



Digital Access, Inclusion and Learning in Community Adult Literacy Centres: Case Studies

Case Studies of
Six Community
Literacy
Organizations

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[AlphaPlus](#) is a not-for-profit organization that provides training, services, tools and resources to adult literacy agencies and educators in Ontario and Canada. Its mission is to increase adult literacy skills, the employability, and opportunities of adults through the use of digital technologies by supporting educators and stakeholders with research, tools and training.

Abstract

AlphaPlus oversaw a cross-case analysis of digital inclusion and digital literacy development in six community literacy centres in Ontario, which receive funding from MAESD's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program. The literacy centres, situated directly in small towns, cities and remote communities throughout Ontario, play a key role in supporting the province's digital transformation initiative and its commitment to ensure an "inclusive digitally enabled province." The centres provide various learning opportunities for digitally marginalized adults—that is, adults living in poverty, the unemployed or precariously employed, those with limited education and some older adults. They use various models of digital literacy development to respond to learners' array of digital literacy experiences and aspirations. However, this work is not currently part of a broader provincial digital inclusion strategy. In addition, professional development opportunities and educator training are inconsistent and not comprehensively supported by the funder. Some LBS performance measures and targets interfere with the ability of community organizations to be fully inclusive and responsive to digitally marginalized adults, particularly older adults and those not actively looking for work.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

AlphaPlus oversaw a cross-case analysis of digital inclusion and digital literacy development in six community literacy centres in Ontario, which receive funding from MAESD's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS)¹ program. The literacy centres, situated directly in small towns, cities and remote communities throughout Ontario, play a key role in supporting the province's digital transformation initiative and its commitment to ensure an "inclusive digitally enabled province." The centres provide various learning opportunities for digitally marginalized adults—that is, adults living in poverty, the unemployed or precariously employed, those with limited education and some older adults. They use various models of digital literacy development to respond to learners' array of digital literacy experiences and aspirations.

Supporting Programs

The six community literacy organizations, built on a tradition of community development and social inclusion, provide both insights into and useful models of digital inclusion. With some additional support and within the context of a coordinated digital inclusion strategy for Ontario, community literacy organisations are well positioned to contribute to the province's digital transformation initiative. To further enhance their role, targeted policy changes could be made to better support professional and program development.

Supporting Ontario's Digital Inclusion Efforts

The six programs also help us to recognize how community literacy organizations could support the development of *digital human capital* and *digital citizenship* to buttress an inclusive digital transformation effort that includes competency development in the areas of civic engagement, policy influence, social change and economic advancement.

All of the participating digital literacy centres are situated directly in the communities, providing drop-in and open door access, and having direct pathways and partnerships from the centre and into a variety of other learning, earning and well-being services and programs. Two of the centres also have co-located services. A third centre is located across the street from employment services.

LIST OF PARTICIPATING PROGRAMS

Program 1	Downtown office building shared with other social service agencies in western Ontario; operates independently
Program 2	Street level offices in small communities in Northern Ontario; operates independently
Program 3	Street-level location in a mid-size town in eastern Ontario; operates independently
Program 4	Suburban office building with other government services; co-located with provincially funded employment services
Program 5	Street-level building just outside of downtown core; operates independently
Program 6	Street level office in a city on edge of GTA; co-located with employment services and other support services

PROGRAM 1

Developing modular courses to support digital literacy and sustain an independent community-based program

During the past two years Program 1 has been rapidly expanding their selection of modular courses to complement their one-to-one and small group programs. These are courses that run over a 6-8 week period for a few hours each week. A driving force behind this decision was to reach new students and expand the program using existing resources and expertise, including tutors. They also wanted to offer their tutors a more flexible and rewarding volunteer experience. The courses can be delivered by tutors in one of the program's two learning centres or in community locations in partnership with various agencies and organizations.

“We had to think in new ways. That’s why the modular programs were born,” explained the program manager.

Courses were originally developed by staff and expert tutors. Students in summer employment programs have also helped in the development process by delivering new courses and providing feedback and direction for changes. Once the course is fully developed, it can be taught by a tutor. To provide the instructional assistance to the tutor the program uses a mentoring model, in which a program instructor will lead the course, a tutor will assist and receive some hands-on training.

The staff worked together as a team to develop the first workshop and establish a working model. As a team, they were able to draw on particular expertise to develop the content, integrate a tutor training component and incorporate Milestone assessments. Once the first course was developed and piloted, they recognized that the model could be readily adapted for other courses.

“We can be lightning fast and responsive to our community [with this model],” commented the program coordinator.

Not only has the program developed a new content model but they have also integrated a new tutor training model. All tutors currently access [Laubach training offered through Contact North](#). Then they are streamed, depending on whether they want to do one-to-one tutoring or facilitate a modular course. Those who want to work individual learners complete the Laubach certification program and others are mentored. Staff “parachutes-in” to do the Milestones and other ministry requirements. Tutors then mentor other tutors. Staff are always available to provide support.

