



QUILL Learning Network

**Coordinating to Bring Low-Literacy and
Marginalized Clients Employment**

**Lake Huron Learning Centre
Client Focus Groups**

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Lake Huron Learning Centre: Client Focus Groups

Introduction

The QUILL Learning Network is part of a project entitled, “Coordinating to Bring Low-Literacy and Marginalized Clients Employment.” Phase one of this project was completed in 2013 and included:

- a) A literature review and research on how multi-service centres in other jurisdictions in the province successfully serve clients without a grade 12 education and help them to gain meaningful employment.
- b) Meetings with service providers to discuss the literature review and best practices, examine systemic linkages, and find solutions that are workable within each program’s capacity.
- c) Meeting to introduce LBS and ES programs in Grey/Bruce County to those community partners that serve learner’s/client’s barriers and introduce the theory of service coordination.

In 2014, phase two of this project was launched. This phase includes discussing the learnings from phase one and creating concrete work plans and assisting with evaluation tools to assess services and implement change in the identified multi-service centres.

As part of this approach, two focus groups were conducted with clients of the Lake Huron Learning Centre located in Kincardine. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather feedback and information from the clients about things that are working well and opportunities for improvement at the multi-service centre.

A total of 13 people attended the two focus groups, with 11 women and 2 men participating. Attendees at each focus group were asked a series of seven questions about their experience using the services at the multi-service centre (see Attachment A for the listing of focus group questions).

The following report provides collated information from the focus groups, with potential actions for further work by the partners in the multi-service centre highlighted at the end of each question.

Things liked about the Lake Huron Learning Centre

Clients who attended the focus groups were very positive about the Lake Huron Learning Centre. The most commonly mentioned thing that participants in the focus groups liked is that they feel the centre is helping them to reach their goals (54.5% of responses). When asked to name one thing they liked about coming to the building, comments from participants included:

- Look for a job, help you to find work
- Found the courses I needed, proctored exams
- Bruce County Slang – ESL class
- Used the training courses

The Lake Huron Learning Centre is helping people reach their goals.

Other participants noted that:

- They enjoy coming to the centre as it is a quiet spot to work, the location is convenient and the centre is very multi-cultural (18.2% of responses)
- They enjoy volunteering and teaching classes at the centre (13.6% of responses)
- The centre provides them with a place to go and a break from their family (13.6% of responses)

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Continue to leverage/build on those things that clients like about the Lake Huron Learning Centre

Experience Using the Services offered at the Lake Huron Learning Centre

How Heard about the Centre

Participants in the focus groups heard about the Lake Huron Learning Centre in a number of ways, with the top two ways being:

- From other service providers such as the Employment Resource Centre, guidance counsellor, personal support worker, town staff and 211 (40% of responses)
- Through word of mouth such as a neighbour, friend, or relative (40% of responses)

See the table below for more details.

| How Heard about the Centre | Comments from Participants |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Other Service Providers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guidance Counsellor about elearnetwork.ca ▪ Employment Resource Centre told me about it, wanted a complete change, wanted to be a paralegal ▪ Online was my only option, so the Employment Resource Centre told me to come here ▪ From Personal Support Work that came to my house ▪ Town staff told me about it ▪ Brand new to the area, called 211, heard about it |
| Word of Mouth | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neighbour who was a volunteer ▪ Heard from a friend who used the services ▪ Relative told me, from a town not 30 minutes away ▪ My friend told me ▪ Came with my husband ▪ Family member wrote an exam, |
| Centre Signage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Driving through the town and saw it, drive by, came in and inquired and became a volunteer |

| How Heard about the Centre | Comments from Participants |
|----------------------------|--|
| Online | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Research online, Bruce Community Development Corporation ▪ Found the information online |

Number of Services Used at the Centre

The majority of participants in the focus groups have used more than one service at the Lake Huron Learning Centre, with 41.7% using two services and 33.3% using three services (see the table below for more details).

