

**Strategy #9: Create a specific employment version of the Educational Pathways Assessment (EPA) that is customizable to each client/employment goal and to create an information/referral tool that both Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Employment Services (ES) can utilize. The target audience are those with less than grade 12, looking for employment, and have a specific employment goal.**

**Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA)**

ABEA has been providing program and client supports in Hamilton for 30 years. During that time we have developed an expertise in assessment and information/referral. Through the years, we have designed, developed and adapted our assessment tool to remain current and relevant to the goals of funders and clients.

While the Educational Pathways Assessment (EPA) was updated a few years ago, we felt that it needed to focus on an action plan that could be used by clients, Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Employment Services (ES) as part of successful client goal attainment.

Through this project, the EPA was renamed “The Educational Planning Assessment Tool (EPAT)” to better distinguish its purpose from the assessments completed at the program level. We will discuss the revisions to the tool later in this report.

This project relied on feedback and input from frontline staff of both ES and LBS in Hamilton and Niagara, network staff with assessment experience (ABEA, Project READ and Literacy Link Niagara) and Workforce Planning Hamilton (WPH).

## Activities

### January - April 2013

- a. Partnered with Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) to get feedback on the development of the tools through their Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)/Employment Services (ES) roundtables.
- b. Scheduled 3 focus groups (face-to-face and distance) with partners.
- c. Developed a list of resources that were researched for use in the tools (see Appendix A).

We were already using NOC, NAICS and Essential Skills profiles as part of our assessment and information/referral process. For this project we also researched various resources for current and local LMI as well as self-assessment tools. These included

- [apprenticesearch.com](http://apprenticesearch.com)
- HRSDC - Literacy and Essential Skills (Tools and Resources)
- Ontario Job Futures
- Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (employment profiles)
- Ontario Skills Passport
- Working in Canada

Utilizing these tools, in combination with current practices, has resulted in a comprehensive assessment and information and referral template to help clients move toward realistic and gainful employment goals.

## **May – June 2013**

- a. Continued to partner with Literacy Link Niagara to get feedback on the development of the tools through their ES/LBS roundtables.
- b. Completed 3 focus groups (face-to-face and distance) with partners.
- c. Drafted the revised assessment and information/referral tool based on focus group feedback.

### **Assessment Tool Content (see Appendix B)**

The assessment tool includes

- contact information
- full employment goal profile (including NOC, NAICS, NOC description, for trades whether it is a compulsory and/or Red Seal trade, employment potential, average wage, education and other requirements)
- 3 employment questionnaires for interests, skills and knowledge and work habits to ensure that the employment goal is congruent with the client in these areas (these result in a listing of the major group matches and transferable skills)
- education details and preferences
- Essential Skills results (this template can be used with a variety of assessment tools that result in Essential Skills levels (i.e., CAMERA))
- educational plan with specific actions, community referrals and timelines

### **Information/Referral Tool Content (see Appendix C)**

The Information/Referral Tool includes

- introduction/instructions
- client contact information and background (in brief)
- community referral resources

- referral sheet in categories with hints as to when to refer (i.e., LBS – refer clients who require upgrading based on literacy screening, report difficulty with reading, writing and/or math or are unsure of their skills)

Utilizing these tools, in combination with current ABEA assessment practices, has resulted in a comprehensive assessment and information/referral template to help clients move toward realistic and gainful employment goals.

### **July - October 2013**

After making revisions from the partner feedback, we began piloting the revised assessment tool and information/referral tool. We continued to make small adjustments to the tools as necessary.

### **November- December 2013**

- a. Presented revised assessment tools and information/referral tool to 2 employment services agencies and the LBS OALCF Frontline Worker Group.
- b. Scheduled to present the revised assessment tools and information/referral tool to the Literacy Community Planning Table in January 2014.
- c. Completed client evaluation of assessment tool and action plan (Appendix D).

### **Lessons Learned**

- A. As we did our research, we realized that while there is an extensive list of Labour Market Information resources available for use online, it is critical to select tools that are easy to access, user-friendly, and adaptable to the assessment tool and process.

B. From the focus groups we have not only implemented many changes to the templates, we also received valuable feedback around the benefits of such tools (see Appendices E-G).

### **Assessment Comments**

Representatives from Employment Services commented that they do not have the time to do this type of in-depth analysis and assessment with their clients. They reported that having an assessment would

- save them time
- eliminate gaps in information
- confirm/support their action plan with the client
- be helpful to all clients pursuing Second Career or incentive training plans

They also strongly agree that receiving an assessment

- enhances relationships between LBS and ES
- enhances referrals from ES to LBS
- decreases barriers for client transition between LBS and ES
- increases effectiveness, efficiency and customer satisfaction

They agree that it also increases the potential of clients gaining employment and retaining employment with the right interventions.

### **Some Quotes from the Focus Group**

“If they had all gone through an assessment we would have had more successes.”

“It would make my job so much easier.”

“This assessment will save staff time. We do not have the knowledge or the time to do it in depth.”

“If we could, we would send at least 20-30% of our clients.”

## **Representatives from Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)**

LBS representatives find the action plan with the client's entire pathway to be very helpful because it allows them to see the plan at a glance. It also allows them to start to make linkages to the next step before the client gets there and to create bridges for the client.

They report that having an assessment by another agency/network

- saves them time
- makes it easier to create the learner plan
- ensures the client is appropriate for the program
- makes the intake more of a visit than an assessment

Specifically, time would be saved

- at intake (30 min to up to 2-3 hours)
- during lesson plan development
- during CaMS inputting
- at exit (for transition)

Most importantly, it saves time out of the classroom so that instructors can focus on teaching or supporting learners.

