central believes that having adult literacy partners promotes literacy as a system in their community, builds upon literacy partner expertise, and shares resources. Through this process, LLSC has learned how important consistent messaging is – like how to get a high school transcript and which supports Ontario Works may be able to offer to participants.

LLSC has also learned about the importance of staying current on new adult education programming, which is why there is a spotlight on professional development at every meeting of Educational Interviewers. Perhaps most importantly, LLSC and its team of Educational Interviewers has learned that mapping out an Educational Path accurately from the beginning can save Ontario Works clients significant amounts of time, energy and money.

What have been some of the impacts of implementing this initiative?

This initiative has really helped to establish relationships at all levels – with individual OW clients, with local adult literacy providers and with Ontario Works staff. Most Ontario Works clients appreciate having time and space to talk about their educational experiences – positive and negative – and to receive concrete actions they can take to pursue their goals.

Literacy Link South Central has been able to offer this service since 2013. One of the reasons it has been successful is because LLSC is constantly reviewing and improving the process. For example, this year, Motivational Interview techniques were integrated into the Educational Interview process.

Quote

“Everyone is a product of their individual experiences. If we don’t make the time and space to understand those experiences, it is difficult to build trust and develop relationships – both of which are foundations for success.”

Literacy Nipissing



Literacy Nipissing is a Literacy and Basic Skills agency serving North Bay and area.

Thank you to Vandra McQuarrie, Executive Director, for sharing Literacy Nipissing's partnership success story with us.

Tell us about a successful initiative that occurred between your LBS agency and Ontario Works

In the small town of Mattawa (population 800) an OW worker became extremely concerned about the lower-than-average educational levels amongst her clients. High Ontario Works caseloads in the Mattawa area, high rates of poverty, and seasonal employment were also additional issues. The caseworker strongly believed that the lack of a Grade 12 education was a huge barrier to sustainable employment for her clients.

The OW caseworker and Literacy Nipissing staff met to develop solutions. All agreed that providing service to a rural, northern, relatively isolated community was extremely important.

Transportation to Literacy Nipissing's LBS program in North Bay was immediately identified as a critical barrier to learners, as there is no public transportation between Mattawa and North Bay (a distance of 62 kilometres, one way). Ontario Works would pay mileage, but most potential learners did not have access to a car. And a cab ride would cost \$150 return! This made transportation completely unaffordable for either partner.

The potential of learning online via e-Channel programming was discussed, but many potential learners in Mattawa did not have computers or access to high speed internet. As well, often learners indicated that they weren't yet comfortable with an online format.

To meet this need, Literacy Nipissing applied to the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board for a grant through their Healthy Communities Fund. The goal of this fund was to support projects that reduce poverty. Via the Healthy Communities Fund, Literacy Nipissing was able to set up classroom space and offer Literacy and Basic Skills programming in Mattawa! They offered LBS programming for three to four days per week over a five-year period. The local school board offered classroom space free of charge.

Who are the partner(s) involved in this initiative?

The partners involved are Literacy Nipissing, Ontario Works, the District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board, and the Near North District School Board.

How did you make this partnership work?

All partners were committed to making the partnership work, and each contributed to its success. All shared a common goal and vision of supporting an under-served community, increasing skills, and helping people to find more sustainable employment. Having access to the Healthy Communities Fund was a key benefit.

Literacy Nipissing did not apply for the Healthy Communities Fund after May 2019 but the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities has started to contribute towards LBS service provision in the Mattawa area.

What were some of the lessons you learned along the way?

All partners learned about the importance of finding creative and collaborative solutions to reaching under-served communities.

Another lesson learned was that this partnership meant a great deal to the community and reached well beyond the prime target of Ontario Works clients. It was embraced by the community at large, the library, the school board, other local service providers and more.

There was a feeling of value that was given to the community and specifically to adults who were felt trapped by the lack of literacy skills. Many students started to feel pride in themselves and the potential they now felt.