| Number of Services Used | Number of Participants | % of Participants |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 3 | 25% |
| 2 | 5 | 41.7% |
| 3 | 4 | 33.3% |

Transition/Movement between Services at the Centre

In terms of participants' experience in moving/transitioning between services at the centre, participants responded that this was done well. No negative comments were made about this aspect of the centre. Many noted that the staff of the different organizations made the referral to another service for them and that the centre is great at networking and for introductions to all staff in the area. Focus group participant comments include:

- *"Started volunteering here and was introduced to all the staff in the area"*
- *"They are great for networking here"*
- *"Vpi would ask students if they wanted to connect with vpi"*

Two participants also stated that they were introduced to the new service by being walked across the hall/room for a face to face introduction:

- *"Walked across the hall, started with Adult Learning Centre, went to vpi, went to Contact North"*
- *"Actually took me across the room to introduce"*

A further two participants used a self-referral to move between services at the centre.

Length of Time Accessing Services at the Centre

The majority of participants in the focus groups have been accessing services at the centre for either three years or are in their first year of accessing services (see the table below for further details).

| Year | Number of Participants | % of Participants |
|------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 2009 | 1 | 10% |

| Year | Number of Participants | % of Participants |
|------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 2010 | 1 | 10% |
| 2011 | 3 | 30% |
| 2012 | 1 | 10% |
| 2013 | 1 | 10% |
| 2014 | 3 | 30% |

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Continue to work with community partners to market the services of the centre
- Explore how word of mouth marketing could be further enhanced

Accessibility of the Programs and Services Offered at the Centre

The participants in the focus groups were asked to provide comments on the accessibility of the centre in three specific areas:

1. Hours of operation
2. Location of the building
3. Items that would make the building more accessible

Results from this discussion are noted in the table below. Of note:

- Many would like to see the centre open for evening hours
- Many walk or cycle to the centre. There is some question as to the convenience of the location for those that don't drive and have to take a cab, borrow a car or get a drive
- Suggestions to make the centre more accessible include: expanding the hours, having smaller classroom sizes, and looking at ways to help people get to the centre

| | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Hours of operation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Would like it 8-5 ▪ Evening courses, for specific programs, ▪ Hours totally work for me but may not be good for others ▪ Would be nice to have a Tuesday/Thursday evening ▪ Contact the staff through email ▪ Evening hours – 5 people suggested they have evening hours |
| Location of the building | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 walk (30 minutes) ▪ 1 cab – fare is \$50.00, a transit system would be wonderful ▪ Would be easier to get to a building in the middle |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <p>of town</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Drive about 10 minutes ▪ 15 - 20 minute drive, I borrow a car from a friend ▪ Cycle, 10 minutes ▪ Perfect location – everyone drives, 3 minutes, ▪ Walk or cycle ▪ Parking is okay |
| Items that would make the building more accessible | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expand the hours ▪ Move the location ▪ Volunteer drivers to assist getting people here ▪ Have a board to match riders and drivers ▪ Smaller classroom size |

| |
|---|
| <p>Potential Actions for Further Work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Explore providing expanded hours of service at the centre, including the addition of some evening hours ▪ Explore ways to help people get to the centre, including the use of volunteer drivers and a ride board to match riders and drivers |
|---|

Achievement of Goals

Focus group participants were asked to talk about whether the classes/services they used at the Lake Huron Learning Centre have helped or are helping them achieve their goals. Ways in which the classes/services have helped clients in achieving their goals include courses offered, guidance and support, and structure. Specific comments include:

- Walking through using online platform
- Quiet place to use the computer
- Provided me with structure
- One-one support
- Office course was good
- I'm seeing that they are using more courses that would help get into Bruce Power
- They had me take computer courses before I started an online course
- Vpi assisted me in what to say on the application that I filled in
- Guidance in responding to TCU
- Helped me build my resume
- Steve was really helpful – Bruce County Slang ESL class

