

Strategy #6: Explore how the strategies identified in the 2009-2010 EONDF Linking Adult Literacy to Poverty Reduction project, including Bridges Out of Poverty, can and have been implemented to facilitate learner and client success.

Tri County Literacy Network (TCLN)

This strategy allowed Tri County Literacy Network to explore and understand the impact of the Employment Ontario Network Development Fund (EONDF) project and be able to share the results with others.

Through this project we

- prepared and implemented a survey
- gathered strategies from Windsor-Essex Employment Ontario programs
- developed a list of the top 10 strategies
- compared strategies to the best practices list
- held a focus group to discuss strategies
- summarized focus group information
- presented the strategies via a province-wide webinar
- created the final report and submitted to Literacy Link South Central

Partners

Through our survey to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS), Employment Services (ES) and Employment and Social Services (ESS) staff who attended the **Bridges Out of Poverty** workshops, we gathered information on the effectiveness of the strategies they used.

Pathway To Potential (P2P) participated in the Roundtable Discussion and provided copies of their publication, **Reality Check**. There is considerable feedback in the survey related to this organization in terms of poverty reduction in Windsor-Essex. Pathway

To Potential was also active on the organizing committee for the Linking Adult Literacy to Poverty Reduction project in 2009-2010.

Activities

January to April 2013

- a. prepared and implemented survey
- b. gathered strategies from Windsor-Essex Employment Ontario programs

May and June 2013

- a. completed an extensive analysis of the online survey
- b. compared the top 10 strategies to the best practices list

June to October 2013

Tri County Literacy Network prepared, promoted and held a Roundtable Discussion in Windsor at the Windsor Public Library on October 10, 2013 with facilitator, Jen Kirkham. The facilitator prepared a PowerPoint presentation for the Roundtable Discussion. The agenda included welcome and introductions, background to the project, online survey results, discussion and suggested future actions or next steps. There were 15 participants registered and 14 attended from 7 agencies, representing Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Employment Services (ES), Employment and Social Services (ESS) and Pathway To Potential (P2P).

November and December 2013

- a. prepared and delivered a webinar giving an overview of our project to 50 participants – 60% LBS, 20% ES and 20% LBS-ES providers
- b. prepared and submitted the final report

Lessons Learned

The survey was distributed April 8 to 10, 2013 to the Windsor-Essex Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Employment Services (ES), Employment and Social Services (ESS) and Pathway To Potential (P2P) providers who participated in the **Bridges Out of Poverty** training in November 2009 and/or April 2011.

There was a

- 70% response rate from LBS (7 out of 10)
- 60% response rate from ES and ESS (39 out of 65)
- 61% overall total response rate (46 out of 75)

Considering that the training was held in 2009 and 2011, the response rate is very positive.

At an individual level, both ES/ESS and LBS providers identified that staff who help facilitate client/learner success should demonstrate strong

- relationship-building skills
- communication skills
- problem-solving skills

At a community level, both ES/ESS and LBS identified the importance of

- coordinated community information and referral protocols
- professional development with community organizations
- information sharing about agency programs with community organizations

At a program level, LBS identified numerous strategies that help facilitate learner success, including instruction in

- essential skills
- problem solving
- financial literacy
- health literacy

- community resources and how to access them

Specific strategies discussed in the open answer sections of the survey that are worth noting are

- an LBS program that has a mentoring program
- an ES/ESS program that invites local agencies to their monthly staff meetings

The top 10 strategies in the Individual Action and Community Engagement areas as identified by the LBS and non-LBS service providers and the top strategies identified by LBS service providers in the Program Elements area are identified below. There is a good representation of strategies being implemented across the 3 areas/levels of best practices. The 3 areas or levels of best practices are:

- a. **Individual Action (IA)** - what you can do.
- b. **Program Elements (PE)** - what Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs can include in program delivery to assist and support learners/clients to move out of poverty.
- c. **Community Engagement (CE)** - how agencies can engage with others in the community to increase knowledge of LBS programs and strengthen LBS program support for people's next steps.

Top 10 Best Practices

1. My agency demonstrates that it values staff who demonstrate strong relationship building skills. **(Individual Action - IA)**
2. My agency demonstrates that it values staff who demonstrate strong communication skills. **(IA)**

3. My agency regularly participates in professional development opportunities that include community organizations. **(Community Engagement -CE)**
4. My agency provides regular updates to all relevant community agencies. **(CE)**
5. My agency participates in coordinated activities designed to improve the community information and referral protocol. **(CE)**
6. My agency demonstrates that it values staff with strong problem-solving skills. **(IA)**
7. My agency takes action to increase staff awareness of the impact of poverty on learners/clients. **(IA)**
8. My agency encourages individuals to become involved in and collaborate with others on issues related to poverty and poverty reduction. **(IA)**
9. My agency takes action to make staff aware of poverty reduction practices within the local community and beyond. **(IA)**
10. My agency is up to date in the poverty reduction strategies in our community. **(CE)**