What have been some of the impacts of implementing this initiative?

This initiative created many impacts. A high-need, under-served, rural, northern community received important services. The community members felt that service agencies were investing in their community in concrete ways. New partnerships were developed or enhanced. And, Literacy Nipissing brought adult-centred literacy resource materials and digital learning technologies to this small, rural community.

Literacy Link South Central has been able to offer this service since 2013. One of the reasons it has been successful is because LLSC is constantly reviewing and improving the process. For example, this year, Motivational Interview techniques were integrated into the Educational Interview process.

Quote

The following quote is from a letter from H.B., an adult student at the literacy program in Mattawa.

"This opportunity is so beneficial for me because it's giving me the feeling of greatness to achieve my goals to finish school and do well later in life."

Later on in this letter, this student added, "...and did I also mention that I felt excellent about myself and my future?"

Trent Valley Literacy Association



Trent Valley Literacy Association (TVLA) is a Literacy and Basic Skills agency serving Peterborough and area.

Thank you to Lesley Hamilton, Program Director, for sharing TVLA's partnership success story with us.

Tell us about a successful initiative that occurred between your LBS agency and Ontario Works

In partnership with Ontario Works, Trent Valley Literacy Association ran a very successful program called “Job Fit with a Twist”. The Job Fit program was created when the local Learning Disabilities Association shut down and a gap in community services emerged. The Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario had created the “Job Fit” curriculum to help adults with learning disabilities find employment. This curriculum was excellent, but it was very dated.

A tutor at TVLA met with the Learning Disabilities Lead for the local Ontario Works office (Peterborough Social Services) and mentioned the “Job Fit” curriculum. Ontario Works was extremely interested this curriculum and began discussions on the content of the curriculum, and how this could roll out in the community. TVLA was then asked to submit a proposal to deliver “Job Fit” to OW clients on a fee-for-service basis.

Their proposal was accepted, and TVLA delivered the “Job Fit” program six times over a two-year period between 2017 to 2018.

Trent Valley Literacy Association updated the curriculum for the “Job Fit with a Twist” program. In fact, each time they delivered this program, it was evaluated and further changes were made. The program was run over an eight-week period, three mornings per week.

Job Fit modules included:

- Job-Fit: The Essentials
- Assessing Learning Styles, Strengths and Strategies
- Resiliency Training
- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Essential Skills
- Developing Employment Goals
- Becoming Job Ready

In recognition of the low income levels of participants, another key component of the “Job Fit with a Twist” program was that breakfast and lunch were provided daily, and participants were welcome to take home any leftovers. Supplies for participation were allocated, such as books, bags, pens, etc. Also, all participants were given a “readiness kit for employment”, which included shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothpaste and more. Childcare and transportation supports were provided on an as-needed basis. Gift cards were given out for participation. Further, TVLA offered daily one-to-one support for those struggling with a variety of issues on an as-needed basis.

Unfortunately, funding for the “Job Fit” program is not currently available from Ontario Works. However, due to the great success and highly positive outcomes of the “Job Fit with a Twist” program, Trent Valley Literacy Association hopes that in the future they will be able to run it again.

How did you make this partnership work?

TVLA and OW worked closely together to support clients. This included linking on referrals, client participation and client support. This hands-on approach was a great benefit to both organizations and to the clients.

Strong partnership and financial support from Ontario Works for the “Job Fit” program was key. Not only did it allow Trent Valley Literacy Association to operate the program in terms of paying instructors and providing office space, but it also allowed them to provide enhanced support to participants, such as offering breakfast, lunch, gift cards and supplies. For clients on Ontario Works, these supports make an important difference.

Further, there was strong community support for the “Job Fit” program. Employment Services referred clients and later came into the TVLA program to explain their services to clients. Other social services supported participants by provided individualised support based on client needs.

Clients were given information regarding participation in volunteer opportunities. Some of those opportunities included working in an animal shelter and working as a volunteer in a program dedicated to individuals with disabilities.

