



Success Stories

Employment-Related
Experiential Learning in LBS



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Acknowledgements

Success Stories: Employment-Related Experiential Learning in LBS

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Our heartfelt thanks to the amazing LBS educators who shared their success stories with us!

- Lori Bruner, Brant Skills Centre
- Carolina Cohoon, Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Deaf/Blind Literacy Program
- Ginette Comeau-Roy, Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre
- Jennifer Ellis, Gateway Centre for Learning
- Shelley Harris, YWCA St. Thomas-Elgin
- Anita Hillis-Krause, Haldimand-Norfolk Literacy Council
- Kathy Kennedy and Lori Farrington, Prince Edward Learning Centre
- Shannon Lee and Stacey McQuoid, Community Learning Alternatives
- Jake Martel, Nokee Kwe
- Martha Rudden, Kingston Literacy & Skills

Funder: Ontario's Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development

Date of Publication: February 2018

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.



Introduction

In 2017/2018, [Community Literacy of Ontario](#) (CLO) conducted, analyzed and compiled research to identify and share information about employment-related experiential learning opportunities in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs.

Our experiential learning initiative had five main components:

1. As part of our research, CLO conducted **26 key informant interviews** with LBS agencies and select partners.
2. We also developed a provincial survey to explore this area with literacy agencies in Ontario. **An astounding 66 LBS agencies responded to our survey** about employment-related experiential learning!
3. CLO, with our partner [CESBA](#), developed and delivered a webinar on this topic called: **“HANDS ON, SKILLS UP! Employment-Related Experiential Learning in Ontario’s LBS Organizations”**. This webinar was delivered twice, in late November and in early December 2017. Click [here](#) to access the recorded version of our webinar and participant handouts.
4. During our research and key informant interviews, we wrote ten experiential learning success stories. CLO is pleased to share these success stories in this newsletter, **“Success Stories: Employment-Related Experiential Learning in LBS”**.
5. Lastly, our experiential learning research will be compiled into a report. This **research report** will be available by March 31, 2018, via email to our members, and publicly on our website as well.

Community Literacy of Ontario wanted to research employment-related experiential learning within Literacy and Basic Skills for several reasons.

This type of learning is growing in popularity in many other areas (for example, with the Ministry of Education and in colleges and universities). Experiential learning was also prominently mentioned in Ontario’s *“Building the Workforce of Tomorrow”* report. From our linkages with our member agencies and literacy networks across the province, we knew that experiential learning was indeed happening in LBS. However, LBS’s footprint in experiential learning had never been compiled, analyzed and showcased. Rather, it seemed to be quietly and successfully occurring under the radar.

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We felt it was important for the literacy field, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD), and others to know of the work that LBS is currently doing in this important area, and for it to be more broadly known that LBS agencies are already part of the experiential learning landscape, with agencies creating meaningful learning opportunities for adult learners.

LBS agencies have a long history and mandate for serving adults with multiple barriers, those who are living in poverty, and those who are furthest from the workforce. We believe this is an important and substantial contribution that LBS makes to Employment Ontario and the provincial landscape. We wanted to highlight the creativity and innovation demonstrated by many LBS providers, so that others in our field (and beyond) can benefit. We hope that our research can assist other sectors who are working with populations that face barriers to entering the workforce, such as youth at risk or New Canadians.

Our research represents a preliminary look into Experiential Learning. The topic, however, bears further study in order to share additional information and best practices, and to increase the amount and scope of opportunities that are available to adult learners with employment goals in LBS.

Accordingly, we are very pleased to share ten experiential learning in LBS success stories! The stories we have shared reflect the experiences in different types of LBS agencies in diverse communities across the province.

These stories also reflect different types of employment-related experiential learning. Examples include:

- Social enterprise
- Structured volunteer opportunities
- Occupational curriculum
- Community partnerships

CLO is very grateful to the educators from the ten LBS agencies who took the time to be interviewed and share their stories with us. Thank you for your creativity, hard work, and strong commitment to adult learners!

We hope that you enjoy these practical and innovative success stories, and that they are an inspiration to you in the important work that you do.

Brant Skills Centre

Who?

The [Brant Skills Centre](#) is a community-based Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program located in Brantford, ON, and serving the City of Brantford and Brant County. Thanks to Lori Bruner, Executive Director of the Brant Skills Centre, for sharing this success story with us.

When?

Staff at the Brant Skills Centre have been developing and delivering experiential learning opportunities for the past five years.

Why?

Experiential learning became a focus for the Brant Skills Centre when the staff of the Centre noticed that community service providers, employers and clients were not making the connection between LBS and improved skills for the workplace. With the knowledge that targeting specific skills and relating them to tasks is one of the best ways to assist people in learning and retaining information, staff of the Brant Skills Centre talked to their Employment Service (ES) and Ontario Works (OW) partners to learn more about what skills ES and OW clients would benefit from learning.

In addition to feedback from ES and OW staff, experiential learning grew at the Brant Skills Centre in response to local labour market information. Staff would review the types of jobs that were available locally and, in conjunction with community partners, determine whether LBS could play a role in assisting clients in developing skills specific to these jobs.

