

---

# Case Study 2: Ontario

---

October 22, 2015

## Introduction

Education offerings for adults with limited literacy or language skills too often consist of stand-alone programs tied to specific funding objectives. Integrated programming, in contrast, offers the opportunity to combine programs and services in effective and meaningful ways to better meet the needs of learners, not institutions.

While some have documented what integrated programming is and why it is worth considering, few have described the realities faced by those who attempt to implement it<sup>1</sup>. In order to address this knowledge gap, a two-year project, funded through Employment and Social Development Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, explored and documented the process of implementation in different contexts. *Designed to Work / Sur mesure pour l'emploi* worked in four provinces to support implementation sites as they set up integrated programming for adults with limited literacy skills. Within this project, research was conducted to identify the conditions that are conducive to the establishment of integrated programs. Case studies were used to explore how these programs are implemented.

## Research methods

Two data collection techniques were used to gather data from Job Skills, the implementation site used to produce this case study: individual interviews and document review. One researcher was responsible for data collection and analysis. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews using pre-established interview guides and analyzed the data using codes identified in the process of drafting Case Study 1.

Three interviews were conducted in November 2014 as project initiation activities took place:

- One in-person interview with the implementation lead
- One telephone interview with the executive director
- One telephone interview with RESDAC support personnel

---

<sup>1</sup> See RESDAC's report, *The what & why of integrated programming: A review of the literature*, by Geraci & Mazzulla (2013).

Five interviews were conducted in June and July 2015 at the start of the program design phase:

- One telephone interview with the implementation lead
- Four telephone interviews with representatives from the steering committee

Interviews were supplemented with telephone updates provided by the implementation lead typically once per month. Telephone updates were scheduled on an ad hoc basis and were used to keep abreast of implementation activities.

Job Skills' staff reviewed a draft of this case study to offer corrections and clarifications, and to elaborate on the contents as necessary.

This case study captures activities associated with all aspects of the implementation process carried out by Job Skills and its partners between October 2014 and August 2015. At the time of writing, program design and curriculum development activities were underway and funding for program delivery was being sought. The Food Service Worker integrated program was projected to begin in early 2016.

## Case Study

### Program Description

Job Skills' Food Service Worker program was designed to help participants develop the technical, English language and soft skills needed to retain employment in the healthcare sector, as well as the job search skills needed to obtain employment. It was intended for South Asian women in the Markham area who otherwise had limited access to sector-specific employment training. Successful participants were set to achieve Food Service Worker certification, a designation that permits individuals to work in healthcare settings.

The program was being designed as a full-time, face-to-face program where participants would attend between the hours of 8:30 and 3:30 daily, for about five months. In-class instruction was expected to be supplemented with hands-on training (e.g., labs, simulations, projects), job site observations and a work placement. The target number of participants was set at 20.

The new program serves as an example of an integrated program whereby all skills necessary for success on the job are developed concurrently. It also relies on a delivery model that allows for the integration of partners' financial and andragogical resources; several organizations pooled financial resources and four organizations agreed to deliver different components of the training in concert.

## Context

Job Skills offers employment and business support services and programming in ten locations in York Region, Bradford West Gwillimbury, Halton, Peel and Toronto. Clients include unemployed individuals who are searching for employment and those interested in starting their own businesses. As explained by one of the interviewees, *“At Job Skills we focus on growing people’s potential in their community, to be the best they can be, to achieve their goals.”*

The newcomer services division is devoted to addressing the unique needs of newcomers and immigrants to Canada who are interested in accessing Canadian workplaces. As part of the newcomer services division, Job Skills offers services at York Region’s five Welcome Centres<sup>2</sup>. They also manage the Markham North Welcome Centre, the location for the integrated program. According to an interviewee, *“York Region is growing in leaps and bounds”* with Markham attracting large numbers of newcomers.

## Initiation

Implementation sites for the *Designed to Work / Sur mesure pour l’emploi* project were identified using input from provincial government representatives. Job Skills was referred to the project team through another local service provider because of their reputation for offering robust employment services.

