

# Skills For Life

Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy

## Final Report



Funded by the Government of Canada in partnership with College of the Rockies  
and Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy.



Government of  
Canada



Columbia Basin  
Alliance for Literacy

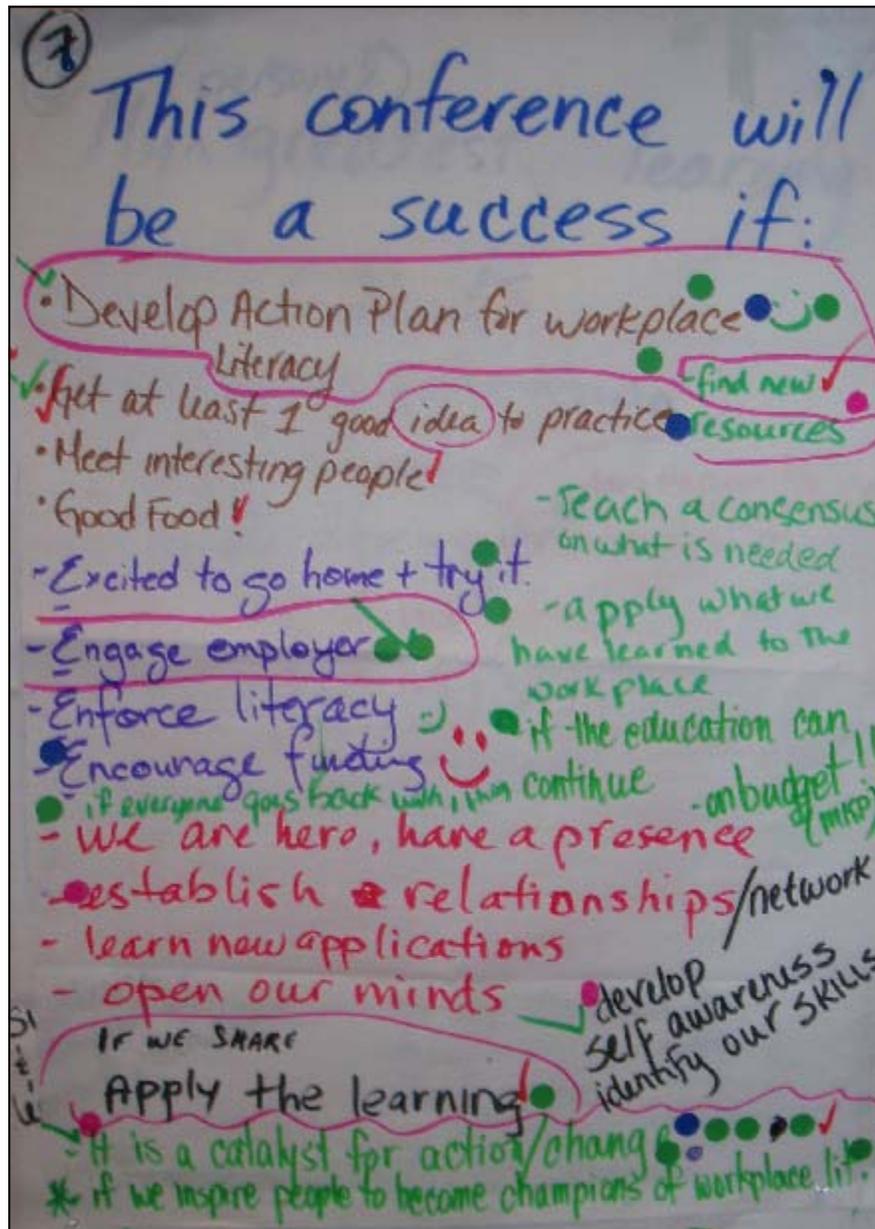




literacy skills  
are like threads

That are woven  
into our work  
and make up  
the fabric of workplace life  
and  
life long learning

PARTICIPANTS THOUGHTS



During Tracy Defoe's presentation, participants were divided into groups and asked to share their responses to various questions/statements. These questions/statements were posted on chart paper and stationed around the room. Copies of these charts are displayed throughout this book.

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*“The Columbia Basin economy is changing and communities are looking for ways to re-create themselves and develop different economic initiatives. In order to be successful, we need to find ways to ensure that people have the essential basic skills necessary to participate. Though traditional Adult Basic Education programs are successful, they cannot fully meet the needs of community members. Alternative delivery mechanisms tied to the work that people are doing or need to do are critical. Additionally, continuous learning will need to be supported wherever people are”.*

This quote is from proposals written over several years in an attempt to find funding to start discussions about workplace literacy and learning.

Though the concept of workplace learning thrives in some sectors, business, labour, industry and educational institutions are not fully aware of the mechanisms or benefits of workplace literacy and essential skills training.

In order to implement workplace literacy and learning widely in rural communities, special considerations must be made. Many sectors and community members must be included in discussions about what to do to support the learning needs of individuals in the workplace.

In the fall of 2005, the College of the Rockies committed funds for a conference where these discussions could take place and people from the region could learn more about what is meant by the term “workplace literacy”; what the essential skills initiative of the Government of Canada is all about; and how we might collectively address workplace learning issues.

To prepare for the conference, the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy received funding from Service Canada to employ three people to survey businesses about workplace learning and training issues and organize the conference.

The Skills for Life Conference was an opportunity for all stakeholders to learn about the potential of essential skills training in the workplace, the possibilities for implementing workplace learning, and the ties between learning and economic development. It provided some time and space to think collectively about labour issues and how to proceed with innovative learning initiatives.



## PROJECT GROUNDWORK

Upon approval of funding for the Skills for Life Conference, the “**Skills for Life Team**” was officially formed on November 7<sup>th</sup> 2005.

### **Skills for Life Team Members**

Liz Spence-Noble – Project Coordinator

Cristina Borgogelli – Assistant Project Coordinator

Caroline Greening – Assistant Project Coordinator

The task was something new for the team. Major challenges the team faced included the geographical scope of the project and the limited time to complete - less than four months.

The team began by developing a database with a full range of East Kootenay businesses. They then developed and tested a set of interview questions that would prove significant to the conference. The team also created a variety of marketing materials including a presentation that was delivered to local Chambers of Commerce to build awareness about the importance of employer and employee skills development in the workplace.

Along with the presentation, a brochure was produced which defined workplace literacy and essential skills and provided statistics addressing lack of skills in the workplace and the impact on our economy and the bottom line of businesses. With the brochure in hand, the Skills for Life Team encouraged businesses to participate in the interview process. The team traveled throughout the East Kootenay Region asking businesses about the challenges they faced in regards to workplace literacy, essential skills and training in the workplace. They were overwhelmed with the positive response received from the business community and encouraged by this supportive reception.

In all 77 businesses were interviewed from Elkford to Golden; the information gathered was invaluable to the success of the project and was the focus of the conference. During this period, the team also organized the conference and contacted workplace literacy and essential skills experts to speak. Once the details of the conference were established, the team set out to register as many participants as possible. Every person who had participated in the interview process was personally invited to attend, along with other stakeholders, from literacy organizations, to government offices, to local school districts. Twenty five people registered for the conference.

This was a great beginning to a very worthwhile endeavor. The Skills for Life Conference started the process of a better understanding about workplace education and the importance of employer and employee skills training and development.

To learn about the results from the survey please refer to the Skills for Life Survey section of this document.

## OBJECTIVES

"The ultimate goal of this project is to re-envision the workplace as a learning place."

### Project Objectives:

- Develop a clearer understanding throughout the region of workplace literacy and how it is beneficial to business, labour, communities and individuals.
- Build the capacity of educators, business, labour and others to implement essential skills development in the labour force.
- Mobilize and coordinate the efforts of community stakeholders to develop a strategic plan around workplace literacy which addresses the needs of individuals re-entering the labour market after an absence, adjusting to job obsolescence/involuntary unemployment, or adapting to workplace change.
- Facilitate the development of community/sector plans to address essential skills training in conjunction with local business, schools, colleges, and various interested agencies.
- Maintain a network of workplace literacy leaders who are also linked to leaders in social and economic development.
- Create partnerships within the region and provincially which will strengthen and support the initiation of essential skills and workplace literacy project/sinterventions.

**FEATURE**

### Linking learning, literacy and skills development to business success

**Cristina Borgogelli**  
*SPECIAL TO THE ECHO*



The cost to Canadian businesses from lost productivity due to poor literacy is estimated to be \$4 billion annually according to The Business Task Force. This indicates the magnitude of the literacy problem in the workplace.

Results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills survey conducted by Statistics Canada in 2005 reported that 42% of Canadians, age 16-65 do not have the minimum literacy skills for coping with everyday life and work.

By improving employees' literacy and basic skills, employers will realize higher profits and a host of other bottom-line benefits. Employees with better basic skills will save employers time and money and improve performance and productivity.

So what does workplace literacy mean?

Canada's National Literacy Secretariat defines literacy as being essential skills that people need at work.

These skills provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.

Through extensive research, the Government of Canada and various national and international agencies, have identified and validated nine essential skills.

These skills include: document use, reading text, numeracy, writing, oral communication, working with others, continuous learning, thinking skills, and computer use. These skills are used in every occupation and

throughout daily life in different ways and at different levels of complexity.

The Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL) has partnered with College of the Rockies and Human Resources Development Canada in developing an Essential Skills and Workplace Literacy Conference. Re-envisioning the workplace as a learning place is the ultimate goal.

The expected outcome of this project is to build understanding and capacity about the issue of workplace literacy and learning and the role of essential skills in getting and keeping work. Potential initiatives to address the needs around workplace learning will be explored and pursued, as well

as opportunities to build partnerships in the region and to strengthen and support the local workforce.

