

**Strategy # 3: Document the current approach by Employment Ontario partners to labour adjustment situations and investigate the development of a new, responsive, collaborative model of labour adjustment among Employment Ontario partners.**

**Strategy #4: Identify and implement supportive coordination strategies, including assessment and referral protocols and tools, to facilitate effective client pathways and outcomes.**

### **Project READ Literacy Network of Waterloo-Wellington (PRLN)**

How can lower-skilled and marginalized workers in Ontario be best prepared and supported by the Employment Ontario (EO) partner services to be successful in employment and education? In **People Without Jobs, Jobs Without People** (2010), Dr. Rick Miner identifies that a more highly educated and trained workforce will be needed to meet labour needs:

- a. The requirements of the labour market are changing. With the emergence of the knowledge economy, the proportion of the labour force requiring some form of education or training beyond high school will increase dramatically. Using a variety of Canadian and U. S. estimates, it is concluded that by 2031 we will need 77% of our workforce to have post-secondary credentials (apprenticeship, university, college, industry, professional).
- b. Two types of new jobs will be created – completely new jobs and jobs that have changed so much that, even if the title is the same, the actual work done and training and skills required will make them new jobs.

- c. We face a future with large numbers of unskilled workers looking for jobs that require skills they don't possess, and a large number of jobs that will go unfilled.

The report, **'From Poverty to Prosperity: Literacy's Impact on Canada's Economic Success'** (Scott & Shillington, 2011), identifies a direct link between literacy skill and income level:

- a. Literacy levels influence the
  - ability to get a job
  - ability to retrain for a job or get a promotion
  - risk of job loss
  - length of time of unemployment and rate of pay
- b. Individuals with low levels of literacy work fewer weeks on average and are more likely to experience periods of unemployment and remain unemployed for longer periods.
- c. People with the lowest level numeracy skills are 5 times more likely to receive Social Assistance Benefits.

Project READ Literacy Network of Waterloo-Wellington (PRLN) has been involved in supporting lower-skilled workers since 1988. PRLN has been

- providing literacy assessments and referrals to local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers
- supporting local service coordination and education strategies and opportunities, including during periods of labour adjustment (see Appendix 1)

Waterloo Region, not unlike other areas of the province, has experienced lay-offs, downsizing and closures across employment sectors. In addition, new companies have opened their doors and need workers.

Periods of labour adjustment provide both an opportunity and a challenge to engage and support lower-skilled Ontarians to successfully transition back to work. The opportunity, as workers leave their jobs, is a natural window to encourage lower-skilled workers to engage in upgrading and retraining – a retooling of their skills to meet the needs of future employment. The challenge is to determine if the current local labour adjustment practices and processes truly support a worker to identify literacy concerns and then to participate in education and retraining.

The Employment Ontario (EO) network of providers and programs are all mandated to provide service as part of labour adjustment. These providers and programs include

- Employment Services (ES)
- Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)
- workforce planning
- Apprenticeship
- Second Career
- Self-employment

The 3 questions to consider are:

1. How do the providers and programs collaborate in an adjustment situation with Local Adjustment Committees and Action Centres?
2. Do all partners have a consistent knowledge of labour adjustment?

3. Are there opportunities to improve collaboration and responses in adjustment situations so that laid-off workers are encouraged to have literacy and skills assessments, participate in upgrading and successfully return to work?

The strategies in this project were targeted to answer those 3 questions.

## **Partners**

An immediate and ongoing partnership developed with the local Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Advisor, Joan Robinson. The goal of the AAP is to work with employers, employees and communities to develop strategies to cope with company downsizing or plant closures. Connecting individuals with the relevant and appropriate Employment Ontario (EO) services that will help them regain employment is an integral part of the service.

Fully understanding the current labour adjustment processes was important to this project. Project staff prepared and shared 2 progress reports on the key informant interviews and the challenges and questions stakeholders had about labour adjustment. Discussions considered

- opportunities to clarify the process of adjustment
- expectations of all stakeholders
- possible pathways for service

In addition, a larger meeting took place with Anne Ramsay (Project READ Literacy Network - PRLN), Joan Robinson (AAP), project staff, and other Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) staff to discuss the reports in-depth and to plan for a community presentation. We collaborated on the content of the meeting, the venue and identified stakeholders who could be in attendance. A decision was made for AAP advisors to present at a scheduled, upcoming meeting of the local Community Employment Linkages Committee (CELC) where EO service partners, program

fundere and other community organizations would be in attendance. Additional adjustment stakeholders were identified and invited by Project READ Literacy Network (PRLN).

