

Our Voice

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Employment Ontario: Projects and Initiatives

In this newsletter, Community Literacy of Ontario is pleased to share information on some of the dynamic and useful projects and initiatives designed to link Literacy and Basic Skills programming with the broader Employment Ontario system.



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We also wanted to provide a brief update on Employment Ontario. As always, your best source of information is the *Employment Ontario Partners Gateway* (EOPG) website at: www.eopg.ca. Some of the key items appearing on the EOPG include:

- ◆ EO agencies delivering “*employment services*” (literacy is classified as “*training services*”) have recently been informed by MTCU that they will hear early in 2010 about the results of the transformation and implementation of employment services. For more information, please see the December 18, 2009 letter from Laurie LeBlanc, Assistant Deputy Minister, posted on the EOPG.
- ◆ Many changes have also been made to MTCU’s *Second Career* program and there are many helpful updates on the EOPG about this initiative.
- ◆ There is an update which overviews the current and future plans for the *Employment Ontario Information System* (EOIS).
- ◆ Various information on *Apprenticeship* is shared.
- ◆ CLO serves as a representative on the *Employment Ontario Service Delivery Advisory Group* (SDAG). You can find the latest information about this group by clicking under the “SDAG Members” tab on the EOPG site.
- ◆ Another great source of information is MTCU’s *Employment Ontario* website at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/tcu/employmentontario/.

Connecting Literacy and Employment Through Essential Skills

By Anne Marie Curtin, Literacy Link South Central

Literacy Link South Central (LLSC) has been funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills to do a two-year project called "Connecting Literacy and Employment Through Essential Skills." This project will run from June 2009 to May 2011 and it has two clear goals.

GOAL 1: Developing Workbooks

The primary goal of this project is to develop seven workbooks that embed literacy skills within employment-readiness tasks and organize these tasks according to Essential Skills. Developing and organizing material this way will help literacy programs and employment programs to provide clients with employability skills and literacy skills simultaneously.

The percentage of clients in literacy programs with employment-related goals has increased over the past few years. Employment-preparation programs recognize that they have clients who have low levels of literacy and Essential Skills. These clients are not always willing to attend adult literacy programs yet they are not successful in using employment-preparation services. The workbooks we develop will give clients in literacy programs the chance to build literacy skills while preparing for employment. The materials will also give employment-preparation clients the opportunity to improve their literacy and Essential Skills while working on employment preparation activities.

GOAL 2: Surveying Employers

A second goal of this project is to engage employers in conversations to explore the Essential Skills they expect employees to have. The results of this research will help to determine the contents of the workbooks mentioned above. It's also our hope that this portion of the project will establish an ongoing dialogue between employers, literacy programs and employment programs about Essential Skills in the workplace.

As a result of this two-year project, LLSC anticipates that employment preparation and literacy programs will work more collaboratively to meet the skills needed by Canadian employers. Clients of employment and literacy programs will be able to move more quickly to fill labour market vacancies.

Our partners for this project include:

- Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford Local Training Board
- Goodwill Ontario Great Lakes
- Literacy London Inc.
- London Employment Help Centre
- Pathways Skill Development & Placement Centre



Please visit our website at www.llsc.on.ca/ to learn more.

Making the Business Case for Integration

By Lynne Wallace, College Sector Committee

The College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading is currently sponsoring two initiatives which support literacy programming at Ontario's twenty four community colleges. Both initiatives focus on the collaboration and support for Employment Ontario sponsored clients and students in the colleges. Both projects involve college staff from college-based apprenticeship, Job Connect, Employment Assistance Services and, of course, Literacy and Basic Skills/Academic Upgrading programs.



Making the Business Case for Integration is a research project led by Sue Folinsbee, who is well-known to the literacy community in Ontario. Sue's research involves specific case studies at seven colleges which focus on the collaboration strategies employed by college-based Employment Ontario programs to ensure better student and client outcomes. Staff often wonder if collaboration is really worth it. Is it worth the time or the extra effort? Does it make a real difference in student outcomes or success rates? Sue's preliminary findings indicate that collaboration can take many forms, at all levels of the organization, and that it generally leads to better outcomes.