Liz Spence-Noble, Cristina Borgogelli and Caroline Greening make up The Skills for Life Team and they will be interviewing local businesses in the East Kootenay region to identify their understanding of workplace literacy and to identify barriers in implementing workplace essential skills training in the region. The research gathered will shape the goals of the conference.

For more information regarding the conference or to take part in the research process please contact the Skills for Life Team at (250)342-3210 ext. 114.

Photo submitted

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO:

- our presenters for contributing their time and knowledge to the conference.
- the 77 businesses who took the time to participate in the interview process and shared their experience and ideas prior to the conference.
- the Government of Canada for funding coordination time and conference materials.
- the Cranbrook office of Service Canada for believing in the project.
- the College of the Rockies' Innovation Fund Committee for setting aside funds for the conference
- Literacies Journal, SkillPlan and The Conference Board of Canada for providing publications for the conference.

### THE SKILLS FOR LIFE TEAM

<b>Marilyn Petersen</b>	Campus Manager- College of the Rockies (Invermere)
<b>Leona Gadsby</b>	Access Education - College of the Rockies (Invermere) Executive Director- Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy
<b>Marianne Thiesen</b>	Project Manager
<b>Liz Spence-Noble</b>	Project Coordinator
<b>Cristina Borgogelli</b>	Assistant Project Coordinator
<b>Caroline Greening</b>	Assistant Project Coordinator





*Leona Gadsby* is the Regional Literacy Coordinator for the East Kootenay and the Executive Director of Administration for the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy. She has 25 years of experience as an adult literacy practitioner with College of the Rockies. Leona has worked in a range of prevention and intervention strategies for addressing literacy issues locally, regionally, provincially and nationally.

## *WELCOME and INTRODUCTIONS*

**Leona Gadsby** opened the conference by welcoming the participants on behalf of the College of the Rockies and the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy. Participation was indicative of the geographic scope of this project. There was representation from Brisco, Cranbrook, Creston, Golden, Invermere, Kamloops, Kimberley, Trail, Radium and Vernon.

Conference presenters were introduced: Tracy Defoe from The Learning Factor, Vancouver; Diana Twiss from Capilano College, North Vancouver; Alison Campbell from The Conference Board of Canada, Ottawa, and Michael Herzog from Bow Valley College, Calgary. "There are many examples of good practice in terms of workplace learning and we are fortunate that people with experience in this regard have agreed to come and share what they know with us."

Leona explained that she has been thinking about Workplace Literacy for some time and wanted to bring together interested people to learn more about it. Assistance and support came from many sources. Marilyn Petersen, Manager of the Invermere Campus, acquired funding from College of the Rockies (COTR) to host the conference. The Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy (CBAL) received funding from the Government of Canada to employ three people to develop this project and coordinate the Skills for Life Conference on Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills.

The concept of workplace learning is not new. People are constantly learning and work is one of the places where we learn. Employees receive some training on the job; businesses and industry provide workshops and training at various levels. However, there are ways of thinking about learning and work that we could learn more about, which is why we are here.

Those of us who work for the college often meet people whose reading, writing, math and computer skills are not strong enough to allow them to get on in school, move ahead at work or otherwise reach their dreams.

During consultations with business and in recent community literacy planning sessions, community members have talked about a need to support people's learning at work.

We are a small region – our financial and human resources are limited. How can we make the most of what we have? How can we support people who want to work but need more skill to be most effective to get those skills? How can we support industry and business to become more productive through a labour force that is continually learning and growing?

Over the next two days, we have an opportunity to explore these questions and others.



*Dr. Nicholas Rubidge* is the president and CEO of the College of the Rockies, which consists of 7 campuses in the East Kootenay. In addition to his college duties, Dr. Rubidge is Chair of the Post-Secondary Employers Association, an executive member of the BC Council of Presidents, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Trades Training Consortium of BC.

## EDUCATION and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**Dr Rubidge** painted a silhouette of the East Kootenay, with statistical references to our communities and workplaces. Of particular note is that the average income for both men and women is below the average realized in other areas of mainland British Columbia. Alcohol abuse is common - 87 litres of alcohol per person per year is consumed compared to 55 litres for the province, and the East Kootenay region experiences a higher suicide rate compared to the rest of British Columbia.

In a light yet powerful discourse, Dr. Rubidge made socio-economic comparisons between Sweden and British Columbia, and between the Caribbean and British Columbia:

### **British Columbia - Sweden Comparison:**

Much like British Columbia, approximately half of Sweden is covered in forest, and more than one third of the area consists of mountains, lakes and marshes. Climate and geography are very similar.

Sweden is half the size of British Columbia with a population twice the size. Sweden has half as many resources - trees, fish, minerals, and water - as British Columbia. British Columbia has more dams and exports a majority of its resources. British Columbia buys its forestry equipment from Sweden.

<b>SWEDEN PRODUCES &amp; EXPORTS:</b>	<b>BRITISH COLUMBIA PRODUCES &amp; EXPORTS:</b>
<b>High quality products and services:</b>	<b>Major Resources:</b>
Steel & Metal	Soft wood lumber
Telecommunications	Raw materials
Aircraft engines	Slightly refined materials
Telecommunications	Gas
Swedish design – IKEA	Electricity
Marine Engines	Coal
Jet Fighters	Water
Chainsaws	Low end paper products
High end paper products	BC Bud
Vehicle Industry engineering (MACK – Volvo – SAAB)	
Mechanical engineering	
Electrical engineering	

## *EDUCATION and ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Cont.*

"While British Columbia has unbelievable riches compared to other provinces and countries, it is one of the worst managed economies in the western world. We give our resources away!"

On an educational level, 25% of East Kootenay high school students fail to graduate, as compared to 18% in Sweden. 55% of East Kootenay residents do not have post secondary education, yet it is estimated that 80% of jobs in the future will require post secondary.

As residents of British Columbia, we should be embarrassed and appalled with this comparison. What did Sweden do differently? Swedes invested in education at all levels - in pre-schools, in regular and post-secondary schools, and in businesses.

### ***British Columbia - Caribbean Comparison:***

The Caribbean is similar to British Columbia in that its central population is remote, separated by water much like residents in most of British Columbia are separated from major centers by mountains, lakes and rivers. Small pockets of the population are spread out geographically.

Thirty years ago, people in the Caribbean could establish a satisfactory quality of life. Tourism brought revenue into the communities, but it also brought foreigners who bought up waterfront real estate and other prime property. Women now work and serve in the tourist industry in low paying jobs and the young men view tourists with frustration. Young men are dropping out of school to get into the black market and drug trade. This is not unlike the East Kootenay region. Fifteen years ago a person could buy recreational and residential property at a third of the price of a house in the city. Now property is too expensive for East Kootenay residents to purchase. The only residents benefiting from this are long term residents who are sitting on a one time capital windfall. Our children are unable to buy into this market. Young men are dropping out of high school and selling drugs and view the tourists with frustration. These are the same dynamics as the Caribbean.

### ***Skills Shortage:***

We seem surprised at the skill shortage. Demographics projected that baby boomers would be retiring starting in 2006 and resulting in shortages in the trades. Over the last 30 years, we have not trained our children in the trades and some other fields that are lacking. For example, Medical Schools are not producing enough doctors. The attitude in British Columbia is that we don't need to train people - we can always get people from elsewhere to work. But we have denied our own children the opportunity to prepare for successful careers. The answer: "Recruit the people we need now and train them."

Education alone cannot develop an economy. We also need to provide training to our workforce. This problem is not just regional. It is of national importance.





*Tracy Defoe* runs a consulting company, The Learning Factor. She brings a focus of learning to workplace change dilemmas. She works with forward-thinking companies and community organizations and their partners on the learning and literacy challenges of the workforce. Her work typically involves research, program design and development, delivering customized training, teaching peer trainers, evaluation and being a catalyst for change.

## THE ABC'S OF WORKPLACE LITERACY

**Tracy Defoe** began the session by reminding us that we all know something about work, change and foundational skills for participation and learning. Tracy demonstrated, through experiential activities, the best practices and the basic information that people should know about Workplace Learning:

“What are the real issues in work-related education? What can people expect to find when they start learning for the future? As an educator who has worked for more than 15 years in workplace learning, communication and foundation (now often called “essential”) skills upgrading, I have found that the issues are fairly constant across different industries. People are threatened by change. They are concerned about the power dynamic of training, about having a say in determining what happens. Nobody wants to waste time or money. Nobody can afford to fail ... The questions are universal; the answers will be unique to each situation.”

The culture, social environment and organization of the workplace will impact the schematics of a successful Workplace Education Program. Consider the following:

- There is formal and informal learning that happens in the workplace. Much of what employees initially learn has to do with the culture of the organization. What makes this workplace different? How do people interact? What actions are safe and smart?
- Skills are foundational abilities, contested because they are different for everyone. Some people do well academically, yet may not be capable of completing certain tasks in the workplace. How do we track skills? How do we measure goals and improvements?
- Groups of individuals within the same organization communicate in different ways, depending on their roles and responsibilities. On the shop floor it is not unusual to hear workers talking about today and yesterday (how things were done, mistakes that were made). In the office the talk is focused on the future (planning, projecting). Workplace education programs need to address needs on all levels. In the shop that may mean helping workers write memos and work schedules; in the office training may center on report or proposal writing.
- Workplace literacies and essential skills are abilities that allow people to apply what they know. Learning isn't effective if it doesn't mean anything. Work skills are a part of work life.



## *BEST PRACTICES IN WORKPLACE LITERACY*

The following outlines some important elements of the Best Practices that can be used when implementing workplace education programs. Taken from various sources, the emphasis is on voluntary participation, customized training material and co-operative decision making between partners.

