

# Reverse Mentoring – Final Report



2016 to 2017

Pairing youth with people who need to upgrade their digital skills



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PAIRING YOUTH WITH PEOPLE WHO NEED TO UPGRADE THEIR DIGITAL SKILLS

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Members included

- Alan Cherwinski, Alpha Plus
- Debera Flynn, QUILL Network
- Rachel Crane, NEXTNiagara
- Stephanie Harper, NEXTNiagara
- Doug Noyes, Literacy Link Eastern Ontario
- Sarah Stocker, Contact North
- Graham Schaefer, Employment Help Centre, Niagara West

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- NEXTNiagara
- Lakeshore High School
- Niagara Regional Housing
- Port Colborne Public Library

Four outstanding adult literacy practitioners edited the curriculum. Their comments and suggestions were paramount to the delivery of the training materials. These practitioners were

- Jacklyn Catterick, District School Board of Niagara
- Tina Deluca, Niagara Catholic District School Board
- Sara Gill, Adult Basic Education Association
- Normand Savoie, LABC Communautaire

Literacy Link Niagara project staff included

- Christine Eaton, Project Coordinator
- Karen Schmidt, Project Support
- Ashley Hoath-Murray, Project Management and Curriculum Development
- Gay Douglas, Project Management

## OVERVIEW

Literacy Link Niagara received Seed Funding from Ontario Trillium Foundation to run a Reverse Mentoring pilot project from May 2016 to June 2017. The purpose of the pilot was to create and test a system where youth under the age of 29 were mentoring people who wanted to improve their digital literacy skills.

Mentors were recruited through Brock University, youth focused community programs, employment services and a local high school. Mentors were provided with tools and training. Those under the age of 18 were also provided with supervision during mentor/mentee meetings.

Mentees determined what they wanted to learn. They could choose from a list of modules.

Modules included

- Social Media
- Internet Browsing
- Tablet/Smartphone Use and Applications
- Microsoft Word Basic
- Microsoft Excel Basic
- Google Docs

Mentors and mentees were matched based on mentee interests, mentor skills and location. The expectation was that pairs would complete 10-12 hours together, averaging one hour per week. Pairs that completed were each given a \$50 gift card. Mentees received a certificate of completion. Mentors received a letter of reference.

## CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Literacy Link Niagara spoke to literacy practitioners and administrators to determine what areas to focus the curriculum. The curriculum was created in a way that would appeal to many different mentees with different goal paths from employment, education and independence.

At first, the modules were going to include Social Media, Internet Browsing, Tablet/Smartphone Use, Microsoft Word Basic and Microsoft Excel Basic. Literacy Link Niagara planned to develop modules for the first three and utilize a free website called GCFLearnFree for the Microsoft pieces. This website allows users to choose which version of the programs they have access to. If LLN were to develop similar curriculum, they would have had to limit it to a few versions because of time.

When discussing plans with the advisory group, a member felt strongly that Google Docs should be included. This free platform is similar to the Microsoft programs, but a user doesn't have to purchase it and can access it on many different devices. For this reason, LLN included it in the curriculum.

The curriculum is written in a way that is easy for a mentor to use and adapt. It is written in plain language and like a natural conversation. This allows a mentor to read pieces aloud directly from it if they choose to.

Lessons give the mentor the opportunity to introduce a new topic to the mentee. Discussion questions are included to create a dialogue that makes the information relevant to the mentee. Activities are included at the end of every lesson to help reinforce and practice what has been learned.

The curriculum ended up being much longer and in-depth than originally planned. The style can be replicated with more material/topics in the future. It is written in a way that tries to reduce the speed of the information becoming obsolete. Instead of using links, it asks users to "Google" specific terms to receive the most up-to-date information.

Four adult literacy practitioners edited the curriculum. The feedback was extremely positive. The curriculum is also useful to literacy practitioners who work with adult learners to upgrade digital literacy skills.

The Social Media module was translated into French. It can be found in APPENDIX B.

## RECRUITMENT PROCESS

Materials were distributed to adult literacy agencies, employment service agencies and other community service agencies at Leaders in Adult Learning Breakfast. Materials were emailed through the Niagara Employment Network database. They were posted on Brock Student Services, Niagara College Volunteer Board and NEXTNiagara social media outlets.

Mentors showed interest by completing a survey monkey. Interest was followed up to determine if they were a good fit for the program and set a training time.

Mentees called to register and completed a quick-screen to determine what help they could benefit from. Staff followed up with them to set a meeting with a mentor when a match was found.

Materials can be found in the APPENDIX A.

## PARTICIPANT CRITERIA

Below is the mentor and mentee criterion for participants.

