Building partnerships between Adult Literacy & Ontario Works

# **A Best Practices Guide**

## Developed as part of



## By



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#

# Overview of the System

## The Adult Literacy System

Over the past decade, Literacy Link Niagara has operated an assessment and referral program for Ontario Works clients in the Niagara Region on a fee-for-service basis. Other municipalities, literacy organizations and regional networks partner to better serve the literacy needs of Ontario Works clients across the province. The result of these local relationships means that there aren’t consistent processes and procedures in place across the province.

This project addressed OW and literacy relationships that have developed in Ontario and ask

* how did these relationships develop?
* what were the challenges and what are the successes?

A goal of the project was to provide areas with limited partnerships with tangible evidence of how strong partnerships were developed (referrals, programming, supports, tools) as well as evidence of the partnerships’ successes.

This project also looked at the new population that is emerging within some OW caseloads – clients with strong histories of attachment to the labour market who have exhausted their EI and cannot find a place for their skill sets within the current economy.

**Project Activities included**

* recruitment of a province wide advisory committee
* an international literature review
* surveys with Literacy & Basic Skills and support agencies to discover best practices and gaps of partnerships across the province
* regional discussions of new OW client profile, best practices and gaps of partnership (Niagara)
* survey of motivations for appointment attendance and next steps of clients who are assessed in a Learning Choices appointment (objective referral service provided to OW clients by Literacy Link Niagara)
* discussion around developing a protocol on client referral by Employment Ontario agencies to Learning Choices appointments

**Project Deliverables included**

* best practices guide to help develop new partnerships
* literacy information documents for Ontario Works staff
* revised Ontario Works literacy pre-screen reflecting the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework
* protocol on client referral by Employment Ontario agencies to Learning Choices appointments (in progress)

##

## The Ontario Works System

Ontario Works is a social assistance program run by the Province of Ontario. It is a program of the Ministry of Community & Social Services. Its main goal is to provide income support for people who cannot support themselves due to lack of employment. Ontario Works provides financial support as well as employment support to help people become independent through sustainable employment. According to the Ontario Works website, to receive support a person must

* live in Ontario
* need money right away to help pay for food and shelter
* be willing to take part in activities that will help you find a job

Ontario Works offices are managed locally and may vary in practices and partnerships from region to region. Ontario Works works with a variety of local agencies to provide a holistic approach when supporting their clients.

## Historical Relationships

Many clients who access adult literacy programs are on Ontario Works. 65% of social assistance recipients in Canada have low literacy skills[[1]](#endnote-1).

Because Ontario Works offices are managed locally, adult literacy networks and programs have had to develop their own practices and partnerships with the local Ontario Works offices. While some adult literacy networks have strong partnerships with Ontario Works, other areas have limited or no partnerships.

The purpose of this guide is to help adult literacy networks and programs identify new ways to partner with their local Ontario Works offices and try to promote more common practices across the province of Ontario.

# Methodology

## Data Collection

Literacy Link Niagara collected research on best practices between adult literacy and Ontario Works in several ways. An international and national literature review was used to identify successful partnership strategies from outside of Ontario. A list of resources can be found in the Appendix. Some of these strategies were piloted in Niagara during the project to determine if they may be successful in Ontario.

Literacy Link Niagara also surveyed adult literacy networks and programs to help identify challenges and successes related to Ontario Works partnerships.

Working with their Ontario Works local offices, Literacy Link Niagara piloted new best practices that had been identified as needed in recent years. Management and front-line staff were consulted about how to implement these best practices.

When necessary, Literacy Link Niagara asked for feedback and data from other adult literacy networks.

## Challenges

While Literacy Link Niagara feels that this project has allowed the identification, creation and implementation of many best practices between adult literacy and Ontario Works, two key challenges to project have been identified.

The Adult Literacy and Ontario Works systems often move at different speeds. Because of the large scale of the Ontario Works system, Literacy Link Niagara found that even if local Ontario Works managers and front-line staff thought that a best practice would be beneficial to use, often implementation was not an option due to procedural constraints of the Ontario Works system.