In addition, an experienced tutor has recently volunteered to develop additional modules. “I don’t have to do this off the side of my desk,” said the PC. Having the

tutor take over some content development not only helps to alleviate staff workloads but is also a rewarding experience for the tutors.

No longer do we have to have someone sign up for a year for two hours per week, week in and week out for two hours. Now we have someone who can come in, dedicate a chunk of time while they are still working, and produce something that can be a volunteer legacy project for themselves.

Program Components

Modular courses run for 6-8 weeks using curriculum content developed by staff or occasionally uniquely experienced tutors, and a tutor/mentor teaching model. The following are currently available:

1. Customer Service Excellence and Bullfrog Point of Sale
2. Computer Basics with Northstar Digital Certification
3. Writing for Success
4. Reading for Health

In addition, three other courses are under development:

1. Workplace or Financial Math
2. Employability Success
3. Smart Serve Modular Training

Learners can also meet regularly in small groups with an instructor or one-to-one with a tutor, both of whom tailor content and literacy development to individual aims and levels. They engage with technology using what one instructor called a “blended learning” model. This often entails supplementing print-based instructions with online activities.

Customer Service Point of Sale

The first module developed was *Customer Service Excellence and Bullfrog POS*, combining interpersonal and communication development with hands-on cash register training. At the time, the program had a tutor working with [Bullfrog Tech](#), a company that develops Point of Sale (POS) solutions for business, government and schools. She developed the training program with approval and support from her employer. The company also agreed to add their logo to the certification awarded to students after successful completion of the course.

After the content was fully developed, another tutor transferred the content on to slides in order to share the course with the tutor team. “We actually don’t have to touch it,” commented a coordinator. In addition, Bullfrog Technology provides the program with updates for an affordable fee. The course is currently being considered for use with adults with mild intellectual disabilities who are preparing to enter the workplace.

Computer Basics

To develop the content for *Computer Basics*, staff re-mixed and re-assembled existing open access content from [GCF LearnFree](https://www.gcf-learnfree.org/). These adaptations were made to better align with the expertise and interests of the students and to work within the modular approach. The result is a collection of learning activities, organized by screenshots with labels and step-by-step instructions. These are used to guide students through typical scenarios when accessing programs and performing some operations such as opening and closing word-processing files, sending an email and organizing files. Students access the activities on their desktop or they can print out the collection. Tutors work with the same core activities and scenarios, but their version of the content contains extensive teaching notes.

The screenshot shows a web page titled "Module A: Basic Computer" with a navigation menu on the left and a main content area. The navigation menu includes "WHAT IS A COMPUTER?", "BASIC COMPUTER PARTS", and "GETTING STARTED". The main content area is divided into sections: "What is a Computer?", "What kinds of computers are there?", and "Mobile Devices are portable and small enough to fit in your hand. They can be as powerful as desktop and laptop computers. They include:". The "What is a Computer?" section includes a definition, a list of uses, and a text box for a question. The "What kinds of computers are there?" section includes a list of computer types. The "Mobile Devices" section includes a list of device types. The page is annotated with several comments and links. Comments include: "Comment [cm.4]: Discuss as a group...", "Comment [cm.1]: Watch the first tutorial...", "Comment [cm.2]: Explain the word Hyperlink...", "Comment [cm.3]: Discuss what exposure students have had with each device type.", and "Comment [cm.6]: Discuss that laptops have a track pad, not a mouse...". Links include "http://www.gcf-learnfree.org/computerbasics/what-is-a-computer/1/" and "http://www.gcf-learnfree.org/computerbasics/mobile-devices/1/".

Module A: Basic Computer

WHAT IS A COMPUTER? BASIC COMPUTER PARTS GETTING STARTED BASIC MOUSE AND KEYBOARD BASIC COMPUTER USE COMPUTER VOCABULARY

What is a Computer?

A computer is an electronic device that stores, looks up and processes information.

A tool to help you

- Type documents
- Send e-mail
- Play games
- Keep in touch with family and friends
- Create presentations
- Browse the Web
- Do so much more...

What do you want a computer to do for you?

Watch GCF Learn Free Tutorial # 2

What is a Computer?

<http://www.gcf-learnfree.org/computerbasics/what-is-a-computer/1/>

What kinds of computers are there?

- Desk top computers
- Laptops
- Mobile Devices

Mobile Devices are portable and small enough to fit in your hand. They can be as powerful as desktop and laptop computers. They include:

- Smart phones
- Tablets
- E-readers

You can read GCF Learn Free Tutorial # 7 for more information about Mobile Devices

<http://www.gcf-learnfree.org/computerbasics/mobile-devices/1/>

Comment [cm.4]: Discuss as a group. Discuss fears, problems, goals etc. Have students make notes.