## Mentor Criteria

To participate in the Reverse Mentoring project, Mentors needed to

- be between 18 and 29
- be confident in their skills in two or more of the following areas
  - Social media (Facebook, twitter, Instagram)
  - Microsoft Word basic
  - Microsoft Excel basic
  - Internet and Web browsing
  - Tablet/Smartphone use and applications
  - Google Docs
- be willing to meet one-on-one to mentor a client to upgrade their digital literacy for a minimum of 6 meetings

The project tried to target mentors who

- could speak fluent french
- identified as indigenous
- were unemployed or underemployed

**Mentor › a person who gives a less experienced person help and advice over a period of time**

## Mentee Criteria

To participate in the Reverse Mentoring project, Mentees needed to

- be unemployed or underemployed (20 hours per week or less)
- fall into level 1 or 2 in the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework for Digital Technology – identified through self-assessment checklist
- need assistance in two or more of the following areas
  - Social media (Facebook, twitter, Instagram)
  - Microsoft Word basic
  - Microsoft Excel basic
  - Internet and Web browsing
  - Tablet/Smartphone use and applications
  - Google Docs
- be willing to meet one-on-one with a mentor to upgrade their digital literacy for a minimum of 6 meetings

The project tried to target mentees who identified as

- Francophone
- Aboriginal
- Newcomer
- Person with a disability
- Single parent

**Mentee › someone who is given support and advice about by a mentor (a more experienced person who helps them)**

## MENTOR TRAINING

Originally, Literacy Link Niagara planned to hold 2 hour training sessions for mentors. It was discovered early on that this was not the first choice for youth. Youth preferred flexible, informal meetings. They didn't want to watch a PowerPoint presentation, participated in ice breakers or learn the history of the project. They wanted the bare bones of what was expected of them and tangible tips and tricks to mentoring.

Meetings were moved to informal locations – cafes, restaurants, and libraries – in an effort to increase the mentor show rate. Staff followed a short list of things mentors need to know and left the rest up to the mentor to direct the meetings. Staff stayed until all their questions were answered and they felt confident moving forward into the pairing phase.

The main purpose of the training was to share the curriculum and how to use it. Mentors were asked to follow the curriculum, but add in additional information if they thought that it might help the mentee meet their learning goals. The curriculum can be found in APPENDIX B.

## PAIRING

Staff met with mentors and mentees in a public setting to introduce them to each other and review the project guidelines. They were asked to complete a Mentoring Agreement that helped outline the boundaries of the relationship. This can be found in APPENDIX C.

9 pairs successfully completed the program. Another 4 mentors were trained, but were unable to be matched because of the distance away from available mentees. 10 mentees were unable to be matched because of the same location issue. In the future, the program would concentrate on specific neighbourhoods or municipalities to ensure this issue did not arise.

## SUPPORT THROUGH PROCESS

Literacy Link Niagara staff offered support to both mentors and mentees during the process. They checked in regularly through phone and email. Mentors were asked to complete a survey monkey after each meeting. Mentees were called after every three meetings to see how they felt their learning was progressing.

Mentees were the drivers of their learning. They decided what they wanted to learn within the perimeters of the curriculum. If the curriculum didn't meet their goals, it was modified. Pieces that were irrelevant to their goals were excluded. Mentors were given the opportunity to share other tips and tricks outside the curriculum that they felt would be helpful. Staff were available to provide guidance and support with modifications.

## CHANGE TO MODEL – HIGH SCHOOL

One of the biggest learnings throughout the project was around the structure of the program. At first, attracting High School students was identified as a more complicated process. For mentors over the age of 18 and not affiliated with a High School, the assumption was made that they could meet with their mentee in a public space on their own time. With High School students, supervision was more complicated. For this reason, the first model leaned more to university students.

At first, over 30 Brock University students registered for the program. When LLN staff began following up to book training, the numbers of interested mentees dwindled quickly. Many would register for training, but not show up. The training model was adapted to be more informal with some success, but still the hours spent attempting to recruit and match were much higher than expected.

In late Fall 2016, Literacy Link Niagara had a change of staff. A new project coordinator brought new energy and ideas to the project. With her connections and enthusiasm, she was game to pilot a new model that involved High School students.

She met with Mr. Gifford, the Principal of Lakeshore Catholic High School, to give an overview of the project and discuss the possibility of working together. She explained the Mentee/Mentor roles and eligibility criteria, and the student benefits of gaining valuable mentoring experience, connecting with members of the local community and earning community involvement hours.

Questions were raised around the logistics of the project, how the Mentee recruitment was facilitated and whether criminal background checks were conducted to ensure the safety of the students working with adults over the age of 30. As LLN does not conduct background checks on Mentees, the High School was unable to host the project on site. To circumvent this potential

obstacle and move the project forward, the project coordinator contacted the Port Colborne Library to begin discussions around hosting the project.