The Brant Skills Centre also recognized the growing role of, and demand for, digital literacy skills within society and employment, resulting in the developing and delivery of experiential learning that focuses on digital technology needed in the workplace.

What?

All of Brant Skills Centre's experiential learning opportunities are offered in the classroom and include occupational curriculum such as:

- Pre-Healthcare Preparation
- Call Centre Preparation
- Point of Sale Training
- Writing in the Workplace
- Numbers in the Workplace
- Apprenticeship Pathways
- QuickBooks

The Brant Skills Centre is currently developing curriculum for Pre-Welding Preparation.

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How?

The majority of experiential learning is offered through Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) funding, but portions of it are funded by Ontario Works or through fee-for-service.

Lessons Learned

- Certain kinds of equipment are necessary for many experiential learning opportunities. The equipment purchases and upkeep must be planned, funded, and incorporated into an asset management cycle.
- Significant amounts of training are required for staff, who are often teaching specialized courses. The ideal is to have more than one person trained in how to teach each type of experiential learning class, so that there is succession planning and reduced risk.
- Make sure there is coordination and discussion among service providers so that opportunities can be marketed and maximized.

Impact

Experiential learning through LBS classroom programming with an employment focus has positive impacts on clients, many of whom need support in order to envision employment as a viable pathway. As well, some clients who are already employed have used experiential learning at Brant Skills Centre to achieve promotions.

This type of experiential learning (incorporated into an LBS program and offered onsite) is accessible to LBS clients who are already comfortable attending classes. There is no cost to the client and scheduling is flexible. In addition, LBS staff are sensitive to other learning challenges that clients may have – which may not happen in experiential learning opportunities offered via other venues.

Another positive impact from offering experiential learning is the building of a solid community reputation for being responsive. Brant Skills Centre has seen an increase in referrals – both referrals coming in and referrals going out to other LBS agencies and Employment Services programs. At times, other community partners are invited into the experiential learning classroom to offer specific learning opportunities to LBS clients such as “what’s in a cover letter?” or “how do you apply for jobs?”

Quote

“Employers are stuck on LBS being something different from what they want or need.”

CNIB's Deafblind Literacy Program

Who?

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind's [Deafblind Literacy Program](#) in London, ON serves a unique group of learners. In order to participate in this program, learners have to have vision loss/blindness, hearing loss/Deafness or have both sight and hearing challenges.

Thanks to Carolina Cohoon, Specialist, Deafblind Literacy, CNIB Deafblind Services, for sharing this success story with us.

When?

The CNIB Deafblind Literacy Program in London has been offering experiential learning for the past three years.

Why?

Experiential Learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice. People think and learn differently in different contexts. Learners come to the classroom and learn to read and write, but how will they know how to apply these concepts without experiential learning opportunities?

Often, learners in the CNIB's Literacy Program have not had the opportunity to actually apply their skills elsewhere. Providing experiential learning means that the adult literacy program focuses on learners' abilities and encourages them to use their skills in real-life ways out in the community. In return, learners feel trusted and flourish.

Carolina notes that learners involved in experiential learning are blooming! They are solving problems, increasing their organization and self-direction skills, and becoming more independent learners.

What?

Learners in the CNIB's Literacy Program are each working on individual goals. Current experiential learning includes:

- **Internal work experience opportunities:** A learner who is learning to use Word processing programs is using new skills to transfer data and proofread. She develops her own schedule to meet the required deadlines. Her employment goal is to do administration in a hospital or a not-for-profit.
- **Peer-to-peer support:** Several learners have been teaching sign language to other Deaf/Blind students and volunteers. One of the learner's goals is to teach sign language at church and in other nonprofits. They have been preparing all of the materials on their own and sharing

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them with the instructor for feedback. The learners have been going to the Dollar Store, printing pictures, just like any teacher, and using skills that they have seen their instructor use with them. They have also been learning new technology, such as ASL (American Sign Language) apps, so they can teach them.

- **Communication:** Another learner has a goal to improve her English. She is creating a PowerPoint presentation to share with her church. She wants to teach about the Bible in the world, so she has been doing some research on different countries and Bible translation, including the use of a globe and maps.

How?

Experiential learning in the CNIB's Literacy Program is funded primarily through LBS funding and the assistance of volunteers. In addition to staff, there is usually a volunteer at the program available to support the students. However, learners still attend the program and self-organize if no instructor or volunteer is available.

Lessons Learned

Initially, there was a need to change learners' minds. They were used to a certain type of learning environment and they needed help from us to raise their self-esteem to feel that they were worthy of experiential learning opportunities.

It's important to offer experiential learning opportunities to ALL learners who are ready and interested in such learning. However, often learners require supports in order to participate in this learning and the supports must be coordinated and, in the case of their learners, funding must be place, as there is a critical need for interpreters and intervenors.

Carolina shares this important advice. "Let go...give people the opportunity to explore". Practitioners may worry that if they "let go", the learners may make mistakes. She notes that it's worth running the risk of making mistakes. It's part of life and educators need to open opportunities for learners to do this within their own means.