Comment [cm.1]: Watch the first tutorial together on one screen. Explain that on the touch screen you press the ctrl key and tap the screen to make the hyper link work.

Comment [cm.2]: Explain the word Hyperlink. Explain that the student can go back to replay the tutorial in the link over and over again. Explain that this link goes automatically to the internet. Explain how to open a hyperlink in a word document. Explain that we used the hyperlink to make it easy to find the tutorial instead of having to search the internet. Explain that we will show the student how to find the tutorial in a different way when they are more comfortable with their skills.

Comment [cm.3]: Discuss what exposure students have had with each device type. Catalogue vocabulary that arises

Comment [cm.6]: Discuss that laptops have a track pad, not a mouse, if they have not seen a laptop before, show a picture of one.

Northstar Certification

Students can also complete a [Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment](https://www.northstar.org/) to earn a certification. TLG has purchased a site licence and is one of only two sites in Canada that can award the certification.

Previously, instructors used [Northstar Digital Literacy Assessment](https://www.northstar.org/) online tests as a teaching tool. However they found some challenges with the content and also encountered numerous dead links. The combined approach using with GCF

LearnFree content and access to Northstar certifications has helped them design and deliver much more comprehensive and worry-free content.

Writing for Success

This course helps students develop academic writing skills to prepare them to pass the GED test and/or enter a college program. The activities are focused on paragraph writing, essays and technical strategies.

Reading for Health

The course was designed to respond to a request from a community organization working with immigrant women living in isolation who were not accessing available programs. The developer, a site coordinator, asked the women what they were interested in and designed a modular program to address various health and nutrition topics, drawing primarily on public health materials.

The program is currently working with a community partner to arrange child-minding for the women during the time that the course is offered. They are also exploring other ways to deliver modular courses within the context of a family literacy program run by their network to run a pilot in the fall of 2018.

Math

They are currently developing a workplace math course designed for on-site delivery. The focus is to build math confidence and alleviate math anxiety using scenarios that incorporate calculator use and some data analysis.

Possible course to support "smart" smartphone use

They are currently working on a way to respond to requests from students who want to learn more about their smartphones. Topics of interest include data plans, tracking, blocking and security, useful apps, and trouble-shooting.

Blended learning to support core courses

The program continues to offer one-to-one and small group learning focused on more comprehensive literacy and numeracy development. Instructors in these programs incorporate a blended learning model and use technology to supplement and enhance their core content.

Impacts and insights

The changes have re-vitalized the program, explained the program coordinator.

The engagement that we have with people now, both students and tutors alike, is really unbelievable...There's a lot of energy in the building that is really great to see.

They have also started to encourage more direct involvement from students, and have them act as assistants in the Computer Basics class, for example. The

opportunity can be transformative, supporting student growth, confidence and engagement.

Staff also reflected on their own learning growth. The changes have helped them to hone their own technology skills in many ways, and recognize their challenges. “We’re really open about our own use of technology and our deficits with technology.” This philosophy helps to foster a culture of equity within the program, as staff model their technology use and challenges. They also encourage tutors to share their own frustrations with technology.

“All of these things are so important---the humanness of how you deal with technology.”

They recognize the potential for adapting the modular model in order to connect with more people in the community. We can use the base curriculum to respond to specific learner groups in the community, explained the program coordinator. We can “expand and contract” the programming by adding more pieces or contextualizing for different groups, such as computers basics for a group of Muslim women or customer service with Syrian refugees. To support their work, they will draw on the expertise of tutors, particularly one interested tutor who has an ESL background.

There’s really no end to the way all of this stuff works. When you have a group around you, who really want to sink their teeth into things, you can start creating something that is flexible, timely and responsive to the needs in the community. That’s what makes us very, very different.

PROGRAM 2

Integrating technology to bridge the distance and ensure equitable access to direct instruction and practitioner support

The program serves several small communities in northern Ontario. They have three sites and also provide on-site teaching and learning in four First Nations communities. The greatest challenge is providing access to practitioners and direct teaching support over vast distances between small communities. The largest has a population of 3,200. Other communities are generally half that size.

One instructor wrote,

As a multi-site organization, our biggest challenge is coordinating/scheduling courses simultaneously and sharing resources across all sites.

Compounding the geographical challenge is poverty. The life line of the area is the Trans-Canada Highway. Many students do not have access to a car, and there is no public transportation. (The region recently lost its Greyhound bus service.) Although there are some privately owned taxis in communities, they are expensive, and not all communities have a taxi service. The literacy program had been using their training supports funding to pay for taxi services. But their funds are quickly depleted each year.

An additional challenge is attempting to cover so many locations with a small staff (five instructors). To provide service on a FN community, one of the main site offices has to be closed, limiting access. One FN community provides shuttle service to a site location, which has alleviated the challenge somewhat. Compounding the site access challenge is winter driving. The highway could be closed several times each winter due to white-out and dangerous driving conditions.