The leadership and support provided by LBS programs is noteworthy. By illustrating specific effective practices at several colleges, this research will help inform all colleges delivering Employment Ontario sponsored programs and services.

Taking Action! A College Network Development Project

Taking Action! A College Network Development Project involves all frontline college staff involved in the delivery of Employment Ontario sponsored programs and services. With funding provided by the Employment Ontario Network Development Fund, college frontline staff are engaged directly in developing internal networks, referral guidelines and self assessment tools, all intended to ultimately improve client and student outcomes. Led by project consultant Bea Clark, recently retired Director of Workforce and Business Development at Niagara College, the project also includes a website survey which will provide colleges with specific feedback from typical users.

Each college hosted an event for frontline staff designed to forge stronger internal networks, encourage the sharing of resources and promote ongoing, regular collaboration. Four regional workshops provided staff with an opportunity to review and discuss the draft tools. The completed tools, two informational bulletins and the results of the website surveys will be forward to all twenty four colleges before March 31, 2010.

For more information about either of these projects, please contact Lynne Wallace at l.wallace@xplornet.com or visit the CSC website at: www.collegeupgradingon.ca

Linking Adult Literacy to Poverty Reduction

By Andrea Dickinson, Tri-County Literacy Network

Tri-County Literacy Network is currently managing the 'Linking Adult Literacy to Poverty Reduction' Project during the 2009-2010 fiscal year with funding from the Employment Ontario Network Development Fund (EONDF). The project was designed to improve the capacity for Windsor-Essex Ontario Works and the Tri-County Literacy Network to work together more effectively with people living in poverty.

The project was designed to meet the three EONDF funding priorities by:

- ◆ Developing strategies and sensitivities of staff for working with learners/clients in poverty
- ◆ Identifying systemic changes that are necessary to improve services
- ◆ Identifying effective Literacy and Basic Skills strategies and programs that address poverty

Deliverables are:

- ◆ *Bridges Out of Poverty* workshop designed to increase staff understanding of poverty
- ◆ Researching local and provincial best practices for programs and collaborative approaches to addressing the needs of learners/clients in poverty
- ◆ Creating and field testing an *Agency Self-Assessment Tool*
- ◆ Holding a forum where research results are presented and a strategic plan for next steps is discussed
- ◆ Evaluations and reports



The activities/deliverables which have been achieved to date:

- ◆ Established and held regular meetings with an advisory committee that includes representation from Tri-County Literacy Network, Ontario Works, Literacy and Basic Skills, and the Poverty Reduction Roundtable and Employment Ontario
- ◆ Developed a survey to research strategies and programs that have proven to be successful in overcoming barriers within networks or other organizations to provide services and programs for those living in poverty
- ◆ Evaluated survey results to identify best practices for inclusion in the one pager of best practices and the agency self-assessment tool
- ◆ Developed a one pager of best practices, including web links that was printed and distributed at the *Bridges Out of Poverty* workshop
- ◆ Developed a *LBS Agency Self-Assessment Tool* and *Agency Self-Assessment Tool* to assess the use of best practices within agencies in the areas of individual action, program elements and community engagement
- ◆ Planned the *Bridges Out of Poverty* (Ruby Payne) workshop
- ◆ Held the *Bridges Out of Poverty* (Ruby Payne) workshop in Windsor for approximately 150 Windsor-Essex Ontario Works, Literacy and Basic Skills, and Employment Ontario staff, with excellent feedback
- ◆ Forwarded the *Self-Assessment Tools* to identified agencies

Next steps in the project:

- ◆ To review the results of the completed *LBS Agency Self-Assessment Tool* and *Agency Self-Assessment Tool*
- ◆ To develop a draft strategic plan designed to ensure Ontario Works and Literacy and Basic Skills programs and procedures are in place to best meet local needs
- ◆ To hold the planned local forum
- ◆ To produce a strategic plan for use by Ontario Works and the Tri-County Literacy Network on a go forward basis
- ◆ To identify potential future project proposals that will enhance project activity

A final report will be produced outlining the details of the project. For further information, please contact Andrea Dickinson at Tri-County Literacy Network at 519-355-1771, or toll-free at 1-877-333-3833, or by email at a.dickinson@cogeco.net, or via their website at www.tcln.on.ca.