Impact

On the agency:

- Learners are more independent, giving the instructor more time to focus on other aspects of work. Learners seek technology to work on their own projects.
- Learners have shared program success via word of mouth. This has resulted in new referrals.

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On adult learners:

- The learners have more independence and self-direction.
- The learners have experienced a significant increase in their self-esteem. For example, learners can now talk to others outside of their community. They maintain eye contact and self-advocate, whereas before they would have assumed that others would not be interested in talking to them.
- Learners have experienced a significant increase in problem-solving abilities. If they need a referral to a specialist, they now ask for support to create a referral. They self-refer. They are not looking for someone to “fix” their problem.
- Some learners are employed right now or they are volunteering.
- Learners show initiative and greater understanding of what skills they want to learn.
- People’s mental health has improved. Because of their volunteer opportunities and experiential learning, learners found the strength to overcome some of their health barriers.

Quote

“I believe that through experiential learning, relationships are developed and nurtured. Learners learn more about themselves, but also interact with others. Purpose is so important, we must help them open the door towards their personal achievements and dreams.”

Community Learning Alternatives

Who?

Community Learning Alternatives (CLA) is a community-based LBS agency in Hastings County with offices in Belleville, Central Hastings and Trenton. Thanks to Shannon Lee and Stacey McQuoid, Program Coordinators at Community Learning Alternatives, for sharing this success story with us.

When?

Community Learning Alternatives (CLA) has been offering experiential learning opportunities for the past thirteen years.

Why?

Through their experiential learning experiences, CLA endeavours to enhance employment opportunities for their learners. Many of their projects have provided opportunities for vulnerable youth in specific job sectors (e.g. hospitality, skilled trades) as well as for service in the community (e.g. Building Healthy Futures). CLA could see the struggles facing youth and they have supported single parents, youth in poverty, those with legal issues and those with special needs. They have helped with critical thinking, communication and problem-solving skills and provided options for paths that suit their skills, needs and interests.

What?

From the fall of 2014 to January 2016, they offered Hospitality Plus, an experiential learning program, in partnership with Prince Edward Learning Centre (PELC). CLA staff worked closely with restaurants and hotels for field trips, work site visits, job shadowing, and placements. At the Travelodge in Belleville, participants gained practice in the positions of front desk clerk, housekeeper, line cook and food and beverage server. Hospitality Plus learners and organizers went on an overnight field trip and were treated to dinner cooked and served by other learners in the program. The hotel rooms used were cleaned the next morning by learners interested in working in housekeeping. The experiences were extremely practical.

Between PELC, CLA-Belleville and CLA-Trenton, seven participants obtained employment with six employers and one hundred and thirty credits (in partnership with the credit programs – Quinte Adult Education and Loyola) were attained toward the learners' OSSDs. Participants completed WHMIS, Smart Serve and First Aid training. The program also paid for the G1 test and/or training to secure G2 licences for driving.

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Their Belleville site also offered the Skilled Trades Exploration Program (STEP) in 2006-2007 in which youth completely renovated their space and learned about plumbing, framing, dry walling and electrical work. The program was also offered at their Trenton site in 2009, and our space was renovated there as well. CLA now has two beautifully renovated spaces for their learners and their services.

For those in the Building Healthy Futures program in Central Hastings, placements were available in a day care, two municipal parks and recreational departments, and two community agencies. The youth were also instrumental in creating a marketing video to promote CLA. The video has been showcased at networking meetings, United Way events, to employment service providers, etc. The video has even been shared at provincial LBS events.

How?

CLA's skilled trades experiential learning program and Building Healthy Futures were funded federally through Skills Link, and Hospitality Plus was funded by the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment (MEDTE), Youth Skills Connection Community Stream.

Lessons Learned

It is best to hire a person to run the program and not use existing staff, who are also doing their regular work within the agency.

Within the projects, the programming was intensive. They suggest narrowing the scope of the projects to those who are completely employment focused.

The programs were also more individualized than intended, and they tried to cater too much to the needs and interests of each learner.

Impact

CLA is now known for experiential learning amongst many service providers in Hastings County and beyond. Since they built and/or strengthened their community contacts with the placements, CLA is more well-known in the community. Learners also learned more about their community (for employment opportunities and supports) and felt more connected.

Quote

"Our CLA learners participate in opportunities that allow them to reflect and apply what they have learned. By doing so, our folks learn more about themselves and can create a path to a better future. Their journey becomes just as important as the destination."

Gateway Centre for Learning

Who?

[Gateway Centre for Learning](#) is an LBS agency located in Midland, Ontario. Gateway serves the communities of North Simcoe.

Thanks to Jennifer Ellis, Executive Director of the Gateway Centre for Learning, for sharing this success story with us.

When?

Gateway Centre for Learning has been offering experiential learning for the past 10 years.

Why?

Gateway began exploring experiential learning, primarily through supported volunteering, for several reasons. First of all, the staff at Gateway recognized that experiential learning is a win-win. Through experiential learning, LBS students build their confidence and increase their networking opportunities, and Gateway benefits from increasing its volunteer pool and from generating new partnerships in the community.