These are things we deal with and people have no clue. It's difficult---no buses or anything.

Technology Facilitated Face-to-Face Learning with Video Conferencing

To address these issues, the program is developing a technology facilitated model of delivery to provide site-to-site and site-to-home virtual connections in order to provide more consistent access to live classes and instructors at scheduled times. This will help the program use their resources far more efficiently and effectively. Learners can remain in their communities or homes to access learning or they can be in one site, but working with an instructor who is located at another site. Instructors will spend less time travelling. In addition, they can pool their knowledge and expertise. Rather than expecting one instructor to have the expertise to address all learning aims, they can now focus on developing a narrower band of knowledge and

deliver that more broadly. For example, an instructor may be the math lead and another is the academic writing lead, etc. The instructor can then plan and deliver sessions addressing one area of expertise to numerous participants in various locations. The access to learning is both broadened and deepened. This access is supported with webcams and larger monitors, along with conferencing software and [Team Viewer](#), a desktop sharing tool that will help instructors provide technical support to participants.

The remote access to live instruction model is crucial for students who have either very tenuous text skills and/or few technical skills. Once learners gain some confidence and a more comprehensive repertoire of online learning skills and knowledge, along with a greater range of literacy practices, they will then be able to access more independent learning models such as E-channel's Good Learning Anywhere, but first they will need the instructor intensive support, explained the coordinator.

If you can't even turn a computer on, how can you access e-learning on your own?

On-site Workshops and Partnerships

Complementing their remote access model are several opportunities for learners to participate in courses to support independence, academic and employment goals. These courses and workshops are offered at one of the program's sites, in partnership with FN communities or off-site in partnership with community agencies and organizations.

The program offers technology skills development workshops on the following topics

1. Using iPads and tablets
2. Basic computer skills using MS Office
3. Using social media and developing a digital portfolio.

Currently, they only run when there are enough students at one site. Video-conferencing technology will help them offer more workshops.

Supporting **independence goals** is a project with the food bank in which cooking sessions are offered using the donations typically received. Participants learn to prepare nutritious food and develop some kitchen math skills, in addition to skills related to reading recipes and food labels.

Supporting learners with **academic goals** is a drop-in credit support program run in partnership with a school board where students can receive support with their courses, most of which are online.

A lot of the stuff is online. They don't even know how to turn the computers on so we help with all that.

In addition the program provides a quiet and uninterrupted place to work by providing child-minding. LBS instructors help students navigate the online learning management system and provide on-demand tutoring to help students brush-up on literacy mechanics or numeracy computation questions required to complete the secondary courses.

The program also support **employment goals**, offering programs on-demand. They offer a soft skill development program, available when there are enough referrals from OW. In partnership with the local Legion, they provided training and access to certifications for Smart Serve, Safe Food Handling, WHMIS and Service Excellence. The literacy program used its fundraising budget to cover the costs of courses. All of the staff recently participated in one-day training session to deliver [Soft Skills Solutions](#) a 35 hour employability courses developed and overseen by the Simcoe County Workforce Development Board focused on communication, teamwork, personal management, problem-solving and professional development. They are also exploring social enterprise opportunities related to plant care and horticulture and running a movie theatre canteen.

We have exceeded our targets by thinking outside the box.

PROGRAM 3

Responding to the community and ensuring inclusion

Program 3 has three main sites in larger towns and also schedules regular sessions in 3 smaller outlying communities. The main centres are open four days per week from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

A team of staff work full and part-time. The Executive Director and Program Coordinators (1.5) do most administrative work and can fill-in for instructors as needed. Instructional staff work each day and use alternate Fridays for administrative and program development work. The instructors oversee both one-to-one and small group sessions with learners. The program also works with occasional volunteers, placement students and summer students. Volunteers and placement students are not assigned to individuals but support the program and instructor.

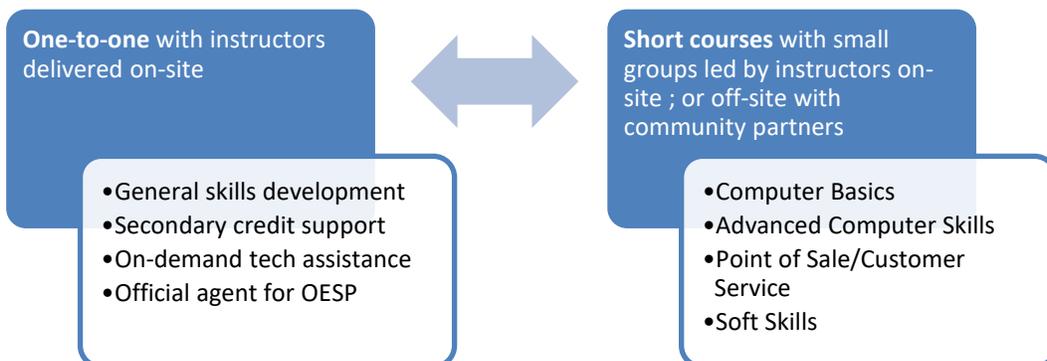
They have seen a change in their student profile, likely a result of recent lay-offs and closures in the community.

