

Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills

Community Context Survey Report

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Prepared by:
Learning Metrix

Decoda Literacy Solutions
980 - 1125 Howe Street
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2K8
604-681-4199

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Introduction

The Displaced Workers community context information survey was administered as part of Decoda's Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills project, which is aimed at understanding the needs of workers who have been displaced from their jobs through planned or unplanned circumstances.

The survey was sent to 228 Literacy Outreach Coordinators in over 100 communities throughout British Columbia (see appendix A) to find out more about the current context and to help understand existing and emerging needs within communities. Respondents were asked to forward the survey link to others who may also have insight into the current economic and work context in their community.

The results were combined with other factors such as geographic representation, emerging job loss information, diversity of causes for worker displacement, organizational capacity and our desire to gather a significant number of data points.

Respondents were given ten days to complete the survey (May 27 through June 7, 2019). The survey consisted of 10 items (Appendix C) which, in addition to respondent contact information, included questions about worker learning needs, whether communities have recently experienced an increased in workers accessing their services, recent events in the community that have displaced workers and a description of those events.

Responses

A total of 106 responses were received from respondents representing over 70 individual communities, 26 Regional Districts and 15 College Regions (Appendix B).

Table 1 shows that New Caledonia, the Rockies and Vancouver regions received the most responses, but all College Regions in the province are represented (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of responses by College Region

College Region	Total
Camosun	5
Capilano	7
Douglas	7
Fraser Valley	7
Kwantlen	5
Malaspina	6
New Caladonia	14
North Island	7
Norther Lights	2
Northwest	4
Okanagan	3
Rockies	14
Selkirk	7
Thompson Rivers	4
Vancouver	14
Total	106

Findings

Respondents we asked to identify the learning needs of workers who access their services. This open-ended question was analyzed and coded into categories. As shown in Table 2, the main focus is digital literacy, identified by 50% of respondents (covering a broad range of skills such as basic computer skills, social media, completing forms online, using email, or accessing online information). The second most frequently identified need of workers (by 45% of respondents) was language skills (examples from the data are reading, writing and speaking English, and conversational and work place language skills). Just over 43% of respondents identified job search and employment related skills (e.g., finding employment, resume writing, employment rights and responsibilities, interview and networking skills).

Table 2: Learning needs of workers who access your services

Learning Needs of Workers	#	%
Digital skills	53	50
Language skills	48	45
Job search/employment skills	46	43
Social skills and challenges	20	19
Financial skills	11	10
Forms	10	9

Approximately 27% of respondents said “Yes” when asked if their organization had recently experienced an increase in workers using their services; an additional 65% said “No” or “Don’t Know” (Table 3).

Table 3: Increase in workers using services

Increase in Workers	#	%
Yes	29	27
No	51	48
Don’t know	18	17
Yes (describe)	8	7
Total	106	100

Descriptions (7%) included increase of immigrants and foreign/temporary workers, worker injuries, greater demand for specific service (digital and financial learning) and community growth.

“Have there been recent events in your community that have displaced workers?” was one of the key questions in the survey. As Table 4 shows, almost half of the respondents (46%) indicated that this was the case.

Table 4: Recent events that have displaced workers

	#	%
Yes	49	46
No	57	54
Total	106	100

Those who said “Yes” were asked to select the types of events that have displaced workers. As show in Table 5, industry slowdown followed by closures were most frequently identified.

Table 5: Types of events that have displaced workers

	#	%
Industry slowdown	22	45
Factory or plant closure	17	35
Natural disaster	6	12
Tourism decline	7	14
Other	19	39

The “other” category above included contextual comments, identification of specific industries, seasonal or temporary work, and economic and social factors that impact employment.

Further, detailed description of events is provided in Appendix D.

For those respondents who said “Yes,” there had been recent events that have displaced workers (Table 4), the types of services provided to workers (Table 2) was examined. As shown in Table 6, the main focus was digital and language skills followed by job search skills. There is no significant difference in the types of services provided to workers in communities that have experienced recent events that have displaced workers compared to those that have not.

