

Innovative Work in Literacy and Basic Skills

Informational Brief

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Literacy Link South Central (LLSC)

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Introduction

We are proud to work in the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) field. Not just because of WHAT our sector does – supporting adult learners as they build their skills, but because of HOW our sector does its work. Somehow, with limited funding and many responsibilities, we have literacy programs and literacy support organizations that still manage to be innovative and creative.

You don't have to have a lot of funding to be innovative. In fact, some of the most innovative approaches and projects come into being because of scarce resources. Innovation can also be the result of looking at what we do in adult literacy and applying it to a new area. Remember when financial literacy was a new term? Now we hear about technical literacy, emergent literacy, physical literacy, and the list goes on! And, of course, being innovative may refer to finding a new solution to an old problem.

In this issue of the Innovation Newsletter, we'll explore innovation in several of its forms. We hope you enjoy the following stories of innovative work in adult literacy, and that you feel inspired, and potentially excited, by your colleagues' work.

Story #1 Ecological Literacy: Innovation at NOKEE KWE

Our innovation this year involves Ecological Literacy. We have helped students learn Literacy and Basic Skills by practicing Restoration Ecology and making positive changes to help our ecosystem. Specifically, our focus has been put on three projects:

- planting native tree species,
- raising monarch butterflies for tag and release, and
- watershed maintenance and conservation.

During the implementation of these projects, we have partnered with three organizations: ReForest London, Monarch Teachers of Canada, and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.

For our tree planting initiative, we helped sponsor a tree-planting event. The participants included three learners with their five family members, one staff with a friend, and one member of our board of directors, who joined together to put 375 trees into the ground. In addition to planting trees, one of our learners spoke about the importance of trees in Indigenous culture, providing many newcomers to Canada with their first positive exposure to Indigenous beliefs and values.

Through our butterfly project, we have released nine specimens so far. Two of them were tagged for scientific tracking purposes; five more butterflies had been in chrysalis and emerged on Oct 3.

To contribute to watershed maintenance and conservation, on October 18, a group of students sampled the surface water of the Dingman Creek Watershed as well as counting native tree species and seeking the habitats of endangered species. The data collected will be a part of the 2016 Upper Thames River Watershed Report Card program, and as such, the data will be used and shared by city planners and conservation authorities.

Through the collaborative work with us, all three of our community partners have learned about both Adult Education and Indigenous perspectives on restoration ecology. None of them have ever worked



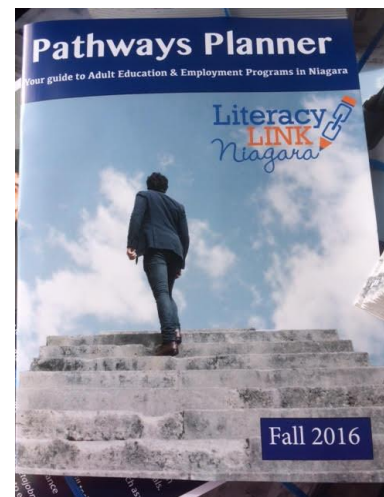
with adult education prior to working with Nokee Kwe, although they have done extensive work with K-12 Educational Programs.

This year's efforts are only the beginning, and we hope to expand this innovative endeavour on Ecological Literacy to incorporate additional community partners and learning activities. So far, we have shared three task-based activities in print with members of London's adult literacy community, and we have plans to share the information digitally to engage our provincial community of practice. Currently, we are developing curriculum resources as well as a photo video series so that not only like-minded service providers can join the movement, but more marketing and educational purposes of such ecological literacy programs can be realized in the future.

Story #2 The Pathways Planner: Helping Connect and Improve Services in Niagara

The staff of Literacy Link Niagara designed and produced a directory of services to help job seekers as well as the staff of local employment and training programs to make appropriate referrals. The decision of creating this directory was made in response to the group discussion at the Niagara Employment Network. Although there had been no specific funding allocated to the project, the Literacy Link Niagara took the initiative to develop an advertising opportunity for local programs and approached the local agencies with the opportunity to advertise in the directory. The advertisement options ranged from \$200 to \$2000.

Surprisingly, the fund was successfully raised only within a couple of weeks of information going out through the E-blast service to local agencies (250 + contacts).



In addition to the information of the local service providers, this directory also includes calendar months so that clients can use it as a day planner to record appointments and interviews. As a result, the directory has turned out to combine three uses together: an information and referral tool for clients to use, a directory to inform the staff of employment and training programs, and a day planner.