We're having more and more people who have been laid off. They are the workers who come in and say, 'I need help with my computer skills. I feel I'm being left behind.'

A large employer recently closed its stores and a distribution warehouse located in one of the communities. At its peak, it employed over 1000 people, about 600 lost their jobs when the warehouse closed in 2017.

Program components

In the past year, the program has enhanced their traditional one-to-one support model with a series of short courses. This was done to respond to the increase in requests for computer skill development and to also attract new learners to the program.



Short courses

The short courses are comprised of small groups with 4 to 10 participants. They usually run for six weeks with one or two sessions per week for a total of about 36 hours. The site coordinator explained,

You can help a lot of learners in a relatively short period of time. We've seen our numbers skyrocket because of this [computer courses].

One of their main sources of new students is the local employment service centres located in the two largest communities. The staff began to see many recently laid off clients with few or no computers skills. While their resource centres have space and devices, they didn't have the instructional expertise, time and content to provide learning supports.

Their staff realized that they don't have the capacity to give people what they really need, which is starting at ground zero and developing those skills before they are ready to make a resume.

In response, the literacy program has run a handful of computer basics courses. Content is comprised of computer basics and discussion about cell phone/tablet use and cell plans. They are also developing a course focused on more advanced office type applications and some basic trouble-shooting.

The program can also run the computer courses off-site in the employment resource centres where they have space, equipment and outreach. They do recruitment and make a referral and the LBS program does the registration, assessment and instruction.

To provide service in rural communities, they have drawn on funding from another source to deliver what they refer to as "education on location." They are also exploring a partnership with the library in smaller communities, but again would need to use another funding source. Similar to employment resource centres, libraries have the space, equipment and outreach, but not the instructional staff. The idea is on hold as they determine if they have the resources: "Of course we'd have to have the money to do this, but now we're tapped out."

The program accessed the content for the computer basics course from another program in their region. The Executive Director explained that her first inclination when considering content and new course is to ask other people in her region whether they have or know of a similar program already developed. They typically share their resources with programs in other communities. Content is then piloted and re-contextualized to a particular group. "We work hard to tailor it to the groups," stated the program coordinator.

One-to-one support

The program also provides credit support to those working towards their OSSD in partnership with the school board. The students are working on independent courses, either on line or in print format. The literacy program staff provide supplemental literacy and numeracy support and also help students navigate the online environment if needed. Staff from the school board's adult and continuing education program visit the 2 main sites regularly to carry-out credit assessments and develop learning plans for the students. The school board program is co-located with the literacy program at one site. The courses are reviewed and marked by other school board staff.

Agent for OESP

Also part of their one-to-one model is a formal partnership with a government agency. The literacy program is a recognized agent for the [Ontario Electricity Support Program](#) (OESP), offering support to those with low-income to complete an application for a hydro rebate.

Community agencies could apply to become an official agent, offering support to anyone who wanted to complete the online application. The application was challenging, since personal information had to be an exact match with billing information, including punctuation and symbols. The literacy program became an agent after staff completed an online training session.

Not only does the program receive some needed additional revenue but they also reach out to new potential learner groups in the community.

It's been a really, really good program for us. People come back. They go to the literacy program and see what we have.

The funding can be carried over year to year and build a small surplus for emergencies. The program has introduced more people in the community to the range of learning opportunities supported by the program. It fits in with their already open-door and inclusive access philosophy.

There is absolute value to having an open door, even when someone just comes in asking to photocopy something. They learn about what we do, and if they aren't interested, they may tell someone else they know. It's the ideal form of marketing.

Future plans include more advanced courses to teach power point and Excel. This could also be tied into financial literacy. They also want to help people transfer what they learn about PCs and the Office/Windows environment to Google Suite. Another possible topic is online safety, security and privacy, particularly when using social

media. Finally, an instructor would like to develop a course that includes geography, civics and history to get people involved in their community.

A lot of what we do here and in literacy in general doesn't necessarily focus on local information such as knowing who the mayor is... this information is still very important and learners should be engaged in the local community because what goes on locally often is connected to something globally.

PROGRAM 4

Offering a comprehensive range of learning opportunities including on-site contextualized learning groups to support employment

Program 4 is an employment focused program that has integrated a comprehensive range of learning opportunities, including those that foster belonging, engagement and collaboration among adult learners.

Their focus on employment could help people living in poverty pursue opportunities that may have positive impacts in their lives, explained the coordinator.

Because we work with adults, and poor adults, we understand that one way out of poverty might be work; so work is a very important potential for our students.