Participants also noted that the classes/services have fallen short in helping them achieve their goals as not all of the courses/services are offered in Kincardine, they don't know

what is available, could use volunteer experience, not enough financial support, and the training provided doesn't match the jobs that are available. Specific comments include:

- I thought the 2 week training session at a restaurant was too short
- Training sessions are in Walkerton, Owen Sound. They should have certificates offered here
- Not all services are offered in Kincardine. The Career Exploration course was offered in Walkerton. Maybe it could be offered here once a month
- Wish I would have known about it 2 years ago (2 responses)
- Knowing what is available
- Could vpi help to find a place where you could do a volunteer stint in your field of choice? It would assist with the networking to get a job in a small town
- Volunteer partnering
- Not enough financial support. I finished my course, but I didn't have the money to take courses to augment the course I had finished. They said they would help find bursaries but didn't
- Need financial support
- Switching career path, no market for the training I took
- Matching the training to the jobs that are available, assess skills to match career
- Offer more technical skills courses
- Courses that Contact North/LHLC offers are not male friendly
- People in the community are working 2-3 jobs so it is hard to break into the workforce
- Vpi job board does not tell you the place that is hiring so you can't follow up
- Vpi needs to broaden their scope/range of employers to help people connect to work

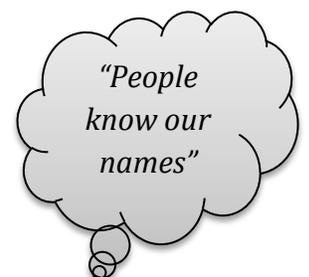
Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Review the comments provided by participants related to areas that the centre has fallen short in helping them achieve their goals and explore opportunities to address these challenges

Level of Customer Service

Focus group participants were asked to describe the level of customer service they have received at the Lake Huron Learning Centre. Overall, clients are happy with the level of customer service received. There were a few comments about areas that could be improved, but overall clients feel well served, whether they use phone, email or walk in to receive services at the centre. Comments provided by participants include:

- Customer service is not consistent. The people with more clients don't get to serve the people because they are too busy
- People know our names
- Bit of a lapse when there was a shift in Contact North staff. Sometimes I felt like I had to chase them, and other times they chased me



- My experience is really good – I use all ways of communication – phone, email
- Use email, phone, and drop in
- A few emails have gone unanswered, but 99% of the time it is great
- Prompt at emailing
- Things happen promptly
- Robotics students could be potential clients, but don't know about the service because they aren't in the building at the same time as the staff
- Very homey

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Continue to look at ways to maintain and increase the level of customer service provided at the centre

The Ideal Multi-Service Centre

Participants were asked what they would put in a building where they could come to get what they needed to help them reach their goals. Their “ideal” multi-service centre would include:

- Drop in working space/lounge
- Proper reception area
- Range of relevant courses that were available on-site and streamed from other locations
- Upgraded equipment and better use of space (hub, separate classrooms, use of colour)
- Support services, such as child care
- An expanded array of services/partnerships with more organizations and services
- Opportunities to connect with other clients/learners

See the table below for the comments provided by focus group participants.

| Elements in an Ideal Multi-Service Centre | Comments Provided by Participants |
|--|--|
| Drop In Working Space/ Lounge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Actual room where people can use a computer, couch, business office in a hotel with couch, need a quiet place to work rather than a restaurant ▪ Drop in centre ▪ Physical job board, would be useful in drop in space ▪ Space that was connected to the internet so when you are in the building, you are on the net ▪ Lounge areas |