Literacy Link Niagara also felt that it was not able to pilot some of the best practices locally it had identified within the time period of the project. By the time best practice research was completed and potential best practices were identified, the project was more than 50% complete. Even the best practices that were implemented could have stronger evidence of success the length of piloting was longer. For this reason, Literacy Link Niagara is continuing the implementation of many best practices beyond the length of the project to better strengthen the relationships between the network and the local Ontario Works offices.

## Advisory Committee

Literacy Link Niagara assembled an advisory committee of people from across Ontario who have a vested interest in the success of partnerships between adult literacy and Ontario Works. It was important that the committee represented staff from adult literacy networks, adult literacy programs, Ontario Works and additional agencies that support or participate in local partnerships (Training Board, Employment Ontario Employment Service Provider, Action Centre.) The Project Ontario Works (POW) Advisory Committee included

Jennine Agnew-Kata, The Literacy Network of Durham Region

Cindy Buckley, Niagara Action Centre

Stan Drobnich, Employment Help Centre

Christine Eaton, Port Cares

Tim Grawey, Ontario Works, Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities, Niagara Region

Laura Hamilton, Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities

Tracey Meszaros, Niagara Workforce Planning Board

Doug Noyes, Literacy Link Eastern Ontario

# Best Practices

## Assessments

### Application Process

Many articles and books highlighted in the international literature review discussed the potential of discrimination against those with low literacy skills during different stages of the Ontario Works process. A few pieces specifically discussed discrimination during the application process.[[2]](#endnote-2) The additional vulnerability that low literacy skills add to someone who was already suffering from economic barriers during the application process was thought to manifest itself in client misunderstandings of rights and responsibilities.

In Ontario, caseloads are very high and many Ontario Works case managers may not have the tools to quickly identify if someone has low literacy skills. It is important that adult literacy networks and programs work with Ontario Works to educate staff on indicators of low literacy. Literacy Link Niagara has utilized an Indicators Checklist to help Ontario Works staff recognize unique ways that low literacy skills may present in their clients even if the client is unaware or has been formally educated. The Checklist has been used for several years in the Niagara area to educate Ontario Works, Employment Service providers and other community agencies on low literacy signs. The Indicators Checklist can be found in the Appendix.

Literacy Link Niagara was initially part of the development of the Ontario Works mandatory literacy screening test over a decade ago. When reviewing the processes of adult literacy and Ontario Works, it became clear that the screening test no longer reflects what is going on in the literacy field. The screening test was originally created to help a case manager quickly assess the literacy skills of their client, so they could determine is a referral to an adult literacy program should be made. While this function was still necessary, Literacy Link Niagara decided it was important to create a new tool that reflected the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF)

The tool has been designed to look like an authentic document (a cell phone bill) to make clients more comfortable instead of asking the client to complete more traditional “school-type” questions like math equations. If forwarded to an adult literacy program, a practitioner will get a quick “snapshot” of the client’s skill levels related to the new framework.

Initially, Literacy Link Niagara wanted to pilot the tool in Niagara and in three other areas in Niagara utilizing other adult literacy networks. Although Ontario Works offices liked the idea of the tool, all offices did not feel that they could pilot the tool before the end of February 2012. For this reason, Literacy Link Niagara asked three networks to validate the tool by providing feedback on the tool. Comments were very positive and Literacy Link Niagara made changes to the tool to reflect the feedback.

The Project Ontario Works (POW) quick-screen tool can be found in the Appendix. After hearing about the tool, Literacy Link Niagara has had interest to pilot the tool through local Employment Service providers.

### Literacy Assessments to determine ODSP eligibility

67% of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) applications come from Ontario Works clients.[[3]](#endnote-3) Recently, Literacy Link Niagara has conducted Learning Challenges Assessment Tool (LCAT) appointments with Ontario Works clients to determine if the client may be a good fit for ODSP. This type of assessment may pave the way for a new service that networks can provide to Ontario Works and ODSP.