### *Principles of Best Practice include:*

- An environment that is participatory
- Respect for everyone

### *Statement of Best Practice*

**The following essential features are included in all the statements of good practice, both formal and informal, that were reviewed.**

- Participation is voluntary in all aspects of workplace education.
- Confidentiality is assured in all types of assessments (organizational and individual), in reports of progress and in evaluations.
- An organizational or workplace needs assessment (ONA (5) or WNA) is a necessary step to ensure that all levels of the workforce have a say in determining if and what education/training is appropriate; if it fits the culture and goals of the individuals and the organization; and, if it will be supported by the workforce.
- The curriculum and learning materials are customized and contextualized to meet the needs and interests of workers and employers.
- Evaluations, both ongoing and final, are based on the goals established by the partners and measure the progress made toward those goals.
- A commitment to lifelong learning and links to further education and training are part of the workplace education strategy for an organization/union.
- Workplace educators, as partners in workplace learning, facilitate cooperative decision-making among partners as well as provide relevant opportunities and materials for learning.

**Further key characteristics of successful workplace education initiatives are included by a majority of the documents or educators:**

- A team/committee/group representing the on-site partners (workers, union, management, educator/facilitator) plans, designs, supports and monitors the learning initiative.
- Equity is respected and promoted in partnerships, in issues of access, in distribution of services and in marketing.

**Some documents and educators mention these additional features of successful work place education programming:**

- A variety of delivery models are available to match up with the learning needs/interests/style of individuals and the organization.
- Location and timing of education programs enhance the learning opportunities by offering the most suitable time and location for the participants.
- Employer and participants in programs demonstrate their commitment through shared time, release time, stipends or bonuses.
- Marketing materials and activities clearly communicate the program's assumptions, approaches to adult education, achievable goals and benefits for participants, unions and employers.

## BEST PRACTICES IN WORKPLACE LITERACY cont.

### Questions to ask prior to implementing a Workplace Training program:

1. **What stage are you at with respect to having consensus on principles of good practice?**
  - current status of your formal or informal guidelines
2. **What are your goals for good practice?**
  - Review existing guidelines? Start from scratch?
3. **What process will help you achieve your goals?**
  - bring a representative sample of partners to the table
  - design a process that meets your goals and time/energy commitments of the people you want to include
  - modest to elaborate activities: discuss at regular meetings; include sessions on good practice in conferences; strike a committee to investigate, report and recommend; plan your own think tank retreat
  - written statements are necessary for getting consensus
4. **Who should provide feedback on a draft version of your guidelines?**
  - other interested partners not at the table; other educators in the field
5. **How will your guidelines inform program policy and practice?**
  - consider the impact on different aspects of your program: hiring, staff development, curriculum development, funding, participants in education programs
6. **How can you keep your guidelines current?**
  - good practice is not static; ongoing review is recommended

From *Good Practice in Use* by Mary Ellen Belfiore for the Ontario Literacy Coalition available for download at

<http://www.on.literacy.ca/pubs/goodprac/cover.htm>

*A- attitude B- build on strengths C- challenge*

PARTICIPANTS' THOUGHTS

**DREAM**

Workplace Ed  
Applied Skills (legitimate at school)  
More choice

What do we hope?  
Level 2's & 3's leaving us Grade 12-Grads

to have workplace education  
as entrenched in our minds  
as pension plans, safety issues

eliminate boxes

\* to include workplace ed in every business budget

→ Funding! (learning communities)

✓ GOVT. / EMPLOYER COMMITMENT  
→ employee

- Viable access for all  
make learning layered and porous and permeable

Next Steps - Networking

- build on what exists
- range of workplace education happening
- equality

→ High End JOBS

relevant training  
Options for young skilled workers.

focus: Quality and excellence

Government Policies

educate educators

healthy communities

- environmentally
- socially
- economically

engaged youth

a culture of learning  
(back and forth learning)  
employers ↔ employees

→ jobs  
skilled, well paying jobs with benefits

Kids coming out of ed system with  
an understanding of work realities  
ie. work ethic like co-op programs



Michael Herzog is from Bow Valley College and is widely recognized as one of Canada's leading experts in the field of Essential Skills. He has helped numerous colleges and public and private sector organizations across Canada integrate Essential Skills strategies into their operations. Michael is also a certified Job Profile Analyst and a Service Canada-approved Essential Skills Profile Writer.

## *TEST OF WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS*

The Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES) development and usage was discussed during this session. The TOWES test was developed from the Essential Skills Initiative of Service Canada and uses the same definition of literacy as the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS).

The IALS was a survey conducted by Service Canada in both 1994 and 2004. Completed in 22 countries, it included adults between the ages of 16 and 65. The IALS was used to determine literacy levels and the impact of literacy on economic success. Both the IALS and TOWES define literacy as having proficiencies in reading text, document use, and numeracy. These competencies are measured by using a five point scale (one being the lowest level; five being the highest). The TOWES Test shows the complexities of numerous front-line occupations. The test can be used as a tool for job placements, or it can help identify individual skill levels within an organization.

It is important that employers focus on foundation skills (or essential skills) that will give employees the 'stickiness' to learn all other skills (occupational and employer specific). Employees with low skill levels tend to memorize how to do a task as opposed to grasping the reasons behind why or how a task is completed, which causes challenges for them when something changes in the workplace. Problems that may occur as a result of an employee not being able to adapt to such change include more accidents/injuries, higher rates of error, more waste, and less productivity.

Most employers in Canada require a minimum of a grade 12 education. However many Canadian adults have limited literacy skills and fall into levels one and two on the five point scale. Respondents scoring at these levels are lacking the skills needed to transfer existing knowledge to new environments. According to the Essential Skills Profiles, most entry level positions require skills at level three. Only 20% of Canadians are at the highest levels 4 and 5 which makes it difficult for Canada to compete globally.

Essential skills are only one facet of a person's value to an employer; the TOWES Test is a tool for testing these skill levels. Employers can use the results of the TOWES to assist in planning skill enhancement programs which would ultimately result in more proficient employees, fewer accidents, and more productivity.

The following pages provide an overview of the TOWES testing program.



### Essential Skills Described

**WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL SKILLS?**

- ✓ “Enabling” skills that help people perform tasks required by their jobs.
- ✓ Skills that provide workers with a **foundation** for learning other skills.
- ✓ Skills that enhance the **ability to adapt** to change.

**Workplace essential skills are the Velcro to which other training sticks**

### How Essential Skills Differ from Academic Skills

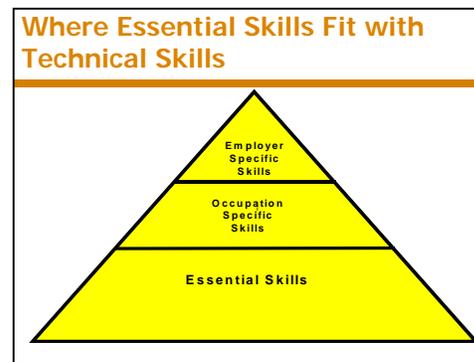
**Academic skills are classroom based**

**Essential skills are workplace based**

### The Nine Essential Skills

1. Reading text
2. Document use
3. Numeracy
4. Writing
5. Oral communication
6. Thinking skills
7. Working with others
8. Computer use
9. Continuous learning

} **Tested by TOWES**



### Government’s investment in Essential Skills...

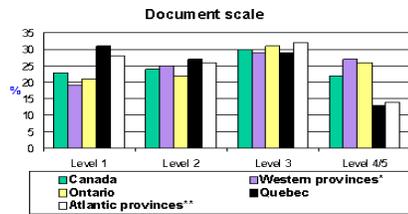
1. Essential Skills Research Project
2. Development of assessments and learning resources
3. Numerous conferences and symposiums
4. Projects such as the CAN/CME project in Newfoundland & Labrador

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada / Ressources humaines et Développement des compétences Canada

### Essential Skills Research Project (ESRP)

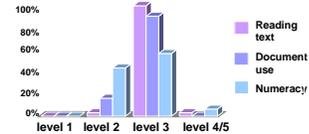
- ✓ Federal Government devised process to determine the essential skills required of jobs using the IALS 5 point scale
- ✓ Essential skill requirements for over 200 NOC job classifications have been determined; over 3000 interviews across Canada were conducted.

### Essential Skills by Region



### Workplace Demand for Skills

Entry-level jobs that don't call for a post-secondary education (e.g. cashier, security guard or labourer) still require skills at a minimum of level 2, but mostly level 3.



Source: Matching Canadians' Literacy Attainment to Actual Occupational Requirements, May 2001.

### Impact on Apprenticeship

#### Essential Requirements for Carpenters (HRSDC)

<u>NOC 7271</u>	
Reading Text	Level 3
Document use	Level 4
Numeracy	Level 3

Most important essential skills

- ✓ document use
- ✓ numeracy
- ✓ problem solving

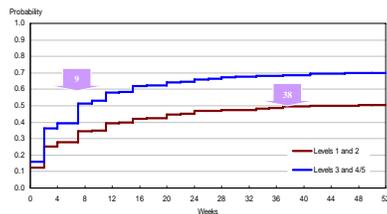
### Impact on Earnings

About 30 percent of what workers earn is linked to their level of Essential Skills



No other factors, including education and work experience are as significant

### Impact on Employment



Source: Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, 2003.

### Impact on Safety

Research by the Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council:

Drivers with level 1 reading skills are 176% more likely to be involved in a workplace incident such as accidents and spills than those at levels 3 to 5.



