



Literacy for All – Learning for Life

Igniting the Power Within Project Report 2009 - 2011

Background

In the Atlantic Provinces the employment and literacy rates are among the lowest in Canada. In today's uncertain economic climate the need for adult learners to recognize the necessity for essential skills is greater than ever. They also need to recognize and document the skills they have. This recognition will improve their ability to achieve meaningful and lasting employment. *Igniting the Power Within (IPW)* is a program that addresses this need.

IPW is a training model that was developed for and by Aboriginals in Manitoba. The model was very successful in helping Aboriginals identify and document their skills to allow them find meaningful employment. This training model uses storytelling as a key teaching method. No PowerPoint presentations are used, but instead participants hear real people telling their stories of overcoming obstacles and finding success.

The PEI Literacy Alliance heard of the success of *IPW* in Manitoba and wanted to see if this model would also benefit non-Aboriginals in the Atlantic Provinces. We invited the *IPW Facilitation Team* from Manitoba to come to PEI and present their model which involves four workshops.

The Government of Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills funded this project.



IPW Facilitators from Manitoba

Igniting the Power Within in PEI

The *Igniting the Power Within Facilitation Team*, made up of 5 to 7 presenters, came to PEI four times to host leveled workshops. Each workshop was two-days long and built from the previous workshop. They showed participants how to use their training model. Participants were mostly employment counselors from the four Atlantic Provinces.

Our partnership with the *IPW Facilitation Team* allowed us to deliver a high quality professional development program to 46 people who work with adult learners and/or Aboriginals in the Atlantic Provinces. Those who participated gained skills that should improve how they work with their clients

The IPW Facilitation Team taught participants various skills to help them help their clients increase their essential skills and find meaningful employment. Participants gained the skills and knowledge outlined in each of the four leveled workshops:

Level 1: Essential Skills and PLAR

- What essential skills are and why they are important
- How essential skills can help your community
- What PLAR is and why it is important

Level 2: Building Portfolio

- What a portfolio is and why creating one is important
- Introduction to coaching others to identify their skills, knowledge and gifts
- How to build evidence for a portfolio
- How to organize it all
- How to set goals and overcome barriers

Level 3: Essential Skills and Portfolio for Community

- How to be a skilled coach
- How to self-reflect
- How to examine life events and pull evidence of the Essential Skills

Level 4: Celebrating Your Voice

- How to use a portfolio
- How to present Essential Skills and abilities with confidence
- How to teach these skills to others

Many people in the field of adult literacy were ready and excited for this professional development opportunity. We received a lot of interest in this project from the beginning and many of those who attended said

they would like to see similar professional development continue for more people.

We received many positive comments through our evaluation surveys. Many participants said they will be able to work more effectively with their clients.

Outcomes of the Project

The project's short-term outcomes were:

1. Increased networks and partnerships
2. Increased knowledge of ES, PLAR and Portfolio building among our target populations
3. Increased knowledge of the effectiveness of training

The project's intermediate outcomes were:

1. Increased integration of essential skills into current adult education programs and services in Atlantic Canada
2. Improved knowledge and identification of essential skills by the participants in adult education programs
3. Improved communication and transfer of information within the adult literacy and essential skills field in Atlantic Canada

The project's long-term outcome was:

1. To improve employability for participants in adult education programs

Most of the participants were employment counselors or instructors. They work directly with clients who are adult learners or those trying to increase their essential skills to find fulfilling employment. The workshops created an excellent opportunity for networking among like-minded organizations.

The Alliance developed a strong partnership with the Mi'kmaq Confederacy, Provincial Literacy Initiatives Secretariat and Workplace Learning PEI through our advisory committee.

The external evaluation report shows that this project has increased knowledge of Essential Skills, PLAR and portfolio building among our target populations.

All participants who filled out the evaluation survey said they would use what they learned with their clients in their communities.

It is too soon to know if this project has improved employability for participants in adult education programs. However, we do know that the 17 participants who filled out the final survey said that they will implement what they have learned and have already done so to some extent.

Success stories

We had a dedicated and reliable Advisory Committee. They worked very well together, provided good guidance and support, and went out of their way to help us address issues and challenges as they arose.

We had a professional Program Coordinator with the organizational skills and dedication required to carry out the project work. The Program Coordinator worked very hard to ensure the workshop participants had a good experience, the workshops were well organized, and that the needs of the *IPW Facilitation Team* were met.

The *IPW Facilitation Team* were strong facilitators. They engaged the workshop participants, delivered the information in a way that was easy to understand, and ensured that participants had plenty of chances to practice using the knowledge and skills they learned.

We had a supportive funder. The funder was extremely supportive and provided extra funding as needed to ensure the project was a success and met the mandate of both parties involved in carrying out the work.

Lessons Learned

Ensure that both organizations involved in the project have similar mandates that support one another and fit into the proposed work plan. There were a few issues that arose due to differing mandates between the PEI Literacy Alliance and the *Igniting the Power Within Facilitation Team*. As a result, changes to the project plan and budget had to be made as the project unfolded to ensure the needs of both organizations were met. This resulted in a lot of extra work and time on the part of all involved.

Have a strong communication plan in place that allows the two organizations working together to communicate effectively.

Throughout the course of the project, the Program Coordinator had difficulties connecting with the *IPW Facilitation Team*. Before the work

began it may have been helpful to create a bi-weekly schedule for phone meetings through-out the length of the project.

Keep the Advisory Committee members up-to-date on the project process. The Advisory committee members who filled out the evaluation survey noted that they were 'sort of' or 'not at all' kept up-to-date on the project process. When engaging key stakeholders in a project, even if their role is minimal, it is important to make them aware of how the work they contributed to is unfolding. This helps ensure continued buy-in and interest in the work.

Ensure the program is offered in a way that is realistic, cost effective and timely for facilitators and participants. All the facilitators and many of the participants had to travel great distances to attend the workshops. It may have been more practical to offer the workshops in a different way to save facilitators and participants time and money as they had to make four trips to Charlottetown, PEI.

Conclusion

46 employment counselors from the Atlantic Provinces have gained skills and knowledge to help them be more effective in helping their clients. They were trained in identifying essential skills, prior learning assessment recognition, portfolio development, coaching others, and self-reflection. Many of the participants said they would use what they learned in their workplace. Their clients now have an increased chance of finding meaningful employment.

If you would like more information about *Igniting the Power Within* workshops that took place in PEI, please contact the PEI Literacy Alliance at 902-368-3620.

To learn more about the *Igniting the Power Within* model please visit <http://www.ignitingthepowerwithin.ca>.