

Palliser Regional Library: "Surviving Downsizing: Reimagining Yourself in a Post-layoff World"

Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills Project

Beta Test Report | February 2023

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The DWLES Project

Palliser Regional Library's "Surviving Downsizing: Reimagining Yourself in a Post-layoff World" (Surviving Downsizing) beta-test was part of the Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills (DWLES) project, which was a collaborative project that was managed by Decoda Literacy Solutions (Decoda) and supported by the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) and Learning Metrix.

The overall goal of the DWLES project was to better understand how literacy organizations can support hard-to-reach remote and rural communities by integrating literacy and essential skills (LES) and employment services for a range of displaced workers, with a particular focus on equity-deserving groups such as women, Indigenous peoples, newcomers, people with disabilities, and others. The project began in 2019 and beta-testing was done in 2021 and 2022.

The project began with 10 literacy organizations in British Columbia (BC) being selected to be part of the data collection phase of the project. This included a literature review, interviews with the BC literacy organizations, focus groups with key stakeholders, and a survey and interviews with displaced workers in each of the 10 communities.

Following the completion of this background research, 11 literacy organizations across Canada—including 7 from the earlier phase—were selected for the beta-test phase of the project, which included implementing and evaluating projects that integrated LES and employment services targeted for displaced workers in their communities.

The purpose of the beta-test phase was to uncover and disseminate evidence-based LES support, training models, and promising practices to inform development of programs and models to improve the employability of displaced workers across Canada. The beta-test projects can be viewed as trial or experimental interventions, and thus were intended to be small in terms of the numbers of learners, with the potential to be scaled up to a full pilot study if deemed successful.

The following report provides an overview of the beta test Surviving Downsizing that was implemented in Coronach, SK.

Surviving Downsizing in Coronach, SK

Coronach is a warm and welcoming community located 10 km north of the Canada/US border in south central Saskatchewan. At the time of the DWLES project, the Poplar Valley Mine and SaskPower's Coronach Power Plant were supposed to be closing over the next three years and 300 employees were to be out of work (area population 1,498). Recognizing the need to support these workers, Palliser Regional Library had developed a concept for a beta test project based on the mine and power plant closures. However, the timeline for the power plant closure ended up being delayed beyond the DWLES project timelines. This delay, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, required a change of approach and a new way to find and connect with displaced workers.

While some organizations in the region focused on helping learners to develop their job preparation and entrepreneurship skills, there was a gap in programming related to soft skills. None of the organizations providing LES or employment services focused on soft skills and the transferability of these skills for job opportunities.

Using ABC Life Literacy's UP Skills for Work curriculum, the beta test project provided virtual synchronous training to learners. Each learner completed a skills assessment with the instructor at the beginning of the program, which helped



them to identify the soft skills to focus on. Learners gained key employability and life skills, such as stress management, time management, confidence, adaptability, and motivation, as well as greater knowledge of how these skills are relevant to the workplace. The training aimed to help learners not only understand how their existing and new skills could be applied in the workplace, but also how to describe and communicate these skills in job applications.


Surviving Downsizing was delivered virtually using Zoom between October and December 2021. It was designed so that each soft skill covered in the training had one session that was about 1.5 hours in length. Four learners participated in the beta test.

Highlights from Surviving Downsizing

There were several highlights that were identified by learners and staff about Surviving Downsizing:

- ✳ The beta test helped the **learners identify their transferable skills and better understand the value** of them for employers. The program focused on helping learners to identify the skills (e.g., stress management) that they had acquired outside of the workplace and understand how these skills could be applied in a workplace setting. Learners indicated that this was a very valuable aspect of the program by helping them to recognize the applicability of their skills in the workplace.



 By focusing on soft skills, the beta test was **relevant to a variety of learners who identified a range of motivations for participating in the training.** Learners took the training for their own personal and professional development, as well as to support others with the development of their soft skills.

Promising practices from Surviving Downsizing

There were several promising practices that emerged from Surviving Downsizing.

Leveraging existing resources for program content.

Rather than developing entirely new content related to soft skills, staff leveraged ABC Life Literacy Canada's UP Skills for Work resources. The facilitator adapted content from the UP Skills workbooks for each class, focusing on the specific needs of the learners.

Identifying LES programming gaps in the region and designing training to address these gaps.

Palliser Regional Library staff identified that while some organizations in the region focused on helping learners to develop their job preparation and entrepreneurship skills, there was a gap in programming related to soft skills. None of the organizations providing LES or employment services focused on soft skills and the transferability of these skills for job opportunities.

Additional project information

This report is part of a series of 11 individual beta test reports developed for the DWLES project. To learn more about the DWLES project and to access project reports, please visit: decoda.ca/our-work/displaced-workers-landing.

What we learned from Surviving Downsizing

1 Reaching out to local and regional social services providers to better understand the needs of community members they serve can lead to partnership opportunities with these organizations in the future.

As part of the process for developing the beta test, library staff reached out to Prairie Skies Integration Network to learn more about the literacy needs of newcomers in the region. This was an opportunity to learn about each organization, share resources, and plan how to leverage their collective knowledge and skills to increase supports for the LES needs of newcomers. This connection resulted in a staff member of Palliser Regional Library becoming a board member of Prairie Skies. Furthermore, this partnership increased the capacity of Prairie Skies to reach out to newcomers in other regions of Saskatchewan due to their ability to draw on the library's extensive connections throughout the province.

2 Funding opportunities that focus on innovation and flexibility allow small, non-profit LES organizations to expand their programming and learn from these experiences within a low-risk context.

As the Palliser Regional Library's programs are typically delivered directly through their branches in communities, the beta-test funding provided an opportunity for the regional library to deliver programming itself. While the initial training idea did not come to fruition, the organization had the opportunity to change course and develop a different training initiative.