Source: Essential Skills as a Predictor of Safety Performance among CPPP-Certified Professional Drivers in Alberta

### TOWES Design

- ✓ TOWES uses authentic workplace documents. Places test-takers in the role of workers who must process information to complete a task
- ✓ Pencil & paper test that takes about two hours
- ✓ Bank of problem sets, varying levels of complexity
- ✓ 20 problem sets involving 60 items
- ✓ Test results reported on same 5 point scale used by HRSDC

### Quality Features

- ✓ Extensive research & development
- ✓ Expert design team
- ✓ Standards in test administration, marking & scoring
- ✓ Support services including: consulting, training, and custom design



Alison Campbell is a Senior Research Associate with the Education and Learning Practice at The Conference Board of Canada. Her work promotes national and local action strategies in the area of literacy and learning in the workplace. Along with having published numerous reports, Alison also manages websites that are designed for employers who want to improve skills

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Alison introduced her work at The Conference Board of Canada, which is an independent, not-for-profit applied research organization. The Conference Board studies economic trends and conducts business research and case studies on such topics as business performance and organizational structure.

Over several years, The Conference Board of Canada has investigated the benefits of workplace education programs and the impact of such programs for employers, employees and unions. The research also looked at the challenges organizations face in implementing successful workplace education programs.

In “The Bottom Line”, Alison shares valuable information from projects that she has been involved with:

The aging population has created a shortage of skilled laborers in certain industries. Young people will not replace retiring workers in large enough numbers, meaning more productivity per worker will be required and immigrants may be needed to fill jobs. Employers face competition that requires them to make their labour more productive *now*.

Previous research has identified the largest basic skill gaps in workplaces to be:

- Ability to communicate using English or French
- Reading and understanding information
- Understanding of and ability to use prose (reading and writing text)
- Understanding of and ability to use numbers by themselves or in charts and tables
- Listening and asking questions to understand
- Speaking effectively to share information
- Working as part of a team
- Understanding and willingness to work within the group’s culture
- Ability to cope with change
- Ability to use technology, instruments, tools and systems
- Learning continuously at work

Employers who have implemented workplace education programs have experienced benefits which include increased productivity, resulting in higher profitability and growth. Employees benefit from such programs through increased self esteem, better understanding and knowledge of work required and higher commitment to team performance. Additionally, employees who are provided with continuous learning opportunities are more valuable to

*THE BOTTOM LINE CONT.*

their employers and ultimately experience increased job satisfaction.

The following table portrays both direct and indirect benefits that can be realized through the successful implementation of skill development and workplace learning programs.

**DIRECT ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS:**

- Increased output of products and services
- Increased quality of work/product
- Reduced time per task
- Reduced error rate
- Reduced wastage in production of products and services
- Better health and safety record
- Bottom-Line Benefits:
  - Increased profitability
  - Increased customer retention

**INDIRECT BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS:**

- Employees have better, job-specific skills
- Improved employee morale/self-esteem
- Better team performance
- Improved labor-management relations
- Reduced absenteeism
- Increased employee retention
- Higher success rates in promoting or transferring employees within the organization
- Improved capacity to cope with workplace change,; improved capacity to solve problems
- Improved ability to understand and use new technology, instruments, tools and information systems effectively

Employers need to spend time on planning their workplace education program. They need to evaluate current skill levels within their organization and determine what types of programs would benefit their organization and those who are carrying out the work. Employers are often held back by their lack of expertise in planning and carrying through the action. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix to literacy and skills improvement. The following are barriers commonly faced by employers in starting up or running a workplace education program, and five strategies to overcome these barriers:

<b>BARRIERS:</b>	<b>STRATEGIES:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◀Lack of time</li> <li>◀Irregular work schedules</li> <li>◀Employee/ Manager resistance</li> <li>◀Lack of Money/ resources</li> <li>◀Difficulty evaluating program effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◀Build initial employer buy-in of benefits: Communicate economic benefits to employers, employees and unions. Give a context: Why are skills so important?</li> <li>◀Facilitate decision making and choices: Initiate the employee learning program as a partnership between management, employees, the union and other community partners</li> <li>◀Connect skill needs to training programs: Assess skill levels, and plan the curriculum to suit the context of the workplace. Utilize resources, expertise and training materials available within your community</li> <li>◀Support program development &amp; delivery: Look realistically at time and budget limitations. Consider different delivery options, adapting programs to suit individual needs, preferences and learning styles.</li> <li>◀Measure and demonstrate results: Evaluations that show impacts (such as changes in behavior and job performance) allow programs to endure and keep stakeholders engaged.</li> </ul>

*THE BOTTOM LINE cont.***BEST PRACTICES IN WORKPLACE LEARNING PROGRAMS:****12 KEY SUCCESS FACTORS**

1. Create a learning environment—Taking a holistic approach to learning will help individuals develop to their full potential.
2. Recognize literacy needs—Conduct an organizational needs assessment to identify skills a learning program should address.
3. Plan before initiating—Using the results of the needs assessment, plan and initiate actions that will meet the objects of both the organization and individual employees.
4. Find adequate funding and support—To maximize available resources, look for funding support partners and in-kind donations such as class space or learning resources.
5. Make decision making inclusive—Involve representatives of various stakeholder groups (employees, supervisors and union representatives) in the decision making process whenever possible.
6. Design an effective curriculum—An effective curriculum will help individual employees meet their personal learning goals as well as the organization's learning needs.
7. Select the right instructor—An instructor who understands the needs of the workplace and of adult learners, and who encourages and engages learners, is a key factor in program success. (Consider peer tutors and coaches to facilitate)
8. Use the best delivery mix— There are many options. Decide which learning situations will suit your organization.

- ◀e-Learning
- ◀Hands-on
- ◀Customize

9. Market and sell the program to all key stakeholders—On-going marketing, focusing on benefits and results, will sustain interest and momentum for improving employees' skills.
10. Engage supervisors—Encourage supervisors and front-line managers to support the employee learning program by showing them the benefits to be gained in the workplace. Include supervisors on the learning project team.
11. Encourage employee participation—Encourage employees to take part in the program by showing them the benefits to be gained in the workplace and in their individual careers.
12. Evaluate programs realistically—Show:

- ◀Outcomes and impacts of training programs
- ◀What is the return?
- ◀Why should we keep doing this?
- ◀Personal commitment

Publications and reports, including case studies, are available from The Conference Board of Canada library



*Diana Twiss* developed peer tutor training curriculum for the Canadian Union for Public Employee's National and has collaboratively written several pieces documenting how to establish workplace education programs. Diana has been the coordinator of the Community Development and Outreach Department of Capilano College in North Vancouver, BC since 1997.

## *Examples of Workplace Learning Models*

Diana introduced a hybrid model of workplace education - the use of peer tutors - and made suggestions for a partnership approach to implementing Workplace Education

An ideal working model includes both a dream and a framework. The "Best" program, upon which this model is based, was run at the Surrey Memorial Hospital. The program was a partnership between the Hospital Employees' Union and Capilano College.

Employees who participated in program sessions were most comfortable learning alongside peer tutors. The combination of co-workers teaching co-workers, aided by qualified instructors, fostered a positive learning environment and strengthened bonds within the workplace. The program proved successful in building individual skills and self-esteem, empowering staff to pursue their career goals and encouraging them to become life long learners.

The model has been used as the foundation upon which to build workplace learning programs for many other organizations. An overview of the model is provided on the following pages.

Detailed program information can be obtained from Capilano College.

EXAMPLES OF WORKPLACE LEARNING MODELS CONT.

## Workplace Education Presentation

### The Capilano College Experience

*Skills for Life Conference- Day Two Session Six*

(Diana Twiss)

#### Why Workplace Education?

- ❑ Technology is changing and workers need to keep up with the pace and procedures of work
- ❑ Layoffs often occur and workers need to be able to find other work
- ❑ The workforce is getting old and they often can't do the manual labour they once did
- ❑ When training is available, workers want to be able to make better use of it

#### Why are unions interested in Literacy?

- ❑ **Unions are all about workers helping workers**
- ❑ Unions want to empower their members and empowerment comes through having confidence from learning
- ❑ **Workers with increased literacy skills will be better able to follow safety procedures, participate in union meetings and respond to contract issues**
- ❑ Unions are interested in supporting workers to improve their lives

#### Checklist: Union Principles for Workplace Education

- ❑ **Respects and builds on the experience and knowledge of workers**
- ❑ Empowers participants- Builds confidence and self-esteem
- ❑ **Is relevant to the lives of participants**
- ❑ Addresses the needs of the whole person-in the workplace, at home, and in the community
- ❑ **Not just about job skills- but skills for life**
- ❑ Takes into account differences in how we learn

#### Checklist cont.

- ❑ **Respects and acknowledges differences in our race, gender, and culture**
- ❑ Workers are active participants in designing and carrying out the program
- ❑ **Integrates literacy with other aspects of workplace training**
- ❑ Assures confidentiality for the learner
- ❑ **Is accessible and open to all**
- ❑ Is voluntary
- ❑ **Builds the union**
- ❑ Add to checklist

EXAMPLES OF WORKPLACE LEARNING MODELS CONT.

### Six components to the program model

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1. Access
2. Relevance
3. Peer Tutor Model
4. Joint Union Management Approach
5. Supported by Post Secondary Institution
6. Confidentiality

### Workplace Education Program Partnership

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The City of North Vancouver, *CUPE Local 389*, and *Capilano College* have partnered to offer educational opportunities at your workplace. In mid-November, you will be invited to an information session about what opportunities exist, what learning needs you have and what a program could do for you.

Workplace education is about becoming a lifelong learner. The workplace is changing quickly and so are the skills needed to be successful. The City currently offers workers training and development. To be able to take advantage of the City's offerings, some workers need to upgrade and improve their skills. Upgrading takes time, energy, and money. This is where a basic skills workplace education program can help.

Many of us experience barriers to learning. A workplace education program can help increase your confidence in a peer supported environment. This brings you back to learning in a positive and support way.