Table 6: Learning needs of workers in communities that have identified recent events that have displaced workers

	#	%
Digital skills	22	43
Language skills	19	39
Job search	16	33
Social skills and challenges	12	24
Financial skills	6	12
Forms	6	12

Discussion

This added project survey proved invaluable in determining which communities and regions had the highest impact diversity, the highest need and the highest capacity to deliver the results we are seeking.

This survey confirmed which partner organizations have the capacity to respond quickly and in detail and informed us about the depth and breadth of employment challenges across the province. In some cases, the survey confirmed our understanding of local challenges (e.g. mill closures) and in other cases we learned about new and emerging challenges (e.g. new fishing regulations causing job losses in the tourism industry). Several mill closures were announced as we were creating and distributing this survey. In some cases, we followed up with more questions for Literacy Outreach Coordinators in communities which had new impacts.

When combined with a media search, existing knowledge, and historical information, the 10 regions emerged. Some were anticipated, some were unexpected. We decided to designate 10 regions rather than 10 communities because in some areas there are several proximal communities with impacts we want to capture.

This survey allows us to have a high level of certainty that we will have the data we need to generate useful results and make supportable recommendations.

Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Invitation

Heather Deal here – new Director, Adult and Workplace Learning for Decoda Literacy Solutions. As I dive into this exciting new position, I am helping launch a new project on literacy and essential skills training for displaced workers.

The project is aimed at understanding the needs of workers who have been displaced from their jobs through planned or unplanned circumstances. The project includes those workers who are hard to reach or reluctant to access skills training or employment services, and who may have low essential skills, including digital skills.

Decoda would like to find out more about your community's current context to help us understand existing and emerging needs.

Please take a few minutes to answer a [short survey](#). This information will help us identify needs in communities. Decoda will show our appreciation with an entry into a draw for a \$100 Amazon gift card.

The survey deadline is June 7th.

Please forward this message if there are others in your community who should complete the survey.

Thank you, I'm looking forward to learning from you and supporting your excellent work!

Cheers,

Heather

Heather Deal
Director, Adult and Workplace Learning

Appendix B: Community by College Region and by Regional District

College Region	Regional District	4. Your community:	Total
Camosun	Capital	Sooke	2
		Victoria	1
		Westshore/Langford/Colwood	1
	Cowichan Valley	Salt Spring Is.	1
Capilano	Metro Vancouver	North Shore, Richmond, Vancouver	1
		North Vancouver	2
		North Vancouver (Lower Capilano, Delbrook, Norgate, Pemberton)	1
	Squamish Lillooet	Whistler	2
		Whistler and Pemberton	1
Douglas	Metro Vancouver	Burnaby	1
		Burnaby, New Westminster, Tri-Cities	1
		Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Katzie	1
		Maple Ridge, Pitt Meadows, Katzie	1
		Port Moody	1
		Tri Cities	1
		Tri Cities	1
Fraser Valley	Fraser Valley	Abbotsford	3
		Abbotsford and surrounding area	1
		Chilliwack	3
Kwantlen	Metro Vancouver	Surrey and White Rock	1
		Langley	1
		New Westminster	1
		Surrey	1
		Surrey/Coquitlam	1

Malaspina	Cowichan Valley	Cowichan	1
	Nanaimo	Parksville-Qualicum Beach	1
		Parksville-Qualicum region	1
	qathet	Powell River	2
	Sunshine Coast	Sunshine Coast	1
New Caladonia	Bulkley Nechako	Fraser Lake	2
		Vanderhoof	3
		Vanderhoof	3
		Vanderhoof, Fort St. James and surrounding area	1
		Vanderhoof, Fraser Lake, Nadleh Whut'en	1
	Fraser Fort George	McBride	1
		Valemount	1
		Valemount	1
	(blank)	Quesnel	1
	North Island	Alberni Clayoquot	Port Alberni and the ACRD
Central Coast		Bella Coola Valley	1
Comox Valley		Comox Valley	2
Mount Waddington		Port McNeill	1
Strathcona		Campbell River	1
	Zeballos	1	
Norther Lights	East Kootenay	Fort Nelson	1
	Peace River	Dawson Creek	1
Northwest	Bulkley Nechako	Houston	1
		Smithers	1
	Kitimat Stikine	Hazelton	1
		Kitimat	1