This meeting took place in September 2013. Joan Robinson presented on the current process and protocols of labour market adjustment including the Rapid Response and Training Service (RRTS) protocol and tiered response, including the

- role of Employment Ontario (EO) partners
- role of Action Centres
- role of the peer helper
- expected timelines (see Appendix 2,3)

The RRTS is activated in two instances

1. When the company lay-off will impact 50 or more employees.
2. Where the lay-off will have a major impact on the community.

A successful, collaborative partnership developed with the Literacy Service Planning Waterloo Region Committee (LSP), representing local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers, by attendance at their scheduled monthly meetings. A project update was included on the monthly agenda and as a group, the LSP providers were able to discuss and share their labour adjustment involvement including challenges, successes and recommendations. The members of the Waterloo LSP table provided consultation and support to plan a community-learning meeting in December 2013 to share project findings.

## **Activities**

### **a. Background Research**

An Internet search was completed to gather background information and gain insight into current labour adjustment research and tools. There are a number of

documents that serve as labour adjustment templates and best practise guidebooks for employers, Action Centres and workers. Two specific examples are:

1. The Mining Industry Human Resources Council produced the **Mining Workforce Transition Kit - A Tool to Support Employees at Mine Closure** with funding from the Canadian government. This 5-module, step-by-step transition guide follows the labour process and offers supports for employers and workers. There are specific templates for the transition (local adjustment) committee (module 3) and also for the Action Centre Team (module 4). Module 4 is a guidebook for establishing, running, promoting and winding down an Action Centre and includes information on services needed including
  - income supports
  - employment
  - literacy
  - retraining information
  
2. The Workforce Development Board in Peterborough produced a second guide, **Surviving a Lay-off: A Guide for Employers**, with funding from Employment Ontario (EO). This guide:
  - a. Introduces employers to collaborative labour adjustment programs and practices in Ontario, noting that employers have a critical role in ensuring positive outcomes.
  
  - b. Provides best practices on
    - planning for closure
    - notifying impacted workers
    - notifying the province
    - suggesting adjustment responses

The CAW (Canadian Auto Workers) Adjustment Tracking Project published research reports in 2010 (**Preliminary Findings**) and 2012 (**Finding Their Way**), which are the findings of a longitudinal study of 260 laid-off CAW automobile industry workers from 3 different communities.

The goal of the preliminary research (2010) was to

- assess utilization of Action Centres and effectiveness of services
- look at employment outcomes
- look at health and well-being benchmarks

The second phase (2012) followed the same workers and further researched

- what had worked well
- shortfalls
- impacts on families
- what happened for the workers

Author Sam Vrankulj found:

- a. There was a high degree of engagement with the Action Centres with most accessing support in employment preparation, retraining (most through Employment Ontario's Second Career program), and gaining essential social supports.
- b. The resources and partnerships with service providers were important to success, as well as the peer helper model at the Action Centres.
- c. Employment outcomes were generally good as some workers were recalled. Of those working in other areas, many were in the situations of precarious employment and working in the service sector and were concerned with ongoing financial stability.

Both reports noted that more vulnerable workers, "...older workers, immigrants, workers from racialized communities, those with lower levels of education, English language literacy and women had higher incidence of negative health and well being outcomes " (Vrankulj, 2012).

#### **d. Key Informant Interviews**

Twenty-one in-depth, confidential interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. People were chosen for their knowledge of and experience along the continuum of labour adjustment.

The goals of the key informant interviews were to better understand

- past and current practices
- what assessment tools are currently used
- how Project READ Literacy Network (PRLN) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers could be involved

Questions addressed their experience with labour adjustment, and where and how LBS and the local literacy network could be involved in adjustment (see Appendix 9).