### The Use of Peer Tutors

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- Makes the program more accessible, as many potential learners will feel more comfortable coming forward and learning with a peer
- Ensures that the program is relevant, as peer tutors know how to tie the learning into the everyday work lives of the participants
- Contributes to a sense of community in the learning centre as the peers are not 'outsiders', but are familiar, friendly faces

### The Use of Peer Tutors Cont.

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- Builds a learning environment throughout the worksite, as new connections are made and participants shift the way they interact with each other outside the learning centre as well
- Contributes to the skills of a unique group of people, as the tutors often become skilled leaders and educators throughout the worksite

### What are the benefits of a Workplace Education Program?

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- More access to education
- Safer work environment
- Ability to advance in the workplace
- Higher self-esteem

\*For more information, and to have the chance to share your learning interests, please attend the information sessions being organized in your area.

### A Workplace Education Program can offer you the following learning opportunities:

---

- General Education Diploma (GED)
- Grade 12 Equivalency
- Reading and writing upgrading
- Math upgrading
- Support if you are taking educational programs elsewhere in the community
- Chance to practice your computer skills
- Language Skills development
- Learn how to help your child with their homework!
- And much more!

EXAMPLES OF WORKPLACE LEARNING MODELS cont.

**Steps in running a Workplace Literacy Program**

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- ❑ Deciding to get involved
- ❑ Raising awareness and getting support within the union
- ❑ Setting up a union committee in the local structure
- ❑ Getting the employer on side
- ❑ Funding and negotiating the program
- ❑ Setting up a joint committee
- ❑ Identifying needs in the workplace and the union
- ❑ Building the program model, with union principles as the bottom line

**Steps cont.**

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- ❑ Instructor selection
- ❑ Generating interest-promoting and recruiting
- ❑ Program implementation-participant needs assessment, participant selection, scheduling of classes, class instructions
- ❑ Program monitoring and support
- ❑ Program evaluation and reporting

\*CUPE-Literacy in the Workplace (Workplace Literacy Programs in CUPE)

**Considering a partnership approach to implementing an Education Program in your Workplace?**

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- ❑ **Determine who the stakeholders are and invite them all to the table in the development stage**
- ❑ Establish goals, roles, and responsibilities, and decision problem solving approach
- ❑ **Meet regularly, take minutes**
- ❑ Conduct an organizational needs assessment so see how learning could impact everyone at the workplace
- ❑ **Evaluate the program annually and distribute report to all stakeholders and participants**

## *Discussion and Final Thoughts*

The Skills for Life Conference concluded on a high note with participants keen to apply new concepts to their work environments as well as making personal commitments to do something positive with what they had learned.

### ***Participants stated what they would like to implement or accomplish in the near future:***

- Computer training for employees
- Help to improve writing skills of employees
- Assist individuals to access better jobs
- Work with organizations to help them access information
- Work with organizations to create partnerships of interested individuals or groups

### ***Final Thoughts from participants:***

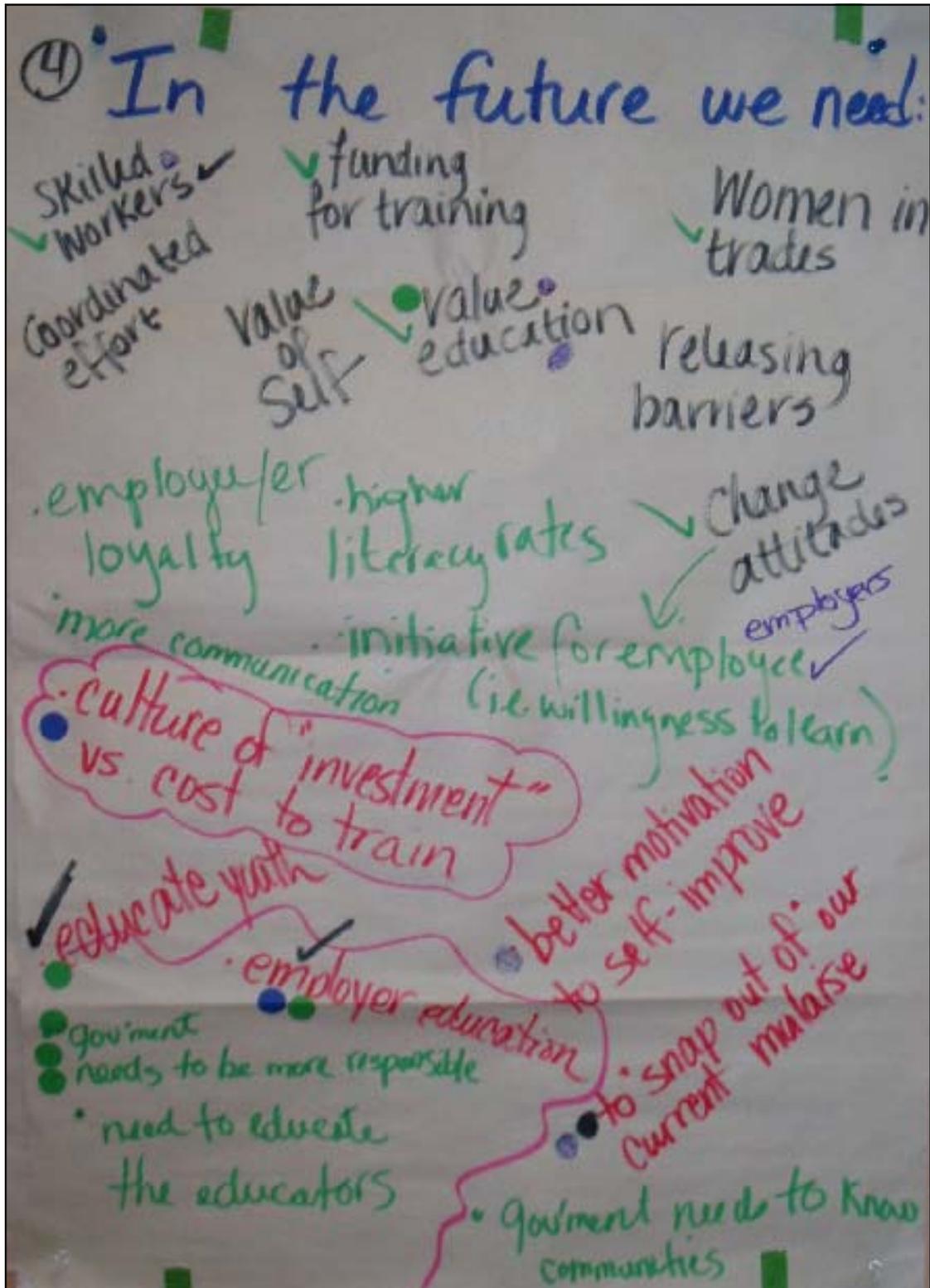
- Everything starts with me
- When you know better you do better
- Everyone needs to be included
- We want for ourselves what we want for others
- We need to create a passion for change and for learning

### ***Closing Remarks***

- We need to start thinking of workers as learners.
- We must start noticing what is involved in another person's job and the way different people work.
- We need to start thinking about where to go from here and to start doing something about it.
- We need to share resources, expertise, and funding. Ultimately, we can find and share information.



