

Lethbridge Public Library: "Moving Forward: New Opportunities, New Lives"

Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills Project

Beta Test Report | February 2023

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The DWLES Project

Lethbridge Public Library's "Moving Forward: New Opportunities, New Lives" 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 "Moving Forward: New Opportunities, New Lives" that was implemented in Lethbridge, AB.

Moving Forward Beta Test in Lethbridge, AB

The Moving Forward: New Opportunities, New Lives beta test project was developed and implemented by the Lethbridge Public Library and took place in Lethbridge. This city of about 100,000 in southern Alberta, attracts many from the surrounding rural communities. The project focused on culture and expectations in the Canadian workplace and the essential skills required to succeed, including document use and computer skills. It was conducted online and aimed to help displaced workers, such as energy sector and farming industry workers, move forward by acquiring the skills they need to secure and retain employment. The training was targeted at newcomers; however, a diversity of displaced workers ended up participating.

Each learner completed a skills assessment and participated in a discussion on their employment history and goals. Each week, learners needing assistance participated in classes on computer basics (such as MS Word and Excel) or numeracy. In addition, those who required improvements in their literacy skills could be paired with a Read On tutor for up to three hours weekly. Upon completion of Moving Forward, all learners had



the opportunity to continue working with their tutors if desired. Finally, local organizations provided presentations on the various types of support or learning opportunities that they offer, and learners had the chance to meet with major local employers.

Moving Forward was delivered to two cohorts of learners between April and October 2021. The training was delivered virtually using Zoom over a four-week period. Learners were in class for four hours, five days per week. Across the two cohorts, 20 learners completed Moving Forward.

Highlights from Moving Forward

There were several highlights that were identified by learners and staff about Moving Forward:

- ✳ Many learners expressed that participating in Moving Forward helped to **increase their confidence in their ability to become employed**. Learners became more hopeful about their employment prospects by learning how to find and apply for jobs and becoming more knowledgeable about Canadian workplace culture and expectations.



* Learners described how the **mock interviews with volunteers** who were human resource personnel from local employers were a very important part of their experience in Moving Forward. Following each mock interview, the volunteer debriefed each learner, discussing areas for improvements as well as strengths. Learners were very engaged and satisfied with this part of the beta test, as were the volunteers.

* As most of the learners who participated in the Moving Forward beta test were newcomers, there were some learners whose first language was neither English nor French. In addition to increasing their knowledge and awareness of Canadian workplace culture and expectations, these learners highlighted how **the beta test was an opportunity to build their English language skills** in a comfortable, social environment.

Promising practices from Moving Forward

There were several promising practices that emerged from Moving Forward that strengthened learner recruitment and engagement while supporting learners in their personal growth and building their LES and job search skills.

Providing opportunities in class to practice job application skills.

Learners did mock interviews with volunteers who had human resource experience. This gave learners practical job preparation experience with highly qualified individuals who could provide them with constructive feedback and effective strategies for job interviews.



Inviting local employers and others to be guest speakers.

In addition to the volunteers who conducted the mock interviews, staff also invited local employers (e.g., from Maple Leaf Foods, McCain Foods, City of Lethbridge), to present to the learners, and share their employment and future opportunities. This introduced learners to new opportunities, increased their understanding of the job application process and necessary qualifications, and built a personal connection between learners and employers.



Developing programs for equity-deserving groups that have been underrepresented in previous LES programming in the community.

The program was designed for Newcomers with the assumption that they may be unfamiliar with Canadian workplace expectations. It also provided an opportunity for learners to connect with each other over their shared experiences of being new to Canada.

What we learned from Moving Forward

1 Leveraging local and regional assets for LES programming is an effective way to support learners' needs and interests and connect them with other supports, resources, and services in the community.

Lethbridge Public Library (Read On) staff developed and leveraged a variety of community-based partnerships with organizations from different sectors. These

included other departments within the City of Lethbridge, Lethbridge College, Economic Development Lethbridge, and multiple employers in the community (e.g., McCain Foods and Maple Leaf Foods), and the local office for Apprenticeship and Industry Training Alberta. These partnerships allowed staff to integrate different areas of expertise in the training program, as well as give learners the opportunity to connect to local supports and services. These community-based partners provided mentorship, training and job preparation coaching, and information on community services and employment opportunities.

2 Developing a specific, focused program that included a broader LES component, was an effective way to provide learners with additional literacy support as needed.

Recognizing that Newcomers have varying levels of LES, Moving Forward was designed as a separate program that was housed under the Library's Read On program, which offers basic LES training and support. This meant that if instructors identified that a learner required additional LES training beyond what could be offered through Moving Forward, learners could easily be provided with additional support through the Read On program. The flexibility of being able to include learners with varying LES levels, allowed for a greater diversity of learners to participate in the beta test and ensured that learners would not fall behind if they needed additional LES support.

3 Understanding the context and needs of communities is critical for developing LES and employment skills training that is relevant and addresses barriers to employment.

The concept for Moving Forward was developed through staff members' collective experiences in working in the LES and employment counselling fields. They identified that there were a number of workers who accessed LES and employment services and were successful in obtaining a job, but were not able to maintain a job long-term. In discussions with these individuals, staff learned that the barrier to staying employed was a lack of awareness and knowledge of workplace expectations and culture in a Canadian context. Staff were able to use this knowledge to develop the beta test and address this need in the community.

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.