### Use of Sensitive Language

Many Ontario Works offices provide sensitivity training for their staff around race, gender and poverty issues. It is important that literacy and negative experiences with traditional schooling also be identified as an area where sensitivity training is needed.[[4]](#endnote-4) To help case managers understand what to say and what not to say, Literacy Link Niagara has developed a Sensitive Language tip sheet. The Sensitive Language Tip Sheet can be found in the Appendix.

### Objective Referral Assessments

Many adult literacy networks provide objective referral assessments to Ontario Works clients. These services are usually fee-for-service. Assessments may take place in network or Ontario Works offices. One network provides screening interviews for Ontario Works clients over the phone.

While processes vary from network to network, networks provide screening assessments for the purpose of referral. Because they have no vested interest in where the client is referred, the client gets referred to the best program fit for them.

Literacy Link Niagara is currently setting up a virtual objective referral assessment procedure with Ontario Works and hopes to pilot in April 2012. Assessments would be completed using Skype at rural Employment Ontario Employment Service provider locations.

## Advocacy and Client Understanding

### Using advocacy as a learning opportunity

In recent years, advocacy for learners by learners has been an approach that several literacy networks and programs have supported. Advocacy efforts allow for learners to connect with each other as well as self-reflect on their own experience. Two guides have been produced in Canada to support advocacy by social assistance recipients

* Knowing your Welfare Rights and Responsibilities <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/guide/guide.pdf>
* Solving the Puzzle
* <http://www.nald.ca/library/learning/puzzle/puzzle.pdf>

Adult literacy programs can use these guides to promote self-advocacy by learners, while also improving many of their literacy skills including writing, reading comprehension and engaging with others.

### Understanding client experience

Many works read in the international literature review identified the misunderstanding of the social assistance recipient’s experience. Issues included stereotyping[[5]](#endnote-5) and media misrepresentation.[[6]](#endnote-6)

At a community meeting of adult training and support agencies in October 2012, it was identified that many staff in these agencies lack understanding of the true client experience of Ontario Works. Many self-identified that they do not have the time to reflect on the client experience because of their workload and that training isn’t provided by their employers. Literacy Link South Central and Literacy Link Niagara have partnered together using the knowledge gathered from Project Ontario Works (POW) to put together a workshop that helps staff in community agencies better understand the client experience. Regional adult literacy networks will receive training to deliver this workshop in February 2012.

A book titled, “Laboring to Learn” identified that many community agencies do not understand the motivations of their clients to attend their programs[[7]](#endnote-7). Literacy Link Niagara tested this assumption to determine if this was true in the case of their objective referral assessments with Ontario Works. Over a period of 3 months, clients were surveyed as to why they attended their appointment. They could choose up to three reasons. Literacy Link Niagara staff assumed that most clients attended because they were told to by their case manager. The results of the 65 surveys completed were as follows.

Literacy Link Niagara staff have a better understanding of the clients they serve after completing this survey. This understanding will help with promotional material and client service in the future. A copy of the survey used can be found in the Appendix.

### Promoting literacy issues

It was identified during the international literature review that the general public often does not see the connection between low literacy and poverty.[[8]](#endnote-8) It is suggested that adult literacy networks and programs, as well as Ontario Works offices start to include more facts about the connection on their promotional materials. Many adult literacy networks already include statistics around poverty and literacy on their websites. Facts can be found on the Ontario Literacy Coalition website <http://www.on.literacy.ca/literacy101/stats>. This will help the general public see the importance of literacy programming in relation to economic success.

## Transitions between programs - Referrals

### Communication with Case managers

As adult literacy in Ontario continues to change with the implementation of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF), it is important that adult literacy networks and programs educate Ontario Works staff on the relevancy of literacy in employment.[[9]](#endnote-9) Many studies show that literacy is a better prediction of employment success than education.[[10]](#endnote-10) This is often not widely embraced and many case managers may not see the importance of literacy to their client’s success, especially if they have their Grade 12.