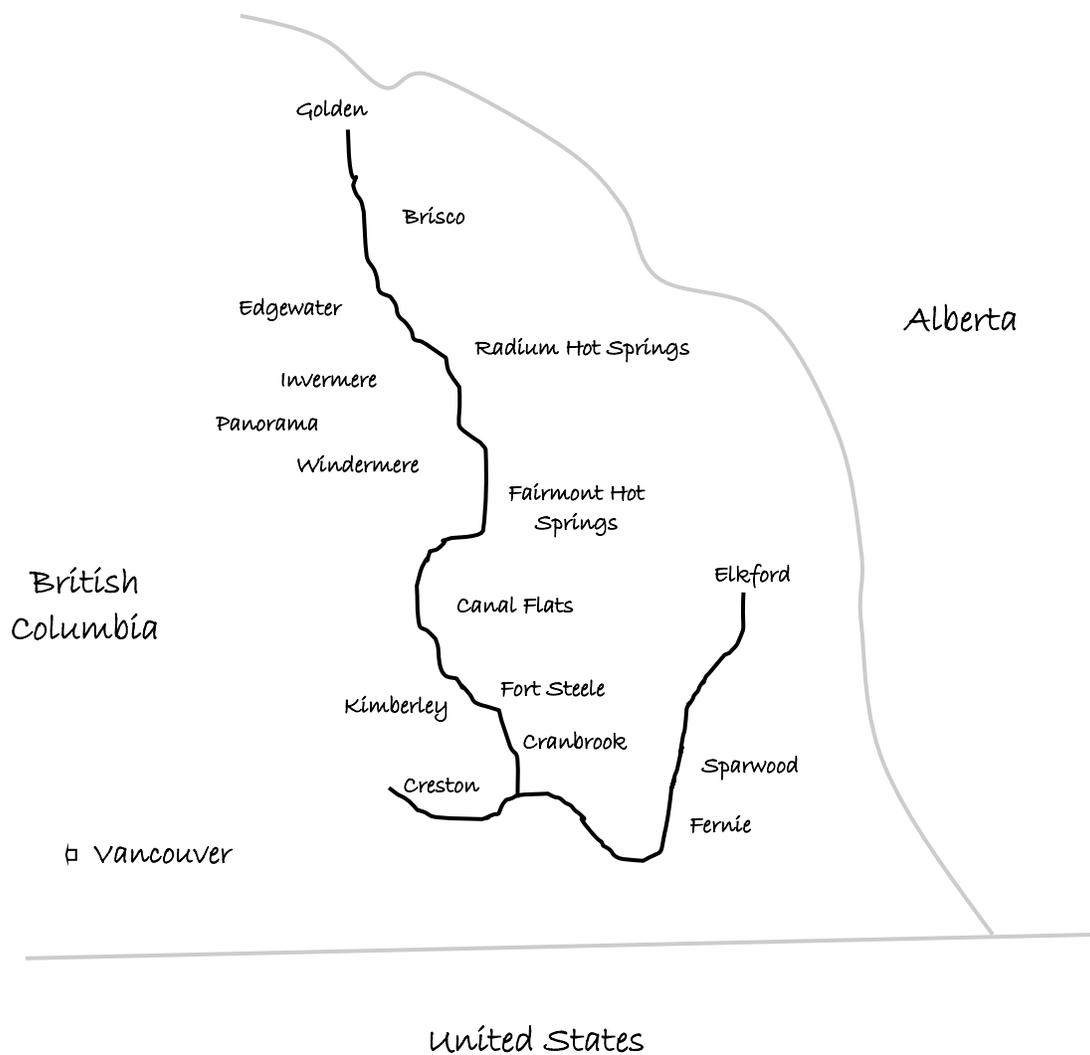
PARTICIPANTS' THOUGHTS



## ESSENTIAL SKILLS & WORKPLACE LEARNING SURVEY

### The Interview Process:

During the course of this project, the Skills for Life Team traveled throughout the East Kootenay Region, interviewing a cross-section of businesses and service providers. The interview process was designed to help understand challenges experienced in the business community with regards to employee skill levels, and to identify training requirements.



## SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How long has \_\_\_\_\_ been in business?
2. How long have you been involved with this particular business?
3. What would you consider to be the main function of your business?  
What are you providing for your customers?
4. How many people do you currently employ?
5. Would that number fluctuate during the year?  
What causes these fluctuations?
6. Do you have an education requirement when hiring new employees?
7. How long has the longest employee worked here?
8. Considering your most recent hire, how long has he/she been employed?  
In the last year how many people have you hired?  
Out of these employees, how many are still employed with your company?  
Do you re-hire past employees?
9. Do you have a staff trainer on-site, or do you outsource your training?  
Yes: Does this person have the proper qualifications to train others?  
(or is it an employee who seems most appropriate to take on that responsibility?)  
If company does outsource;  
What courses or areas of training are addressed by outside trainers?
10. What does your in-house training include:
 

Orientation	___	Management training skills	___	Food Safe	___
Task specific training	___	Customer service training	___	WHMIS	___
Computer training	___	Team work	___	Safe Work Practices	___
Communication	___	Management training skills	___	Vehicle Operation	___
11. Consider **entry level positions**, which (level) of essential skills would they need in order to successfully complete their jobs? Rating Scale: 1 to 3. (**1=basic, 2=intermediate, 3=advanced**)
 

<b>Reading Text</b>	Employee handbook, benefit package	1	2	3
<b>Document Use</b>	Ability to fill in forms / provide written information	1	2	3
<b>Numeracy</b>	Add / subtract / calculate numbers	1	2	3
<b>Oral</b>				
<b>Communication</b>	Speak with confidence, eye contact, use correct grammar	1	2	3
<b>Thinking Skills</b>	Problem Solving	1	2	3
	Decision Making	1	2	3
	Job Planning & Organization	1	2	3
	Memory Use	1	2	3
<b>Working with Others</b>				
<b>Others</b>	Recognizes the importance of teamwork	1	2	3
<b>Computer Use</b>	Understands and uses computer based programs	1	2	3
<b>Continuous Learning</b>				
<b>Learning</b>	Willingness to pursue training, personal development	1	2	3

*SURVEY QUESTIONS CONT.*

12. Consider **senior level positions**, which (level) of essential skills would they need in order to successfully complete their jobs?

Rating Scale: 1 to 3. (1=basic, 2=intermediate, 3=advanced)

<b>Reading Text</b>	Employee handbook, benefit package	1	2	3
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<b>Document Use</b>	Ability to fill in forms / provide written information	1	2	3
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<b>Numeracy</b>	Add / subtract / calculate numbers	1	2	3
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**Oral**

<b>Communication</b>	Speak with confidence, eye contact, use correct grammar	1	2	3
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<b>Thinking Skills</b>	Problem Solving	1	2	3
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Decision Making	1	2	3
-----------------	---	---	---

Job Planning & Organization	1	2	3
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Memory Use	1	2	3
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**Working with**

<b>Others</b>	Recognizes the importance of teamwork	1	2	3
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<b>Computer Use</b>	Understands and uses computer based programs	1	2	3
---------------------	--	---	---	---

**Continuous**

<b>Learning</b>	Willingness to pursue training, personal development	1	2	3
-----------------	--	---	---	---

13. Do you have in place a program that provides opportunities for employees to move into different jobs within the organization?

Yes: Tell me about the program:

No: What are your reasons for not offering this type of program?

14. Have you attended or are you attending work related classes or courses?

If so what are they?

Did you find them valuable?

15. Do any of your employees currently attend work related classes or courses?

Yes: What are they?

Are they more productive and motivated after completing work related courses?

16. Does your company pay for or subsidize continuing education?

17. Do your employees rely on equipment or machinery to carry out their tasks?

Specify:

Do you provide the necessary training?

No: Are employees expected to be trained prior to employment?

18. To what extent are computers utilized in the workplace?

Office Applications, Inventory Applications, Customized Industry or Business Applications, Customized Computers:

19. During your time in this business, have you brought in new technology and / or equipment?

If so, what procedures are in place to train new or existing employees?

20. If you were to further develop your training program, are there specific jobs or areas that you would like to focus on?

21. In your opinion, do your employees have the skills required for the tasks performed in the workplace?

22. Are you encountering any issues regarding your employees' job performance?

If so, what are they?

What are you doing to address the issues?

What attribute do you feel is the most valuable for an employee to possess?

## SURVEY RESULTS

In total 77 businesses were interviewed in the following industries:

Food & Beverage Establishments	8
Golf & Recreation Providers	6
Hospitality (hotel, motel, resort)	6
Manufacturers of Goods	2
Sawmills	4
Mining	1
Retail Outlets	27
Service Providers (including non-profit)	23

Figure 1: Businesses Interviewed (This reflects approximately 2% of businesses in the East Kootenay)

### Business Demographics:

A wide range of businesses were interviewed from small to large, seasonal and year-round, union and non-union, public and private. The results articulate the training challenges that exist within the East Kootenay and the types of learning opportunities business owners believe would benefit employees, employers and the business communities in which they operate.

Figure 2: Business Demographics

Type of Business	Hospitality	F & B	Mining	Winter/ Summer Recreation	Manufacturing	Mill	Retail	Service
<b># of Employees</b>								
0 - 50	4	6	1	2	2	1	22	20
51-100	1	2		1			3	2
101-150							1	1
151 +	1			3		3	1	
<b>Years in Operation</b>								
0-1							1	
1-5	1	6		2			4	3
5+	5	2	1	4	2	4	22	20
<b>Business Focus</b>								
Goods	1	8	1	1	1	4	22	4
Services	2	6		3	1		15	22
Atmosphere	2			5	1		4	2

## SKILLS FOR LIFE SURVEY RESULTS cont.

### Literacy and Essential Skills Profile:

Essential skills profiles describe how each of the nine essential skills is used by employees in a particular occupation. Employers were asked to identify the skill levels required for both entry level positions and senior level positions within their organization.

Employers were asked the following questions, provided with a list of essential skills and asked to rate each skill at a level 1, 2 or 3. (These levels do not reflect the IALSS scale, simply the employers' view of the level of difficulty.)

Consider **Entry Level Positions**, which (level) of essential skills would (employees) need in order to do their jobs?

Consider **Senior Level Positions, supervisor or manager**, which (level) of essential skills would (employees) need in order to do their jobs?

