

Lethbridge Public Library & Saamis Employment and Training Association: “Moving Forward”

Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills Project

Pilot Project Report | December 2023

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DWLES Project Overview

Lethbridge Public Library/Read On Adult Literacy and Learning Program's (LPL/RO) pilot project 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).

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 first phase of the project began in June 2019 and finished in June 2022. It included two components: background data collection and analysis and beta-test projects. Detailed implementation and outcomes findings of this phase of the project can be found in the [Second Annual Report](#) and the [Final Project Report](#), respectively.

The project received an extension to December 2023 to implement a second phase focused on pilot projects. The purpose of this phase of the research was to expand select organizations' beta-test projects into scalable and transferable pilot projects. Upon completion of the beta-test project phase of DWLES and receiving funding for a pilot phase, five literacy organizations were selected to continue for the pilot phase of the project. The organizations were selected based on their successes and lessons learned from the beta-test phase.

LPL/RO's pilot project involved expanding the reach and transferability of its Moving Forward beta-test project to a new partner organization – Saamis Employment and Training Association (SETA). The following profile provides an overview of this new pilot, including the transition from the beta-test to pilot phase, program implementation, key findings, and promising practices.



Beta Test to Pilot Project

For the beta-test phase of the DWLES project, LPL/RO designed and delivered the Moving Forward program in Lethbridge, AB. The Moving Forward program was developed to help learners understand workplace expectations within a Canadian context and how to navigate workplace culture. The original Moving Forward curriculum included workplace expectations and culture, as well as job search, job application, and interviewing skills. It was developed primarily for newcomers.

Upon completion of the original Moving Forward beta-test, LPL/RO staff reached out to SETA to discuss integrating Moving Forward content into their programming. SETA is an employment and training organization that serves Indigenous peoples living in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge and surrounding areas. SETA offers various career training opportunities, employment preparation workshops, leadership programs, and other employment and training services, including an Office Administration Program. SETA's Office Administration Program is delivered in partnership with Medicine Hat

College and is a 24-week program that includes a 12-week in-class training component and a 12-week paid practicum. The program is available to Indigenous people living in Medicine Hat or Lethbridge. Program graduates obtain the technical, employability, and social emotional skills required to work in Office Administration. For the DWLES pilot phase, SETA integrated the Moving Forward curriculum into the Lethbridge-based Office Administration Program to complement the other skills development aspects of the program. This was unique to the Lethbridge pilot project, as it was the only DWLES pilot that was not a standalone program. SETA's Lethbridge location is situated on Treaty 7 territory, which is the traditional and ancestral territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

Program Implementation

As Moving Forward was originally designed for newcomers, a significant and important part of the pilot project was adapting the Moving Forward curriculum for the Indigenous population served by SETA. The curriculum was adapted through a Blackfoot lens specifically for the learners enrolled in the Office Administration



program in Lethbridge. Staff from SETA adapted the curriculum to make it culturally relevant for learners in the program by integrating Blackfoot history, culture, values, language, and images into the program content and materials. For example, the curriculum was renamed to “Stamikakomanistowaawaahkat” – Blackfoot for “just keep moving forward.” SETA staff described “Stamikakomanistowaawaahkat” as common advice from Blackfoot Elders whenever an individual or group encounters difficulties, obstacles, setbacks, or losses.

Additionally, in the first module learner introductions were originally framed as a brief elevator pitch, whereas in the adapted version, learner introductions were framed as a way to build relationships and included a PowerPoint slide with an image of a group preparing to share a meal together. Furthermore, some content from the original Moving Forward curriculum was covered in other parts of the Office Administration program (e.g., job search, job application, and interviewing), so this was removed from the adapted curriculum. Thus, the final adapted curriculum primarily focused on the workplace culture and expectations content.

The workplace culture and expectations content was included in the 12-week in-class training portion of SETA’s Office Administration Program, which ran from the end of October 2022 until the end of January 2023. The instructor delivered the content for one hour, three to four days each week, typically at the end of the day after learners had gone through the technical training. The content was covered through PowerPoint slides, class discussions, and the Moving Forward workbook that was developed for the original beta-test.

Key Findings

Thirteen learners participated in the pilot project with SETA. Learners ranged in age from 19-40 years old and all identified as Indigenous. When asked about their experience with the workplace culture and expectations content during the focus group, learners reported feeling more confident and prepared, and that they valued the adaptation of the curriculum through a Blackfoot lens.