The OALCF allows the literacy field the opportunity to connect employment outcomes with literacy upgrading through the goal paths. A working group of networks developed a presentation for outreach to Ontario Works and other support agencies regarding the relevancy of employment and literacy in Fall 2011. Local networks can provide OALCF information presentations in all communities.

### Partnerships beyond adult literacy and Ontario Works

Many works read in the International literature review identified the importance of partnering with other stakeholders to support adult literacy and social assistance partnerships.[[11]](#endnote-11) The belief is that by supporting clients using a holistic, case-managed approach they would have increased community participation and develop long-term capacity for success.[[12]](#endnote-12) Literacy Link Niagara piloted two activities to connect adult training and support agencies called the Niagara Employment Network in 2011. Activities included frontline staff meetings and a directory of local services for job seekers. Using some of the best practices from the review, Literacy Link Niagara is currently revamping the framework of the Niagara Employment Network with the focus being to help clients seamlessly transition from program to program by using tools to support effective collaboration. A common referral form template was developed based heavily on a form from Project READ Literacy Network and on templates from other networks and input from local programs. The template can be found in the appendix.

In January 2012, Literacy Link Niagara held a referral protocol day to discuss referrals with our Employment Service Providers, Ontario Works and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies. There were two sessions – a morning meeting and an afternoon meeting.

The purpose of the morning meeting was to facilitate discussion between Ontario Works, Employment Services providers (Management and Front-line) and Literacy Link Niagara staff about referral protocol and literacy assessment opportunities for Employment Service provider clients receiving OW. In recent months, Literacy Link Niagara had been contacted by Employment Service frontline staff who wanted to know how to get an objective referral assessment for their Ontario Works clients paid for by Ontario Works. Literacy Link Niagara wanted to discuss formalizing the process. All partners were very interested in formalizing and discussions took place as to what kind of referral process would make sense. In small groups, participants discussed whether a linear or cyclical model of referral would be most beneficial to clients and staff. Literacy Link Niagara learned that Employment Service providers and Ontario Works were interested in a cyclical model of referral that was transparent to all parties involved. It was decided that the notes from the meeting should be given to a small group of front-line staff to recommend a model that would most make sense in their daily activities. Literacy Link Niagara will be calling a meeting in early March to do this.

The purpose of the afternoon meeting was to facilitate discussion between Ontario Works, Employment Service providers and adult literacy programs about client profiles and client transitions among the 3 programs. Participants were divided into small groups and asked to answer four key questions about referrals. Literacy Link Niagara learned that staff identify niches within the Ontario Works client group including mothers, youth and those who could be served by Ontario Disability Support Program.

Notes from both meetings can be found in the Appendix.

## Programming

### Understanding the labour market

While literacy upgrading will definitely allow clients to access more opportunities, it is important for programs to have a clear understanding of the labour market. Lack of literacy is not the only barrier as sustainable jobs do not exist in numbers to support getting all people out of poverty.[[13]](#endnote-13) Working with a local training board to better understand emerging and declining jobs will help literacy and Ontario Works staff better direct their clients into goal paths and jobs that offer a sustainable income and living wage. As technology demands in jobs continue to change, it is also important that literacy staff upgrade their skills and knowledge to provide better support to those entering or re-entering the workforce.[[14]](#endnote-14)

### Preparing clients to learn

It is important that literacy program staff understand the multiple barriers that Ontario Works clients may face. These barriers, paired with outside influences and messages, may result in internalized blaming.[[15]](#endnote-15) A client may need some transition time to build trust in the new environment to become ready to learn. This transition can be made with the support of literacy staff, tutors and peers. The client experience workshop discussed previously and found in the Appendix can help staff understand the experience of the Ontario Works client and better empathize with the situation.