As the interviews progressed, themes emerged that reflected confusion with current practices including

- the role of the Employment Service (ES) provider
- how providers get involved in adjustment
- concerns about cost and capacity
- type and amount of reporting
- levels of assessment
- general expectations from MTCU

There were questions concerning the ways Action Centre staff and peer helpers worked with service providers and what all stakeholders could expect from each other. Interviews were conducted with

Employment Ontario Employment Services Providers

- Lutherwood
- The Working Centre
- Northern Lights
- YMCA of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo
- Conestoga College

Carol Simpson, Workforce Planning Board

Judi Riddolls, Guelph-Wellington Business Enterprise Centre (Employment Ontario - Ontario Self Employment Benefits contract holder)

Frank Curnew, Waterloo Region Labour Council

Jane Tuer, Project READ Literacy Network

Arnie Francisco, experienced Local Adjustment Committee Chair

Action Centre Coordinators and staff including peer helpers

Joan Robinson, Adjustment Advisory Program Advisor

Laid-off Workers

#### **e. Review of Employment Assessment and Screening Tools**

Both screening and assessments tools offer a way to better understand the interests, needs and goals of the worker.

Screening tends to be a brief overview that may be completed in a survey where the worker self identifies their situation or possibly in a conversation where behaviours could be observed. Screening is often the first step and quickly identifies needs and options, and supports referrals for service.

Assessments may be the next step, marking an investment for the worker and the provider that result in a personalized learning and employment plan. Assessments take time to complete and they incorporate written tools and in-person interviews that consider many areas, including

- work history
- education and training history
- certifications
- job seeking skills
- job skills
- employment readiness
- language skills
- available supports
- goals
- barriers

In addition, testing may be used to measure and demonstrate skills, aptitudes and preferences. Employment Services (ES) offer assessment of employment or employability skills. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) offer assessments identifying literacy and essential skills.

In key interviews, ES providers and the Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Advisor discussed the use of screening and assessment tools. The Labour Adjustment Needs Survey (see Appendix 4) is an example of an AAP screening survey that would be completed by impacted workers at the initial meeting. Completion is voluntary and the results are compiled and used by the Local Adjustment Committee to better understand the demographics and self declared needs and goals of workers. Generally, ES providers complete assessments when workers attend their locations and register for EO services or assisted services. These assessments have no prescribed methods. When present at the Action

Centres, Employment Services (ES) staff generally are offering a screening service, many utilizing informal conversation that highlight the workers'

- current situation
- ideas for next steps
- possible support or referrals

**f. Attended Monthly Literacy Service Planning (LSP) Waterloo Region Meetings**

The LSP Waterloo Region is a local committee, facilitated and supported by Project READ Literacy Network (PRLN). At this table, participating Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers and Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU), focus on local planning and coordination of LBS services and programs. Members include

Waterloo Region District School Board, Essential Skills Upgrading – serving Waterloo and Cambridge

Waterloo Catholic District School Board, St Louis, Core Essentials – serving Cambridge and Kitchener

The Literacy Group – serving Cambridge and Kitchener

Conestoga College – serving Cambridge, Waterloo

Project READ Literacy Network

MTCU Employment and Training Consultant

**g. Community Learning Meeting**

Labour adjustment stakeholders were invited to a community meeting on December 6, 2013 to learn about the project purpose, findings and next steps.

Discussions included

- methods for pre-screening for literacy concerns
- challenges in discussing literacy needs
- opportunities to work collaboratively (see Appendix 5)

#### **h. Assessments of Laid-off Workers: Case Study of Knap and Vogt, Kitchener, Ontario**

In November 2013, Project READ received a request from the Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Consultant at Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to support workers at a local furniture components factory that was shutting down.

Project READ's Executive Program Director provided information and referrals to over 70 employees at an open house event at the factory on November 27, 2013. As a result of making contact with union and management representatives at the open house, Project READ was asked to coordinate 2 activities:

1. Provide individual assessments to workers.
2. Solicit proposals for on-site training programs from local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies.

After a discussion with LBS representatives, it was cooperatively decided that 2 of the 4 local LBS agencies would submit complementary proposals. The college proposed a GED preparation program and the community-based agency submitted for an Employment Track Express group.

<http://www.collegeupgradingon.ca/employmenton/ete/studentmanual/etestudentmanual.pdf>

Proposals were submitted to the company's human resources department in mid-December. Project READ assessed 45 workers for their educational and essential skills at the company's Action Centre in late December 2013. A report on the results of those assessments is available in the Appendices.

This smooth, coordinated provision of support to newly laid-off workers was made possible by the support and communication cultivated during this project among the various partners, including

- Government
- regional network
- company
- union
- local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) agencies.