The supported volunteer placements enhance the regular LBS course work done by students at Gateway. These volunteer placements occur either directly at Gateway Centre for Learning or via other community organizations. The volunteer placements helps students make the link between what they are doing in the classroom and actual jobs, reinforces the learning that students are doing, and provides hands-on learning – a critical method of learning for many LBS students.

It's true that, in many communities, employment services can provide Employment Ontario clients with exposure to real jobs – through job placements and other means. However, Gateway has noticed that providing supported volunteer opportunities for students really increases students' self-esteem. Students note: *"It absolutely boosted my confidence"* and *"Here, I get praise"*. Students are able to explore real-world job tasks with less fear of failure.

Also, experiential learning enables students to learn more about different types of jobs in no stakes/low stakes scenarios. Students may try a job, but not like it! This is good learning to have before you move on to apply and take a postsecondary course. For example, students may volunteer with the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty Against Animals to ensure they like working with animals before moving on to take a dog grooming program.

[Click here](#) to learn more about Gateway's volunteer program.

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What?

Gateway's niche in experiential learning is offering structured volunteer placements to students, both in the community and in their LBS program. Gateway staff encourage all students to volunteer, and most do.

For community placements, Gateway staff coach students, link them with employers, help students with their resumes and assist students in understanding and following workplace policies. Then, Gateway staff encourage and monitor students in the background during their volunteer placements.

Gateway also offers volunteer placements within its own LBS program. For example, students can volunteer to assist with office coverage or in the agency's bookstore, which also happens to be Gateway's social enterprise. Students may also volunteer for special events, or provide administrative support.

At Gateway, all volunteer placements are treated very seriously. Intake and exit interviews are conducted. Policies and procedures apply. Police checks and satisfaction surveys are administered. The goal is to treat the volunteer opportunities like actual employment opportunities to give students real exposure to the labour market.

All student volunteers get additional training and certification. They take WHMIS, AODA and customer service training before they begin to volunteer.

If students have a criminal record, then Gateway has a partnership with the John Howard Society, and the potential for volunteer opportunities are assessed on a case-by-case basis.

How?

If volunteering is part of the learner's plan, then LBS funds the experiential learning. However, in cases where volunteering is not supported by LBS funding, Gateway just offers the volunteer experience on a volunteer basis, because it's so important for the students.

Lessons Learned

At Gateway, after a decade of offering experiential learning, they've come up with some lessons learned:

- Volunteer placements are a great way for students to gain confidence and build their resumes.
- The literacy centre needs to be very aware of community services – both for volunteer placements and for referrals.
- Take things slowly and plan for successful placements. Usually, things work well, but sometimes, the student isn't ready, and the program may have inadvertently set them up for yet another failure.
- Occasionally, community agencies take advantage of the students as volunteers and don't give them a good placement, or don't support them adequately. Gateway monitors the placements in order to ensure a good fit.

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Impact

Gateway has seen some very positive results from offering experiential learning to students. For example, volunteer placements are a great way for students to learn about their skills and interests, gain confidence, and build their resumes and their networks.

Through supported volunteer placements, students build community contacts, which in a small community (in any community, actually) is extremely important. Gateways knows the value of networking – both in terms of creating social opportunities for students, but also in terms of navigating the hidden job market.

Not all students in their program come to Gateway with well-defined employment goals. Through volunteering, students can explore potential areas of interest for future jobs. Students don't have to limit themselves with what they are capable of doing at that moment. Experiential learning gives them the chance to learn and explore new areas, in a supportive environment.

For some students, it's the first time in their lives that they have been supported and they flourish.

Quote

"Our volunteer placements help students to discover their hidden skills and talents, increase their self-confidence, and develop marketable skills for the job market. What's not to love about that?"

Haldimand Norfolk Literacy Council

Who?

The [Haldimand Norfolk Literacy Council](#) (HNLC) serves the counties of Haldimand and Norfolk. As a community Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program, the Council has offices in several locations throughout the counties.

Thanks to Anita Hillis-Krause, Executive Director of the Haldimand Norfolk Literacy Council, for sharing this success story with us.

When?

The HNLC has been offering experiential learning for the past two and a half years.

Why?

According to Anita Hillis-Kraus, “Experiential learning just seemed like a natural progression.” The HNLC was already using workplace-based curricula with adult learners who had employment goals. One such curriculum was on how to develop the skills required to be a cleaner. As HNLC needed to hire a cleaner, it seemed like a good time to see if any learners would be interested in taking the curriculum. One young woman did, in fact, think she wanted to become a housekeeper. She used the curriculum to become familiar with the tasks and terminology associated with the job, but then decided that she didn’t like this type of work.

That’s one of the great things about LBS agencies offering experiential learning. There is less risk attached and learners can explore if certain careers or jobs suit them.

If you go through Employment Services and get a placement and it doesn’t work out, then it can seem like a failure. Within LBS, it’s just another learning opportunity and it can be a positive thing to put on a resume, even if it’s not your “forever” goal.

What?