### Client retention in literacy programs

Many clients who attend their first literacy program appointment do not complete their literacy upgrading as defined by their entry goal. Many clients drop out within the first three weeks.[[16]](#endnote-16) In “What works?,” a research pilot by the Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities, three retention tools were created to help LBS college practitioners increase the retention of Ontario Works clients in their programs. These tools include a

* Learning Disabilities Quick Screen
* Information on setting up focus groups for learners to build connections
* Self-management/self-direction quick-screen

These tools can be found at <http://www.collegeupgradingon.ca/projrprt/whatwork/whatwork.pdf>

### Boutique Programming

Many adult literacy programs partner with Ontario Works to offer boutique programming. These programs are just for Ontario Works recipients and often have a specific goal or direction. In a Project Ontario Works survey to literacy programs, 18% of respondents identified that they offered boutique programming. Most programs were focused on preparation for employment. By offering these programs, many Ontario Works office will pay for associated costs, allowing for expanded capacity by adult literacy programs.

# Recommendations – Summary of Best Practices

In summary, Literacy Link Niagara recommends that networks and programs use the following best practices to create or strengthen their partnerships with Ontario Works.

Assessments

* Understand the Ontario Works application process and help Ontario Works staff to implement tools to identify literacy issues at this time
* Use Literacy Assessments to determine ODSP eligibility
* Talk to Ontario Works staff about use of sensitive Language
* Offer objective referral assessments to Ontario Works clients (networks)

Advocacy & Client Understanding

* Use Advocacy as a learning tool in the classroom
* Understand client experience to avoid compassion fatigue
* Promote literacy issues and the links to poverty

Transitions between programs - Referrals

* Communicate with Ontario Works casemanagers
* Partner with agencies outside of adult literacy and Ontario Works to support seamless transitions

Programming

* Understand the local labour market to help clients make informed choices about their next steps
* Prepare clients to learn by understanding their transition into the classroom
* Use specific approaches to increase Ontario Works client retention in literacy programs
* Offer boutique programming specific to Ontario Works clients

# Appendix

## List of Resources from Literature Review

Barone, Diane. Narrowing the Literacy Gap: What Works in High-Poverty Schools. New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2006.

Clark, Sharon, Sankar Ramasamy and Heide Pusch. Adult Literacy Interventions 2001/2002 to 2003/2004 Australia: Ministry of Social Development, 2006.

Goforth, Dee and Mary Jonik, What Works: Recruitment and Retention of Ontario Works Clients Ontario: Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities, 2001.

Kapsalis , Constantine. The Connection between Literacy and Work: Implications for Social Assistance Recipients Canada: Human Resources Development Canada, 1998.

Knowing Your Welfare Rights & Responsibilities. Manitoba: Grassroots Press, 2001

Martin, Larry & James C. Fisher, The Welfare-to-Work Challenge for Adult Literacy Educators. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1999.

Maxwell , Judith and Tatyanna Teplova, Social Consequence of Low Language/Literacy Skills London: Canadian Language & Literacy Research Network, 2007.

Rivera, Lorna, Laboring to Learn: Women’s Literacy and Poverty in the Post-Welfare Era Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

Shannon, Patrick, Reading Poverty Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998.

Smith, Janet, Literacy, Welfare & Work Canada: Human Resources Development Canada, 1999.

Solving the Puzzle. Saint John, New Brunswick: Urban Support Network, 2002.

Sutton, Alison & John Benseman. Screening Welfare Beneficiaries for Adult Literacy Skills: A Review of the International Literature. Australia: Ministry of Social Development, 2006.

Time for a Fair Deal – Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults Toronto: Toronto City Summit Alliance, 2006.

Vaillancourt, Julie , Ontario Works – Works for Whom? An Investigation of Workfare in Ontario Canada: Fernwood Publishing.

