



Supporting Transitions

Literacy Link Niagara
Your link to adult learning



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Executive Director Gay Douglas Broerse

Researcher/Writer/Project Coordinator Ashley Hoath

Project Support Jacky Catterick

What is Supporting Transitions?

The Supporting Transitions project was funded by the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (TCU) from July 2009 to March 2010.

The Supporting Transitions project was the second phase of a project called Easing Transitions, which was completed in March 2009.

This current phase utilizes the information collected from the first phase to better bridge the relationships between Niagara's Employment and LBS agencies.

A pre-screening tool was developed to help Employment agencies and clients recognize when a client may require Literacy services.

Literacy Link Niagara created a web-based tool using their information and referral protocol in an easy-to-navigate format to help Employment agencies and clients find programs best suited to them

A joint training event will be held to educate LBS agencies on the programs of Employment agencies, and vice versa.

Easing Transitions Background

The goal of the Easing Transitions project was to better understand the literacy levels required of a learner that are necessary for successful transition between a literacy program and an employment program. Over the course of the project, our initial list of goals and outcomes grew in order to better address the needs of Employment Ontario (EO) agencies.

Initial goals and outcomes:

Short term outcomes included:

- A clearer understanding of literacy needs required for EO referral
- An increase in appropriate referrals to EO agencies
- The identification of barriers and obstacles for clients moving between EO agencies
- An enhanced working relationship with EO partners

Long term outcomes may be:

- Changes to the EO system to provide greater access for clients
- Heightened mobility between EO programs

Initial deliverables:

- Collection of EO program materials
- Analysis of materials by Literacy Level
- Identification of key barriers
- Final report with recommendations for ease of client movement between EO programs

Additional components developed over the course of the project:

- Analysis of materials for Essential Skills
- Analysis of materials for Clear Writing
- Introduction to Literacy and Basic Skills, Essential Skills and Clear Writing workshop

Findings:

- EO agencies are aware that LBS may be an issue with their clients
- None of the documents reviewed had an LBS level of 5
- Most documents required a literacy level of 2/3 in reading and 2 in writing to complete
- Clarity of material including language and design was a concern and Clear Writing & Design training was recommended to all agencies who participated

Needs met by Supporting Transitions

Supporting Transitions will create “a seamless customer service strategy that is responsive to employment and labour market demands” by educating and assisting literacy agencies and Employment agencies in utilizing each other’s programs. It will help build the relevance of literacy training and academic upgrading to achieve client success and enhance referrals between partners by creating accessible tools that require little training or time to choose effective pathways for Learners. These tools will create improved service between Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (TCU) foundation skills and TCU Employment services that will increase the success of Learners.

This project will meet the needs of TCU to be accessible to learners, for Employment Ontario (EO) agencies to work more closely together in local communities and to remove obstacles that may prevent clients from moving smoothly through the system. The project also meets the needs of EO programs to achieve high standards of client satisfaction. This project also meets the needs of literacy agencies to expand their information/referral protocols beyond literacy to other EO agencies.

Supporting Transitions Deliverables & Outcomes

Deliverables include

- a new online referral tool that helps clients and EO agencies find literacy and other adult education programs without requiring background knowledge
- a new online quick screen tool that helps determine whether a client may benefit from a literacy program

Short term outcomes included

- increased appropriate referrals between EO agencies
- enhanced working relationship with EO partners
- better knowledge of each other between EO partners

Long term outcomes may be

- a more holistic system of service for Learners
- heightened client mobility between EO programs

Who benefits from the project

Learners

Will receive better service because staff will have a better understanding of which programs will best serve their needs/goals

Employment Ontario and Literacy Agencies

Staff will have the tools to make better referrals, update materials to better serve the clients in their programs

Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities

Tools can be transferred to other communities, Creation of a more holistic system

Communities beyond Niagara

Templates and tools created will be easily adaptable to other communities

Challenges of the project

The major challenge for this project was the restructuring of Employment Ontario agencies. It was easy to get participation from Literacy agencies because they feel comfortable with the network.

Because we are just starting to work with Employment Ontario agencies, it was hard to get people to not only trust us enough to let us view their materials and protocols, but the programs were unsure that they would even exist in the next year.

Larger priorities meant it was hard to get “buy-in” to this phase of the project. After the tools were developed, many agencies front-line workers showed interest in them and their uses.

Information & Referral Tool –

Links to Learning

It has been hard in the past to get people to understand the literacy system in Niagara. We wanted to develop a tool that would allow for quick access to literacy information without requiring background knowledge.