For Job Skills, the project’s national scope was seen as a way for staff to learn from others. In addition, Job Skills saw benefit in those project activities that would enable them to talk to government representatives about new funding models. They saw value in identifying new ways to look at service delivery, particularly because their experience showed the benefits that can accrue to clients when they work collaboratively with different partners. Typical clients at Welcome Centres receive services, referrals and action plans based on the outcomes of thorough needs assessments. Action plans help clients access services and supports offered by multiple agencies concurrently. Much like integrated programming, the Welcome Centre model provides a one-stop shop for newcomers in the area of adult education.

---

<sup>2</sup> Welcome Centres are unique to Ontario. They house five core agencies that offer a range of complementary services to newcomers, including language development, employment services, accreditation information services, settlement support, including youth, women and seniors’ services and childcare. In addition, Welcome Centres establish partnerships with agencies and organizations that offer complimentary services such as Ontario Works, Service Canada and Community Legal and Family Counselling services. Each Welcome Centre is operated and managed by one of the core service provider agencies.

Client needs played a crucial role in Job Skills' decision to implement an integrated program. Staff at the Markham North Welcome Centre identified that a large number of South Asian women who access the Welcome Centre do not have the minimum language skills required to enter existing training programs. An interviewee explained, *"It's frustrating because there is a limit as to what I can do for them."* Integrated programming was seen as a good option that would expand the range of services offered by Job Skills in an effort to meet the needs of this underserved group.

An existing employee was seconded two days per week to serve as the implementation lead throughout the project. The management team at Job Skills provided her with initial direction. As part of the *Designed to Work/Sur mesure pour l'emploi* project, RESDAC support personnel answered questions and provided implementation assistance through bi-weekly telephone meetings.

### *Needs identification*

Needs identification activities were initiated soon after Job Skills agreed to be part of the *Designed to Work/Sur mesure pour l'emploi* project.

Job Skills identified the target group by considering which newcomer groups were underserved at that time. They found that many South Asian women who accessed the Welcome Centre did not have sufficient English language proficiency to qualify for existing employment-oriented programs. As such, they were seen as a good fit.

Three potential occupations were initially identified all of which were considered attractive and accessible to the target group: hotel housekeeping, food handling and early childhood education. A key consideration in choosing the occupational focus was establishing that there was indeed a need for workers in the occupations by speaking to employers. As articulated by the implementation lead, *"It doesn't make sense for me to be training people for sectors in which there are no jobs."* Furthermore, Job Skills wanted to choose an occupation that offered reasonable wages and resulted in an industry-recognized certification attainable by the target group. Certification is critical as it gives participants a competitive advantage when seeking employment.

After deliberation and discussions with RESDAC support personnel, potential partners and steering committee members, Job Skills decided to focus its program on food service workers in healthcare settings. The occupation was chosen for its high employment rates and higher than average wages, as well as its relatively attractive hours of employment. A review of existing programs revealed that various colleges in the region offer food service worker training; however, the training is designed for individuals with strong English-language skills and well-

developed soft skills. Job Skills also found that a local college looked as though it might be willing to adapt their existing program to the target group and confer certificates. In combination, this meant that the occupation met all of Job Skills' criteria in the context of this project.

The implementation lead sought advice on how to engage employers from other agencies that had recently delivered occupation-specific programming. Job Skills staff members then contacted employers to describe the planned program and arrange interviews and observations. Staff visited two work sites to explore occupational demands. They conducted interviews with food service workers and their managers and observed workers as they carried out job duties.

RESDAC's project team carried out a language analysis soon after the interviews and observations had concluded, using data from job site visits and published occupational data. The language analysis identified, catalogued and analyzed the reading, writing, listening and speaking tasks food services workers perform in healthcare settings. The analysis was intended to help establish a realistic minimum language level for entry into Job Skills' integrated skills program as well as inform curriculum development efforts.

### *Steering Committee & Partnership Development*

Needs identification and partnership development occurred at the same time. For the most part, individuals and organizations that were identified as partners that could support the initiative were invited to serve as steering committee members.

Job Skills sought partners who would help with all stages of needs identification, program design and program delivery, and could contribute expertise and financial resources to the initiative. They approached employers, economic development organizations, education providers, social service agencies and workforce planning boards.