## **Lessons Learned**

### **Impact of Employment Ontario on Labour Adjustment**

In the Province of Ontario, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) responds to downsizing and closures. Companies initially advise the Ministry of Labour (MOL) and then AAP advisors meet with company and employee representatives to discuss labour market adjustment including

- closure or downsizing
- expected number and type of positions of impacted workers
- projected timelines
- local Adjustment Committee set-up - including
  - AAP advisor
  - company human resources
  - union representation (if unionized)
  - staff representation
- necessity of an Action Centre
- expected budget/cost sharing

The Local Adjustment Committee hires a Committee Chairperson. An initial group meeting is held with impacted employees where a survey is completed to determine

- demographic information

- employees' immediate plans and needs
- perceived barriers to accomplish these goals (see Appendix 3).

When 50 or more employees are affected by lay-offs, the Adjustment Advisory Program's (AAP's) Rapid Re-employment and Training Service (RRTS) will be activated. Led by the AAP Advisor, this initiative works to ensure a swift, appropriate response, bringing resources to help the impacted workers and communities (see Appendix 3).

### **Historically**

The Local Adjustment Committee prepared a request for proposals and then contracted with selected employment service providers on a fee-for-service basis. Providers hired or assigned dedicated staff to provide service at the Action Centre where they

- completed in-depth needs assessments of affected employees
- developed individual action plans
- prepared comprehensive reports for the committee including
  - numbers
  - employee needs
  - agencies or services to be brought in to respond
  - schedule of services

Not all local employment service providers prepared proposals to be the lead agency or participated in labour adjustment.

### **Currently**

In the Waterloo Region, 10 Employment Service (ES) providers are under contract with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to be full suite providers of ES. Labour market adjustment services are an implied part of their paid contractual arrangements. Therefore, there are no additional dollars for this service, no request for proposals, and all full suite providers can participate based on their service capacity.

Full suite providers are required to offer 'unassisted' or self-directed resource and information areas as well as 'assisted' services including

- completing in-depth employability assessment
- developing individual employment plans
- supporting career planning and job search services
- making referrals to other programs and services
- providing job matching and job placement including wage incentives and job retention services, for people requiring more supports

Annual business plans are prepared with unassisted and assisted targets in different categories. Quarterly performance reports are completed and organizations are expected to demonstrate that they are either meeting or developing strategies to meet their targets. Successful outcomes include exiting to employment full-time or part-time (the highest percentage) as well as exits to education and training including English as a Second Language and the Second Career program.

### **Concerns of Key Information Employment Services (ES)**

There were several identified concerns of key informant ES providers including:

- a. **Cost** – No additional dollars have been made available to existing ES providers to support an Action Centre.
- b. **Duplication** – Full suite ES providers are funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to offer staffed local Resource and Information Areas (R&I) providing support for self-directed job search. These R&I areas provide
  - computers
  - pre-employment workshops on a variety of topics
  - program information on job search, career planning, academic upgrading and education

This leads to the question - How do Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) funded Action Centres differ from the Resource and Information Areas (R&I)?

- c. **Staff Capacity** – As no new staff can be hired or dedicated to Action Centres, it may be difficult to staff Action Centres from the current staff complement. Sending staff to Action Centres could leave agencies short staffed at their contracted sites and at potential risk of not meeting contractual targets.
- d. **Assessments** – While historically the selected employment provider would complete comprehensive needs assessments as part of their fee-for-service contract, for Employment Service (ES) providers, comprehensive employment assessments are completed when a person is requiring more supported or ‘assisted’ services. No assessment is completed for people using the R&I or ‘unassisted’ service area. An Action Centre could be considered as an R&I area.
- e. **Employment Ontario Information System (EOIS) Database Entry and File Retention** – People who need assisted service, must complete an EO Participation Registration and be added to the Employment Ontario Information Systems Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS). Access to the EOIS-CaMS is needed to
- search for an existing case file
  - create a new case file
  - register an employment plan
- Data entry is time consuming and is not completed at Action Centres. Additionally, providers need to create and keep hard copy files at their service locations.
- f. **Referrals** – To access other Employment Ontario programs such as the Second Career retraining, Ontario Job Creation, Ontario Self Employment Benefit programs,

and wage incentives for job placements, participants must be registered in the Employment Ontario Information Systems Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS), be part of assisted services and have an open employment plan.