Okanagan	Central Okanagan	Central Okanagan	1
	Okanagan Similkameen	Oliver, Osoyoos, OK Falls	1
		Princeton	1
Rockies	Central Kootenay	Creston	1
	Columbia Shuswap	Golden	4
		Golden	1
		Golden	1
	East Kootenay	Cranbrook	1
		Elk Valley	1
		Elk Valley (Fernie, Sparwood, Elkford)	1
Invermere		1	
Kimberley		1	
Windermere Valley	1		
Kootenay Boundary	Boundary	1	
Selkirk	Central Kootenay	Castlegar	1
		Kaslo/Balfour	1
		Nakusp	1
		Nelson	1
		Salmo	1
		Slocan Valley	2
Thompson Rivers	Cariboo	100 Mile House	1
		Williams Lake, British Columbia	1
	Thompson Nicola	Barriere and area	1
		North Thompson Valley	1

Vancouver	Metro Vancouver	Chinese	1
		Downtown Eastside Vancouver	1
		DTES and East Vancouver	1
		East Vancouver	1
		Immigrants and children	1
		Kensington-Cedar Cottage	1
		Kitsilano	1
		Kiwassa East Vancouver	1
		Mount Pleasant	1
		Mount Pleasant	1
	Vancouver	1	
Vancouver, Kitsilano	2		
	Mount Waddington	Mount Waddington/ North Vancouver Island	1
Total			106

Appendix C: Questionnaire

Displaced Workers Survey - June 2019

The objective of Decoda's Enhancing Displaced Workers Literacy and Essential Skills project is to fill knowledge gaps on what works for literacy and essential skills training for displaced workers in Canada to improve their employability.

Thank you for helping us learn more about what is happening for workers in your community!

1. Your name:

2. Your email:

3. Your role

4. Your community:

5. Your organization:

6. What are the learning needs of workers who access your services?

7. Has your organization recently experienced an increase in the number of workers who use your services?

- Yes
 No
 Don't know
 If yes, please describe:

8. Have there been recent events in your community that have displaced workers?

- Yes [skip to page #2: "Displaced workers"]
 No [skip to page #3: ""]

Continue

9. What types of events in your community have displaced workers?

- Industry slowdown
- Factory or plant closure
- Natural disaster
- Tourism decline
- Other, please describe:

10. Please describe the event(s), including the industry and kinds of workers that are most affected. Include situations that may affect dispersed or independent workers.

Go Back

Continue

Appendix D: Description of events that have displaced workers

<p>10. Please describe the event(s), including the industry and kinds of workers that are most affected. Include situations that may affect dispersed or independent workers.</p>
<p>gentrification knows no boundaries so a variety of places have been closed, or taken over, with new folks given historical and traditional jobs</p>
<p>It's possible that when Anita's Camp was displaced this also displaced workers.</p>
<p>Port Alice pulp mill closed in 2016, putting 400 North Islanders out of work. This 100-year old mill had few technological upgrades, so workers are not equipped to work in modern mills in other locations. Many workers over age 40, and are not prepared for new careers and are averse to or fear retraining. Reading literacy needs are unknown, but suspected as many older workers began at the mill out of high school or before.</p>
<p>The job loss has affected the entire economy resulting in closures of other businesses (restaurants and convenience store) and reduced hours of liquor store and bank. The Scotiabank is officially closing in October (more job loss) and there is the possibility of the Post Office closing.</p>
<p>There is a need for life planning, financial planning, job retraining, and probably adult literacy.</p>
<p>We have not seen an influx of displaced workers.</p>
<p>Major Construction projects have come to an end see above mostly construction/labour</p>
<p>Forestry Industry is slowing due to high fire risk as well as trade embargos based on US/China debate</p>
<p>As we enter tourism season it has been noted that a number of bookings have dropped significantly at some of our resorts. New fishing regulations have impacted the sport and commercial fishing industries.</p>
<p>The retail industry. it is very difficult for employers to find people who are okay with minimum wage jobs and scheduled shifts</p>
<p>The ski hill workers are seasonal and often cannot make ends meet during the shoulder seasons.</p>
<p>We have also lost many workers due to a huge lack of housing with the boom in Air BNB rentals.</p>
<p>Oil and gas down-turn has never recovered. It has directly affected O&G workers as well as the support services (supply, labour, etc)</p>
<p>Manufacturing industry - seasonal slowdown and layoffs of mostly new immigrants to Canada. They are in a union workplace, but many had not completed their probationary period. Some will have rights for recall.</p>
<p>Seasonal end of work period at the racetrack - every year a few hundred workers move and change jobs when the racing season ends. Some return to the interior, some to the Fraser Valley or the Downtown East Side. A few dozen return to Mexico or another country.</p>
<p>The Galloway Mill recently laid off several employees.</p>
<p>As we transition from Winter to Summer, employment opportunities change and seasonal workers are looking for their next place of work. The population of Fernie decreases in the summer, which can leave employers desperate for enough workers.</p>

