

Mount Waddington Family Literacy Society: "Connect4Work: Introduction to Computers for Job Seekers"

Enhancing Displaced Workers' Literacy and Essential Skills Project
Pilot Project Report | December 2023
Lauren Brooks-Cleator, Shawn de Raaf, & Patrick Wray

North Vancouver
Island, BC

DWLES Project Overview

Mount Waddington Family Literacy Society's "Connect4Work" 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.

Mount Waddington Family Literacy Society's (MWFLS) pilot project involved adapting program content and expanding the reach of Connect4Work: Introduction to Computers for Job Seekers. The following profile provides an overview of this pilot, including the transition from the beta-test to pilot phase, program implementation, key findings, and promising practices.



Beta Test to Pilot Project

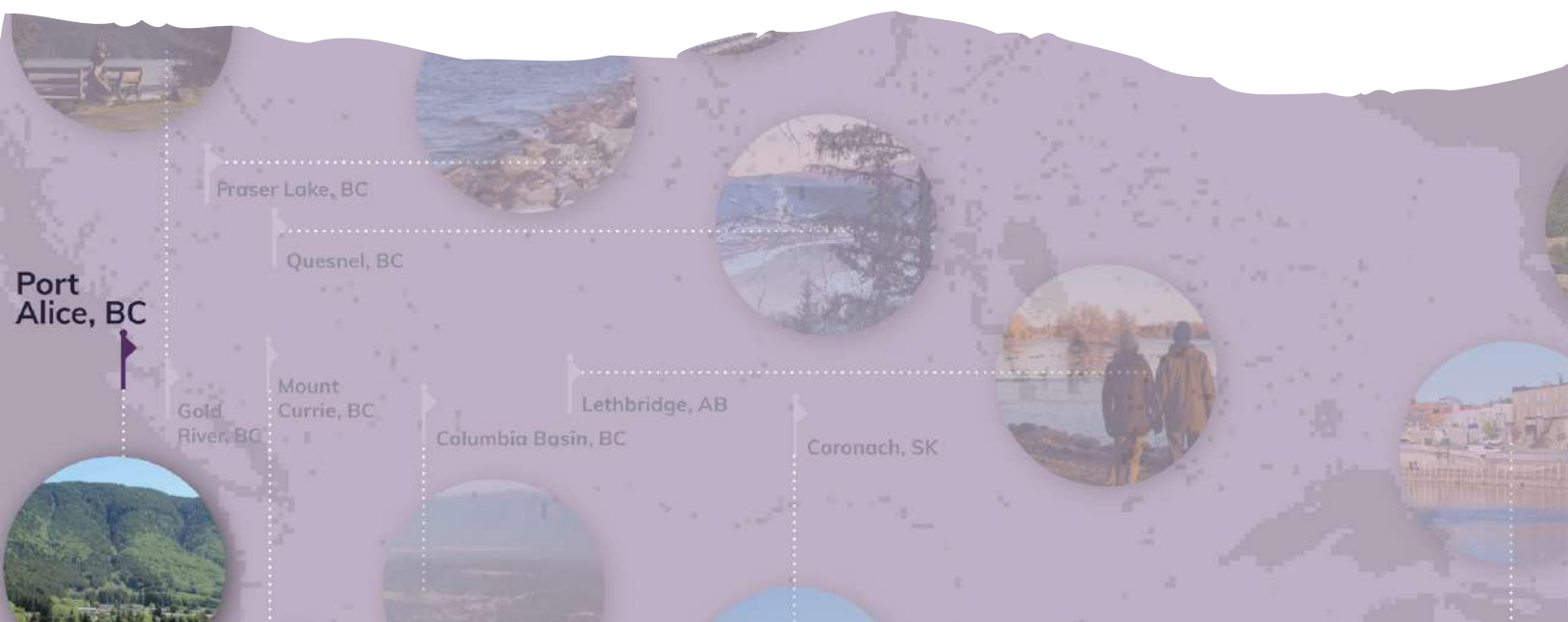
For the original beta-test phase of the DWLES project, the MWFLS designed and delivered Connect4Work. It was implemented in Port Alice, Port McNeill, and Port Hardy on Vancouver Island, BC. The North Island region experienced a significant economic change when the 100-year-old Neucel pulp mill, which employed many residents from the region, closed in 2019. Due to the closure, more than 400 employees were out of work and many of them were without job-related transferrable skills. Further, many of the affected workers were over the age of 40 and had a significant digital literacy gap that hindered their ability to search and apply for work. To help address this gap, the MWFLS established the Connect4Work beta-test project to build learners' digital skills.

The aim of the pilot project was to expand the reach of the Connect4Work curriculum to other organizations and broaden its focus beyond North Island. Additionally, MWFLS wanted to further develop the Connect4Work curriculum to integrate more Skills for Success resources.