Currently, 5000 copies are being distributed throughout the Niagara region to local employment and training programs, community partners, and where jobseekers may congregate. Due to this success, the Niagara Literacy Link intends to publish a second edition in spring of 2017.

With limited existing staff resources, this project has been accomplished with the support of local programs. Gay (the director of Literacy Link Niagara) commented on this innovative experience in this way: "Support was overwhelming and we surpassed our goal" and "it's a fine example of community collaboration." This project not only creates a new stream of funding, but enhances LLN and builds

relationships through the wide distribution of the published directory in the region. The published directory literally put LBS, employment, and wraparound services "on the same page," which promotes the public perception that we are well linked with Employment, Training and either Community Services.

Story #3

Brant Skills Centre presents...The Apprenticeship Pathway

Apprenticeship – namely the need to recruit and prepare more individuals to enter apprenticeship – is definitely a topic of interest in Ontario. It is well documented that we will need a significant increase in apprentices to replace retiring journeypersons. So what role with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs play in this effort? Some programs, like the Brant Skills Centre, are already well on their way.

The Brant Skills Centre has taken steps to address this challenge through a program called “The Apprenticeship Pathway.” This program was designed to introduce individuals to apprenticeship as a viable career pathway. More specifically, the program will assist a client to:

- Get a better understanding of the apprenticeship process (apprenticeship overview);
- Identify your trade of interest and determine the trades that fit with your needs, goals, interests and skills;
- Enhance your computer, numeracy and other essential skills relative to certain trades;
- Understand health and safety requirements;
- Learn about programs and services that can assist you with finding and obtaining an apprenticeship;
- Become aware of the next step in your goal path/action plan.

This program has been run numerous times already and attracts Literacy and Basic Skills clients, Ontario Works clients and other members of the community.

Story #4

Project READ: You and Your Grandchild: Learning Together in a Changing World

The Project READ team created their newest program, “You and Your Grandchild: Learning Together in a Changing World,” in 2013 when they noticed an increase in grandparents attending their family literacy programs. And their needs are different than parents. They experience more isolation, and are often less familiar with current technology and how to engage in learning with their grandkids.

When the Project READ team couldn't find any resources for this group, they created their own. “We got a grant to develop the program, and held a focus group to determine their needs. It was a huge amount of work,” Jennifer Hewitt, Family Literacy Facilitator, laughs, “but we love this program.”

The community loved it, too. The program began as 10 weeks of classes for grandparents who were also primary caregivers to their grandchildren. Participants met for 2 hours a week to focus on family learning.

Benefits expanded beyond the expected increase in confidence when it comes to engaging in literacy activities with their grandchildren. The program validated participant experiences and reinforced that they had valuable skills to share with their grandkids. The program also built a much-needed



community. Participants developed ongoing friendships and support networks that continued after the program itself wrapped up.

This program received a 2016 Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life Literacy Innovation Award Honourable Mention for the creation and delivery (or in the development, implementation and delivery) of adult literacy or adult-integrated family literacy programs delivered by a community organization in Canada.

Story #5 Career Ladders

The Literacy Network of Durham Region (LiNDR) in partnership with Durham Workforce Authority, Literacy Link South Central and Literacy Northwest has been engaged in developing a Career Ladders model for the past several years. In that time, a great deal has been accomplished at a local level to not only identify a potential sector, but to gauge the interest of both training providers and employers.

The concept of Career Ladders arranges post-secondary level training into a series of incremental certificates that workers can access in a flexible manner. These small certificates can be stacked into larger credentials such as college diplomas. Each certificate, or rung, in a Career Ladder is designed to meet the needs of both participants and local employers through the development of necessary workplace skills. To further the practicality of this process, literacy and essential skills training and extensive personal wraparound supports are embedded in the delivery of stacked post-secondary certificates allowing for supportive and seamless career upgrading.

This initiative is a potential solution to the difficulty many adults have in merging the requirement for up-skilling and academic credentials with the simultaneous need for entry level, stable employment opportunities. It also follows that Career Ladders provides a system that aims to address higher skilled jobs that can be difficult to fill with existing low-skilled workforce participants.

Through work accomplished in the first two funded phases of the project, the concept of Career Ladders has been embraced in Durham Region by educators, industry and community service agencies. Ongoing consultation has demonstrated that there is an appetite to restructure the delivery of training to meet the skills needs in the areas of food processing – specifically meat cutting as well as the advanced manufacturing sector. A training pilot in one of these two areas is expected to take place in 2017/2018.