- g. **Less than 50 Impacted Workers** – Looking for clear directions when there will be no Action Centre (less than 50 impacted workers). To provide the best response - How do Employment Ontario (EO) partners find out about lay-offs to best prepare for and develop services? How are impacted workers informed about EO partners?

### **Concerns of Key Informant Adjustment Committee Chair, Action Centre Coordinator, Staff and Peer Helpers**

There were several identified concerns including:

- a. **Reporting** – Changes in the adjustment model leave questions on what reporting is required by stakeholders and who is responsible or best suited to complete reports. Action Centres are required to provide program statistics including client data and follow up, percentage adjusted and financial reports to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).
- b. **Experience in Adjustment** – Previously employment agencies completed request for proposals for Adjustment Committees and were selected based on experience and ability to complete adjustment work. In the new model, Employment Services (ES) providers may not have experience working in adjustment and with Action Centres. Can Action Centres expect the same level of service from all ES providers?
- c. **Value of Peer Helper Model** - While ES in both assisted and unassisted programs services are staffed by trained, professional employment staff providing programs and services, the value of the peer helpers at the Action Centres can't be overlooked.

Peer helpers know the workers and are also impacted workers themselves. They

- provide emotional support
- maintain contact with workers
- offer encouragement, referrals and advocacy

“We are confident in the personalized support offered by the ‘peer helper’ model. We are proud of how ‘worker led’ Action Centres reach out to their laid-off colleagues, drawing them in and guiding them as they struggle through the intimidating job market and often confusing structure” (Pierce and Roberts in Vrankulj, 2012).

d. **Demographics** – Action Centres aren’t provided with a full contact list of displaced workers. This has a number of impacts

- time and energy is spent in outreach and promotion by the Centre to try to connect with workers
- staff don’t know who hasn’t connected and while it is a worker’s choice to use the Centre, staff don’t want to make assumptions that the workers who haven’t connected have found work or another source of income
- vulnerable workers may not be connecting with Action Centres

Research shows that laid-off workers experience negative health and well-being concerns especially, “older workers, immigrants, workers from racialized groups, those with lower levels of education, English language literacy and women” (Vrankulj, 2012).

### **Concerns for Local Workforce Planning Board**

Workforce Planning Boards identified several concerns including:

- a. **Demographics** – There is a lack of shared information on the skills and education of impacted workers from employers and Rapid Response and Training Service (RRTS). While adjustment is often seen as downsizing, there is

upsizing when employers are looking for skilled workers (vacancies and skill shortages). If information about impacted employees was available sooner, there could be opportunities for workers to quickly transition to employment.

Sharing this information would mean quick access to growing employment sectors and better matching skilled workers seeking employment with either existing employers, expanding or new companies investing in Ontario.

- b. **Importance of Timely, Up-to-Date Labour Market Information Shared with Workers** – “Labour market information (LMI) represents a key mechanism by which to facilitate labour market adjustments. Well-organized LMI can reduce job search costs for both firms and workers and help workers reallocate themselves among different employers and industries effectively. Improved LMI can also make the supply of job candidates and the demand of employers more elastic” (Sharpe and Qiao, 2006). It is important to ensure that labour market information is presented at initial worker meetings and is available at Action Centres.

### **Concerns for Key Informant Literacy Service Providers (LBS)**

LBS identified two main concerns.

- a. **Identifying Literacy early in the adjustment process** – Impacted worker’s initial needs are to clarify what is happening with the company and what financial assistance and supports they are entitled to. For many, their immediate goal is to get another job. Sharing information about the essential skills needed for the current labour market and the opportunity to participate in an easily accessible ‘skills checkup’ may plant seeds for upgrading.
- b. **Referrals to Literacy programs** – In Waterloo, Wellington and Dufferin for the period of April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013 data shows only 18 reported referrals from Employment Services (ES) to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS). The number of ES

assisted clients for the same period was 8,929 (WFPB, 2013). This raises questions about

- how literacy pre-screening could be adapted
- how LBS programs are being explained
- how this impacts referrals for programming

## **Recommendations**

These recommendations are made recognizing there is not a cookie cutter response to labour adjustment. Each situation will present unique challenges and opportunities for partnership with stakeholders. Stakeholders include

- impacted workers
- employers
- Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) advisors
- Adjustment Committees
- Action Centre Chair
- staff
- peer helpers
- EO partners - including
  - ES
  - LBS
  - self employment
  - Apprenticeship
  - Second Career
  - Workforce Planning Boards
  - Labour Councils
  - municipalities

Recommendations are grouped into 3 categories: Communication, Collaboration and Training.