CLO's Online Promotions Project

Community Literacy of Ontario has received funding from MTCU for a project called: *Online Promotion of Literacy to Employment Ontario Partners*.

In this project, CLO will create five audio-visual, user-friendly, and easy-to-access online presentations to educate stakeholders about literacy. These presentations will help to:

- ◆ Increase awareness amongst Employment Ontario partners and other stakeholders about the importance of literacy and LBS agencies
- ◆ Educate partners and stakeholders about the role played by LBS agencies in supporting adults to increase their literacy skills and gain access to other employment and training services
- ◆ Underline the strong co-relation between enhanced literacy skills and success in other employment and training programs

These online presentations will contain short, effective and powerful educational messages about the key need for literacy, including the following topics:

- ◆ What is literacy and why is it important?
- ◆ Literacy in Ontario
- ◆ Benefits of literacy training
- ◆ Understanding clients with literacy needs
- ◆ Literacy and Employment Ontario partners



Literacy programs and networks will find it easy to share these online presentations with EO partners and other stakeholders via an email link. The presentations will be available in June 2010.

Supporting Transitions Between Employment Ontario Agencies

By Ashley Hoath, Literacy Link Niagara

In 2008-09, Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) was funded by MTCU to complete “Easing Transitions Between EO Agencies”. This project required LLN to conduct a comprehensive review and analysis of EO partner agencies’ materials and program elements to identify the literacy levels and Essential Skill levels necessary to understand and use these materials (project completion date: March 30th, 2009). A report with these levels was delivered to the programs that participated in the project. Literacy Link Niagara proposed to continue a second phase of the project entitled, “Supporting Transitions Between EO Agencies” in 2009-10.

This current phase utilizes the information collected from the first phase to better bridge the relationships between Niagara’s Employment and LBS agencies. Using the information collected in the first phase, Literacy Link Niagara is working with Employment agencies to adapt their current materials to better serve their clients using literacy levels, Essentials Skills levels and clear language. A pre-screening tool is in development to help Employment agencies recognize when a client may require Literacy services. LLN is also putting their information and referral online in an easy-to-navigate format to help Employment agencies and clients find programs best suited to them. Literacy Link Niagara will create learner profile templates based on the assessment of materials from the first phase that can assist LBS agencies with easily identifying the most effective Employment program fit for learners. A joint training event will be held to educate LBS agencies on the programs of Employment agencies, and vice versa. Please visit www.literacylinkniagara.ca for more information.

EmployAbility Success!

By Karen Farrar, QUILL Learning Network

Employment Ontario has sharpened the literacy field’s focus on employment-related learning. The increased emphasis on workplace preparation and activities has many instructors searching for new materials to help their students make the transition to employment. It is especially challenging to find materials that are suited to students who are seeking entry-level positions. Many of these students have never worked or have very limited job experience. They need to build their literacy skills at the same time as their Essential Skills in order to be successful in their chosen employment.



QUILL Learning Network received funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to produce an Essential Skills focused curriculum that is specifically geared toward students who are candidates for entry-level jobs. *EmployAbility Success!* uses a style that allows students to ‘job shadow’ four characters in their workplace situations. Students using the *EmployAbility Success!* curriculum are given opportunities to practise their Essential Skills in the world of work. Workplace scenarios enable them to make the connections between the skills they are gaining now and the jobs they will be doing in the future.