not recently but the Canal flats Mill shut down and displaced a lot of workers. I see a lot of older workers who have been in positions for many years and now need to be certified officially in what they do already. Also since almost everything is done on computers and with technology, there are many old school people here that do not want to learn new technology.
Balfour workers - Pacific Insight and Canfilter (in the Nelson area) both closed down and in order to for families to still remain in the area one parent is going out of the region for work leaving one parent to solo parent much of the time.
Some of the workers moved out of the area altogether.
Kaslo - the summer forest fires have resulted in a decrease in tourism
One of two major mills in our community closed 4 years ago and a local mine closed 2 years ago.
Fires of 2017
Paper Mill cutbacks. This impacts working families that are lower down on the ladder at the mill. They get cut first and they have less seniority.
Fort Nelson is currently in an economic decline. This started in 2008 with the closure of our 2 lumber mills, and was exacerbated in 2014 due to the decline of oil and gas. We currently have no viable industries in the town aside from tourism and arts and culture, which we will hopefully see some development in. The waves of lay offs sent hundreds of people through our doors needing learning help and various types of assistance. Many of our learners are vulnerable, unable to find adequate employment and reliant on government assistance, accessing food banks and other similar resources.
Road repair and flood mitigation were temporary projects that employed locals such as heavy equipment operators, traffic controllers/flaggers, occupational first aid attendants, general labourers, and fisheries and wildlife biologists. Cancellation of ferry service and wildfires resulted in decline of all tourism related businesses. Accommodators and hospitality businesses did not hire as many seasonal workers, and associated businesses such as gas stations and grocery stores were also negatively impacted so did not hire seasonal workers.
agricultural workers; job opportunities for those labourers not here on contracts.
High cost of real estate, families are unable to afford living in our community. Increase in technical demands from employers, workers are let go as don't have updated skills.
labourers and people over 50 years of age have been effected as trades people have a better chance of going to another industryindustrial labourers are site-specific miners cant easily swap to become sawmill workers. There are limited numbers of jobs for women, the women who work in industrial settings are often let go before their counterparts who are men. With a lack of childcare, new mums are forced to give up jobs until their children are old enough for two-year daycare. Women are forced to take on several part time jobs which may be 15 to 20 hrs each, but combined they amount to 50-60 hrs a week.
Production worker laid off due to business closure, health issue preventing them to continue working in job heavily rely on physical labour
Miners - Closure
Forestry - Forest Fires
Local sawmills are experiencing shut downs, both temporary and permanent. This also translates to a slow-down in the logging industry.