### **Communication**

a. There needs to be clear and ongoing messaging from Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) to adjustment stakeholders

- in person
- in print
- online

Communication needs to focus on how the Employment Services (ES) contracted model impacts the historic work and understanding of Adjustment Committees, and Action Centres – Chairs, staff and peer helpers and other stakeholders.

b. Communication needs to clarify the role, responsibilities and expectations of the peer supported Action Centres and of the ES and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers in the areas of

- needs employability assessment (move to assisted service and Employment Ontario Information Systems Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS) data entry
- reports
- service locations - (staff capacity)
- protocols on how ES and LBS keep Action Centres updated on worker/learner status to meet adjustment percentages
- follow up (who does what and when)

c. There needs to be a review of labour adjustment and Employment Ontario (EO) materials to reconsider using the word 'literacy', renaming and focusing on skills check up, Essential Skills and upgrading.

## **Collaboration**

The initial meeting with impacted workers needs to include

- the Workforce Planning Board for labour market information
- Project READ Literacy Network (regional literacy network) - representing local Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) service providers, for Essential Skills and opportunities for enhancing skills/ to demystify literacy
- other Employment Ontario (EO) partners and adjustment stakeholders

## **Training**

- a. Opportunity for LBS to support and train Employment Services (ES) frontline workers, including Resource and Information Areas (R&I) staff, in pre-screening for literacy and understanding literacy programming and literacy assessment.
- b. Opportunity for ES and LBS providers to participate in peer helper training as they are able to support literacy pre screening, talk about literacy, understand all programming and assessment.
- c. Opportunity for frontline ES and peer helpers to experience an in-depth literacy and essential skills assessment.

## **Challenges**

### **a. No Common Employability Assessment Tool or Process**

During key informant interviews, ES providers shared that there are many ways employability assessments are completed and while they would support incorporating some type of literacy pre-screen, it would need to be simple and flexible.

At the December 2013 community meeting, EO partners and stakeholders discussed ways they currently screen or assess literacy needs. Processes developed would

support Employment Ontario (EO) partners more broadly in their day-to-day work in EO, potentially resulting in more frequent and more effective referrals. Project READ Learning Network (PRLN) shared a sample pre-screening tool that has been used with the local Ontario Works office (see Appendix 7).

**Recommendation:** That a small work group form, including Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers, to discuss and design a practical pre-screening tool for literacy and to support implementation.

#### **b. Role of Service Canada Employment Insurance**

In a downsizing and lay-off situation, Employment Insurance regular benefits provide temporary financial assistance to impacted workers. To be eligible for regular benefits, workers must show that they are, 'unemployed, able and willing to work and actively looking for suitable work.'

Workers can participate in training programs, including skills upgrading, either on their own initiative or with direction from Service Canada. However, "If you are taking a training course on your own initiative ... you must show, without a doubt, that taking a course is not an obstacle to your active job search or to your acceptance of appropriate employment" (Service Canada, 2013). Generally, Service Canada considers a course of 10 hours or less per week, held in the evening and not at a university level as acceptable for a worker to continue to receive benefits, as it wouldn't interfere with job search.

When literacy concerns have been identified for an impacted worker, providers recognize that focussing on upgrading best prepares the worker to be successful in pursuing further training or returning to the workforce.

**Recommendation 1:** That the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) advocate for Service Canada to recognize the need for increased hours (greater than 10 hours per week) of training for workers participating in literacy and basic skills upgrading and that increased training should not impact EI benefits.

**Recommendation 2:** That MTCU work with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers to prepare information slides for the Service Canada mandatory worker information sessions. This information needs to better reflect the most effective ways to promote upgrading and skills check-ins to best engage learners, utilizing sensitive language. Supporting notes should be prepared to accompany the slides for effective presentation and explanation. Information on local LBS providers should be available for interested workers (see Appendix 6).