## Indicators Checklist



Indicators Checklist for Literacy Needs

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Avoidance** |  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | gives excuses for not reading or writing, ”I forgot my glasses”, “ I hurt my hand”, “I left that information at home” |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | seems to ignore or dismiss printed materials, glances at it quickly and puts it away “to look at later” |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | becomes angry or defensive when asked to provide a writing sample |
| **Actions** |  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | often shows up very early, late or not at all for appointments |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | doesn’t appear to record appointments anywhere, i.e. planner or calendar |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | brings a friends as “caretaker” i.e. someone the client relies on for information |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | does not show up to training or workshops that involve reading and writing |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | has difficulty following up on written or printed instructions you give |
| **Interactions** |  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | asks few or no questions about printed information |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | asks excessive questions about printed materials, especially when information seems obvious to the reader |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | has difficulty using automated phone systems/voice mail, i.e. making numerical choices on keypad, picking current option |
| **Writing** |  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | has difficulty filling in forms accurately and or completely |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | copies name and or address from ID or envelopes |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | writing has obvious spelling, grammar, punctuation and sentence structure errors |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | forms or notes provided are obviously completed by another person |
| **History** |  |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | away from school for a long period, i.e. illness, suspension, kept home |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | attended many schools, especially in elementary years |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | reports not liking school |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | attended special education programs or basic level high school courses |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | worked many short-term, low-skilled jobs; little or sporadic attachment to labour force |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | turned down from or unable to complete training programs in the past |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ | long or repeated time periods on Social Assistance |

If you checked any of the above, your client **may** have literacy issues.

If you have any questions please call Literacy Link Niagara 905-650-3027

Adapted from: Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, (2001). Screening Tool for the Onsite Basic Education Referrals Project.; Ministry of Community and Social Services, (1996). Indicators of Literacy Need, Ontario Works Program Guidelines, Appendices.; Payne, M. & Ilijow, D. (2001). READ: A Basic Skills Referral kit for Use with Ontario Works Clients.; Peel, Halton, Dufferin Literacy Network, Literacy Checklist.; Project READ Literacy Network Waterloo-Wellington, (2000). Literacy Screening Tool for Ontario Works Clients.

## POW Quick-screen Tool

Please download the latest version from the Literacy Link Niagara website [www.literacylinkniagara.ca](http://www.literacylinkniagara.ca).

##

## Sensitive Language Tip Sheet



**Sensitive Language for a Sensitive Topic**

There is no denying the power of words. The words we use change based on who we are speaking to and in different environments. Use the suggestions in this chart when working with a client with potential literacy issues.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **What not to say** | **What to say** |
| Literacy | * skills upgrading/training
 |
| Illiterate | * difficulty with reading, writing, communications and math
 |
| Go back to school | * upgrade your skills
* improve your skills as a first step before a job search
 |
| School | * skills upgrading/training
 |
| Stupid or Slow Learner | * have learning difficulties
* have learning challenges
* have barriers to learning including a rough personal life
* had trouble in early education
 |
| I.Q./Intelligence Tests/Test | * skills based assessment to measure strengths and identify areas that can be improved
* find your current level, identify strengths and areas you can improve in
* screening tool
 |
| Send to program X | * offer an opportunity to attend an upgrading program
 |
| Fail/failed | * unsuccessful
* the program was not the right fit
 |

## Client Survey

****

**Ontario Works Client Survey**

**\*Answers are nameless and will not be shared with anyone including your caseworker**

**Why did you attend the Learning Choices appointment today? Please check up to 3 options.**

* To improve myself
* To get out of the house
* To be part of my community
* To try something new
* For my children
* To increase my literacy skills
* To get a job
* To increase my income
* To go into an educational program - Grade 12, College/University
* Someone told me to attend – Please tell us who \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The options for the survey were taken from “Laboring to Learn: Women’s Literacy and Poverty in the Post-Welfare Era” by Lorna Rivera, an in-depth case study of an adult literacy program in Boston’s Dudley Street neighbourhood. The case study identified that adults attend literacy programs for one or more of the following reasons. The reason is identified first and the brackets contain the clearly written statement for clients to check off in the survey.

* Self-Improvement (to improve myself)
* Diversion (to get out of the house)
* Community/church involvement (to be part of my community)
* Launching (to try something new)
* Family responsibility (for my children)
* Literacy development (to increase my literacy skills)
* Job advancement (to get a job)
* Economic need (to increase my income)
* Educational advancement (To go into an educational program - Grade 12, College/University)
* Urging of others (someone told me to attend – please tell us who \_\_\_\_\_\_\_)

It is understood that an adult learner may have several reasons for attending a Learning Choices appointment. Respondents to the survey are asked to check up to 3 answers so that the most important motivations are captured in the results data.