The program has a history of innovation and leadership in developing work-based learning initiatives. Their range of programs and projects include the following:

- Core programs funded by MAESD, which support workforce literacy and foundation skills development, in addition to academic upgrading in partnership with a local college, and GED preparation
- Co-located employment resource centre offering a full suite of employment supports to job-seekers and employers
- Fee for service courses in partnership with the city's income supports agency (i.e. career and education planning, exploring the trades)
- Assessment and training services, supporting a proprietary assessment tool
- Currently involved in a national employment training initiative to support Indigenous communities;
- Also involved in a sector specific skills training program.

For the purposes of this study, we focused on the core programs (i.e. workforce literacy, foundation skills development and academic upgrading).

Professional Expertise and Program Development

The program is the largest community literacy organization funded by MAESD and has the resources to support 10 full-time educators in two locations, in addition to administrators, two site coordinators and an executive director. The program also has dedicated IT support at each site, a position that is combined with teaching. Additional staff and consultants are also involved on a project basis.

Since all instructional staff are full-time, there are both informal opportunities to discuss teaching and learning and more formal opportunities. Educators meet regularly to discuss a range of topics related to program operations that include

pedagogy. The coordinator explained that they have intentionally pursued a process of questioning what they do and why. To innovate takes time, she added.

We have made it part of our project to think about our work and ask questions. Every week we set aside an hour. It's a cultivated and deliberate time.

Importantly, all provincially mandated administrative work and learner reporting is disconnected from teaching and learning work. Instructors aren't directly involved in reporting or the administration of the Milestones, explained the coordinator.

We have really separated admin work. All the reporting and paperwork has been separated out of the classroom.

The site coordinator is responsible for all EOIS-CaMS related information gathering and reporting. The instructors supply minimal information to complete the learning activities section of a learner's EOIS-CaMS plan..

The program has a computer lab at each site and recently received new tablets and laptops for use in classes. They simultaneously support two over-arching approaches when integrating technology: 1) educator autonomy and 2) on-site work experience within the context of more comprehensive learning and literacy development.

Educator Autonomy

The program has developed and maintained the conditions for professionalism and autonomy, allowing individual educators the flexibility, creativity and time to investigate and try new tools, learning strategies and ideas in their classes. The coordinator said,

We've created classrooms that are relatively autonomous. It's a significant move that we have been able to make.

As a result of this approach, teaching staff develop their own technology integration and digital literacy pedagogies based on their student group and their own evolving repertoires of skills, knowledge and capabilities learned in collaboration with other educators and on their own. They may also collaborate with the digital technology educator in the computer lab to support larger projects and provide continuity.

What happens in each class looks very different. Their choices are fluid and highly contextual and are influenced by the following considerations:

1. Evolving technologies
2. Their own expertise and evolving repertoires and interests
3. Student expertise and their evolving capabilities and interests
4. Time to experiment, discuss and reflect on new approaches.

The adoption of new tools and supports can take a while, explained one instructor. It's a circular process where people "may come back to things." Small insights are gained incrementally by talking, and sharing with others, followed by time to experiment and follow-up with colleagues and the students to discuss and informally evaluate how things worked.

On-site Work Experience and Learning Opportunities

Integrated into the program is an innovative on-site work experience and learning opportunity which also includes various technologies. All students participate in small groups or teams to support the operation of a snack and lunch counter and plan events. Several elements are intentionally integrated and fostered:

- An opportunity to gain some work experience
- Collaborative and collegial work environment and opportunity to develop interpersonal skills, strategies and capabilities
- Problem-solving focused on issues with actual consequences (e.g., running out of a certain item, tracking a budget, communication with wider group, etc.)
- Opportunities to integrate technology and text skills, knowledge and concepts with authentic applications.

	Learning Together	Text /Tech Activities
1. Daily operation of snack counter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities • Communication with each other and customers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • iPads used for transactions • Schedules • Make flyers
2. Food preparation for the snack counter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Menu planning • Budgeting & shopping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-line recipes • On-line comparison shopping
3. Inventory control and book-keeping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative learning & supporting each other to become team leader • Report on task completion/findings to team and school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track sales and transactions • Make calculations • Update the inventory
4. Planning events and outings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and gathering information from students • Making decisions based on feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information gathering • Advertising the event and creating posters • Surveying the groups to make choices • Plan, hold event, review

PROGRAM 5

Innovative and creative classes informed by social justice pedagogies supporting community development and individual transformation

They develop programs using both MAESD and additional funding sources, including corporate funding. For the purposes of this project, we will focus primarily on their MAESD funded programs but also highlight the way that programs with other funding sources are able to integrate technology in very innovative ways.

The director summarized the program approach. Our staff look at people as a whole person, which includes their communities, she explained.

How do we create an environment where people are excited about learning? That's the bottom line.

How do we build strong communities together? Everything we do has to have impact not only in the classroom but also in the community. How do the learners we are engaged with take back what they learn to the community?