Structure of tool

The online tool was a modified version of the Information & Referral Protocol manual that is kept current by our Planning & Referral Coordinator, Jacky Catterick. The online tool would allow information to be distributed to people who would not otherwise have access or knowledge of the tool.

At first the tool was to only include Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS) information, but as Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) grows to be more inclusive of all adult education programs before post-secondary, it was determined that these should be included in the online tool.

The first page allows the user to select which type of program they are looking for. The choices are

- Literacy & Basic Skills
- Grade 12 & Equivalent
- Online Learning.

When the user selects Literacy & Basic Skills, the next page allows them to select literacy stream that would fit their needs. These include

- English/Anglophone
- French/Francophone
- Native
- Deaf/Hard of Hearing/Deafened/Deafblind
- Special Needs – English

The user is then directed to a page where they can select the municipality that they would like to access the program.

After they select the location, the user can select a program delivery style:

- 1 to 1
- small group
- classroom.

By selecting a type of program, the user will be given all programs that match the criteria in the area. They can compare each of the programs with the “go back” button. The program details pages gives the client or employment counselor information on the

- delivery model

- client focus
- location
- contact person
- phone
- fax
- email
- website

If the user is looking for Grade 12 or equivalent, the step-by-step process is very similar. First the user selects whether they are looking for

- Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)
- Academic and Career Entrance (ACE)
- General Educational Development (GED)

They will then be directed to a list of municipalities, followed by the programs that fit their needs.

If the user selects the Online & Distance Learning Opportunities, they are directed to a list of online and distance programs.

Promotion of tool

Literacy Link Niagara launched the tool on March 24 2010 to a group of Employment Ontario and Literacy agencies. Limited cards promoted the tool were handed out. More will be available for mass distribution of front-line EO workers in mid April.

Literacy Link Niagara will be partnering with Business Education Council and Niagara Employment News to connect their database of Employment Ontario agencies to our tool and vice versa. This will allow quick access to literacy and employment programs through one starting link. We hope that cross promotion will draw new traffic to our site.

Test with literacy agencies

The tool was tested with 16 literacy agencies in February 2010.

Using their feedback, we reconstructed the website to be more user-friendly. Overall, the feedback was very good. Most feedback contained corrections or additions of specific program information.

Other suggestions included

- adding maps to get directions to help learners find locations
ex. MapQuest
- adding technology that would better communicate with deaf clients

Launch with literacy and EO agencies

On March 24, 2010, we held a launch for the tool at the Keefer Mansion Inn in Thorold, Ontario. The event was an informal breakfast that allowed for networking between Employment Ontario and Literacy staff.

The tool was presented and very well received. We handed out evaluations that asked attendees the following questions

- What did you like about the Links to Learning tool?
- What improvements could be made to the Links to Learning tool?
- Who do you think could benefit from this tool?
- In what ways might this tool make a difference in your job?

Please see the results in Appendix A.

Adaptive nature of tool

As we stated at the launch of the Links to Learning tool, we will be expanding and adapting this tool always. We will be created a quick fill-out page on the website that will allow staff of listed agencies to submit changes to make sure that information is up-to-date.

In the next few months, we will be adding English as a Second Language and French as a Second Language information.

Quick Screen tool

It was identified in the Easing Transitions project that Employment Ontario agencies have little knowledge of literacy agencies, as well as identifiers of literacy issues. For this reason, we decided to create a quick tool that would highlight whether a client may benefit from a literacy program.

The tool is not an assessment or a standardized test and can only give insight into the probability of a client's need for literacy intervention.

The tool is administered through the Survey Monkey website. This allows us to track the answers of users over time.

Structure of tool

The tool based on three questions that ask the client if the statements sound like them.