They reported that between 10-20% of clients referred by others or self-referrals have to be redirected because they are not appropriate. In many cases, this means 2-3 hours of time out of the classroom to make connections for referrals.

In terms of using Labour Market Information (LMI) to develop learning activities and tasks for learners, they reported that it is sometimes difficult to focus on employment goals if there is another goal path before it (i.e., credit). This assessment tool could offer them the information to make it easier for them to

incorporate employment-specific tasks and connections into the upgrading program.

### **Information and Referral Tool Comments**

Employment Services (ES) identified that they were not comfortable making direct referrals to Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS). They felt that in order to make appropriate referrals to LBS they need

- frontline training
- ongoing networking opportunities
- a list of agency contact information (and someone to keep it current)
- one point of contact for LBS programs
- web-based information (searchable)

They need the tool to be quick to implement (less than 15 minutes). This could possibly be used at a follow-up meeting with a client. They already have an existing referral form but this is only used to send a client from one ES agency to another. They would like one form that allowed for all types of referrals.

Similarly, LBS representatives reported that they were only somewhat comfortable making referrals to ES and not comfortable using Labour Market Information (LMI) to make referrals.

They felt that this tool could be useful for walk-in clients. They agreed with their ES counterparts that in order to make appropriate referrals to ES they would need

- ongoing networking opportunities
- a list of agency contact information
- one point of contact for all programs to make warm referrals

They also agreed that using the tool should take no more than 15 minutes and they could actually hand the client the form for their reference.

- C. As with any new tool, we are learning that it takes time to tweak the tool to be efficient and effective for both clients and assessors. We are keeping a log file of any notable training tips so that a support document can be shared with those previously trained to use the Employment Pathways Assessment (EPA) who will now need to training to use the Employment Planning Assessment Tool (EPAT).
  
- D. Through discussions with Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) frontline staff, this project made us aware of a greater need for ongoing dialogue to help move ES and LBS into a more cohesive working entity. Although some collaboration occurs and ongoing contact is maintained, there are still gaps in knowledge of frontline staff to make appropriate referrals, and/or to understand that ES and LBS can work in tandem to achieve seamless client pathways and success. Further discussion needs to occur to
  - i. help establish when LBS should be referring clients to ES
  
  - ii. encourage communication needed between LBS and ES when working in tandem with a client
  
  - iii. use effective and efficient documentation/paper trail/follow up with clients who are working in tandem with ES and LBS
  
  - iv. ensure data integrity is maintained

## **Challenges**

There were two challenges we faced during this project.



1. We wanted to use online employment surveys as part of the assessment but at times, found the site to be 'down', making it difficult to complete reports for clients.
2. Completing evaluation call backs with clients was difficult. It is a general practice of Adult Basic Education Association (ABEA) to do follow-up calls with all clients we assess. Staff made a maximum number of 3 calls per client. If we were unable to reach the client upon the 3<sup>rd</sup> attempt we closed the file. We would like to have had more feedback but clients are often transient, or once in a program, don't see the need to return our calls. We were able to get a 41% response rate.

## **Knowledge Transfer**

To date, we have completed 2 outreaches to Employment Services (ES) and 1 with the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) Frontline Worker Group. We will be presenting the revised assessment tool to the Literacy Community Planning (LCP) Table in January 2014.

Feedback from those who have seen the tool has been very positive. One local agency is looking at ways to incorporate the Educational Planning Assessment Tool (EPAT) as part of their Employment Services (ES) and Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) services using ABEA as the assessment provider. Should this occur, it means this agency can focus on delivery of services and ongoing assessment, rather than on placement assessment, resulting in greater effectiveness and efficiency.

In December, we participated with Literacy Link Niagara (LLN) in a webinar to share the information learned through this project with practitioners across the province.

This project will not be moving into Phase II, so the value of this project will be specific to Hamilton and those networks with assessors trained in the use of the Educational

Pathways Assessment (EPA) through a previously funded MTCU project (2009). Our next step with knowledge transfer will be to update the previously trained and approved assessors in the use of this newly revised and current assessment tool.

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

This strategy ties to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Vision by ensuring that clients are moving towards employment that matches their interests and skills.

**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.”**

It ensures that clients are choosing employment goals in the context of current and local labour market information so that the job future is embedded into the action planning process. These tools support seamless bridging between Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) and Employment Services (ES) and support the integration of services through increased understanding and use of Labour Market Information (LMI) for clients and practitioners of both LBS and ES.

This strategy also reinforces the Vision of MTCU-EO in the value and importance of collaboration. It is only through supportive use of agency expertise that MTCU-EO will achieve its highest level of effectiveness and efficiency.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that the more relevant and applicable an assessment tool is, the broader the audience that benefits from its use. As seen in the feedback of this project, both ES and LBS see greater efficiency and effectiveness when the Education Planning Assessment Tool (EPAT) is used. Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs know that the client sent to them is a good fit for their program and has a higher chance of being successful in the

program. As stated by Employment Services (ES) providers, there would be more client success if assessments were completed.

The EPAT supports the work of MTCU-EO, the LBS programs and most importantly the clients of ES and the learners of LBS.

Appendix A	Tools Report
Appendix B	Educational Planning Assessment Tool Template
Appendix C	Information and Referral Tool Template
Appendix D	EPAT Client Follow-Up
Appendix E	Focus Group - Employment Services
Appendix F	Focus Group - LBS
Appendix G	Focus Group - Networks