**Note: Level 1 = Basic**

**Level 2 = Intermediate**

**Level 3 = Advanced Skills**

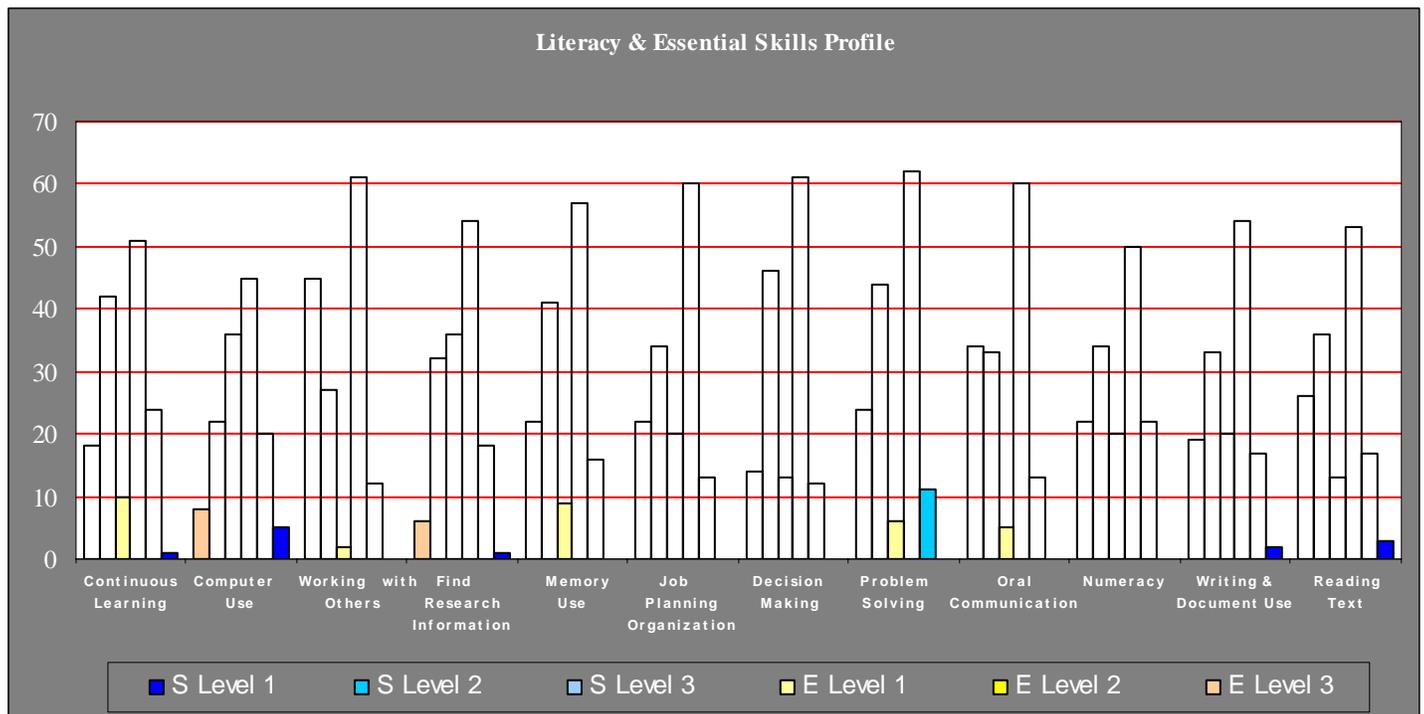
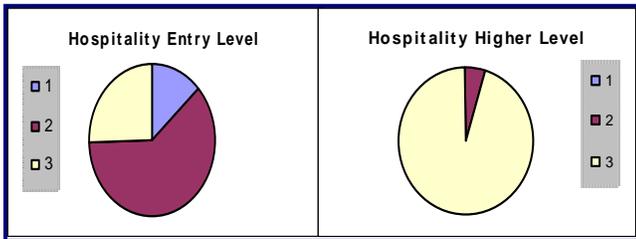


Figure 3: Literacy & Essential Skills Profile for the East Kootenays (totals of all industries by category)

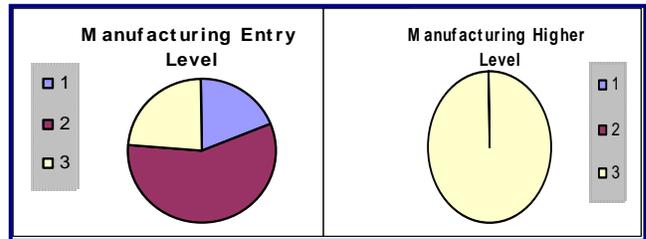
Note: S denotes the requirements for a senior-level position, E denotes the requirements for an entry-level position

SKILLS FOR LIFE SURVEY RESULTS CONT.

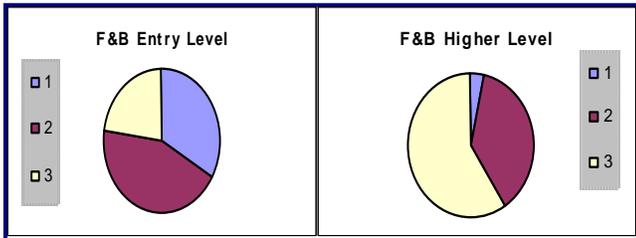
Literacy and Essential Skills Profile: Industry Totals  
HOSPITALITY



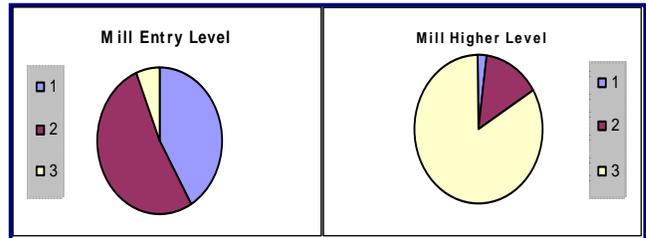
MANUFACTURING



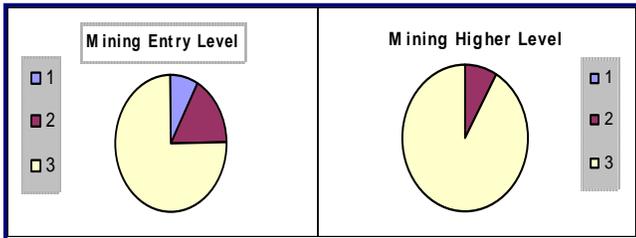
FOOD & BEVERAGE



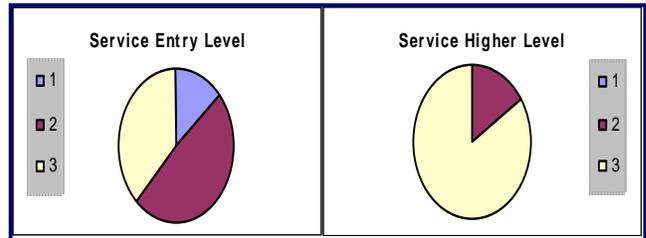
MILL



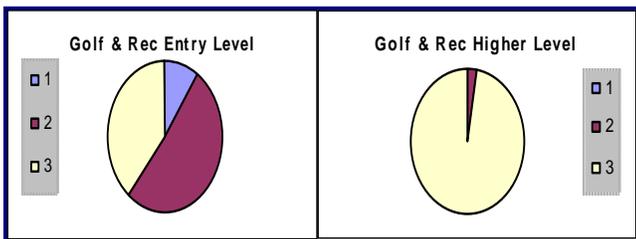
MINING



RETAIL



GOLF & RECREATION



SERVICE

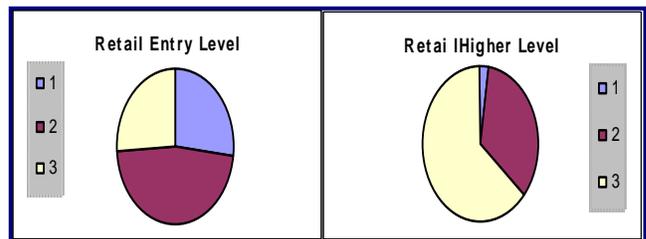


Figure 4: Literacy Skills required by Industry Segments (categories combined totals—levels 1,2 & 3)

Note: Level 1 = Basic Skills      Level 2 = Intermediate Skills      Level 3 = Advanced Skills  
These levels do not reflect the IALSS scale of levels.

## SKILLS FOR LIFE SURVEY RESULTS CONT.

### What are the Issues?

East Kootenay businesses, which were interviewed, identified a number of issues that prevented effective training and impacted their business operations:

- 58% of these businesses stated that their operation is dependent on tourism trends and staffing requirements increase dramatically during high seasons.
- There is a shortage of available labor during the high seasons; businesses find themselves understaffed with little time for training.
- There is an on-going shortage of skilled labor available to the workforce.
- Desired certification, trade courses, and degree programs are not available locally.
- Small businesses feel they cannot justify the time or the expense of training.
- High turnover rates are experienced, particularly in the Food and Beverage, Golf & Recreation, Hospitality and Retail industries. On average, during the last 12 months, 2.5 individuals were hired for every available position which creates a continuous challenge during the high seasons.
- Employers have reported that individuals currently entering the workforce lack a strong work ethic, have “attitude”, and are difficult to train.
- The majority of businesses stated that they do or would promote from within; 35% of employers prepare employees through cross-training or job shadowing; only 5 employers have a formal development program in place.
- 12% of employers state that they do not have effective recruiting practices in place, and that they require a higher level of leadership and training skills.

**30% of employers stated that employees are performing at or below an acceptable skill level. 12% of these employers noted a lack of basic skills in reading, writing/document use, numeracy and problem solving.**

**Additionally, 17% of employers stated that, while employees are performing at an acceptable level, there is room for improvement.**

SKILLS FOR LIFE SURVEY RESULTS CONT.

**How employers are addressing the issues:**

The interview process provided the Skills for Life team with an outline of how East Kootenay businesses are reaching out to their employees and the kinds of training they still wish to provide.

76% of businesses interviewed currently offer basic training, with the majority of time spent on orientation and task training. 77% of managers and 61% of staff members have or currently attend seminars, workshops or continuing education courses. Notwithstanding, 58% of businesses let our interviewers know that their training requirements are not currently being met.

TRAINING NEEDS	Provided In House	Accessed by Computer	Offered On-Line	Out-sourced	Prerequisite for Employment	Training Needed is not Provided or Insufficient	Totals
<b>BUSINESS SPECIFIC TRAINING:</b>							
Internally Motivated Training	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Business Knowledge	2	0	0	0	0	1	3
Orientation	50	1	0	0	0	3	54
Policy	8	0	1	0	0	2	11
Product	8	0	2	8	0	6	24
Task	58	0	0	0	0	0	58
<b>LITERACY &amp; ESSENTIAL SKILLS TRAINING:</b>							
Communication Interpersonal Skills	12	0	0	2	0	6	20
Communication Devices	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Computer	27	0	0	7	1	6	41
Continuous Learning/Personal Dev	0	0	0	2	0	5	7
Goal Setting	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Language ESL/Native	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Math/Numeracy	0	0	0	0	0	5	5
Problem Solving	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Reading	0	0	0	1	0	3	4
Team	17	0	0	2	0	2	21
Time Management/Organization	1	0	1	1	0	4	7
<b>POST - SECONDARY EDUCATION:</b>							
Degree - Certificate - Trades - Professional Designations	1	0	2	14	11	0	28
<b>PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:</b>							
Work Specific - General Workshops - Seminars (staff/management)	54	1	5	55	0	39	154
<b>SAFETY SEMINARS &amp; TRAINING:</b>							
Health & Safety (worksafe) - Emergency Response - Job Specific	37	0	1	38	4	6	86
<b>SKILL BASED:</b>							
Equipment - Computer - Technical Trng	31	0	0	12	0	6	49

Figure 5: overview of training and training needs.