First they are asked to check all of their goals are in the next five years. This gives the potential client the opportunity to recognize the outcome of using a literacy program. This will also allow us to determine who is using the tool and how it can be adapted in the future. They are as follows

- I would like to learn to read
- I would like to improve my reading, writing and or math
- I would like to get my Grade 12/high school diploma
- I would like to get my GED
- I would like to go to college

The second statement asks the client to check all of the statements that sound like them. They are given a list of barriers that will help identify what type of intervention will best suit them. They are as follows

- I don't have my High School or GED
- I failed one or more grades or classes when I was in school
- I haven't worked in more than 10 years and feel nervous about my skills

- I have been out of school for more than 20 years and feel nervous about my skills
- I find it hard to keep a job for more than a year
- I want to get a job in a new field and I don't have the right skills

We finally ask the client to identify the highest level of education they have completed. They choose from the following list

- Grade 8 or below
- Grade 10
- Grade 12/High School
- GED
- College

Depending on the answers of the client, they are routed to one of three final pages. They are as follows

- You most likely do not need literacy upgrading.
If you feel that you may benefit from a literacy program, please visit www.literacylinkniagara.ca/linkstolearn
If you have any questions, please call 905.650.3027
- You may not need literacy upgrading, but may benefit from a GED Readiness Assessment if you are interested in writing the GED.
If you are on Ontario Works, please call 905.650.3027 to find out how to get an assessment.

If you are not on Ontario Works, please call 905.934.1818 to find out how to get an assessment.

- A literacy program can help you reach your goals. To help you find a literacy program that fits your needs, visit www.literacylinkniagara.ca/linkstolearn

If you have any questions, please call 905.650.3027

Please see the outline of the web-based tool in Appendix B.

Promotion of tool

The tool will be linked to the Links to Learning website to allow for quick access to the recommended pathway. The new Links to Learning business cards will feature the web address of this new tool on the back.

We will send out a fax and email blast advertising both these tools to Niagara charities and not-for-profit agencies in late April 2010.

Launch with literacy and EO agencies

We will be launching this new tool on April 21, 2010 at a networking event for Employment Ontario and Adult Education staff.

The launch will include a quick walkthrough of the tool, as well as distribution of the promotional cards.

EO influence

In the first phase we looked at the materials a client would see from Employment Ontario agencies. When designing this new quick screen, we decided it was beneficial to the same language and style as some of the documents we saw.

For this reason we decided to have clients identify if they had barriers that would suggest that they could benefit from a literacy intervention. By using language and style that Employment Ontario staff is used to, we hope that this will allow quick understanding by counselors and easy-use by clients, as they will be used to hearing similar language.

Clear Writing

At the beginning of the project, we decided we wanted to bring in a clear writing consultant to do a workshop for Employment Ontario and literacy staff. We believe that Clear Writing can help staff get their messages across to their clients in a quick and efficient way, as well as their messages to each other.

In fall 2009, Gay Douglas Broerse and Ashley Hoath were trained in Clear Writing. Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA) received funding in 2009 to train the 16 adult literacy networks in Ontario. Training included a two day workshop, followed by a one-year mentorship. Literacy Link Niagara is currently in the mentorship stage. We are being mentored by Leah Morris from ABEA.

For this reason, we decided to present the workshop ourselves. Leah Morris was there to evaluate and step in if needed. We quickly reached the number of participants we could take after promoting our new workshop. We have another workshop scheduled April 9, 2010, which has also reach capacity as of mid-march. The first two workshops we provide are free.

Future of Clear Writing Services in Niagara

For the first year, we will be offering Employment Ontario and literacy agencies limited opportunities to receive free help with document revisions and organizational auditing. We hope that we can create a trend towards using Clear Writing to reach clients.

We will also be approaching municipal government, regional government and businesses to offer our services.

Next Steps

Literacy Link Niagara will continue to push the benefits and tools developed from this project in the following ways.

- We will promote the Links to Learning tool and the Quick Screen at our networking event for Employment Ontario and literacy staff on April 21, 2010.
- We will distribute 1000 cards promoting the Links to Learning and the Quick Screen tool to Employment Ontario front-line staff to give to their clients.
- We will continue to adapt and change the Links to Learning tool as requested by the listed agencies and community.
- We will grow the Links to Learning tool to include English as a Second Language/French as a Second Language.
- We will link our website with the Niagara Employment News database to allow for holistic access to education and employment resources in Niagara.
- We will offer a second free workshop to Niagara not-for-profit agencies on April 9, 2010.
- We will grow the Links to Learning tool to include Employment Ontario Employment Services

We would be happy to provide the Link to Learning tool as a template for other areas. The administrators would need a copy of Adobe Contribute, an easy to use web building software that

does not require coding knowledge. Our current site could easily act as a template and the administrator would only have to change the text.

We would also be happy to share our quick screen tool. Because it links to our Links to Learning tool and does not contain any regional information except for the final pages, it would be easily absorbed into another agencies current list of tools.