What were some of the lessons you learned along the way?

Trent Valley Literacy Association learned about the importance of evaluation. They evaluated the “Job Fit” program each time it was offered and made improvements continually.

TVLA realized the importance of offering resiliency training. Most participants faced difficult life circumstances and lived in poverty. Building resilience was a key step to moving forward in challenging situations.

Trent Valley Literacy Association also believed in celebrating success! At the end of the “Job Fit” program, a party was held to celebrate the many achievements of the participants.

What have been some of the impacts of implementing this initiative?

The “Job Fit with a Twist” program was highly successful. Trent Valley Literacy Association closely evaluated the program and tracked participant outcomes. For example, over half of the clients in the first group secured and maintained employment!

There were also strong participant increases in career decision making abilities, job search skills, skills development, access to social supports, and more.

Other extremely important outcomes included increased confidence and resilience, and enhanced connections among peers, TVLA and the community. Some participants formed groups that offered friendship and peer support after the program was over.

In fact, 100% of participants said that they would recommend the “Job Fit with a Twist” to others!

Quote

“It was wonderful to see participants increase their confidence, build their skills, create new community connections and increase their resiliency to face difficult circumstances and create a better future for themselves.”

Wellington County Learning Centre



The Wellington County Learning Centre (WCLC) is a Literacy and Basic Skills agency that serves the rural Wellington County.

Thank you to Elizabeth Debergh, Executive Director, for sharing WCLC's partnership success story with us.

Tell us about a successful initiative that occurred between your LBS agency and Ontario Works

The Wellington County Learning Centre has developed a unique program involving engaging local employers with Ontario Works (OW) clients. Their goal when they work with individuals supported by OW is to encourage them to first try a program that is not directly attached to getting a job or getting a Grade 12 or GED. Those programs are more intense and require a large commitment, while the other programs are less intense and are a better way to introduce the learner to what it's like to take a program.

People are often scared to start a program because there is a lot of pressure for them to immediately get a job. Staff at the Wellington County Learning Centre finds that adult learners often need a more straightforward first step. They want to get to know the learners first and encourage them to attend regularly and have a sense of accomplishment. This is a great way for people to get to know the agency. The Wellington County Learning Centre is NOT school. The WCLC is all about adult learning, and it's a partnership between the learner and the learning centre. The WCLC is not going to teach adult learning something they're not interested in learning. If an employer says, "*You need basic math*", that makes more sense to an OW client than if an adult literacy provider says it to them.

So, the Wellington County Learning Centre created the "*Let's Get Real Employment for YOU*" program – a program that involves interest tests and surveys and requires participants to research the NOC (National Occupational Classification) codes to determine which type of field they might be interested in, where their strengths are, etc.

The purpose is for everyone to get a general idea of what type of employment they might want to pursue. Then staff go out and find employers and employees who do those types of jobs. The classes are small – the WCLC only takes about five Ontario Works clients at a time.

Once the WCLC has connected with employers, the clients go as a group to visit these employees and employers – not to ask for a job but to dig deeper to find out more about that type of job. What’s it like? How much does it cost to train for this type of position? By going as a group, each person is exposed to five different types of jobs. At the end of the program, everyone gets \$200 if they complete all the classes. If you miss even one class without an excellent reason, then you don’t get the \$200. Offering a financial reward upon completion is a big incentive to clients. The Centre gives the \$200 as an honourarium so the clients don’t get it clawed back. The WCLC pays the money, and they run the program twice a year. After this program is run, the Centre connects the participants with employment services.

The Wellington County Learning Centre has found that even people who miss a class continue to attend. At the end, they are happy with what they learned. Participants will notice skills in other learners and tell each other, “*I think you’d be really good at that.*” They start motivating each other as a group.

