

Labour Market Partnership Project

Strategy #4: Assessment Information and Referral and Effective Outcomes

ESIRT-Essential Skills Identification and Referral Training

Screening Tool and Practitioner Training

Project READ Literacy Network

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Project Strategy

This project strategy sought to identify and implement supportive coordination strategies, including assessment and referral protocols and tools, to facilitate effective client pathways and outcomes using two clear objectives.

Objective 1

Create a quick, user-friendly screening tool to help EO/ES workers

- Recognize a client's readiness to discuss literacy
- Recognize a client's need for further literacy assessment
- Recognize a client's need for academic assessment/PLAR
- Capture educational information through conversation and observation
- Analyze that information
- Refer their client to appropriate literacy or educational services

Objective 2

Create training on the use of the tool and include information on how EO/ES workers can

- frame LBS upgrading in an employment context
- promote literacy services to the client
- be more aware of literacy supports

Project Partnerships

Building on the established relationship with Employment Services Providers and Ontario Works in Waterloo Region and Guelph-Wellington, Project READ partnered with these organizations to:

- coordinate and deliver training
- run focus groups
- pilot the screening tool

Project Activities

Background Research

An internet search was conducted to gather information and review a variety of current screening tools used in the LBS and Employment Services community. Additional screening tools used in healthcare and other service provision were also reviewed. Tools came from local, national and international sources.

These tools included

- Signals (Bow Valley College, 2012)



- OSP Check-in Tool (MEd, n/d)
- PRLN's current screening tool (PRLN, n/d)
- POW Quick Screen (Literacy Link Niagara, n/d)
- Newest Vital Signs (Pfizer, 2011)
- Delta Screener (2006)
- C-SIP: Cooper Screening of Information Processing (Cooper, 1992)
- Opening Doors: Literacy and Homelessness Information and Referral Protocol Screening Tool (Luce et al., 2002)
- Assessment and Training Referral Guide for Northwestern Ontario Employment Ontario Service Delivery Partners (Alers, 2012)
- DFES Screening and Assessment Good Practice Guide (DfES, 2005)

Key Informant Interviews

Key Informant interviews were conducted with

- Ginny Carnevale, Independent Literacy Assessor
- Cynthia Cartwright, ES Program Coordinator and Employment Advisor, Lutherwood
- Sue Damon, Program Coordinator & Assessor, The Literacy Group

These interviews gathered information about informal and formal screening processes, decision making and key indicators for literacy needs. Strengths and weakness in current screening protocols and tools were also discussed.

Findings

Current screening tools had significant shortcomings for use in an Employment Services initial meeting. Many tools integrated “assessment” questions or “skill testing” as part of the screening. It is not clear if these elements were included because the tools were designed for systems and pathways that did not include further literacy assessment or if the target group for which they were designed requested skills assessment features in the tool. Some tools were too long or complex for use in an initial meeting and for a quick determination of whether literacy supports would be needed. The short tools did not capture adequate information to create an appropriate client referral for literacy service. Tools for potentially low-literate clients need to be tempered with sensitivity training and need to be non-threatening or non-judgemental. Some of the current screening tools were considered to be too difficult to use with low-literate clients without considerable literacy and skills training or experience. In short, the existing tools lacked at least one critical element that is needed for literacy screening and referral arising from an initial interview or meeting with Employment Services.

The design of a screening tool clearly had to reflect

- the needs of the client



- the needs of the screener
- the environment in which it would be delivered
- the way screening would be integrated into other services or client pathways

Focus Groups and LBS Awareness Training

To determine the needs of clients, screeners and the way a screening tool needed to be integrated into pre-existing service-provision, two focus groups were held in June 2014. Key informants from Employment Services and Ontario Works in Waterloo Region used a case study and role-playing to demonstrate their current knowledge and practices to interview and refer the client in the case study to appropriate literacy service providers. The group debriefed and discussed strengths, concerns and gaps in their current process.

After the case study training on the following was provided:

- Adult Education Principles- adult motivation for upgrading and fear of school
- Essential Skills levels
- How to frame literacy skills in the context of employment attainment and retention
- How to promote or “sell” literacy services to ES clients
- LBS Service Providers and Programs in Waterloo Region
 - Class size
 - Delivery style
 - Flexibility in training times and availability
 - Boutique Programs
 - Common Referral form for all EO programs and Ontario Works

In addition to this training, ES workers were also given training on the use of the current Project READ Literacy Screening Tool.

The case study exercise was repeated with a new client scenario and the ES workers were asked to use their new knowledge and skills with the PRLN screening tool to interview and refer the case study client to appropriate services. The group debriefed and completed a *Screening Tool Feedback Form*.

Notes from the debriefing and *Screening Tool Feedback Forms* were reviewed and integrated into the newly designed screening tool. ES workers also indicated the value of the information on how to promote literacy to their clients. This information was added to the screening tool as part of the *Screening Tool Guide* and is available as a supplementary PowerPoint presentation.

Screening Tool Pilot

The workshops were repeated with Employment Services and Ontario Works workers in September in Guelph and Fergus and served as a pilot for the new screening tool. The same case studies and training materials were used but the new *Screening Tool and Guide* replaced the PRLN Screening Tool.