Appendix A – Results of evaluations – Launch of Links to Learning tool

Literacy Link Niagara's Links to Learning

Results of evaluations

1. What did you **like** about the Links to Learning tool?
 - Very clean, easy to follow, very pleasant website
 - Easy to use, lots of information available
 - It lists services within the various areas in the Niagara Region
 - Easy to navigate
 - An excellent tool with great potential
 - Clear and easy to follow
 - Quick, easy access to info
 - Easy to use and follow through
 - Easy to use – for the learner
 - This is a much needed tool!!! I can't wait to use it
 - The simplicity of the information offered. Nice to have info on all upgrading programs in the Region in ONE place. Great job!
 - Simple – straight forward
 - That clients have the ability to locate a program themselves, or can be easily guided through a worker
 - Lots of white space, easy to navigate
 - Easy to understand
 - Easy to navigate, good use of space on the page, clear font/good colours

2. What **improvements** could be made to the Links to Learning tool?

- Ask for feedback as to what programs/services can be added
- Will spend some time on the website
- Search button, contact us option
- Could this be linked to other networks or services?
- The links and logos of partnering agencies as links to info, maybe some images to help guide those with lower literacy
- Expanding as discussed
- Maps – how to get there
- Individuals able to access themselves
- Nothing
- None at this time, looks awesome
- None that I can think of
- Not sure
- None

3. Who do you think could **benefit** from this new tool?

- New learners, new immigrants from multicultural centre, centres that are closing or laying off
- Clients and staff
- Employment service providers, anyone seeking literacy assistance
- All of my EO colleagues, many of my clients with literacy needs
- Most agencies working in the region
- Many people looking for the availability of programs
- Community partners, potential learners, internal partners

- Too early to tell
- Employment counselors, service providers
- Anyone in literacy or employment
- All clients seeking employment who have limited literacy skills, also those seeking academic upgrading as a first step prior to employment
- EO – both literacy and employment, newcomers
- Clients seeking to improve their skills, education and employment readiness, As well those who work with this population can use this valuable tool
- Anyone looking for upgrading
- Public and agencies
- Staff and clients

4. In what ways might this tool make a **difference** in your job?

- For those that do qualify because of literacy and are not enrolled in a program to visit the website
- Ease of finding literacy referrals
- It could help me to offer clients direct links to your services
- Ease of updating and referring
- It may direct people to the various agencies
- Time saver
- Easier way to display the options to potential learners
- It will be much easier to help clients figure out the right path for them
- Much easier now to find the perfect fit of program for each individual
- Could be integrated into new employment model
- Easy to use resource
- Gets the information out there
- Fast

- As we reconfigure as an EO delivery site, there is a lot of emphasis on I&R, this will be a valuable piece for the staff that will be managing that dimension

Additional Comments:

- Thank you for treating us to breakfast. Great location! A small advertisement to give to others other than a business card
- Thank you! Great job. I look forward to your developing projects (especially your skills assessment for laid off workers)
- You need to advertise in our lifetime learning guide (distributed 165,000 annually)
- Great job in presenting
- Thank you!
- Great job!
- Is it possible for there to be audio instructions added for those who have any significant reading difficulties?
- Thank you
- Great site!

Default Section

Could a literacy program help you?

Use our quiz to help decide.

Check all goals you would like to complete in the next 5 years

- I would like to learn to read
- I would like to improve my reading, writing and or math
- I would like to get my Grade 12/high school diploma
- I would like to get my GED
- I would like to go to college

Check all that sound like you.

- I don't have my High School or GED
- I failed one or more grades or classes when I was in school
- I haven't worked in more than 10 years and feel nervous about my skills
- I have been out of school for more than 20 years and feel nervous about my skills
- I find it hard to keep a job for more than a year
- I want to get a job in a new field and I don't have the right skills

Check all the highest level of education you have completed

- Grade 8 or below
- Grade 10
- Grade 12/High School
- GED
- College

Please list any other education or training accomplishments

You most likely do not need literacy upgrading.

If you feel that you may benefit from a literacy program, please visit

www.literacylinkniagara.ca/linkstolearn

If you have any questions, please call 905.650.3027

You may not need literacy upgrading, but may benefit from a GED Readiness Assessment if you are interested in writing the GED.

If you are on Ontario Works, please call 905.650.3027 to find out how to get an assessment.

If you are not on Ontario Works, please call 905.934.1818 to find out how to get an assessment.

A literacy program can help you reach your goals. To help you find a literacy program that fits your needs, visit

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If you have any questions, please call 905.650.3027