



QUILL Learning Network

Coordinating to Bring Low-Literacy and Marginalized Clients Employment

St. Marys Education and Employment Site Client Focus Groups

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St. Marys Education and Employment Site: 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, a focus group was conducted with clients of the St. Marys Education and Employment Site. The purpose of the focus group 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 11 people attended the focus group, with six women and five men participating. Attendees at the 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 group, 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 St. Marys Education and Employment Site

Clients who attended the focus group were very positive about the St. Marys Education and Employment Site. The most commonly mentioned things that participants in the focus group liked are the convenience of the site (30% of responses) and that it is a positive environment (30% of responses).

When asked to name one thing they liked about coming to the building, comments from participants included:

- Easy and convenient, good spot
- People are very friendly, positive environment, approachable

- Upgrade skills, computer skills
- Great help, helpful
- Peace and quiet
- Lots of space

The St. Marys Education and Employment Site is convenient and staff are friendly.

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Continue to leverage/build on those things that clients like about the St. Marys Education and Employment Site

Experience Using the Services offered at the St. Marys Education and Employment Site

How Heard about the Centre

Participants in the focus group heard about the St. Marys Education and Employment Site in a number of ways, with the top three ways being:

- Saw the sign on the building (31.25% of responses)
- Through word of mouth, such as a friend or family member (31.25% of responses)
- Read about it in the newspaper (25% of responses)

Other ways individuals heard about the centre were through staff at the site and through the advertising for the site’s open house.

Number of Services Used at the Centre

The majority of participants in the focus group (54.5%) have used both services at the St. Marys Education and Employment Site, with 45.5% using only one of the services provided at the centre (see the table below for more details).

Services Used	Number of Participants	% of Participants
Partners in Employment	8	72.7%
Adult Learning Programs of Perth	8	72.7%
Both	6	54.5%

Transition/Movement between Services at the Centre

In terms of participants’ experience in moving/transitioning between services at the centre, participants rated this aspect of the centre from “okay” to “thumbs up”. Some of the participants noted that the staff of the different organizations work well together and that they were referred to the other service by staff. Focus group participant comments include:

- *“Heard about the service then went and used it”*
- *“Made connections separately”*
- *“PIE directed me through the door”*
- *“I was introduced to PIE staff”*
- *“Staff may not have the knowledge about the other program”*
- *“I want more personal help, I wish there was more personal help at PIE”*
- *“I want more encouragement from PIE staff”*

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Explore how word of mouth marketing could be further enhanced
- Ensure that all staff working in the centre have a working knowledge of the programs and services each offers

Accessibility of the Programs and Services Offered at the Centre

The participants in the focus group 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:

- Participants in the focus group are highly satisfied with the current level of accessibility at the centre. The only suggested change was to have the centre be open longer on Fridays

Hours of operation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Open longer on Friday ▪ Staff are currently flexible if we need access beyond the current hours of operation ▪ Good to have some flexibility
Location of the building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Three participants walk to the building, with the walk taking 5 to 10 minutes ▪ Five participants drive to the building, living from five to twenty minutes away ▪ The location is convenient ▪ Parking is great
Items that would make the building more accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No suggestions were made by the participants

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Look for ways to continue to meet the service needs of clients, including being flexible with the hours of operation of the centre

Achievement of Goals

Focus group participants were asked to talk about whether the classes/services they used at the St. Marys Education and Employment Site have helped or are helping them achieve their goals. Ways in which the classes/services have helped clients in achieving their goals include the learning of specific skills, boosting their confidence levels and providing them with resources and supports to get a job. Specific comments include:

- Reached my first goal
- Tutoring
- Ask about the program from Tina's sister on the east coast
- Gave me confidence to use a computer, practical skills
- Learned a computer program (excel)
- Gave me confidence to know what to do
- Got my GED
- Recognized there was a lot of material online
- Got a job in a week
- Group setting, the skills we have, the skills we want to obtain, our values, worked on resumes, steered me to different job interviews, knew how to match you to the right employer
- Great resume help
- Taught us how to market ourselves

Participants also noted that the classes/services have fallen short in helping them achieve their goals as there are limited jobs for older workers in the area, and that not all of the courses/services are offered in St. Marys. Specific comments include:

- There are limited jobs for older workers, it is hard for older workers to find a job, biases in the workforce, hidden prejudices in the workforce
- Can't get all services in St. Marys, have no time to go to Stratford
- Need a possible ride share type of service, formal way of connecting people for ride share
- Hard to serve, barriered clients
- Need to offer a program on how to use a computer for a cash register or debit machine

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 St. Marys Education and Employment Site. Overall, clients are happy with the level of customer service received. They feel well served and that staff at the centre care about them. Comments provided by participants include:

- It is easy to make appointments
- Calls are returned, use text
- Email is answered immediately
- Excellent customer service,
- Greeting in the building, people know your name
- Personal, people care about you, people call to check in on you, know the community, know how to read you and tailor your needs to the people out there
- Being a small community, they network very well,
- Well connected
- They get to know me, they are just like a friend
- People are intuitive, doesn't matter your education (ALPP)



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:

- An intimate atmosphere with a good physical space and people
- Links to and resources about other community resources
- Support services, such as child minding
- The provision of additional types of courses (ESL, working in a retail environment)

- Other partners on site (EI, Ontario Works, Service Canada/Ontario, mental health)
See the table below for the comments provided by focus group participants.

Elements in an Ideal Multi-Service Centre	Comments Provided by Participants
Atmosphere	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intimate feel this centre is wonderful ▪ Good physical space and great people
Link to Other Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Get information about multi-cultural association ▪ Resource binder for other resources
Courses Offered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ESL, would like to be certified in ESL ▪ POS machine, cash register ▪ ESL for children ▪ Courses for working in retail and the equipment to learn on
Support Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child minding
Potential Partnerships/Other Services to be offered at the Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Having a better way to other services that people need – food, mental health ▪ Service Canada/Ontario ▪ EI ▪ Ontario Works

Potential Actions for Further Work:

- Review the “wish list” for an ideal multi-service centre and identify which items can be implemented at the St. Marys Education and Employment Site

Final Participant Thoughts

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

- Build a kitchen for cooking
- What they are doing is right
- They are meeting the needs
- Staff are working at a job, but they make it so easy it doesn't look like work
- The support you get from Carol and Yvonne fosters other friendships

Attachment A: Focus Group Questions

QUILL Labour Market Partnership Project St. Marys Education and Employment Site 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?