Program Implementation

Similar to the beta-test phase, the Connect4Work pilot project was delivered in-person over six weeks of class instruction for six hours each week. There were three cohorts of learners: one in Port McNeill and two in Port Hardy. The third cohort was delivered in partnership with Sacred Wolf Friendship Centre in Port Hardy. This partnership was developed to engage more Indigenous learners in Connect4Work. Given project timelines, this cohort was not included as part of the evaluation.

The Connect4Work curriculum was quite similar from beta-test to pilot project. It was a basic introduction to digital literacy that included basic computer operation, computer vocabulary, Internet searches and safety, creating basic documents, using email, using online communication platforms (e.g., Zoom), and an introduction to a variety of online resources from government and health services to banking and library services. The curriculum in the pilot project also included an overview of online



resources related to Skills for Success. The facilitator chose to include these so that learners knew where and how to access the many online Skills for Success resources in the future to further enhance their skills and increase their employability.

In addition to the regular Connect4Work curriculum, the facilitator created a secondary version of the curriculum that had a broader focus, so that other organizations could adapt it to their own local context. Using this version of the curriculum, the facilitator hosted four train-the-trainer sessions to help increase capacity of others to deliver the curriculum. Participants in these sessions included staff from other employment and training organizations from across BC.

Key Findings

A total of 13 learners participated in Connect4Work over the two cohorts. Almost all learners fully completed the program. A couple of learners left the program for personal reasons external to the program.

Learners ranged in age from 25-60+ years old. Interestingly, most learners were 60 years of age and older, which aligns with the original intent of the beta test to address the digital literacy gap among older residents on North Island.

Findings from the surveys and focus groups with learners further validated and strengthened the findings from the Connect4Work beta-test. Learners continued to report that their participation in the program reduced their fear of

using computers and increased their confidence, as described by the following learner:

“ I had a lot of fear of computers. This course erased fears and showed me how to work my way through. ”

Learners in the pilot project emphasized the need for a basic digital literacy program. One learner clearly articulated the impact of not having basic digital skills:

“ For computers, not knowing how to use them is like not knowing how to read and write. ”

Another learner highlighted the value of this type of program for learners with low digital literacy:

“ I think [this program] helps a lot, especially for someone who has no skills. It will help them be more comfortable. ”

Similarly, one learner described the generational digital literacy gap and highlighted that this program is particularly beneficial for addressing that:

“ At our age [as an older learner], we feel a bit left behind because we didn't grow up with [computers]. We now know how to do things [after taking Connect4Work], such as going on government websites, and we know how to use them. Now we're much more comfortable. ”

Learners also continued to report that they wanted to do further digital skills training after completing Connect4Work. Connect4Work provided them with an introduction that piqued their interest in pursuing further training. One learner spoke of their interest in continuing the training:

“ Now I'd like to have a more advanced program and go into detail of Word and Excel. Now that we have the basics, it would be good to get more into the advanced skills. Many of those programs are required for office work. ”

The facilitator also shared that they were regularly approached by community members about offering a more advanced digital literacy program:

“ I've had a lot of people approach me regarding having more advanced Excel done for training. Unfortunately, there was not room in this course to do it since there's already so much in there...even yesterday I had someone come up to me when I was working at the library and she asked, "are you guys [MWFLS] going to do a course for people who learn the basics and want to go a little bit further in it?" ”

The findings from both the beta test and pilot project suggest that a basic digital literacy program continues to be valuable to North Island residents and that there is also an interest in more advanced digital literacy training.

Promising Practices from the Pilot Project

In addition to the promising practices from the original beta-test outlined in the [beta-test report](#), one promising practice emerged from the Connect4Work pilot project, which is described below.

1 Developing a curriculum that is relevant to a variety of learners:

There were many reasons that learners wanted to participate in Connect4Work and improve their digital skills, such as being able to use them in their current job, wanting to enrol in online training/education, or using them to grow their businesses online. Learners from a variety of backgrounds and with different goals found value in participating in Connect4Work. Additionally, the curriculum was able to be taught in a group setting as well as one-on-one. The facilitator shared that they had used content from the Connect4Work curriculum as a tutoring aide for a learner in a different program. By addressing basic digital skills, the curriculum was relevant and applicable to a variety of learners.

2 Adapting the curriculum to have a broader focus beyond the local level:

The curriculum in the beta-test phase had a very localized focus on North Island and BC resources and supports. The pilot project curriculum maintained this focus since it continued to be

delivered to North Island residents; however, there was a secondary version of the curriculum developed that had a broader focus. The intent was that this would enable organizations to use the curriculum and integrate their own local resources and supports. This helped to make the curriculum transferable to organizations and their learners outside of the North Island region.



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.