Academic Upgrading

Students attend the academic upgrading program five hours per day. Classes focused on Communications, Numeracy, Language Arts and Digital Technology are facilitated by individual instructors and students follow a weekly schedule. The instructors often work as a team, using a cross-curricular approach, to support key activities or projects. The model is an intentional consideration, explained the director. It allows students to work with “different teachers who bring out different learning styles.” It also helps students establish a routine and incorporates elements that are used in larger educational programs, such as a timetable.

Students are not divided by within the learning groups. They all participate in group discussions and activities, and particular assignments and expectations are individualized. The approach is supported by Indigenous perspectives that disavow artificially imposed skill and level hierarchies and nurture a holistic understanding of each person's strengths. The director explained:

I saw the disadvantage of labelling people by quote, unquote “ability.” It means for a lot of folks that they are less determined. Or it means that getting from one to three is almost insurmountable because they are already

siloed into a level-specific program. My main thing is about learning. It's not about level.

The program's social justice perspective means they strive to provide "equitable learning" for a diverse community and "people who have seen that they don't have equitable opportunities." At the heart of their approach is creating a space for learners to feel they are valued and can make contributions to the program.

Once you start to create a learning environment where people are respected---what a learner brings into the classroom is as valuable as what the teacher brings into the classroom---you start to see quickly how people shift. I do believe a lot of that is here. Once you're really feeling comfortable and socially supported in a learning environment, you get some breakthroughs that are beautiful to see.

Communication Projects

A core part of the academic upgrading program is a comprehensive communications project completed each semester. The focus is on developing comprehensive communication skills, using power point combined with a real-life opportunity perhaps at a conference. All complete a project. The project is tied to a person or an opportunity from outside the centre.

The projects provide the following expansive and rigorous learning opportunities:

- An integration of discussion, presentation, research and information gathering, reading, writing and technology.
- The development of individual capabilities and capacities, such as entrepreneurship, telling one's story and struggles or navigating the legal system. "Nothing is in isolation at the end of the day," stated the director .
- These are guided by broader personal development concepts using an "Indigenous lens" said the coordinator such as purpose, aspiration and passion leading to individual transformation in how one understands one's self and place in the world.
- The use of active and engaging formats and modes of participation such as a Dragon's Den model to support entrepreneurship, a slam poetry event and a mock trial.
- Projects also involve the creation of a product (a product pitch, a poem).
- And/or participation in an event involving invited guests.
- In addition, invited guests such as lawyers or entrepreneurs or local writers and poets offer support and feedback, acting as "external evaluators."

When two lawyers participated in the mock trial project, the students worked even harder, explained the coordinator.

They took it so serious. I brought in instructors from my other courses and they couldn't believe what their students were doing.

An annual project is digital storytelling, in which learners produce a video story or vlog incorporating narration, photos and video to document their personal story.

Digital technology class

Within the academic upgrading program is a dedicated digital technology class. Depending on the learner group, they will pursue various topics that include,

- Basic skill development using the Northstar online assessment system used as an introduction to the topic
- Office applications also using Northstar and additional You Tube videos; instructor will add instructional material and questions to open source content using [edpuzzle](#)
- Information literacy and online searches using adapted and found activities (e.g., a fake news quiz found on the BBC website).

The instructor stated:

I want to teach them things they want to know not things I think they should know.

Motivational Learning Workshops

Every Friday, academic upgrading students take a break from the regular schedule and participate in workshops, often run by community partners. We bring in people “who are achieving” to talk to learners, explained the director . One example was a topic on “obstacles and opportunities.” After a live interview, where the guest social change maker shares their journey, students can pose questions and then the guest social change maker will engage directly in an activity, whether dance, painting, or music with learners. Guests then often ask to have an on-going involvement with the learning centre. Some events have also attracted additional local residents in the community.

Summer Courses and Short Courses

The program has also developed a series of summer workshops and short courses to complement their regular programs. These often attract new learners and provide continuing learners with a change. Summer course include the following:

- Focused computer courses on a specific application or topic.
- Newly created internet course will be offered with the aim of engaging more people in the community, particularly parents and older residents who may not be familiar with some internet privacy and security issues.
- Global citizenship courses covering timely topics social justice topics such as white supremacy and privilege, tolerance, anti-blackness, Islamophobia and

Indigenous knowledge and place-based learning; a placement student oversees the program and develops curricula with various staff members. .

Social Enterprise

Also overseen by the community organization are two social incubators related to catering and sewing. They each provide skill development opportunities, a social network, and supplemental income to participants. Under development is a social incubator skills development course that will integrate digital literacy to enhance entrepreneurial and financial skills. The course, supported with LBS funding, will include industry experts who will cover certain topics. Each module will integrate a real-life application, such as using online ordering systems and online banking.