Learners described how the workplace culture and expectations content helped them to feel more confident and prepared to enter/re-enter the workforce because they learned about what to expect in a new workplace. One learner described what they learned about entering a new workplace:

“ The instructor told us that when we start a new job it’s like a whole new language when you enter a new workplace. It helped me feel more confident and know what to expect now when I start a new job. ”

Learners also felt that they were more confident in their ability to prevent or navigate conflict and difficult situations as an employee and more confident in their knowledge of employer expectations. For one learner, this was important not only at an individual level, but also as a Blackfoot community member:

“ It’s helpful to understand what to expect because I’m not just representing myself when I’m at my job, but I’m representing our people and what other people might expect of me and our people. I want to do that well. ”

Even the learners who were familiar with the topics covered in the curriculum felt that it reinforced their knowledge or was a good refresher.

Additionally, learners valued and appreciated that the workplace culture and expectations content reflected Blackfoot culture and ways of being and knowing. For some learners, it helped them learn how to navigate a predominantly white workplace as a Blackfoot person, as described below by one of the learners:

“ It's hard to incorporate Blackfoot culture into a workplace, especially off reserve. It doesn't fit well in a mainly white workplace. I've never been at job where there's been any cultural side to it, especially off reserve, but on reserve too. This course helped us understand that a bit more. Really liked learning the words and seeing the pictures [that were integrated into the content]. ”

The learners also felt that workplace culture and expectations content was a valuable component of their overall Office Administration Program. They were keen to have the slides as a resource, which they described as very detailed and informative, so that they could refer to them in the future. Learners indicated that the content was a good complement to their learnings from the other program components, especially with their upcoming practicums. As one learner described:

“ [The inclusion of the workplace expectations content into the broader program] worked really well. We learned the hands-on part [related to Office Administration], but then this was about what to expect when we get a job. ”

During the focus group, learners provided suggestions for future iterations of the workplace culture and expectations content. They indicated that they would like either more depth and less breadth of content or more time in the program to go through the curriculum. They felt that because there was so much content to go through, it sometimes felt rushed, especially since it was delivered at the end of the day. As described by the learner below:

“ I would have liked more time spent on this part of the program. It was the last two hours of each day of class, but sometimes that time would go towards homework and other times it was a workshop. I would have liked more time on the workshops to be able to get through all of them. ”

One learner shared that they felt some topics could be covered in more depth:

“ I feel like we just touched the surface of many of the workshops, so it would have been good to go more in-depth on some of them. ”

When asked about specific topics that they would like to be covered in more depth, learners responded that they would like to spend more time focusing on job application skills, such as interviewing. They also wanted to spend more time learning about how to practically understand the culture in a workplace, particularly when starting a new job and suggested including specific examples and scenarios. Learners were also interested in focusing more on how to navigate their rights related to harassment and racism in the workplace, particularly as an Indigenous person.

Alternatively, if more time for the content was not an option, they suggested giving learners an opportunity to select the specific topics to be delivered, so that they could go more in-depth on some and less so on others. One learner shared the following suggestion:

“ It would be helpful to have an outline of the workshops from the beginning and then be able to choose as a class which ones we want to focus on if we aren't able to get through all 19. ”

Promising Practices from the Pilot Project

There were two key learnings that emerged from this pilot project, which are described below.

1 Adapting and tailoring curriculum:

The pilot project demonstrated the importance of adapting program content and materials to reflect learners' culture and experiences. In the beta-test phase, the Moving Forward curriculum was developed for newcomers; however, a few Indigenous learners enrolled in the program and found the training very helpful as they (re)entered the workforce. LPL/RO recognized the potential value that the Moving Forward curriculum could have for Indigenous

learners if it was adapted to their specific needs. Thus, LPL/RO staff approached SETA, an Indigenous employment and training organization, about adapting and delivering the curriculum. SETA staff were able to adapt the curriculum to better reflect the knowledge, values, experiences, and culture of the Blackfoot learners in the Office Administration program. The focus group findings illustrated that tailoring the curriculum was particularly valuable and important to the learners, as it made it more relatable and relevant.

2 Integrating additional soft skills with technical training:

This pilot project was unique in that the workplace culture and expectations part of the Moving Forward curriculum was integrated into SETA's Office Administration Program, rather than being delivered as a standalone program. This provided learners with the opportunity to develop their technical skills related to office administration, as well as the soft skills (i.e., those addressed through the workplace culture and expectations curriculum) that would support them in obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment. Learners in the focus group described how they felt that the workplace culture and expectations training enhanced their experience in the program by helping them to feel more confident in navigating the workplace as they ventured into a new career or new job.

Additional project information

This report is part of a series of 5 individual pilot project reports developed for the DWLES project. To learn more about the DWLES project, please visit: decoda.ca/our-work/displaced-workers-landing.