*SKILLS FOR LIFE SURVEY RESULTS CONT.*

**Additional Information:**

Businesses identified specific training needs; the most crucial being:

- **Communication**
- **Computer Skills and Upgrading**
- **Customer Service**
- **Management / Leadership**
- **Math / Numeracy**
- **Product Knowledge**
- **Safety**
- **Sales**

75% of businesses interviewed provided subsidies to attend continuing education programs or would provide assistance to employees to take work related courses.

25% of businesses take advantage of training programs provided through their head office, franchise support team, or manufacturer representatives.

14% of businesses would like certification programs available for their specific industries.

**Employee Attributes:**

Workplace attributes that the business community described as being the most valuable were:

- **Interpersonal and Communication**      **38%**
- **Good Work Ethic**                              **28%**
- **Good Attitude**                                 **18%**
- **Team Work**                                        **7%**
- **Common Sense**                                 **6%**
- **Knowledgeable**                                 **3%**

## EAST KOOTENAY CHARACTERISTICS

### Labour Force Characteristics:

(The following information was provided from the RDEK Regional Profile Issue No. 5 November 2005)

In 2001, approximately 29,665 people made up the East Kootenay labour force, which is almost unchanged from 1996. The participation rate (labour force expressed as a percentage of the population 15 years and older) was 66.4%, just above the provincial average of 65.2%. The participation rate was 72.7% for men and 60.1% for women.

### Number of Business Establishments:

In 2004 there were 4,740 businesses in the East Kootenay Region.

Number of Employees	Number of Businesses
0	2196*
1 - 19	2298
20 - 49	159
50 plus	87

- Includes self-employed, contractors, businesses employing part-time only, family-member only

Source: BC Stats, Establishment Counts by Employee Size, 1995-2004

### East Kootenay Income:

In 2001 the average personal income in the East Kootenay Region was \$29,375. This was 6.9% lower than the provincial average. The average income for men was \$36,935 and for women \$20,410. The average income for people working full-time, year-round was \$42,298. This is only 3.9% below the provincial average and was \$48,824 for men and \$31,446 for women.

The average family income in the East Kootenay Region was \$61,045 or 5.8% below the provincial average.

PRESENTER CONTACT INFORMATION



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## RESOURCES

<b>ABC CANADA</b>	<a href="http://www.abc-canada.org/">www.abc-canada.org/</a>
<b>B.C. Statistics</b>	<a href="http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/">www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/</a>
<b>Bow Valley College (Towes Test)</b>	<a href="http://www.bowvalleycollege.ca">www.bowvalleycollege.ca</a>
<b>Canadian Council on Social Development</b>	<a href="http://www.ccsd.ca/facts.html">www.ccsd.ca/facts.html</a>
<b>College of the Rockies</b>	<a href="http://www.cotr.bc.ca">www.cotr.bc.ca</a>
<b>Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy</b>	<a href="http://www.cbal.org">www.cbal.org</a>
<b>Human Resources and Skills Development Canada</b>	<a href="http://www.hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca/essentialskills">www.hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca/essentialskills</a>
<b>Literacy B.C</b>	<a href="http://www.nald.ca/lbc.htm">http://www.nald.ca/lbc.htm</a>
<b>Movement for Canadian Literacy</b>	<a href="http://www.literacy.ca/">www.literacy.ca/</a>
<b>Skill Plan</b>	<a href="http://www.skillplan.ca">www.skillplan.ca</a>
<b>Statistics Canada</b>	<a href="http://www.statcan.ca/start.html">www.statcan.ca/start.html</a>
<b>The Conference Board of Canada</b>	<a href="http://www.conferenceboard.ca/workplaceliteracy">www.conferenceboard.ca/ workplaceliteracy</a>
	<a href="http://www.work-basedlearning.org">www.work-basedlearning.org</a>
	<a href="http://www.scorecardforskills.com">www.scorecardforskills.com</a>
	<a href="http://www.workplacebasicskills.com">www.workplacebasicskills.com</a>
<b>The Learning Factor</b>	<a href="http://www.thelearningfactor.ca">www.thelearningfactor.ca</a>
<b>The National Institute for Literacy</b>	<a href="http://www.nifl.gov">www.nifl.gov</a>
<b>Free Downloadable Reports Please visit:</b>	<a href="http://www.conferenceboard.ca/education">www.conferenceboard.ca/education</a>
<b>Profiting from Literacy:</b> Creating a Sustainable Workplace Literacy program	
<b>Strength from Within:</b> Overcoming Barriers to Workplace Literacy Development	
<b>Turning Skills into Profit:</b> Economic Benefits of Workplace Education Programs	

## Where do we go from here?

**The Skills for Life Conference** began dialogues on the need to establish effective workplace education programs. The supporting partners for this project are committed to continuing discussions and turning the wheels of change. Research, resources and guidelines are readily available.

Tracy Dafoe, facilitator and speaker for this conference, says simply:

“For solutions we need to accommodate the individual person in their real context. You can’t upgrade the skills of a town or a factory - it takes hundreds and thousands of individual changes to make a difference. Participants will be at all levels of any organization. Everyone will have to change.”

As one conference participant commented:

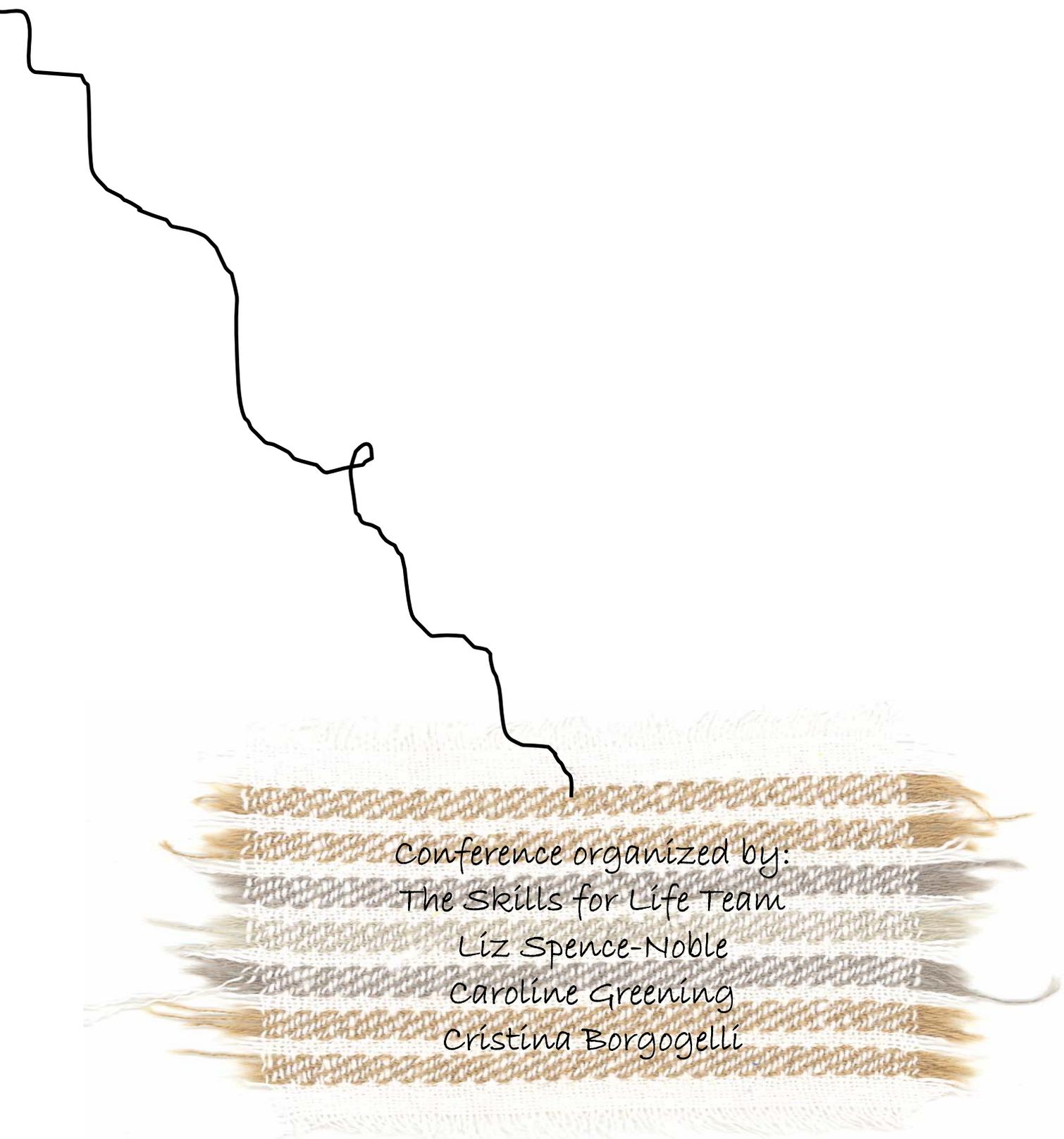
“This conference will be a success if we apply what we have learned to our workplace and encourage literacy while applying learning.”

Where we go from here depends on each of us and all of us. The Skills for Life Conference showed us the road and now we need to go down it, finding companions along the way. Conference participants were committed to supporting learning in the workplace, the College of the Rockies and the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy are willing to act as resources and participate in actions, and all of the conference presenters would be happy to discuss possibilities.

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Conference organized by:  
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