## **Knowledge Transfer**

### **Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU)**

A written progress report was completed and shared with Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Advisor in June 2013. The purpose of the report was to share initial findings on observed state of labour adjustment in Waterloo Region as identified by key informant interviews. Findings were discussed focussing on ways that MTCU could

- communicate and address provider concerns
- clarify misunderstandings
- clarify Ministry expectations
- clarify the process of labour adjustment

This report was later redrafted to include a recommendation for a joint community meeting with AAP to support the project and clarify concerns and challenges for Employment Ontario (EO) partners regarding engagement in labour adjustment and to suggest a pathway for adjustment.

A second meeting was held to review the progress reports and plan a community meeting specifically for the Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) Advisor to address labour adjustment. Those in attendance were

- the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Management
- the AAP Advisor
- an Employment Training Consultant
- the Executive Director of Project READ Literacy Network – Anne Ramsay
- the project consultant

### **Literacy Basic Skills Providers (LBS)**

Progress reports and project updates were shared monthly at the Literacy Service Planning Waterloo Region meetings. These were opportunities to highlight suggestions on ways Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) to work more closely together, including

- labour adjustment experiences
- literacy assessment and screening
- increasing an understanding of shared performance measures
- reporting requirements in Employment Ontario Information Systems Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS) and referrals protocols

### **Opportunities for Community Learning**

Joan Robinson, AAP Advisor, attended the regularly scheduled Community Employment Linkages Committee (CELC) meeting in September 2013 to specifically explain and clarify adjustment services and MTCU expectations. This presentation was in direct response to the Labour Market Project (LMP) progress reports and recommendations made to MTCU.

CELC is a Waterloo Region employment-planning table with representation from ES and LBS, program funders and community organizations. At the September meeting, 2

Action Centre chairs were also invited to attend. A presentation was made on the flow of labour adjustment, the role of Action Centres and peer helpers. There was an opportunity for discussion and also recommendations from the floor for more streamlined service. (See Appendix 3.)

A community service learning session was held December 6, 2013 to share project findings. Labour Market Partnership project staff and Project READ Literacy Network staff, invited Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers, Action Centre Chairs, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) staff and other adjustment stakeholders to

- attend to hear the findings of the report
- learn about literacy pre-screening
- experience part of a literacy assessment
- discuss ways to work better together on behalf of the impacted worker both in adjustment situations and in daily work with clients (see Appendix 5)

Fourteen Employment Ontario (EO) partners attended the December 6<sup>th</sup> Community meeting, not including 3 PRLN staff. Eleven attendees completed pre- and post evaluations, a completion rate of 79%. Results of the evaluations showed

- 75% of attendees had a good to excellent understanding of the project post evaluation compared with 45% in the pre-evaluation
- 100% of attendees rated their understanding of the importance of coordination needed between LBS and ES providers during labour adjustment situations as good to excellent post evaluation compared to 64% in the pre-evaluation
- 64% of attendees rated the understanding of literacy assessment tools as good to excellent post evaluation compared with 46% pre evaluation
- 100% of attendees rated their awareness of EO programs and services available to laid-off workers as good to excellent in the post-evaluation compared with 91% in the pre-evaluation

- 91% of attendees rated their understanding of referral processes for Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Employment Services (ES) as good to excellent post evaluation compared with 73% in the pre-evaluation
- 82% of attendees rated their interest in learning about LBS programs and services as good to excellent
- 75% of attendees felt the session would have a good impact on a client's access to LBS and ES programs
- 75 % of attendees rated their satisfaction with the project's outcomes as good to excellent (see Appendix 8)

## **Achieving Employment Ontario (EO) Mission and Vision**

**MTCU Vision: "Ontario will have the most educated people and highly skilled workforce in the world to build the province's competitive advantage and quality of life."**

The Vision of EO is to build and support a highly skilled and educated workforce in the

province by offering a comprehensive, coordinated service to all Ontarians to meet their employment and training needs. Services are available to support both the demand side (the employer) and supply side (the job seeker) of employment. Client satisfaction and service excellence are cornerstones of all EO programs ensuring staff are knowledgeable and competent and providing consistent, high quality services and programs that are

- accessible
- individualized
- focussed on client need
- offered in a timely manner

The results for customers are that they get effective, relevant skills training, employment and career planning services, where and when they need them. The Employment Ontario Service Promise is to

- ensure the highest quality of service and support to help individuals and employers

meet career or hiring goals

- provide opportunities to make it easier for individuals to improve their skills through education and training
- ensure that no matter which Employment Ontario (EO) office an individual enters, he or she will get the help required
- work with employers and communities to build the highly skilled, highly educated workforce Ontario needs to be competitive (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities - MTCU, 2013)

In addition, participant or learner suitability for eligibility for Employment Ontario (EO) programs ensures that services are available to vulnerable Ontarians who are at risk of continued or long-term unemployment or being marginalized in the labour market.