## Common Referral Form

Please download the latest version from the Literacy Link Niagara website [www.literacylinkniagara.ca](http://www.literacylinkniagara.ca).

## Notes from Referral Protocol Day

AM Meeting

Why do you use referral protocol?

* statistics – funder request
* for client needs
* MPHIPPA – track referrals for confidentiality
* for open dialogue between agencies
* because we can’t meet all of the needs of the individuals, referrals ensure that our clients get their needs met
* it can be internal, external, formal, informal
* it is important to make the referral over the phone when the client is in the office, the client is more likely to follow-up if the appointment is made for them

Do you have a formal referral protocol?

* both formal and informal at CERF Niagara
* Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) has a formal protocol internally
* Port Cares (PC) has an internal paper trail between departments at PC and with the SAEO office on site

Who are you currently referring clients to?

* Ontario Self Employment Benefit (OSEB)
* Real Work (CMHA)
* Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)
* Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities of the Niagara Region (SEAO) also known as Ontario Works (OW)
* Employment Services (ES)
* Literacy Link Niagara (LLN)
* Regional housing
* Mental health

Do you think there is a benefit to having a formal referral protocol between ES/OW/LLN?

* if we lose contact with a client – opens communication
* ensures we maintain confidentiality
* accountability
* follow-up
* statistics

Why a new protocol?

* referrals are informally occurring from the ES front line since the Skills Match (SM) project and there is no written protocol
* need a more integrated, case-managed approach – we are all working with the same clients

**Group discussion notes**

Linear Referral Process

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pros** | **Cons** |
| * all services represented
 | * only one starting point
 |
| * agreements are in place
 | * on the chart the services are no always in the specific order
 |
| * quick referral, easy
 | * assessment is not shared with Employment Services (ES)
 |
| * links into current process between Ontario Works (OW) and Literacy Link Niagara (LLN)
 | * ESP? Doesn’t always know that a client is on OW
 |
| * easier to keep track
 | * no next step for client from ES to LLN
 |
| * simple referral
 | * fall thru the cracks
 |
| * speed of process for client
 | * repeat client
 |
| * files close
 | * clients need services simultaneously
 |
| * CAMS system requires a linear process
 |  |

Challenges to the linear referral process

* Getting information – lack of communication between all agencies involved

Cyclical Referral Process

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Pros** | **Cons** |
| * client can access referral at any point
 | * more paperwork (releases, referral, consent)
 |
| * one point of contact with Ontario Works
 | * more hands involved – who owns the information
 |
| * assessment/referral process quicker and easier
 | * more confused process for the clients “overwhelming having to work with 3 providers”
 |
| * facilitates better communication amongst all services
 | * client and interagency communications
 |
| * more client-focused (better support system)
 | * not adequate “what’s going on”
 |
| * multiple access points
 | * multiple or conflicting messages to clients – may “play” agencies
 |
| * better service coordination
 |  |
| * client would always have a next step
 |  |
| * 2 way or 3 way
 |  |
| * Holistic
 |  |
|  |  |
| * ok to talk between agencies – client aware
 |  |
| * build on other’s success
 |  |
| * communication/case conferences (if the cyclical referral process is put in place)
 |  |
| * maintain agency relationships
 |  |

Challenges to the cyclical process

* physical location of assessment - at service provider or Ontario Works
* creating a process that we can all agree on
* simpler is better for frontline staff and client

Next steps

* Graham – if a ES CM is working with a client who needs literacy services who do they contact first?
* Melissa – it doesn’t matter who determines an assessment is needed, but that the process is in place for the assessment to be happened
* Dorothy - there could be a CSM as the first point of contact who can find the current casemanager
* Melissa - there is a current pilot between Welland and St. Catharines OW offices and ES (Job Gym and YMCA) where referrals are faxed, but the system is not perfect and the volume is high
* the least amount of paper work the better
* official document – draft protocol
* all three players must be involved in the process
* LLN to put together several different models and bring them back to the group (or an advisory group)
* need to involve frontline staff because they are the ones making the referrals (CFLFG)
* have the frontline staff design the model

PM Meeting

The laid off worker, with strong ties to the labour market, has been identified as the “new” Ontario Works client in some communities. Is this the case in our community?