Experiential learning opportunities that the HNLC currently has in its toolbox include early childhood education, cleaning, and office administration/clerical. In the past, the organization has also offered pre-PSW (Personal Support Worker) programming. They are fortunate to have two local nursing homes/retirement homes in which they can place learners who are interested in PSW and in cleaning. The learners volunteer and the length of the volunteering or the number of hours depends on the needs, desires and availability of the learner. The cleaning position at HNLC is a paid position and the organization has also hosted office administrative assistants who are supported by Ontario Works.

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How?

The coordination and teaching costs of offering experiential learning are covered through LBS funding.

Lessons Learned

- Timing – meeting the needs of both employers' schedules and learners' schedules can be challenging. A lot of coordination is required.
- Reaching out to potential employers is a job in and of itself. The HNLC is fortunate because its two coordinators are long-time employees with excellent connections in the community. It's important for staff to have either familiarity with local employers or the time to develop these relationships.
- It's really important to know the organizations/employers you send learners to for experiential learning. LBS clients can be vulnerable and it's important that they have positive experiences.

Impact

Learners build transferable skills that they can take with them into other/additional employment opportunities – both skills that relate to workplace terminology and processes, but also soft skills like working as part of a team and time management.

Experiential learning has also showed itself to be a motivator for learners and a chance for them to grow their skills as well as their self-esteem. Engaging in experiential learning is a low-risk way for learners to gain experience that will enable them to make good career choices.

By offering experiential learning, the organization develops a track record. Community stakeholders begin to suggest partnerships in order to meet client needs. The profile of the HNLC has increased as well.

Quote

"In a perfect world, I'd like to link each set of workplace curricula to a local employer...I'd love to have all these relationships at my fingertips!"

Nokee Kwe

Who?

[Nokee Kwe](#) is a community-based Literacy and Basic Skills Program based in London, Ontario. It is part of the Native stream, and serves both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners.

Thanks to Jake Martell, the Coordinator of the LBS program at Nokee Kwe, for sharing this success story with us.

When?

Nokee Kwe has been exploring experiential learning for the past two years.

Why?

Some adult literacy programs suddenly “find” themselves doing experiential learning as a natural and not necessarily expected extension of programming. Others – like Nokee Kwe – seek out experiential learning to meet learner goals. At Nokee Kwe, a considerable number of adult learners were looking for ways to get their 40 hours of volunteer experience in order to successfully get their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

Like many LBS programs, Nokee Kwe also supports learners who are seeking employment, but who have limited work experience. Experiential learning assists these learners in developing employment experience and work references, and helps them to augment their resumes and assist them in their job searches. Last, but certainly not least, some Nokee Kwe clients must complete community service hours mandated by the Department of Corrections. Experiential learning offers these learners an opportunity to obtain the hours they need while also participating in activities that will build their skills and their self-esteem.

What?

Many of Nokee Kwe’s experiential learning opportunities have grown (pun intended!) from outreach and coordination with environmental agencies. One of the main partners – [Reforest London](#) – offers volunteer opportunities to participate in planting events. According to Jake, “*we try to increase learner buy-in for these events by engaging with the task at hand prior to the day of the event.*” Engagement could include a class vote to see what type of species will be planted, or on which day the planting will occur. Or it could include the use of topic-specific curriculum. Nokee Kwe has developed learning tasks based on environmental information and activities that are available through local environmental organizations.

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How?

Experiential learning opportunities offered by Nokee Kwe are provided through Literacy and Basic Skills funding.

Lessons Learned

- It is best to work closely with any volunteer organizations you want to partner with, prior to building a professional relationship. Knowing your partner first is always a good strategy.
- Don't design "high-risk" activities that have to run to a tight schedule or with a certain number of volunteers. Build in some wiggle room, so the experiential learning opportunities are not high stress – for you, your partners, or your learners.

Impact

Experiential learning through volunteerism can assist learners in building their social skills and enhancing their social/employment networks. Jake notes that for clients who are indigenous, some partnerships, such as one Nokee Kwe did with multi-cultural organizations and environmentalism, felt like a step towards reconciliation in that it connected members of indigenous communities with members of newcomer communities. Further, it was a chance to talk about First Nations cultures, including the integral role of trees and tobacco.

The benefits from experiential learning for clients have been numerous, but Nokee Kwe has also benefitted as an agency. For example, their participation in experiential learning has increased their community profile in positive ways.

Quote

"This is not just about volunteerism. It's about being part of something important (like environmentalism) and a call to action."

Kingston Literacy & Skills

Who?

[Kingston Literacy & Skills](#) (KL&S) is a community-based LBS agency serving the city of Kingston and surrounding areas.

Thanks to Martha Rudden, Manager of Literacy and Basic Skills Programs, for sharing this success story with us.

When?

Kingston Literacy & Skills has been offering experiential learning for the past eight years.

Why?

The benefits of experiential learning are far-reaching, providing LBS learners with positive experiences, and setting them on a good path for jobs that suit their skills, needs and interests. Experiential learning includes the obvious building of skills, but also results in increased self-esteem for learners, who benefit from the knowledge that they have gained real-world experience.