Other Best Practices identified by Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) as part of the Program Element (PE) section included

- professional development on topics such as
 - communication skills for personal growth and classroom instruction
 - relationship building for personal growth and classroom instruction
 - problem-solving skills for personal growth and classroom instruction
 - up-to-date information and community resources
 - current strategies to improve literacy programs
- program delivery such as
 - problem-solving skills
 - how to access community resources
 - Essentials Skills

As a result of the Roundtable Discussion, we learned reasons why some strategies were not being implemented to the same extent as others, as well as why there was an increase or decrease in implementation of some strategies over time (2009 to 2013). We also discussed potential solutions related to these findings and next steps. The evaluation summary from the Roundtable Discussion indicated that the most significant learning they took away from the session revolved around the importance of having knowledge/awareness of other agencies in the community (62.5% of the responses indicated this).

Lessons learned from the project are:

- a. The strategies identified through this project do make a difference in the lives of clients/learners.
- b. There needs to be clearer link made between literacy and poverty, learning and employment.
- c. Poverty training needs to be provided to frontline staff and staff need to be involved in discussions about how to better meet the needs of clients/learners. This needs to happen on an ongoing basis.

Knowledge Transfer

Information was shared on the results of the survey at the Roundtable Discussion. The summary of the Roundtable Discussion notes and evaluation summary were shared with the participants after the session.

The evaluation feedback from the Roundtable Discussion indicated that participants

- had an average increase in knowledge of 3.6 out of 4
- felt the strategies discussed will facilitate learner and client success to a great extent (average 3.6 out of 4)
- are using or will use some of the strategies in the future (90%) – none stated they will not implement the strategies
- valued “to a great extent” identifying local strategies as a way to increase learner and client success (100%)

Results of the survey, Roundtable Discussion and the project as a whole were shared during the webinar on December 11, 2013. The evaluation feedback from the webinar indicated that those who participated

- had an increase in knowledge
- were likely to implement the strategies
- were satisfied with the webinar

The pre and post online surveys can be used in other communities to determine the impact of “**Bridges Out of Poverty**” training at the individual, program and community level.

Achieving the Employment Ontario Mission and Vision

The Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU) Vision of Employment Ontario (EO) is “that there will eventually be a comprehensive system that, in addition to breaking down barriers between ‘programs’, will also better integrate the supports that clients/learners require to succeed”.

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.”

In exploring the strategies from this project we have learned that one of the key strategies for learner and client success is providing them with current information on community resources. As a strategy already in use, this indicates that there is effective integration among Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS), Employment Services (ES) and Employment and Social Services (ESS). This is a direct tie to MTCU’s EO Vision. The support of EO’s Vision is also apparent in that survey respondents indicated the positive impact of these strategies.

1. LBS providers are able to

- better meet the needs of clients/learners
- make appropriate client referrals
- use poverty reduction strategies

2. Non-LBS providers are able to

- make more referrals
- make appropriate referrals
- provide more complete and accurate community information to assist clients
- better meet the needs of clients/learners and have more positive feelings for clients/learners
- participate more actively in poverty reduction activities

Challenges

It was challenging to develop a survey that was not too long so that people would be willing to complete it; but long enough to gather the information we hoped to gain.

We had to go through the entire registration list for the workshops in 2009 and 2011 to confirm who was still employed at each agency and confirm contact information. There were a number of people who were no longer working at some agencies so we could not include these people in the survey.

We decided to add a section in the survey for people to indicate if they were interested in a follow-up interview. Three were interested but we were only able to reach one. This person did provide good information on best practices which helped in developing the Roundtable Discussion.

Conclusion

We analyzed the survey results in discussion with the evaluator and by documentation of the results. The analysis shows positive gains, especially for the LBS programs, and shows some areas that still need work. The analysis is very detailed showing percentage increases and decreases in all aspects of the survey. The Roundtable Discussion assisted in understanding the results and provided solutions/suggestions for further improvements.

Next steps recommended at the Roundtable Discussion include:

- a. Create better connections between community partners.
- b. Provide poverty training in the community for frontline workers (local training).

- c. Invite a speaker on Circles.
- d. Increase the understanding of what “literacy” is (awareness campaign on the connection between literacy and poverty reduction).
- e. Develop a partnership between Tri-County Literacy Network, Pathway To Potential and Windsor-Essex Employment and Employment and Social Services (ESS) (previously Ontario Works) to follow-up on the awareness campaign for the community and poverty training/Circles information for frontline staff (further information on Circles is available at www.lambtoncircles.com/about-circles).