* yes, and more to come
* yes
	+ skills mismatch
	+ don’t want to work for minimum wage
	+ Employment Insurance benefits almost exhausted before they access help
	+ denial from job loss
	+ lack of transportation
	+ unwilling to relocate
* clients who have gone thru their Employment Insurance now needing Ontario Works for the first time
* yes, and also new Ontario Works clients due to Employment Insurance benefits finished, those facing upcoming closures

If so, how has this impacted our community and the services your Ontario Works/Literacy and Basic Skills/Employment Services program provide? How can we better serve these clients?

* need pre-employment programs/life skills for multi-barrier referrals
* Ontario Works transitioning to Ontario Disability Support Program
	+ provide knowledge on options available in the community
	+ better relationship building to determine client wants/needs e.g. better screening to determine if individual is job ready
	+ all agencies need to be aware of community partners programs and services to perform appropriate referrals
* we need to change our mindset
	+ not seeing long-term or second generation clients
	+ clients may have more skills and less barriers
	+ clients need higher level upgrading
	+ more apprenticeships
	+ clients need more soft skills
* Yes, an increase in volume, but also creates an increased need for mental health services.
* To better service clients we need increased awareness of services available and access to them.

What other Ontario Works client profiles do we see in our community? How can we best serve these clients?

* newcomers, youth, those with criminal records, mature workers, single parents, addictions, mental health
	+ funding is needed to train staff or to have enough staff to best service these clients
* long term recipients, those with no employment history or gaps in their employment history, criminal records, lack of motivation – they don’t want to lose their Ontario Works security (drug card, health benefits)
	+ serve with
		- modules (e.g. filling in documents)
		- case managed approach between agencies
* youth, single mothers, newcomers, (visible and non-visible)
	+ make them aware of services available
	+ need to educate employers on youth workers and new comer capabilities
	+ overcoming prejudice
	+ educate youth on realistic employment goals and wages

What referral protocol/process would best fit the needs of Ontario Works clients?

* What we discussed this am.
* screening tools to determine best routes
* medicine wheel approach that supports the client in a holistic way
* cyclical process

## Links in Best Practices Guide

Client Advocacy guides

* Knowing your Welfare Rights and Responsibilities <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/guide/guide.pdf>
* Solving the Puzzle

<http://www.nald.ca/library/learning/puzzle/puzzle.pdf>

Poverty and literacy facts for promotion

<http://www.on.literacy.ca/literacy101/stats>.

Client retention strategies

<http://www.collegeupgradingon.ca/projrprt/whatwork/whatwork.pdf>

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2. Julie Vaillancourt, Ontario Works – Works for Whom? An Investigation of Workfare in Ontario (Canada: Fernwood Publishing, 2010) 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Vaillancourt 19. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Janet Smith, Literacy, Welfare & Work (Canada: Human Resources Development Canada, 1999) 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Lorna Rivera, Laboring to Learn: Women’s Literacy and Poverty in the Post-Welfare Era (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008) 17. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Patrick Shannon, Reading Poverty (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998) 40. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Rivera 68. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Shannon 115. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Smith 22. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Constantine Kapsalis, The Connection between Literacy and Work: Implications for Social Assistance Recipients (Canada: Human Resources Development Canada, 1998) 4. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Smith 30. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Time for a Fair Deal – Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (Toronto: Toronto City Summit Alliance, 2006) 37. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Rivera 21. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Maxwell 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Rivera 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Dee Goforth and Mary Jonik, What Works: Recruitment and Retention of Ontario Works Clients (Ontario: Ministry of Training, Colleges & Universities, 2001). [↑](#endnote-ref-16)