

# **Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Development for Immigrants in Rural Alberta Communities – Phase Two**

## **Report Summary**

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- Kate Glover, Coordinator, Willow Creek Community Adult Learning Society

### **Executive Summary**

This project **Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Development for Immigrants in Rural Alberta Communities – Phase Two** had four objectives. They were to:

1. to create new employment opportunities for ESL speaking immigrants by providing job specific pre-employment training. (Food Processing industry and one other industry)
2. to create a new labour pool for industry (Food Processors and one other industry) by providing job specific pre-employment training for ESL speaking immigrants.
3. to create further training opportunities for ESL immigrants by modifying current training programs to an accessible language level.
4. to further develop local program and instructional capacity in rural communities by assisting existing programs to develop and implement industry specific pre-employment training following the framework/process model developed in Phase One.

**These objectives were developed through three main projects.**

1. Piloting the **Industry specific Pre-employment language Training: Food Processing** with the Taber & District Community Adult Learning Association and with Willow Creek Community Adult Learning Society and using the feedback to revise the original curriculum as needed.

2. Supporting Brooks Community Adult Learning Council while they used the **Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Training: Program Development Framework** to develop and pilot a curriculum for the Oil and Gas industry for their local employers and ESL clients.

3. Modifying a **Confined Space Entry Program** and a **Skid Steer Program** currently being used by Lethbridge Community College so they are more accessible by ESL learners.

All of the projects were completed and met with favourable reviews. However, the Alberta economy changed significantly from the time this proposal was first put forward until the actual opportunity to run the classes. This resulted in difficulty in finding participants for the pilots, particularly for the Food Processing classes. The originally intended segment of the population for the classes were the Low German Mennonite men who were doing seasonal work in Southern Alberta. 4 years ago, Food Processors were not hiring these men because they didn't "have a grade twelve education". This was their screening tool. However, in the current economy and labour market picture, this situation has changed. The LGM men are employed and are being sought after to work. The interesting outcome of this was the new segment of the population that came to the forefront, the Low German Mennonite women. They were enthusiastic about the food processing courses and liked learning English through this content area. While not necessarily searching for work immediately, many of them would like to get into the workforce when their children are older.

The curriculum and the framework have also been used outside of this project as guides to plan other curriculums. Some communities are using parts of the curriculum to enhance training that they are already providing. They have proven to be valuable resources for the Community Adult Learning Councils. The certificate bearing programs that were modified will also be made available to Community Adult Learning Councils.

**The recommendations from this project are:**

1. Modify other certificate bearing courses to make them more accessible to ESL learners.
2. Build funding for onsite childcare and transportation into budgets for future programs
3. Provide support for other communities to use the Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Training: Program Development Framework.

**Background**

This project grew out of the Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Training Program which took place in 2003- 2004. This former project took place at a time when the present economic situation in Alberta was just on the horizon. A labour shortage was imminent and economic growth depended upon immigrants. However, many of the immigrants that were currently employed in seasonal work and looking for permanent work didn't have adequate language skills to participate in the workforce. Today's workforce needs employees that have adequate language skills to access the training needed around downsizing, diversified markets, value added products, lean processing methods, health and safety requirements and restructuring.

Many of the industries that needed to employ immigrants were situated in rural areas of the province. Often, these areas don't have the infrastructure to support language training for specific purposes. The Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Training: Program Development Framework was developed to help rural communities in their efforts to meet the specific language training needs of their local industries and their ESL speakers. The Framework was piloted by using it to develop the Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Training: Food Processors Curriculum. The Food Processing industry was chosen as the pilot industry. Even though this industry doesn't require specific certified training for front line employment it is undergoing an increased need for training. The HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) program, which is becoming more prevalent in food processing plants, requires extensive training and document use. Occupation Health and Safety training is also becoming more extensive and regulated. Employees must have the language skills and document use skills to be able to access this training. The Food Processors Curriculum was designed as a pre-employment training program which would give the learners the skills needed to be able to successfully participate in training while on the job.