KL&S has used occupational curriculum to build learners' literacy, numeracy and digital skills within the context of certain sectors and types of jobs. Learners get the combined benefits of increased Essential Skills as well as practical skills that they can use to build their job skills and approach potential employers.

Some learners at KL&S have very limited employment experience, and therefore paid employment is a significant leap for them. In some cases, KL&S uses volunteering as a way to assist learners in getting employment-related experience. Volunteering helps learners gain confidence and it also helps them realize that employment is a viable goal.

What?

Learners at KL&S are at different stages of comfort with workplace tasks and have many different needs. As a result, KL&S offers a range of different experiential learning opportunities, but their goal is always to present to learners diverse and creative real-life learning experiences.

Some of the experiential learning opportunities offered by KL&S take place primarily in their program, such as when the students are taught using occupational curriculum. This learning may look like more traditional literacy instruction, but the staff at KL&S embed it within language and tasks that learners would encounter in specific types of employment.

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In addition, KL&S offers chances to gain work experience through internal job experiences in their daycare or with office tasks. KL&S also leverages their links with employers by asking employers to come to their program to speak about jobs, whether they work as a carpenter or at Starbucks.

Learners who are close to being employment-ready are placed as volunteers in the community with other not-for-profits. KL&S places learners with organizations of interest to the learners. For example, a learner who has an interest finding a job as a pet groomer may get a placement with the Humane Society.

Over the years, Kingston Literacy & Skills has offered a wide variety of targeted experiential learning programs, including (but not limited to):

- **HELP** (Hospitality, Employability, Leading, Potential): Starbucks staff did presentations on coffee types, then brought students into the kitchen to show them how to make specialty coffee. As part of HELP, Employment Services provided learners with Service Excellence training and other job-search workshops.
- **Road Crew and Construction Certificates:** This initiative combined literacy, skilled trades tasks, soft skills training and real-world training, such as Fall Arrest, WHMIS, and First Aid CPR. This initiative was a partnership between LBS, Ontario Works and Employment Services.
- **Retail:** For students who want to work in retail, KL&S currently offers occupational curriculum in this area. They also have a cash box and do activities with that. KL&S has purchased point of sale materials and has begun delivering this type of training at its Napanee site.
- **Pre-PSW:** This is one of KL&S' most popular programs. It helps prepare learners for Personal Support Worker training.
- **Cooking with a Mission:** This Napanee KL&S program provided a healthful cooking/life style series of workshops with OW, the Health Unit, Morning Star Mission and Career Edge. They also had input and presentations from various hospitality businesses in the area, and the local employment service agency. This project increased participants' Essential Skills, taught them about healthy living and eating, provided basic training in restaurant work, and connected participants with employers.

How?

Kingston Literacy and Skills mainly finances its experiential learning opportunities through LBS funding, but they also have partnerships with Ontario Works, Employment Services and others. If they need to, KL&S applies for grants with various foundations.

Success Stories

Lessons Learned

KL&S offers quite a few experiential learning opportunities, so they have learned some valuable lessons, including:

- There are many small activities you can do to give learners employment-related experience. Most want to work, but lack confidence and experience in the workforce. Be sure to focus on building learner confidence and supporting them with activities related to their goals.
- Be cautious about setting learners up for success, not failure. If they have a negative experiential learning situation, then it can be very detrimental to their self-esteem.
- Take the time required to do good planning and to resource the management of experiential learning.
- Be active in the community and develop creative partnerships with stakeholders. Other service providers, not-for-profits, employers and others are often very willing to help, once you explain the need and importance of what you are doing.

Impact

Kingston Literacy and Skills definitely sees positive results from offering experiential learning opportunities. Perhaps most notably, KL&S sees an increase in learner self-esteem. As learners who are unemployed gain enhanced skills and confidence, they become increasingly prepared to tackle employment. For learners who have a job already, experiential learning can give them the encouragement to seek better employment.

KL&S has also increased awareness of literacy and of their LBS agency in the community, and they have developed many new partnerships as a result of offering experiential learning.

Quote

“Experiential learning provides LBS learners with positive experiences – and sets them on the right path for a job that suits their skills, needs and interests.”

Prince Edward Learning Centre

Who?

[Prince Edward Learning Centre](#) (or PELC) is a community-based LBS agency located in Picton, Ontario. PELC serves the residents of Prince Edward County.

Thanks to Kathy Kennedy, Executive Director, and Lori Farrington, Program Coordinator, for sharing this success story with us!

When?

Prince Edward Learning Centre has offered experiential learning via its social enterprise, PELC Pops, for the past two years.

Why?

The staff at Prince Edward Learning Centre had been thinking about experiential learning for some time – they just weren't sure what to offer. Prince Edward County is a tourist area. There are many festivals and very artistic locals who tend to sell the things they create to make a bit of extra money. Staff who attended the festivals noted that they rarely saw LBS learners in attendance. The learners didn't seem to be engaged in this area of their community. However, seeing all the vendors with their pop-up businesses gave the staff of PELC an idea.

