

# Return to Work Program User Guide

By Literacy Link Niagara and Adult Basic Education Association

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## Program Overview

The goal of the Return to Work (RTW) program is to allow women who are returning to work to recall and practice transferrable skills related to writing, critical thinking, numeracy and workplace communications. It is designed to support the ‘remembering’ of key workplace skills and boost the appreciation women have for themselves as they re-enter the workforce.

The four (4) week essential skills training program was developed by Adult Literacy staff and piloted in 4 times, 2 in Niagara and 2 in Hamilton, with support from local Employment Service providers. In-class instruction was provided Monday – Thursday, 9:00am – 2:30pm. Friday was designated as a day for participants to focus on individual career planning and/or job searching.

Topics covered throughout the program include: Essential Skills, Communication Skills, Transferrable Skills, Learning Styles, Goal Mapping, Work Ethics & Values, Non-traditional Jobs, Digital Technology, Working with Money, Clear Writing, Personal Branding, Presentation Skills and Networking.

The RTW program promotes an approach that is flexible and easily adaptable to a variety of settings. Flexibility was built into the program in terms of curriculum, timelines, settings and the number and choice of activities to use. We encourage you to have fun with the delivery of the RTW program!

## Learnings

In future projects that are related to program design and delivery, Literacy Link Niagara and Adult Basic Education Association will use what they have learned to influence recruitment times, project partner roles and delivery locations.

The Return to Work women fell into one of two categories. Highly skilled and formally educated with a rich employment history or lower skilled with less formal education and little employment history. Future cohorts could be run together to allow for peer mentoring or separate to increase skills in appropriate areas and allow for a better client experience.

Hamilton ran their programs out of a literacy service provider, the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board. Niagara ran their programs out of two separate Employment Services locations, Employment Help Centre and Employment Solutions with support from literacy providers. Women who were very close to re-entering the workforce were more likely to use the supports from the Employment Services providers. Women with lower skills were less comfortable in a high traffic space and may be better served in a literacy program environment.

Women who are attempting to return to the workforce often lack confidence. In the future, job-shadowing or co-op opportunities could be included. This will improve self-value, increase hands on work experience and allow for the women to gauge whether the job and responsibilities are suitable for them. In addition, accompanying the women to a job fair and/or networking event would connect them with potential employers, other job seekers and in turn increase their self-confidence. Incorporating mock interviews near the end of the program would allow an opportunity to practice skills learned and become more comfortable with the interviewing process.

Running a program after Christmas break was a bit challenging. It was difficult to recruit and assess clients for entry into the program. If this program was to be run again, timelines would be adjusted to allow for maximum recruitment and initial literacy assessments.

# Curriculum

The curriculum documents can be found in Google Drive. Click this link to view materials

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kYxFLUfMxJ\\_rHOjtY5VtcjNRWeaVP6BQ?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kYxFLUfMxJ_rHOjtY5VtcjNRWeaVP6BQ?usp=sharing)

In the **Curriculum folder**, you will find the Spotlight on Change curriculum, developed by Project Read Literacy Network, which is mainly used throughout the delivery of the RTW program. Supplementary curriculum, including ‘Career, Life, Work: Getting the Job’, ‘Job Success Strategies’ and ‘Money Math’, developed by Northwest Literacy Council can be included where necessary to enhance the program. It is recommended that the Curriculum be adapted to accommodate participant need as well as rural, urban and mixed demographics.

In the **Framework folder**, you will find weekly frameworks that can be used as a step by step method of delivery for new facilitators or as a general guide for seasoned facilitators. Daily topics and course content are outlined in this Framework yet should be adapted to meet the needs of the participants based on levels of education, and employment experience.

In the **Resources folder**, there is a list of activities for each topic covered throughout the program. The activities are learner centered, participatory and respect the principles of Adult Education. Task-based activities, developed by piloting facilitators to measure skills learned, can be found in the **Tasks folder**. It is recommended that facilitators develop additional task-based activities to accommodate participant levels and needs.

## Getting Started

Employment Service Providers play an integral role in the delivery of the RTW program. It is recommended that you meet with your local Employment Service provider to develop a schedule of workshops and guest speakers that complement the curriculum and cater to the needs of your registered participants. A list of Workshops and Guest Speakers used throughout the pilots can act as a starting point for discussion with your local Employment Service Provider (**see Resources folder**). Insert the workshops and guest speakers into the curriculum Framework once schedule has been agreed upon.

Eligibility criteria for registration can include the following. Women who: have been out of the workforce for 3 or more years; want to return to work; are concerned their skills are not up to par with the current job market; are unsure how to find work; need additional skills upgrading support.

Registration Forms (**see Admin folder**) are used to gather the participants personal contact information and brief details around highest level of education, employment goals, any barriers that may affect their learning and to identify individual goals of being in the program.

Literacy assessments (**see Assessment folder**) should be administered at the start of the program to help identify areas where additional upgrading and/or training may be required and to allow for concurrent referrals to be made to academic upgrading, community services or employment supports. Components of the program may need to be altered based on the results of these assessments.

Self-reflections (**See Evaluation folder**) are conducted at the beginning and end of the program to get a sense of how participants view themselves and their skills. An evaluation is completed at the end of the program to allow participants an opportunity to reflect inward, outward and forward.

# Suggestions for Delivering the RTW Program

## Prior to Start Date

- Familiarize yourself with the RTW Framework and Curriculum
- Meet with local Employment Service provider to discuss the RTW program and develop a schedule of workshops and guest speakers
- Make appropriate changes to the Framework to accommodate workshops and guest speakers
- Secure space to facilitate the RTW program
- Market program
- Hold information sessions to promote program
- Complete participant registrations
- Organize daily course content and respective activities from curriculum and resources list
- Choose relevant task-based activities or develop new tasks
- Develop a course overview that includes topics to be covered along with scheduled workshops and guest speakers

## Beginning of Program

- Provide participants with a course overview
- Complete pre-program reflection
- Set each participant up with a portfolio or binder
- Hand out journals for participant's daily reflections
- Complete relevant agency Authorization/Consent to Collect forms
- Begin facilitation of course content

## Week 1

- Administer literacy and numeracy assessments
- Review and adapt course content to meet the needs of the participants

- Develop task-based activities as required

## Weeks 2-4

- Review and adapt course content to meet the needs of the participants
- Develop appropriate task-based activities as required
- Connect participants with an Employment Services provider for additional employment supports
- Make appropriate concurrent or exit referrals to Community Service providers as required

## End of Program

- Celebrate completion of the program
- Complete post-program reflection
- Complete program evaluation
- Hand out Certificate of Completion
- Hand out Workplace Survival Kits

## **Next Steps**

The project materials will be distributed to adult literacy programs across Ontario. Literacy Link Niagara and Adult Basic Education Association will host a webinar to share information about best practices, challenges and project materials with the literacy and employment services fields in 2018/2019.