In fact, the Centre doesn’t have any difficulty recruiting Ontario Works participants. The WCLC used to pay money to advertise the program, but they don’t have to do that anymore. In addition to talking to local Ontario Works caseworkers, the Centre advertises the program on Facebook. They mention the honourarium to raise interest, and the Centre usually has to put people on a wait list. All the little towns in the rural areas have a “*What’s happening?*” Facebook page. The WCLC uses these resources to spread the word about the program.

Who are the partner(s) involved in this initiative?

The partners the WCLC has for this program are their local Ontario Works office, employers and employment service providers. It’s important when you work with employment services to understand the systems under which they work. The Wellington County Learning Centre wants to refer people from their programs who are excited and ready to succeed. The Centre even uses employment services to show non-profit types of jobs – in order to show what the environment is like – for participants who are interested in that kind of work.

Most employers are very amenable to being involved in the program. When the WCLC contacts employers, they write them a letter to let them know that the Centre isn’t asking them to give anyone a job. Instead, the Centre explains that meeting with employers is a first step in successful job and potential employee development. Sometimes it takes employers a while to understand what’s being asked of them, but the WCLC is persistent. The Centre also makes sure it reaches out to small businesses and entrepreneurs – not just the large companies.

How did you make this partnership work?

In order to make this initiative work, the staff divide the responsibilities. The instructors work directly with the Ontario Works clients on the self-assessments and labour market research. The Centre runs two classes a week (for two hours each) for five weeks. Each time they run the program, it's a little bit different. The WCLC always uses the NOC codes and inventories, but then they switch up the curriculum a bit depending on the group they have.

The Wellington County Learning Centre addresses computer skills by having learners research and take some of the self-assessments online. Research is a big part of the class and, again, students use each other as supports.

The sixth and seventh week involve the employers and it's the Executive Director's job to get the employers on board. She starts by doing the outreach, contacting companies and talking to the CEO/President or, sometimes, the receptionist. Receptionists can often tell you who you need to talk to. Then the Executive Director talks to the recommended person in the company and follows up with a letter that explains all the details.

This program has been so successful that the Wellington County Learning Centre budgets for it and pays for it through their regular operating funds. All participants complete milestones at the end of the program.

What were some of the lessons you learned along the way?

The Wellington County Learning Centre has learned a few lessons since they started offering the "*Let's Get Real Employment for YOU*" program. The best thing to keep in mind is that you're not pushing the learners into doing anything. The Centre makes that very, very clear to them. It's about the learning – not the end destination. It is a low-risk opportunity for learners to learn about themselves and an area of employment. This reduces the fear-factor for many Ontario Works clients.

The WCLC also learned about the importance of active communication with all stakeholders in order to make the partnership succeed. Employers are often willing to help out, if staff clearly explain the requirements and community benefits to them. Participants ended up seeing new possibilities for themselves and encouraging their fellow participants on their employment path.

What have been some of the impacts of implementing this initiative?

The “*Let’s Get Real Employment for YOU*” program has a significant impact on Ontario Works clients. By completing the self-assessment inventories, OW clients get a good (and sometimes new) sense of who they are and find their own motivation in the process.

People might come in and say, “*I want to be a novelist.*” After they do their research, they come to their own conclusion that it might not be feasible. Often people find the research to be motivating. When they think about their end goal related to employment and learn they need further education, they realize: “*This is why I want to get a GED – because I want to be an ECE*”.

One young man wanted to get into radio. He didn’t have a GED, but when he found he needed to get a GED to get into the program he wanted, he signed up! The turning point was the employer tour. The Centre went with the learner to a non-profit media company to see the equipment, talk to an employee who was in his 30s and who had gone to college, learn about the employee’s experience at the local college, and watch editing in the edit room. The learner’s eyes just lit up and the WCLC staff could see the excitement in his face.

On the way home staff introduced him to the college student radio station, and they all listened to it the whole way home. About a week after the program had ended, the Centre got a call from the learner. He was ready to start working on his GED in order to go to college!

Quote

*“Show learners how to get to and open the door.
It doesn’t mean they have to walk through.”*