Programs Supported by Other Funders

Youth Mentoring

In the youth mentoring program, students in Grades 7 and 8 are paired with adults to support their digital literacy and language development. The model extends a role that young people often have in many communities in which they take on a teaching role with the adults in their lives. It's had a great impact on the youth as well as the adults," explained the instructor. Adults are learning digital skills (using Gmail, Instagram, Word, Chrome, Facebook) and also improving their language skills as they communicate one-on-one with the youth. Groups of youth are paired with adults in various locations under the guidance of a facilitator from the learning centre. The youth mentors are trained using a coaching model. They learn about the learning needs of the adults that they are working with and practice communicating with them.

Immigrant Women's Leadership Program

The leadership development program supports women with backgrounds in community or social development to find career opportunities, volunteer placements and further postsecondary education, in the social service sector. . The program is comprised of four core courses, all of which integrate technology. Learning capabilities include facilitation skills, conducting primary research, using social media and managing an online employment search. They are also trained to use MS Office tools commonly used in the workplace such as Outlook and Teams in Outlook, a posting and chat platform, to mimic work processes. Teaching and learning activities are organized using a project-based approach in which the participants learn skills, knowledge and strategies within the context of a project supporting or modelling actual work activities, which becomes an authentic demonstration of their accomplishments in the course.

PROGRAM 6

An inclusive and individualized program in a multi-service support agency

The program is part of a multi-service support agency providing a range of supports including housing, employment and well-being in a city outside the GTA. It is centrally located and easily accessible by public transit for all who wish to attend.

The coordinator explained that the program's inclusiveness, flexibility with continuous intake and individualized attention make it work for people.

People are attracted to the community-based model, especially if they need flexibility and wrap around supports.

A Focus on Supporting Employment

The literacy program instructors work closely with the employment services counsellors, providing combined supports for those seeking employment. In addition, the employment resource room is open for anyone to use, including those who may not be actively seeking employment but need access to resources and technology to complete applications and paperwork related to housing, income supports and pensions. This sort of community access was once part of the federally funded Community Access Program, which ended in 2012. "The need is still there," stated the coordinator. Clients can use the photocopiers, scanners and computers free of charge. The resource centre counsellors may refer individuals to the literacy program.

The literacy program instructors also have regularly scheduled hours in the resource centre, in which they provide on-demand and individualized support to people. At the same time, they can quickly and informally assess people's abilities and comfort with literacy and technology and gauge their interest in participating in one of their short-term and targeted courses or longer term and more intensive learning groups. They refer to the literacy learning area as a training room rather than a classroom.

It's all in how you present. We package it up. We used to ask if they are interested in the Literacy and Basic Skills Program and people would say 'I want a job.'

With up to 800 visits per month in the agency's resource centre, the literacy program has a steady flow of referrals. In addition, they receive referrals from other programs in the agency, along with referrals from community partners. They don't advertise and are readily able to meet, and often exceed, their targets. Programming decisions are made to meet the clients' aims and aspirations.

Increasing Tech Demands in the Employment Application Process

Employment application processes demand comprehensive literacy, technology and cultural knowledge explained an instructor.

- Most employers require uploading a resume and cover letter along with completing an online application;
- It is now standard practice for large retail outlets like Costco or Walmart to require applicants to complete an online aptitude test with 80 questions;
- This is then followed by an interview; and
- Employers may also require new hires to complete training modules online during a probationary period.

The increasingly demanding application process requires a comprehensive knowledge of technology, communication and literacy related to employment application and interviewing, along with insights into the types of behavioural interview and aptitude questions being asked. For example, explained the instructor a student was asked, “Do you get angry when you’re with your friends?” The response required is complex and difficult to understand, requiring coaching, support and practice.

The instructor also said that clients were recently hired by two well-known chain restaurants, and had to complete a series of online modules on a tablet either on-site or at home. Some had never used a tablet before and some didn’t have Internet access at home. They approached the centre for support, not just for access to devices and Wi-Fi, but also to get support navigating the online environment.

The resource centre and literacy program are also seeing more learners over 65 who are looking for employment, encountering demands they may have never experienced before in their working lives.

Program Components

In response, the literacy program integrates various program delivery models to provide responsive, individualized supports while working with the employment resource centre, other community partners or independently in their learning area, referred to as a training room.

1. On-demand and responsive support for individuals or pairs in the resource room
2. Individualized computer training using detailed skills checklists to determine current skills and skills the client would like to acquire.
3. Opportunities to move from individualized support to a regular small group to focus on more comprehensive skill development to prepare for secondary and postsecondary education.
4. Access to online certifications for WHMIS and health and safety training.
5. Access to certification programs such [Safe Food Handling](#) with TrainCan Inc. and [Soft Skills Solutions](#) through program trained instructors. The program has covered the fees for their instructors to become certified

trainers. Instructors can support the learners in the program and can also offer training more broadly in the community, which is also an outreach strategy. They are exploring ways to offer a customer service course using this model.

They are also exploring ways to support learners with independence goals using a modular course design.