The *EmployAbility Success!* curriculum, with modules on reading, document use and writing, is in the early stages of its development. It will be available to the literacy field in June, 2010. Please see: www.quillnet.org/ for additional information.

The Literacy and Essential Skills Awareness Guide

By Mary Wiggin, Ottawa Community Coalition for Literacy

The three eastern regional literacy networks, Literacy Link Eastern Ontario (LLEO – lead network), Literacy Ontario Central South (LOCS) and Ottawa Community Coalition for Literacy (OCCL) partnered this year on a project to produce a resource called *The Literacy and Essential Skills Awareness Guide*. The guide was funded by a grant from the Capacity Development Fund, MTCU.



The guide gives employment counsellors and social service workers a series of tips that may help them identify clients who need to improve their literacy and Essential Skills. Some clients will have to upgrade these skills in order to be successful in completing the terms of a Back/Return to Work Action Plan. The guide also includes questions workers can ask clients in order to find out more about their educational background and literacy skills as well as information to guide the interpretation of clients' responses.

The partners wanted to provide the resource in French as well. It is available under the rather grand title, *L'observation d'un faible niveau de littératie et de compétences essentielles pour réussir un retour sur le marché du travail ou en formation: Guide de référence*. Louise Lalonde, Executive Director of Le Centre, Moi, j'apprends worked on the project and has been making presentations to francophone agencies in Eastern Ontario. Doug Noyes, Lesley Hamilton and Mary Wiggin have also presented to employment counselors and social service workers in their network areas. To date the four have made presentations to almost 600 workers and have future bookings. The response has been very positive.

The presentations provide an opportunity to talk about issues that are familiar to literacy workers but not necessarily known by social service workers and employment counselors:

- ◆ Many adults will not reveal they have a literacy problem, and in some cases they don't recognize that they have a need
- ◆ Literacy is much more than being able to read or write. It includes, among other things, oral communication, computer skills, problem solving and analytical skills
- ◆ A Grade 12 diploma or record of completion of some high school credits does not necessarily match a person's skills
- ◆ It makes a difference what kind of high school a client attended, how long ago and where
- ◆ What are Regional Literacy Networks and what services do they offer?

Contact information for the three regional literacy networks is included in the guide. During the presentations workers learn that the networks can provide information, referral services and, in some cases, literacy assessments for clients who may benefit from literacy and Essential Skills programming.

All of the regional and sectoral literacy networks received copies of the English and French versions of the guide in a format that allows them to add their own contact information. LLEO (www.lleo.ca/), LOCS (www.locs.on.ca/) and OCCL (www.occl.ca) have posted the guide on their websites in both languages and people are invited to download copies at no cost.

Training CD on Aboriginal Inclusion in Employment Ontario

By Ontario Native Literacy Coalition staff

The Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) has produced a CD to help frontline staff in Employment Ontario delivery agencies learn about Aboriginal culture and how to work effectively with Aboriginal people.

The rationale for developing this awareness building CD presentation was clear. In many areas of Ontario Aboriginal people live in communities that are isolated from the mainstream. Individuals in this situation tend to be more aware of, and immersed in, their culture and traditions and are often wary of approaching an EO service delivery agency, especially if none of the frontline staff are Aboriginal.

In other parts of the province the Native population may appear to be more integrated into mainstream culture, in fact EO staff may find it difficult to identify clients as being Aboriginal. In both cases these clients share the same fundamental value system, learning styles, challenges, and needs.

Service providers who understand this and know how to work with Aboriginal people will be in a better position to achieve positive, long-term outcomes for their clients, which is an outcome everyone within the EO service delivery network supports. Organizations with these skills are also much more likely to attract Aboriginal clients in need of their services. This presentation is designed to be viewed by any frontline service staff, even if they are not currently working with Aboriginal clients.

For more information on the Aboriginal Inclusion CD, please contact the ONLC at www.onlc.ca or at 1-800-971-2255.

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