The Head Librarian was thrilled at the idea of partnering with LLN to offer what they considered a much-needed program within the community. Safety concerns were also raised regarding the pairing of underage students with adults. A quick solution to this problem was to be on site supervising for the duration of the sessions each time the pairs met. The Library quickly agreed to reserving computer systems and meeting spaces for our Mentor/Mentee pairs at a predetermined weekly date and time. Recruitment flyers were also posted for interested community members who access the library.

The recruitment of both Mentees and Mentors then began. Mr. Gifford presented the project to his Department Heads and the Guidance department who both received referral protocol to ensure interested student were able to get started as Mentors. Attempts were made to partner with the local Friends Over 55 Community Centre yet due to prior commitments, they were not able to assist with the recruitment. They did however post recruitment flyers around the Centre and expressed interest in working together in the Fall should the project continue. Recruitment then began through word of mouth in the community and secured Mentees to pair with interested student Mentors. Mentees included retired professionals, business owners and part time workers, all requesting to learn different modules within the curriculum.

A group facilitated Mentor training session, covering an overview of the project and curriculum, took place at the Library the week prior to the sessions starting. One to one meetings, where Mentors were paired with their respective Mentees, were scheduled. The introductory meeting included a tour of the Library meeting space, a review of the modules of interest and the completion of the Mentoring Agreement.

Sessions began the following week. Mentors tailored the teaching to meet the Mentees identified areas of interest specific to available modules. Having on site supervision allowed for observation of the teaching and learning. In addition, it provided opportunity to check in with the pairs and give observational feedback immediately afterwards. This process kept the students engaged and motivated provided the Mentees with an opportunity to share real time thoughts and/or concerns and satisfied the potential safety concern.

Communication remained consistent with the Head Librarian and on site support staff during the weekly sessions. Feedback received was positive and the continuation of the partnership in the future is well supported.

Faculty staff at a follow up meeting offered suggestions on how LLN could strengthen the partnership with Lakeshore Catholic High School moving forward. Timing of when project information was shared with the teaching and guidance staff was noted. To ensure all staff receive accurate and inclusive information, it was recommended to schedule a brief presentation at their first staff meeting late August and again at the beginning of the second term.

As for recruitment, it was mentioned that most students are eager to earn their community involvement hours beginning late September. Grade 12 students in particular need to complete this requirement for their OSSD and would be able to add their participation in the project to their scholarship applications that go out mid-January.

The success of this piloted high school model can be highly attributed to the co-operation and accommodation of the Library staff and faculty staff who see value in this project and the continual lifelong learning that it fosters. Both Lakeshore Catholic High School and the Port Colborne Public Library have committed to an ongoing partnership and look forward to assisting in the growth and delivery of this project in the future.

As the model has now been established and successfully piloted, LLN will pursue future funding to specifically grow this program and replicate this model in other municipalities. Niagara West already has mentees waiting to be matched if the program receives future funding.

## CHALLENGES & LEARNINGS

This project was a journey in understanding the generational differences between millennials and other adults. Below is a chart of our challenges and learnings over the course of the project.

Challenges	Learnings
Recruitment of mentors and mentees in the same locations	At first, the recruitment calls were too broad. Mentors and Mentees were waiting to be matched, but were not in the same municipalities. In the future, LLN will focus on specific recruitment campaigns by targeting areas with prepared youth mentors through local High Schools.
Mentor training styles	Youth do not want to sit through long, formal training sessions. Informal sessions where they can ask their own questions and engage with the tools are more appreciated. Coffee or food offerings increase retainment.
Supervision of youth under 18 while volunteering	Both recruitment and retention of mentees and mentors increased when sessions were held in the same public space with an LLN staff member every week. This negated concern over safety issues. Partnering with a library or other public agency also allows mentees to access additional community supports if needed.
Staff changes – Communication issues with advisory and partners	Having a staff change during a highly involved project was difficult. While the project benefited with an injection of ideas in the second phase, communication between LLN and the advisory committee proved difficult. In the future, LLN will

ensure this is a priority with scheduled updates as part of the project plan.

Ambitious project outcomes

While LLN considers this project to have positive learnings and overall success, they would not have identified so many project activities in a short time. The curriculum alone took much longer than expected. Moving forward, LLN will make project timelines and outcomes more realistic to avoid staff burnout.

## NEXT STEPS

The project report and curriculum will be shared with 16 adult literacy networks that can pass on the information to over 240 adult literacy agencies in Ontario. Literacy Link Niagara will post the project report and curriculum on their website. They are committed to updating the material for the next 36 months when changes to technology occur.

Literacy Link Niagara is committed to running a small cohort of 6-8 students through one high school for the 2017-18 year. Lakeshore High School in Port Colborne, with the support of the public library, is willing and ready to participate.

With all Literacy Link Niagara has learned, they feel ready to roll out this high school model to additional schools. They will be looking for additional funding to support the ongoing growth of this unique and needed program.

## APPENDIX

### Recruitment Materials

### Tech Teach Curriculum

### Mentoring Agreement