They knew that PELC could not manage a storefront social enterprise. It would be too large of an undertaking, with too much overhead and too much in the way of human resources to manage it. However, a pop-up social enterprise that directly involved the learners might just be possible.

What?

The staff decided that with all the summer festivals and events that occur in Prince Edward County, it would be a good idea to sell gourmet popcorn at some of these events. They could decide which festivals and events they wanted to sell at and plan accordingly. They knew that offering learners the chance to sell popcorn and to do it as a small business would create a great experiential learning opportunity. And so, PELC set up the social enterprise that is now known as **PELC Pops**.

Success Stories

How?

PELC made the decision to involve learners in the social enterprise right from the beginning. The goal was to create an excellent learning experience for the learners, and ensure that learners were involved wherever and whenever possible. For example, learners helped to determine the colour scheme and the uniforms that would be worn to create an old-fashioned look and feel for PELC Pops.

To get some seed funding to start up PELC Pops, PELC applied to the Prince Edward County chapter of The Awesome Foundation. With this foundation, people have the opportunity to pitch their ideas for how to make their community even more awesome. The ten people on the foundation board, each of whom have donated \$100, vote on who gets the \$1000 grant. Once again, the learners were involved every step of the way, and they helped with the development of a logo and with making the pitch to the Awesome Foundation. Everyone was delighted when PELC was successful! The learners were shocked and pleased that they had helped to make this success happen, which increased their buy-in and confidence.

PELC Pops bought a fancy old-fashioned style popcorn machine with the foundation's money. The only requirement of The Awesome Foundation was...**GO FORTH AND BE AWESOME!**

The next step was to source local healthy ingredients for the popcorn, which also became a learning opportunity for the students. Organic ingredients were sourced, along with a secret spice mix recipe in order to make extraordinary popcorn.

A core group of learners assist with the social enterprise. They get paid and the little extra income is very much appreciated. The learners gain many important skills via their involvement in PELC Pops, such as money math, customer service, food services, marketing, administration and coordination experience related to special events. Prince Charles and Camilla even made an appearance at an event attended by PELC Pops.

You can learn more about this exciting initiative by connecting with PELC POPS on [Facebook](#) and Instagram (at @PelcPops).

Lessons Learned

In their experience with PELC Pops, Prince Edward Learning Centre has learned several important lessons:

- Social enterprise is a great way to give students all kinds of great experience and skills.
- Involve students right from the beginning. They have much to contribute and it helps to gain their support and buy-in.
- Start small, and build from there.
- It has to be based on community needs. PELC Pops worked well in Prince Edward County, but might need to look different elsewhere.
- Don't be afraid to innovate!

Success Stories

Impact

The learners improved their customer service and food handling skills, and they increased their confidence and knowledge of money math and social enterprises. Learner confidence increased substantially as learners saw the real-world results of their efforts.

Some learners felt anxiety at first, but PELC staff supported them through these challenges and, later, some learners applied at a local grocery store and got jobs due to their involvement and experience with PELC Pops.

Many learners at PELC live at or below the poverty line. Being able to earn a small amount of income by participating in PELC Pops meant a lot to the learners as they were able to generate their own income and use that income in ways that were personally meaningful.

Quote

*"Can you guess the only requirement of the Awesome Foundation for PELC POPs? It was '**GO FORTH AND BE AWESOME**'! And, that's just what we did!"*

Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre

Who?

The [Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre](#) (SVRC) offers a variety of programming in the Sudbury region, including LBS and Employment Services.

Thanks to Ginette Comeau-Roy, Program Manager, Education and Workforce Training, Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre, for sharing this success story!

When?

The Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre has been offering experiential learning for the past six years.

Why?

Employment is a goal path for many LBS agencies, but it's a significant goal path for the Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre since their LBS program is co-located with Employment Services. They estimate that 65% of their LBS clients are on the employment goal path. As they have many learners who are on the employment goal path, experiential learning became a natural avenue to explore to provide learners with the skills they need to be successful.

The SVRC wanted to make sure that the experiential learning opportunities they offered were aligned with what job seekers needed for the local labour market, so they consulted with two local agencies – the YMCA and the March of Dimes – in order to assess the need and to find out what clients are looking for most. The SVRC discovered that cashier/retail training was a high need (alongside LBS instruction) for both students and employers, as well as Microsoft Office training.

What?

At the Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre, they offer two experiential learning programs: Microsoft Office – Workplace Essentials and Retail/Cashier training.

The Retail/Cashier training is a continuous intake program, offered to a group or to an individual, depending on demand. They have a cash register, so the instruction is task-based, and they teach money math, workplace communications, and customer service. The SVRC developed much of the curriculum they use for this program, but they adapted and tailored some of it from Literacy Link Eastern Ontario's occupational curricula. The SVRC also uses the *"Paving the Way to Lasting Employment: A Manual and Twelve Interactive Training Videos"* from Kingston Literacy and Skills.

The SVRC's Microsoft Office – Workplace Essentials program is embedded within LBS. Learners gain basic writing and numeracy and communication and digital skills for the workplace. The Centre uses Excel to teach math and Word to teach letter writing and communications. As part of this program, learners create real-life office documents and emails.

