



# Workforce Literacy Bulletin

## Workforce Literacy: A Virtual Reality for Learners

*By Rejeanne Faucher, New Leaf Literacy Program, Sudbury*

In November 2002, the Sudbury Vocational Resource Centre's New Leaf Literacy Program opened the doors to its first learner operated virtual business. The "FROM ME TO YOU OUTLET STORE" holds inventory donated by local merchants, staff and volunteers.

This outlet operates with its own bank and currency. Learners are paid minimum wage based on hours of attendance and additional hours for specific tasks. These tasks are assigned based on each individual's abilities. Hours are recorded and then submitted to the payroll/accounting department (conducted by learners) who calculate payroll and issue cheques.

Individual bank accounts have been set up for each participant through Excel and learners can deposit their earnings. Access is available to their account balances. During store hours their earned dollars will allow them to purchase items in the outlet.

Through this workforce training, our learners are able to perform tasks such as: inventory, pricing, customer service, money management, and operating a cash register. When an interest in working in the outlet is demonstrated, a resume and completed application form must be submitted to the coordinator. Once hired, employees are assigned a student workbook and an employee handbook, which allows them to become familiar with retail expectations. When the individual is ready, training on the cash register is offered by the assistant manager (promoted learner) and is overseen by a volunteer. The coordinator and the numeracy instructor administer this endeavour.

The outlet provides an opportunity to purchase clothing, books, toys, household items, personal grooming products and even makeup. As the majority of our learners live on low incomes, this service has been an appreciated one.

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## Community Literacy Agencies and Workforce Literacy

As a wrap-up of Community Literacy of Ontario's, *Working Together for Program Growth and Learner Success* project, CLO would like to profile some of the exciting initiatives that are happening in Ontario in the challenging area of workforce literacy.

Workforce literacy, while not new, is still relatively uncharted territory for many community literacy agencies. CLO would like to take this opportunity to showcase and share the innovative and ongoing efforts of one community literacy agency in the area of workforce literacy. CLO is also delighted to share insights from one of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities' five "first sites" selected to assist with the implementation of their workplace literacy strategy.

It is important to recognize that the literacy field is striving to meet the employment needs and goals of their clients in unique and creative ways. These initiatives are working towards meeting the challenges of workforce literacy.



## More on "A Virtual Reality for Learners"

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Everyone enjoys the shopping aspect and they benefit from purchased items. The retail outlet was especially welcomed at Christmas when many learners were able to provide Christmas gifts for their loved ones while maintaining their pride.

The setting up of such an endeavour has been very challenging. Obviously the outlet is still in progress and will require some fine-tuning, but as a whole it has been a welcomed experience for our learners and staff.

A second virtual business is in the final stages of development and we hope to give birth to "The Office Link" in 2003. Through this endeavour we wish to help our learners with communication techniques (telephone) and increase their confidence in the use of office technology.

New Leaf hopes to pursue its venture to provide ongoing workforce training, however due to financial constraints, the challenge is even greater. The New Leaf Literacy team of coordinators, instructors and volunteers are extremely committed to their learners and have been instrumental in the development and execution of workforce strategies.

For more information on the "FROM ME TO YOU OUTLET STORE", please contact New Leaf Literacy by telephone at 705-677-0432 or by email at [rejeanne@svrc.on.ca](mailto:rejeanne@svrc.on.ca).

# First Hand from a First Site



By Earla Smith, QUILL Learning Network

Quality in Life Long Learning (QUILL) (located in Walkerton Ontario and serving Grey, Bruce, Huron, Perth & the Georgian Triangle Region) is one of five "First Sites" literacy networks to pilot the development and implementation of MTCU's "Essential Skills Training in the Workplace". This initiative, funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and through work with the OLC, is intended to develop and build a framework for promoting, marketing and delivering workplace literacy training to Ontario employers on a fee for service basis.

The model adopted in our region, is to market customized training to employers in the manufacturing and hospitality sectors, with QUILL doing the initial promotion, providing information sessions, presentations and referral services. Our partners in the initial pilot project, Georgian College - Owen Sound campus, the Avon Maitland School Board and the Walkerton Adult Learning Centre will be delivering the training.