| Elements in an Ideal Multi-Service Centre | Comments Provided by Participants |
|--|--|
| Reception | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Receptionist at the front door to welcome people ▪ There should be a proper reception area, more welcoming ▪ Reception area, suggestion box, more materials to pick up and read ▪ Video of what goes on in the building, in the proper reception area |
| Courses Offered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Computers need to be able to teach the programs that are part of today's work – e.g. Indesign program ▪ Provide the training for the jobs that are coming ▪ Provide special programs e.g. teach a photo shop course to help mothers do this at home ▪ Commercial kitchen ▪ Offer an alternative education opportunity, might be a good place to offer a carpentry course as they are closing the shop at the high school ▪ Screen/assess people taking a course – Myers Briggs – so people know what courses will be best for them to enter the work force ▪ Career Exploration course |
| Stream Courses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stream courses from Walkerton to Kincardine to save on travel time ▪ Classes that are streaming courses in the class, video conferencing |
| Equipment/Space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Computers need upgrading ▪ The class should be in separate classroom area, so people don't have to walk through the classroom ▪ More colour, use the power of colour on the walls ▪ Be more of a hub ▪ Closed off room for privacy |
| Support Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Babysitting service ▪ Child care |
| Potential Partnerships/Other Services to be offered at the Centre | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ YMCA Day Care ▪ Ontario Works ▪ Big Brothers and Sisters ▪ Housing ▪ Service Canada ▪ Service Ontario ▪ Newcomer services ▪ Settlement services ▪ Small business centre ▪ Should be a collaboration with Bruce Power to help people get jobs and build the community |

| Elements in an Ideal Multi-Service Centre | Comments Provided by Participants |
|--|--|
| Opportunities for Connections with other Learners/Clients | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Local list of who is taking a course so you could create a type of study group ▪ Connect with people to sell text books |

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Review the “wish list” for an ideal multi-service centre and identify which items can be implemented at the Lake Huron Learning Centre

Final Participant Thoughts

When asked if there was anything else they felt was important for us to know, the following comments were made:

- Where they are is better than losing them
- Brighter sign, nothing about the sign brings you in
- Bring more services together
- Put up success stories on electronic signs
- Chairs outside the building to sit on
- Someone to help me build a Bruce Power profile on the website
- Run a co-op for people to volunteer at workplaces
- In order to better market the centre, look at using the following methods:
 - ESL conversation group
 - Booths at the multi-cultural events
 - My FM, FM 101.7
 - Use the robotics team, they are masters of social networking
 - Put information in school newsletter
 - Use testimonials - I had my exam proctored here, it saved me 4 hours of driving
 - Advertise on Kincardine swap and sell
 - Use the Quick K store community board– on the community board where the Scotia Bank is
 - Go into the schools and let the teenagers know about this place
 - Tell the gifted classes that courses are here, so the students can take advance courses
 - Set up a time to have students meet an expert
 - Use the Kincardine papers, digital paper to highlight the centre – what’s new at the LHLC once a month

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Build a more comprehensive marketing strategy for the the centre to incerase the communtiy’s awareness of the centre and the services offered there

Attachment A: Focus Group Questions

QUILL Labour Market Partnership Project Lake Huron Learning Centre Focus Group Questions

1. Let's do a quick round of introductions. Can each of you tell the group your name
2. Tell me about your experience using the services at this building
Probe:
 - How did you hear about the services offered here?
 - How many services have you used?
 - What was the movement like between services?
 - How did the referrals happen? Were they seamless?
 - For what length of time have you been accessing services in this building?
3. How accessible are the programs and services offered in this building?
Probe:
 - Hours of operation?
 - Location of the building? How do you get here?
 - What would make it more accessible for you?
4. Tell me about whether the classes/services you used here have helped or are helping you achieve your goals.
Probe:
 - In what ways were/are the classes/services helpful to you?
 - In what ways do you feel that the classes fell short in helping you reach your goals?
5. How would you describe the level of customer service you've received?
Probe:
 - Appointments being made
 - Calls being returned
 - Greeting in the building
6. If you were designing a building where you could come to get what you needed to help you reach your goals what would you put in it?
Probe:
 - What other services would be helpful?
 - What other supports would you like to have?
 - Food, child care, equipment, etc.
 - What would attract you to use a service?
 - How can we make this building and the services we offer more welcoming?
7. Is there anything else we haven't discussed yet that you think is important for us to know?