Endako Mine closed in Fraser Lake a few years ago - many of the workers who chose to stay in Fraser Lake, have not found other replacement jobs.
On the flip-side, the anticipation of the pipe-line and creation of new camps, means that many of our students are looking for opportunities to gain skills that will prepare them for work in this industry.
low paying., low skill jobs
unable to comment on specifics.
Seasonal tourism jobs (ski hill, golf course) can lead to uncertain working schedules which are dependent upon tourist activity. Start dates, end dates, daily work schedules may vary and be unpredictable. These jobs come with no benefits.
Our region has seen a recent curtailment in the forest industry which is a major player employment-wise. The affected workers often have limited transferrable skills.
A large flood in May 2018 caused the closure of businesses, loss of jobs and a slow down/closure in industry. This continues to be an issue, especially a year later now that EI has run out for many displaced workers and the rebuild of our community continues at a slow pace.
Interfor, a major employer in the Boundary, has also had some shut downs recently due to supply issues.
low literacy, low English, also, some jobs that are physical now require digital literacy
Finning International closed its Sparwood office in 2016, resulting in 450 job losses in the Elk Valley.
Changes in temporary foreign worker restrictions made it harder for workers to remain in their jobs past their initial application.
Fernie Alpine Resort hires hundreds of staff in the fall and most are laid off in April.
An incident involving multiple fatalities at the Fernie Memorial Arena displaced all arena based services, clubs, and activities. (coaches, managers, coordinators, etc)
Galloway Mill sold to entrepreneur resulted in many lay-offs.
As industry increases in the area, workers are required to increase skills in order to maintain employment levels- many do not have the literacy skills needed to do this. Most of the workers are involved in camp jobs as labourers. We also see many young families requiring literacy supports in order to find employment to support their families, as their children grow and prepare for school, the parents prepare to re-enter the workforce-but need support to increase skills, capacity, and trouble shoot challenges.
Mine: Reduced production at one of the local mines affecting that majority of the workforce including tradespeople, equipment operators, engineers, geologists, administrative and management staff.
Wood Mill: Full mill closure for one week affecting all production staff.
The industries where the budgets are subject to changes may have an impact on the people who work in such fields. New contracts may affect different positions - from cutting hours to eliminating them.
Please see above

<p>The Galloway Mill recently closed down, resulting in many layoffs. Wildfires have led to decrease in tourism. Those working in campgrounds, hotels, restaurants or with outfitter companies have been impacted by wildfires over the past two summers.</p>
<p>DFO: Chinook Fishery shut down</p>
<p>Industry slowdown - With the legalization of marijuana, a huge shift in the marijuana industry has occurred. Many people who once cultivated marijuana illegally for employment are now having to re-enter the workforce after years of being unemployed. Others are trying to shift their business to accommodate the legal standards and are facing a whole new set of rules and standards that they have to adhere to run a legal business (i.e. paperwork, licensing, etc.)</p>
<p>Factory or plant closure - In April 2019 a local factory, Pacific Insight Nelson, closed their manufacturing operations. At it's peak the company employed over 400 people. As of now, there are only around 100 still employed, leaving a large number of people unemployed with very specific work skills (designing and building lighting and electronics for automotives)</p>
<p>Tourism decline - With the huge threat of forest fires, tourism has declined dramatically over the last few years. Many small businesses feel the effects of this. Also, it makes for less service jobs being made available for the summer months.</p>
<p>Decrease in jobs in the Alberta oil and gas industry - In 2015 and 2016 the oil and gas labour market in Alberta shrunk dramatically leaving many people in my area without work and minimal employable skills.</p>
<p>Mill closure. Declining school numbers. Fluctuating tourism. Failure of large projects to take off. Fires causing seasonal instability and uncertainty so tourism affected.</p>
<p>Pacific Insight Electronic Corp factory closure.</p>
<p>Owners, operators, small accommodations, restaurants more so in Port Renfrew.</p>
<p>Interfor (the main sawmill in Castlegar, employing hundreds of workers) is having 3 - 1 week shutdowns this year due to the high lumber costs. Many families are utilizing the food bank etc. on these weeks when they are without wages.</p>
<p>Wildfires have impacted the community (two consecutive summers) and this has negatively impacted people personally, as well as placed a financial strain on businesses in the community.</p>
<p>Recent curtailments at West Fraser Mills have meant reduction in numbers of workers needed (mills have gone from 3 shifts to 2 shifts).</p>
<p>Recent closure of Tolko Mill in Quesnel has meant people have been shuffled to other positions in other partnering mills (limiting opportunities for seasonal workers and students).</p>
<p>Mill closures impact businesses such as forestry contractors, logging operators, crews that work to support the industry such as buncher/faller operators.</p>