Results



What participants say about the Screening Tool and Screening Tool Guide?

- Information and layout is easy to use
- Adaptable to most situations
- Formalizes the thought process in order to make a referral
- Questions and examples are concrete and specific
- 2-part format allows for observations to be recorded during non-threatening casual conversation and then more intense questions can be asked when the client is “ready”
- Next steps are easy to follow
- Would be a helpful tool for people looking at retraining
- Most likely to be used as a “private resource” by the EO/ES worker to collect and analyze information
- Could be used in front of select clients as a check-list
- Can be easily integrated with other pre-existing or mandated tools in a larger tool kit
- The matrix is an easy way to communicate gaps and next steps to the client
- Could be used in initial appointments but more likely to be used as rapport with client builds
- Could be used in one session but more likely to be used to capture small pieces of information from several meetings
- Information in “I Just Need a Job” training workshop PowerPoint very helpful



Final Products Developed

Pilot participants placed high value on the materials in the training workshop and in the Screening Tool and Guide. They also requested current, up-to-date contact information for all programs and front-line staff at LBS programs and Literacy Networks. In response to this request, instructions were provided so that the workshop and screening tool can be modified to reflect programs and service providers in different geographic locations. These instructions can be found in the Network Adaptation Guide.

Final Products created

- “I Just Need a Job” Training Workshop PPT
- Screening Tool and Guide
- Network Adaptation Guide

Lessons Learned

Screening Tool Use

Despite LBS and ES workers agreeing that trust and rapport need to be built with a client, some environments don’t necessarily lend themselves to that philosophy. Sometimes ES workers and their clients have to contend with quick, intense initial meetings with mandated outcomes. The *Screening Tool and Guide* may have limited use during the initial interview in some contexts but could be used

- in addition to information learned in the training workshop
- to create ES worker awareness
- to help frame a conversation about literacy barriers
- to record information after a meeting.

Screening Tool Format

ES workers largely agreed that a paper version of this screening tool would be most convenient. An electronic version would only be used to print rather than fill in on screen with the client. Most ES workers agreed that the document would largely be used as a “private” document that would act as a resource for the worker rather than a document that would be gone through, line-by-line with the client. In addition to this paper preference by ES workers, it was revealed that some organizations would have difficulty getting authorization to download or install even simple applications onto their internal computer systems at branch offices. A digital version of this Screening Tool and Guide would not be authorized for use in some work environments.

The Larger Literacy Context

Workshop attendees placed very high value on the training that focussed on a review of Essential Skills; how to broach the topic of literacy barriers; how to promote literacy services to their clients and how to frame literacy skills in the context of employment attainment and retention. ES workers cited staff turn-over, time



constraints and varied experience among ES workers as barriers to their own awareness of their clients' literacy barriers. The "I Just Need a Job" training workshop PowerPoint presentation has also been made available in addition to the Screening Tool and Guide to support these ES worker needs.

Visibility of the Literacy Networks

Some ES workers reported having excellent relationships with individual LBS practitioners and LBS Programs. These workers advocate for their clients regularly by contacting programs directly and making referrals. Many frontline ES workers, however, did not know that the role of the Literacy Network is to be a centralized, impartial support organization that can assist with referrals, awareness, training and program information. For many frontline ES workers it came as a great surprise that they could call their local network and discuss specific clients, scenarios and generally "pick the brain" of network staff. This lack of knowledge may be present because contact between networks and ES organizations is often handled by administrators or a designated liaison. The depth and breadth of network support may not be passed on to frontline staff.

Knowledge Transfer

Knowledge was transferred throughout this project. Employment Services and Ontario Works staff in Waterloo Region and Guelph-Wellington gained knowledge during the development of the tools through the training workshops in June and the pilot workshops in September. A summary of the project and products developed was presented at a webinar in November, 2014. This webinar was recorded and will be made available online. All project products will be available through Project READ Literacy Network and can be downloaded from www.projectreadliteracy.webs.com.

Significance of Strategy to Employment Ontario Vision and Mission

The vision of Employment Ontario 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, and 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
- To provide opportunities to make it easier for individuals to improve their skills through education and training
- To ensure that no matter which EO office an individual enters, he or she will get the help required and
- To work with employers and communities to build the highly skilled, highly educated workforce



Ontario needs to be competitive (MTCU, 2013)

This project and the products created during the project serve to shore up Employment Ontario's vision and mission by providing resources to ES workers that

- respect clients
- serve clients' literacy needs
- ensure best fit for program referrals for clients
- enhance a client's pathway to employment goals

Conclusion

The Screening Tool and Guide, "I Just Need a Job" workshop and the Network Adaptation Guide serve as support resources that can assist Employment Services staff to provide their clients with effective pathways to training and employment. The tools can be used in a variety of settings to help practitioners and clients recognize a client's

- Readiness to discuss literacy and literacy barriers
- Need for literacy assessment
- Clear path to appropriate literacy programming

Use of these tools will foster greater service coordination between LBS and ES and will facilitate positive client employment outcomes.



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Appendices

1. Screening Tool and Guide
2. Network Adaptation Guide
3. Common Referral Form