*Effective Strategies for Marketing to Employers and Community Partners:*

- ⇒ Attend as many community functions as possible in order to promote the need for workplace training. (Get people thinking!)
- ⇒ Market essential skills training as the foundation or springboard for other training.
- ⇒ Build trust and relationships with community partners and members. This will allow you to be seen as a key player in the area and be included when some other organization is initiating an event.
- ⇒ Foster and build image in the community as a collaborative partner.
- ⇒ Host events jointly with other community partners that promote training/learning.
- ⇒ Give presentations on the value of essential skills training in the workplace whenever possible. This could include presentations to the Business Enterprise Centre, Tourism Associations, H.R. and employer groups.
- ⇒ Attend job fairs, symposiums, Chamber dinners, or any function where employers might participate.
- ⇒ Network – network – network!
- ⇒ Develop and distribute professional marketing material.

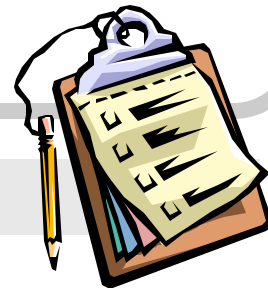
At QUILL, our approach with employers and community partners has brought us some success and we are being invited to events to deliver our presentation on essential skills training and its merits. We have partnered with our Local Training Board to develop marketing material and continue to work with them on some initiatives. QUILL, in partnership with one of our region's Business Enterprise Centres and the local Training Board, will host an event for employers and members of the Chambers of Commerce. This event, called *A Buffet of Training Providers*, will provide participants with an overview of what training opportunities exist in the area. We will deliver our presentation and each individual trainer/organization will speak about their services and delivery. The hope is to have employers see essential skills training as the foundation and springboard to all other training they may need in the future. This approach is very successful and will hold us in good stead for future collaboration and partnerships.

Over the past year, new marketing material, geared specifically to capturing the interest of employers has been developed in collaboration with the other "First Sites" and the OLC. We have targeted specific employers in the area and written to them enclosing this marketing material. We have faithfully followed up with personal phone calls (no voice mail messages!). This is developing a great deal of awareness and in several instances we have been requested to meet with management for discussion about programs, classes, etc. As a result, we consider this approach successful as well.

As we continue with the "First Site" project, we will now be working more closely with agencies in our network on an individual basis to assist them to develop their capacity to deliver effective workforce programs. Through surveys and needs assessments as well as progress/readiness scales, each agency will be in a position to measure and see what training and resources they require to not only build capacity for the delivery of workforce programs to learners, but also understand and prepare for delivery of programs in a workplace. For more information, please visit QUILL's website at [www.quillnet.org](http://www.quillnet.org)

According to CLO's recent survey of Ontario's Community Literacy Agencies:

- ⇒ 45% of community literacy agencies have partnerships with local employers!
- ⇒ 39% of community literacy agencies offer MTCU-funded *workforce* programming
- ⇒ 10% of community literacy agencies offer MTCU-funded *workplace* programming



## Workforce Literacy Resources

### Workplace Literacy Central

Developed by the Conference Board of Canada, Workplace Literacy Central is a free resource with information, tools and advice for Canadian organizations and employers who want to raise literacy and basic skill levels in the workplace. <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/workplaceliteracy/>

### Employability Skills 2000+

Employment Skills 2000+ are the employability skills, attitudes and behaviours that you need to participate and progress in today's dynamic world of work. They include communications, problem solving, positive attitudes and behaviours, adaptability, working with others, and science, technology and mathematical skills. A listing of the skills developed by the Conference Board of Canada can be found in a downloadable format at: <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.htm>

### Employability Skills Toolkit

Developed by the Conference Board of Canada for the self-managing learner, the Employability Skills Toolkit is a compilation of practical tools designed to help learners use and develop the skills needed to enter, stay in and progress in the world of work. For more information, please visit: <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education/learning-tools/toolkit.htm>

### Occupational and Career Information in Ontario

This site provides links and information on occupations, job trends and career guidance. Information includes the Ontario Job Futures publications, apprenticeship links and more. [http://www.on.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/english/lmi/eaid/career\\_e.shtml](http://www.on.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/english/lmi/eaid/career_e.shtml)

Contact the AlphaPlus Centre for a variety of resources on workplace/workforce literacy.

### Ontario Job Futures 2000

Ontario Job Futures 2000 is a publication that provides information on the current trends and future outlook for 157 occupations common to Ontario. It is a joint effort of the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada. [http://www.on.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/english/lmi/eaid/ojf/ojf\\_home\\_e.html](http://www.on.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/english/lmi/eaid/ojf/ojf_home_e.html)

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