

Labour Market Project Phase 2 – Concurrent Clients - Literacy Link Niagara

Summary

In Phase 1 of the Labour Market Project, Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) received funding to review the role of frontline practitioners in assisting lower-skilled clients in moving towards employment, including the identification of tools and supports that frontline practitioners need. To build on this research, Phase 2 focuses on working with clients that are receiving services from both LBS and Employment Services (ES) to determine best practices, gaps and duplications. This project is one strategy of several that was researched by adult regional literacy networks in Ontario. The collection of these projects is called the “Coordinating to Bring Low Literacy and Marginalized Clients Employment” project and is coordinated by Literacy Link South Central.

In recent years, LLN has completed a number of projects that have tried to connect literacy and employment practitioners to create seamless transitions between services. LLN wanted to complete this strategy to focus on the experience of clients who are using both literacy and employment services. LLN wanted to distribute data and tools to staff to help them better understand how clients use and transition between both programs. It is hoped that this knowledge can lead to better support and more seamless transitions.

Partners

A chart of partners and their roles in the project is below.

Partner	Role(s)
Niagara Literacy & Basic Skill programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Recruited clients to participate in focus groups- Hosted client focus groups- Participated in online frontline staff survey- Gave feedback to help build and revise tools to support Concurrent Clients- Some are members of the advisory committee
Niagara Employment Ontario Employment Services programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Recruited clients to participate in focus groups

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participated in online frontline staff survey - Gave feedback to help build and revise tools to support Concurrent Clients - Some are members of the advisory committee
Client of Literacy & Basic Skills and Employment Services Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participated in focus groups to help understand the experience of clients who are using both services

Outcomes

Short term learning outcomes included

- better understanding of how many clients are using programs concurrently
- better understanding of best practices and gaps in service
- identification of tools that may help with transitions
- creation of tools where gaps exist
- better understanding of client experience

Medium term behaviour outcomes included

- implementation of best practices in Niagara programs where applicable
- use of tools in the process of client transitions
- change in the process of client transitions through knowledge of client experience
- better referrals by staff
- implementation of tools and processes in other communities

Medium term behaviour outcomes are heavily weighted by how the field chooses to use the findings and tools.

Activities

As part of this strategy, Literacy Link Niagara (LLN)

- worked with local literacy and employment service programs to identify 21 clients who are using both services and would be willing to provide feedback
- worked with literacy and employment services through the duration of the project to identify potential tools that may help with transitions – digital survey and frontline staff discussions

- evaluate experiences of Concurrent Clients including best practices and challenges of service
- prepare a marketing/training campaign for literacy and employment services that train new staff on the integration of services
- host a webinar to share findings
- disseminate findings in a final report across the province

Lessons learned

Client Focus Groups

Many clients are using both services, but in most cases, Literacy & Basic Skills and Employment Services do not connect about the client's goals, referrals and path.

Clients are not interested in participating in online surveys. Even with staff encouragement, clients sign up to participate but do not follow through to completion. LLN has had better success with client focus groups in recent projects, which is why the approach was changed.

Clients are extremely frustrated at lack of job prospects at the end of programs. Sometimes their anger is channelled towards program staff and/or reflected in program evaluation.

It is important to train staff to be able to understand local labour market information and pass that information on to clients to help determine career options. Clients kept asking where to find this information during focus groups.

Frontline Survey

Some programs continuously refer back and forth to the same program. This happens when personal relationships/connections make it easier to send clients back and forth. This may not be the most effective referral for the client.

Employment Services (ES) use informal discussion to determine when to send a client to Literacy & Basic Skills (LBS). For this reason, LLN revised the Indicators checklist and distributed it to local Employment Service programs to help strengthen referrals. LBS refers to ES when an employment identifies they have a goal of employment.

Both ES and LBS believe that clients can benefit from participating in both programs concurrently.

ES are most likely to refer a client based on their location. This may be because ES is expected to offer the same suite of services across the region, where LBS offers specific

niches. LLN distributed dot charts to help ES better understand the niches offered in the literacy system.

ES wants quick and easy referral tools, not full assessments. There are many people actively using tools that have been distributed in the past by LBS. They clearly see their role vs. the role of an LBS provider.

LBS is slightly more confused about when to refer to LBS. LLN will work to strengthen the understanding of when to refer by hosting a workshop about community referrals in early 2015.

LLN created or revised materials to help support client transitions between LBS and ES. They include

- Literacy Indicators Checklist (revised)
- Common Referral Form (revised)
- Sensitive Language Cheat Sheet (revised)
- Literacy Clues Questions (new)

Challenges

Digital Surveys to Focus Groups

Originally, LLN was going to follow clients over several months using digital surveys. Unfortunately, clients did not follow through once they signed up to participate. Instead of waiting until the end of the project, LLN decided to move to client focus groups in Summer 2014. 5 focus groups were held in early Fall 2014. 21 clients participated.

Difference between data and actual Concurrent Clients

Some programs that wanted to send learners to focus groups were surprised to learn that even though their records showed they had Concurrent Clients, clients weren't actively using both services. Programs that participated in focus groups were either co-located or had very active relationships with other providers.

Knowledge transfer

Literacy Link Niagara has shared information and tools with local literacy and employment programs .

Literacy Link Niagara was part of a webinar series about the Labour Market Strategies on November 18, 2014.

Literacy Link Niagara will share this report with the Learning Networks of Ontario.

Significance of strategy in relation to Employment Ontario's Mission & Vision

This strategy ties to MTCU-EO's mission and vision by

- providing LBS practitioners with research and tools to help learners transition to employment and/or employment services
- ensuring LBS clients are moving towards employment
- supporting seamless transition to employment by bridging LBS to Employment Services (ES)

Conclusion

Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) will continue to support and strengthen the relationships between Literacy & Basic Skills and Employment Services to move towards seamless transitions for clients.

Appendix

Additional documents for this project include

- Literacy Indicators Checklist
- Common Referral Form
- Sensitive Language Cheat Sheet
- Literacy Clues Questions
- Focus Group Wrap-up
- Frontline Survey Summary
- Working with Learner Focus Groups