Success Stories

The SVRC places students with the March of Dimes (MOD) or other local employment service or community agencies. They also work with a placement agency to assist learners in gaining access to clerical/administrative placements.

The SVRC actually gets referrals from MOD and employment services and they refer to them if learners are not currently working with an employment counsellor.

The SVRC wishes they could expand and do more. Experiential learning helps the students so much; however, getting adequate funding for their experiential learning programming is an ongoing challenge.

How?

The Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre's experiential learning opportunities are funded solely through LBS funding.

Lessons Learned

Over the past six years, the SVRC has learned from their experiential learning offerings. For example, they've learned about the importance of partnerships. The SVRC found partners in expected places, like employment service agencies, but also in unexpected places. For example, the SVRC is currently in a partnership with LIUNA (Laborers' International Union of North America).

And they've learned that partnerships need to be supported and maintained. The SVRC needed to invest financial and human resources in their partnerships in order to ensure that they remain strong. It is difficult to find adequate core funding for their experiential learning programming.

They've also learned to listen to community needs. The SVRC needs to work closely with the agencies and individuals who work with their clients and potential clients to learn how best to provide clients with experiential learning opportunities that will meet their needs.

As staff, they have come to highly value experiential learning, but so have the learners. The learners in their program very clearly see the benefits of experiential learning, and they are grateful for the experiences that the SVRC provides for them.

Impact

The Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre can't over-estimate the impact of experiential learning on building self-esteem. Learners who participate in experiential learning show significant increases in self-esteem. Learners realize that they are not only acquiring the basic literacy skills they need, but they are also getting a glimpse of what they need to be successful in the workplace. This knowledge results in greater confidence in interviews and, ultimately, on the job.

Quote

"Through experiential learning, LBS students get to know their skills and understand what they are good at. It really helps them figure out their next steps and gain confidence to build a better future."

YWCA – St. Thomas-Elgin

Who?

The Adult Education Program of the [YWCA of St. Thomas-Elgin](#) is a community-based Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program that provides services to the towns of St. Thomas and Aylmer.

Thanks to Shelley Harris, Director of Employment and Settlement, Adult Education Program, for sharing this success story with us.

When?

The YWCA of St. Thomas-Elgin has been offering experiential learning for the past ten years.

Why?

The Adult Education Program has a number of learners who have skills, but who may never be able to achieve their Ontario Secondary School Diploma or a General Equivalency Development (GED). These learners are trying to build skills to show employers what they can do. This type of experiential learning certification and documentation is valuable to learners with employment goals. It helps learners to gain employment experience and to build their resumes.

Experiential learning is also very motivating for learners in that it can assist them in seeing the application of their learning. For instance, there is less motivation to learn measurement unless you can see the application in real-life tasks.

What?

The Adult Education Program has a garden project which had input from learners from the very beginning. Learners assisted with the development of the proposal that enabled them to build a greenhouse by getting quotes for the compost equipment, the rain barrel, etc. Once the proposal was accepted, learners were involved in finding the best priced greenhouse, building materials, soils, and delivery. They assisted with plant selection, seeding and maintenance of the gardens. Currently, the Adult Education Program has some second-generation newcomers who will collaborate next year to plant vegetables that are not readily available to newcomers in local grocery stores.

The Adult Education Program also has pre-construction occupational curriculum for use with learners who are interested in construction. Measurement is a huge issue for a lot of clients. When students have completed the curriculum, the program works with them to connect with Employment Services to find employment.

Most often, learners find work in local factories. For most types of employment, computer skills are essential, so the Adult Education Program offers digital literacy programs.

Success Stories

The Adult Education Program also does Safe Food Handling with some clients. They are looking at curriculum around this to offer to learners prior to them accessing the online certification in food safety. People who are looking to work in kitchens take this training. They've also done SmartServe and offered curriculum around this.

How?

Most of the experiential learning is offered through LBS funding, but the Adult Education Program supplements programming with other grants and other funding when possible.

Lessons Learned

Listen to learners! If you have an open time where the class can just chat and throw ideas around, wonderful things come out of that. Learners want to share their skills and knowledge. For example, one learner makes amazing soup. So, this learner showed how he uses his Safe Food Handling skills and knowledge, and everyone enjoyed this shared soup!

Impact

- Learners get exposure to working as part of a team.
- Experiential learning increases learners' voices, confidence and self-esteem.
- Other clients of the YWCA (from the women's shelter in the same building as the literacy program) saw learners giving back to the community. For example, the women's shelter residents, who are not part of the LBS program, worked with the learners to tend the garden on the weekends. It became a connection between these two different groups. During harvest, it was wonderful to see the synergies between these two groups.
- Longer term, a lot of learners have started gardens in their own homes. They are involving their children and they have access to fresh vegetables.
- Learners are building budgeting skills.
- Some learners have become involved in community gardening as volunteers, while others have been more active in the broader community.
- The women residents at the shelter have benefited as well, as their motivation and social connections have increased.

Quote

"Listen to the learners! If you have open time where the class can just chat and throw ideas around, wonderful things come out of that. Learners want to share their skills and knowledge."