Job Skills worked to identify steering committee members who held decision-making authority in their respective organizations. Most initial partners were identified through pre-existing relationships. Additional steering committee members were identified as needs identification and implementation activities advanced. Members included:

- Job Skills' Welcome Centre manager, employment services managers and the executive director
- The English as a Second Language program manager from a local school board
- An income and employability support supervisor from the municipality
- A supervisor of long-term care employees
- A representative from a national applied research organization
- A program developer from a provincial literacy organization

- A manager from an organization that provides services to the South Asian community
- A department chair from a local community college that delivers food service worker training
- A manager from an immigrant services provider that delivers life skills training

Steering committee members had a variety of reasons for wanting to be part of the initiative. The most common reasons related to the recognition that the initiative has the potential to serve individuals in need of training, address education and training gaps and meet labour market needs.

The steering committee met approximately once a month. Meetings provided a platform for Job Skills to describe the potential benefits of integrated programs and a place for partners to share their experience, offer their expertise and influence the implementation process. Steering committee members contributed to discussions and decisions on job prospects, occupational focus, project scope, targets, screening and eligibility criteria, partnership development, soft skills and language skills instruction, and occupational demands.

Committee members helped identify additional partners that could provide curriculum and training staff; they also pointed out other projects, resources and funds that could help Job Skills launch the initiative. Partners contributed in various ways outside steering committee meetings as well. Some members committed financial resources to the initiative, while others helped identify potential employer partners. Education partners willingly shared curriculum for review and analysis. Job Skills' experience working with multiple partners and the pre-existing relationships between partners contributed to a positive working environment and cordial meetings.

While the commitment of the steering committee was vital to the successes experienced, their efforts were not without some challenges. Integrating new partners into the steering committee structure as the project progressed aligned with the project's needs. However, it demanded that steering committee time be devoted to providing an overview of the project's purpose and goals each time new partners joined the committee. Both Job Skills and steering committee members commented that it proved difficult to find the time to attend meetings and carry out project-related activities given already busy schedules. And finding suitable employment partners in the targeted sector remained a challenge throughout the implementation process. Some staff of long-term care facilities and food service providers that employ food service workers expressed interest in the initiative; however, formal support at a corporate level proved elusive. Employers were hesitant to invest in a training program for new hires. As explained by a steering committee member, *"The challenge – and this is not a reflection of this project but a reflection of any project – it's very difficult to get employers on board."*

## Design

### *Program Design*

Once the target audience and occupational focus were selected, and training partners were on board who would be delivering the training, program design activities began in earnest.

The Food Service Worker program was designed to integrate language skills training (English as a second language), technical skills training and soft skills training, also referred to as employability skills, all with an eye to helping participants perform to the standards required by employers. In addition, job search skills were included to help participants access employment opportunities. The program was expected to include more hours of instruction than a typical college program in order to address all the skills needs of the target audience. This additional time was allocated in part to hands-on learning activities (e.g., labs, simulations, projects), job site visits and extended work placements, changes which employers suggested from their experience with existing Food Service Worker program graduates. These changes were also consistent with steering committee members' perspectives; they were adamant that increased exposure to job sites better prepares participants for employment.

Different program components were to be delivered by different education and service providers. Job Skills and an immigrant services organization planned to develop and provide job search training, employment services and occupation-specific soft skills training. The partnering school board offered to deliver occupation-specific English as a Second Language instruction and the college contributed Ministry of Health-approved food service worker technical training. The college's contribution enabled participants to achieve certification, a critical component of the Food Service Worker program offered by Job Skills and its partners. In addition, local employers were sought to provide venues for job site observations and work placements.

Initially, a subgroup of steering committee members met to discuss program design issues such as eligibility criteria. A working group was later established to carry out program design activities. The working group comprised trainers from partner organizations. Their efforts were guided by the theory and practice of adult education and learning.