Coordinated labour adjustment strategies support the EO Vision and Mission by providing

- information to impacted workers on current labour market opportunities and needed skills
- information and assessment on skill identification
- employment services
- information and referral options to meet individuals goals and needs

In adjustment, there are additional stakeholders, including Adjustment Committees and Action Centre Chairs, Coordinators and peer helpers. These stakeholders work in a collaborative manner when supporting adjustment of displaced workers. Peer helpers, hired from the workplace being adjusted provide individual support to workers at the Action Centre. To build upon the role of peer helpers, it was suggested during this project that helpers receive training in literacy pre-screening and making effective referrals to support impacted workers to make successful transitions.

## Conclusions

The labour market is not static; there will continue to be worker lay-offs from company closures and downsizing as well as opportunities for employment from growing industries in Waterloo Region. As a main stakeholder in the work of labour adjustment, Ontario's Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) and Rapid Re-employment Training Service (RRTS) initiative provides coordination and immediate response to announced lay-offs, by connecting individuals with the relevant and appropriate Employment Ontario (EO) services and partners that will help them regain employment.

To successfully re-enter the workforce, impacted workers need to understand the current labour market and realistically look at how their skills, experience and education are marketable and transferable to current and future jobs. As Miner (2010) points out, future jobs will require a more educated and skilled workforce. However, it can be both difficult for service providers to screen for literacy issues and for workers to disclose literacy challenges. While admission can be embarrassing and stigmatizing for the worker, there is a cost to not honestly identifying literacy concerns. Workers can be trapped in a cycle of low skilled, precarious employment and periods of unemployment, exhausting severance and employment insurance payments and falling into social assistance (Scott & Shillington, 2011).

How can literacy networks and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers support a more successful labour adjustment result for impacted workers to ensure lower-skilled and marginalized workers can more quickly be identified and access programs and services? This project has identified key areas and points of connection where collaboration is possible. Recommendations include:

- a. **Local Adjustment Committees** – Literacy Networks or LBS providers become active members on adjustment committees to provide information and ensure LBS services are included in adjustment strategy.

- b. **Initial meeting with impacted workers** – Literacy Network attends with other Employment Ontario (EO) partners to present information about essential skills in the new labour market, planting seeds for workers to access a ‘skills checkup’ to identify their strengths and skills gaps.
- c. **Action Centres** – Literacy Network participates in peer helper training to
- provide a pre-screening tool and identify literacy concerns
  - share ways to talk about literacy to engage workers
  - provide an overview of literacy providers
  - help identify pathways to retraining and education
- d. **Action Centres** – Literacy Network can provide an opportunity for peer helpers to experience a literacy assessment. This will help to build understanding to better support impacted workers through the process.
- e. **Employment Services (ES)** – Literacy Network and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) providers offer training to frontline ES staff including Resource and Information Areas (R&I) staff to
- provide a literacy pre-screening tool to identify literacy concerns
  - share ways to talk about literacy
  - provide an overview of literacy providers
  - provide opportunity for ES and LBS to work concurrently to support lower-skilled workers
- f. **ES** – Literacy Network and LBS providers to work with ES to develop workshops that can be offered as part of the R&I programming to link literacy to employment success. Topic areas could include
- Essential Skills and Skills Checkups
  - Pathways to Retraining and Education
  - Are you ready for a Second Career?

g. **Employment Services (ES) and Service Canada** – Literacy Network provides information on common messaging about identifying literacy needs and accessing Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs and services for laid-off workers attending ongoing Service Canada information sessions.

h. **Ontario’s Adjustment Advisory Program (AAP) and ES** – Literacy Network can be a point of connection to LBS services and programs in labour adjustment situations without Action Centres (with less than 50 impacted workers).

When all labour adjustment partners clearly understand the labour market process and work collaboratively, lower-skilled and marginalized workers will have the best result in a labour adjustment situation.