Capilano University: "Gathering Together: Introduction to Small Business Startup within Indigenous Communities"

Lil'wat & N'Quatqua First Nations, BC

The DWLES Project

Capilano University's "Gathering Together: Introduction to Small Business Startup within Indigenous Communities" (Gathering Together) 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 Gathering Together that was implemented in the Lil'wat and N'Quatqua First Nations, British Columbia.

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Lil'wat and N'Quatqua First Nations, BC

The Lil'wat and N'Quatqua First Nations are located two and half hours north of Vancouver. Named for the spectacular 2,591 m mountain in the centre of Líĺwat Traditional Territory, Lil'wat First Nation is home to approximately 1,450 of the Nation's more than 2,200 members. In 2015, the N'Quatqua nation had 356 registered members, with 164 members living in the community, 42 members living in other first nations communities, and 151 living off reserve.

There is a need among both First Nations to create small business/self-employment opportunities. With high unemployment rates, and few employment opportunities, individuals leave their community for work. Individuals with low literacy and numeracy skills often cycle through low wage jobs without opportunities for advancement. Self-employment creates opportunities for flexible schedules to balance multi-generational family obligations and attending community and ceremonial events.

Capilano University partnered with the Ts'zil Learning Centre (TLC) to develop and implement a literacy project focused on supporting learners on their entrepreneurship journey. Ts'zil Learning Centre is owned and operated by the Líĺwat First

Nation, offering a variety of programs which include academic upgrading, post-secondary academic, trades, and training opportunities for adult learners eighteen and older. Capilano University has an office and regularly offers programming at the Ts'zil Learning Centre.

Gathering Together

Gathering Together was a community-based entrepreneurship training course for Indigenous learners. It supported learners' goals for self-employment by working within the communities, building capacity within the Nations, having flexible schedules to balance multi-generational family obligations, and supporting employment that grows and gives back to the community. The project took place at the Ts'zil Learning Centre and worked with individuals who have a home business or a desire to create a business. Through an Indigenous lens, the project worked with the whole person. It included strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety, and supported learners' learning readiness by developing their literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, while at the same time engaging them in entrepreneurial training. Each week the facilitator would introduce a new entrepreneurial concept, and the class would practice their new skill by completing a handout. The handouts were based on a

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deconstructed business plan or model. For example, the facilitator would present a lesson on goal setting, and then the class would complete an exercise on setting a goal for their business. By the end of the ten weeks, the goal was that each student would complete a business plan or parts of a plan that were of particular interest.

Gathering Together was delivered in winter 2022 to two groups: one in Lil'wat First Nation and one in N'Quatqua First Nation. The training was delivered in-person over a 10-week period. Learners were in class for one evening each week. Twelve learners completed Gathering Together. The number of learners was kept low due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the experimental nature of the project.

Highlights from Gathering Together

There were several highlights that were identified by learners and staff about Gathering Together:

✳ The beta test **helped many of the learners identify their goals related to entrepreneurship**. Using learners' already established self-employed "side jobs" as a starting point, learners had the opportunity to develop the skills to start a formal small business by building their entrepreneurial skills. Learners indicated that the training gave them more direction and concrete steps to move forward with their business ideas.

✳ Learners appreciated having the **opportunity to meet and learn from multiple small business owners.** The facilitator invited small business owners from the

communities to share their tips, knowledge, and experiences with the learners. The learners indicated that they appreciated the local examples, as they were relevant to their own experiences.

✳ The beta test led to the development of a **speaker series at the Ts'zil Learning Centre in collaboration with the local Chamber of Commerce**. The speakers series aims to build off of the beta test by inviting funders of Indigenous small businesses, additional entrepreneurs, local Community Futures representatives, and others, to network and engage with community members who are interested in entrepreneurship.

Promising practices from Gathering Together

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

Reaching out to specific individuals and entrepreneurs in the community to support learner recruitment.

Program staff connected with individuals in the community who had previously shown an interest in entrepreneurship and encouraged them to participate in the training. They also followed up with existing small business owners who had previously indicated that they would benefit from further developing their entrepreneurial skills. These connections supported recruitment efforts because of the beta-test lead's strong relationships and knowledge of learners' needs.

Providing informal opportunities to build relationships with and among learners.

At the beginning of each class, the learners and facilitator shared a meal together that was provided by the program. This created an opportunity for the facilitator to have conversations with the learners to get to know them, build relationships, and hear about their ideas and interests in an informal manner.

Using a storytelling approach to teaching.

To deliver the training, the facilitator used storytelling as a method to engage learners and teach new concepts. The facilitator would create a fictitious small business and use this throughout the training to help learners understand what works well and what does not work well, and why, in relation to starting, managing, and owning a business. The learners indicated that they found this particularly engaging and beneficial to their learning, as it was applicable and practical.

Using the 4 Rs to create accessible education for Indigenous learners.

The beta test was designed through a lens of creating respectful, relevant, responsible, and reciprocal learning opportunities. This meant that 1) the facilitator was respectful of learners and their ideas and goals, and worked to foster a learning environment grounded in respect for one another; 2) the content was developed to be relevant to learners' interests and needs; 3) the training was delivered in a responsible way in that it was not too challenging for learners, but also not too simple; and 4) the beta test was a reciprocal learning opportunity for both the learners and the facilitator/beta test organization.

What we learned from Gathering Together

1 There is significant value in integrating multi-sectoral community-based partnerships and leveraging local knowledge into the development and implementation of LES and employment skills training.

Gathering Together involved multiple partners, including the Líĺwat First Nation, which operates the Ts'zil Learning centre where the training was held, as well as the N'Quatqua First Nation, which provided support for recruiting participants. Further, there was also the opportunity to leverage the University's capacity, in particular, the beta test lead's access to university resources and expertise, as well as with the broader literacy community. Business owners from Líĺwat and N'Quatqua First Nations also shared with learners their experiences and learnings related to entrepreneurship. The beta-test lead leveraged their connections within the community and chose these businesses to ensure that the examples provided were reflective of the learners' communities and experiences.

2 The definition of "displaced worker" needs to account for the impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples and communities.

There was a diversity of criteria used to define displaced workers for each of the beta tests involved in the DWLES project. For Gathering Together, an important consideration for defining displaced workers was the impact of colonialism on Indigenous peoples. Colonialism has caused many economic, infrastructure, social, and health inequities for Indigenous peoples. The reserve and residential school systems, as well as other historical and ongoing forms of oppression have displaced Indigenous peoples from their land, their cultures, and their opportunities for work. For Gathering Together, which focused on LES and employment skills training for Indigenous peoples, this was a fundamental aspect to the development and implementation of the beta test.

3 Understanding the context and needs of communities is critical for developing LES and employment skills training that is relevant and creates potential opportunities for learners.

The staff involved in the beta test at Capilano University were well aware of the resources, needs, and realities of the communities in which they work. Capilano University, and the beta-test lead in particular, has a strong relationship with the two communities and an in-depth understanding of the needs of learners who live in those communities. These relationships and knowledge of the community helped to identify community members who were struggling to find employment and were trying to start a small business. The staff identified that there was clearly a need to support Indigenous entrepreneurs in starting and/or managing a small business and was able to develop a beta test to work towards addressing 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.