The working group began by critically examining the college's technical training to look for ways to incorporate soft skills and language skills instruction. Efforts were also devoted to refining assessment protocols so that assessments could better reflect how participants would need to employ their skills and knowledge on the job. At the time of writing, the working group was determining how skills integration would occur. The delivery partners were set to deliver training aligned with their expertise. How the training was to be scheduled so that the different

skills could be delivered in an integrated fashion rather than as separate stand-alone courses had yet to be determined.

Discussions were also underway to incorporate the Employability Skills Assessment Tool (ESAT) framework and assessment methodology into the program<sup>3</sup>. This reflects the importance placed on soft skills, as a key determinant of participant success. In describing the outcomes of a previous Food Service Worker program, a steering committee member reported that learners' lack of professionalism had posed more challenges than had been anticipated.

For the most part, the collaborative program design and integration of training services from different providers was seen as a departure from the ways in which partners were accustomed to working. Job Skills' staff remarked, *"I'm very pleased with the degree of engagement and willingness to do things differently."* Despite these positive outcomes, balancing needs and perspectives was not always easy. For example, setting a target number of participants needed to take into account both the nature of the program and the funding restrictions faced by delivery partners. Setting a program schedule that allowed language and soft skills instruction to be distributed across the program required trainers willing to be employed only a few hours per week. Program and work placement length needed to balance partners', participants' and employers' needs and restrictions.

### *Resources*

Implementation efforts were initiated with funds from RESDAC's *Designed to Work/Sur mesure pour l'emploi* project. Job Skills allocated the funds to second the implementation lead from her existing position two days per week for the duration of the project.

Resources were pooled through Job Skills and its partners. Job Skills covered management's time on the initiative. They planned to cover marketing and evaluation activities, job search and job maintenance services, classroom space and technical support. One steering committee member's organization agreed to cover the training costs of one of the training partners, pay college tuition fees for qualified participants and offer in-kind support to secure work placements. Another committed to covering the cost of a language instructor to develop and deliver occupation-specific language training. A steering committee member provided consultations regarding the target client group's cultural and linguistic needs. Another planned to help identify observation sites and work placements in local long-term care homes.

The RESDAC project supplied andragogical support to assist the implementation lead as she facilitated needs identification activities, managed partnership development and led program

---

<sup>3</sup> ESAT includes a framework for developing and assessing employability skills. It is available through Futureworx, Truro, Nova Scotia. <http://futureworx.ca/content/esat>



design. Expertise from the RESDAC project team was also used to facilitate the working group's efforts and conduct the language analysis.

While Job Skills' was able to pool funds from different partners, these were not sufficient to cover all costs associated with implementation. Additional funds were required to cover college tuition for most participants and trainers' time to collaborate during the design phase, before and after program delivery. Most partners were only able to allocate funds to cover training delivery time for their respective trainers.

Once the need for additional funding became evident, the implementation lead focused efforts on securing necessary funds for the project. Various funding options were explored including private foundations, the Ontario government's labour market partnership (LMP) agreement and the Canada-Ontario Job Grant (COJG). The difficulty encountered in getting employer buy-in at the corporate level eliminated the option to apply for the COJG. Job Skills' application for LMP funding was declined, as program development and piloting were deemed ineligible under the agreement. At the time of writing, funding had not yet been secured; however, Job Skills had been invited to submit a letter of intent to a private foundation that expressed interest in supporting the initiative.

One of the resources in short supply throughout implementation was time. For the implementation lead, having only two days a week for the work proved limiting. Steering committee members also reported challenges in balancing existing full-time work with the project's needs. Job Skills' executive director articulated the need for this key resource, *"New programs in an already overtaxed and under-resourced organization requires some time."*

## Looking Forward

At the time of writing, Job Skills continued to be actively engaged in implementation. Trainers and steering committee members were working on program design and curriculum development activities. At the same time, the implementation lead was exploring funding options that would allow the different facets of the program to be fully integrated and allow Job Skills to offer the program to all target group members regardless of income support status.

Recruitment and outreach efforts were scheduled to begin as soon as funding was secured. Steering committee members planned to play a key role in generating interest and identifying individuals who were ready and able to take part in the program. In the words of one steering committee member, *"I'm looking forward to seeing how successful [the program] can be."*