The present project, Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Development for Immigrants in Rural Alberta Communities - Phase Two, continued from the original project. It piloted the Food Processors Curriculum in two locations, Taber and Granum, and supported another location, Brooks, while it used the Framework to develop another language training program for a local business. It also further developed the theme of making training more accessible to ESL employees by taking two certificate bearing training programs that are used in the workforce and rewriting them at a more applicable level. The rewritten training programs also contain strategies for instructing ESL learners and a study supplement for ESL learners in these programs.

## **Findings**

\_ The surge in the Alberta economy affected the expected targeted audience for piloting the Food Processor curriculum. People that would ordinarily have been suitable for these training programs are now employed. The Low German Mennonite men are being enticed to stay on farms by being offered better salaries and other perks such as housing and year round employment. Also, because many food processors so badly need employees they have dropped their previous screening tool and, have already begun hiring Low German Mennonites. It was quite a struggle to get enough learners to attend the two pilots of the Food Processing Curriculum. However, the result has been to locate another pool of learners that seem ideally suited to this labour market; Low German Mennonite women.

\_ Even though their husbands are working, much of the work is seasonal and with the rising costs in Alberta these families need help in meeting the household bills. The women may need to work, at least part time, to help support their families. The women that attended the classes were very eager to learn about the workforce.

\_ Low German Mennonite women are available, interested in and willing to take courses. However, they bring their own special needs to classes. The classes must accommodate lack of transportation and on-site childcare and must be flexible in timing.

\_ Transportation was an issue for the women in the pilot programs. In one program the instructor provided transportation for one of the participants and the CALC employed a driver to pick up some of the other women. This has to be taken into consideration when planning programs in rural areas.

\_ Providing onsite day care is a necessity for many immigrant women and the cost for this must be factored into future programs. However, this too, had positive repercussions. The children loved coming and playing with their friends. They would get up in the morning and ask their mothers if they were going to play that day. Many of these moms and children are quite isolated and this allowed them to experience the socialization needed for school.

\_ One of the most interesting findings has been the "spin off" opportunities that are presented by holding whole day classes. As mentioned, in the Willow Creek program, the lunch hours were used to have guest speakers from community health programs and to provide information around nutrition and cooking. The women in the class loved these sessions. They have compiled a cookbook of the recipes that they have tried and have learned how to read recipes. They also had the Public Health Nurse speak to them about immunization for children, use of care seats for children, women's health (breast self examination, pap smears), and the Dental Hygienist spoke to them about children's and adults dental health.

\_ As well as gaining knowledge about the workplace and information that could be applied to their home, the women gained confidence in their social ability and their ability to learn. Because they were introduced to guest speakers, other classmates, instructors, coordinators and employers they learned how to react in unfamiliar social situations and became more acclimatized to Canadian ways.

\_ This course has been a springboard for future courses. Because the moms and children have enjoyed meeting together twice a week for the past month, the Willow Creek Community Adult Learning Council is going to offer a "Stay and Play" program for children as well as a conversational English class for the moms. Also most of these same women are enrolled in an upcoming class, following the same format, which will help them apply for their driver's license. Several of the women want to get a driver's license because they want to be able to get a job.

\_ The instructors in the rural communities have a very good knowledge of their learners and communities. They are able to expand the programming to meet other needs beyond the prescribed curriculum.

\_ The Food Processing Curriculum has been very well received in communities. Several communities are using parts of it or strategies from it to enhance their other programs.

The curriculum deals with facets of Canadian workplace culture that are transferable to many different settings. As mentioned previously, one of the communities that piloted it has used it as a model for their next course on “Getting a Driver’s License”.

\_ The Brooks coordinator who used the framework for curriculum development found it very user friendly and easy to follow. She used it to prepare and pilot a curriculum for the Oil and Gas industry. She then used it to prepare another curriculum for the local meat processing plant.

\_ The challenge is still finding work positions for the learners once they have finished the course. Even though the participants are now better prepared for the workplace it may still take time for them to get other factors in their life arranged so that they can actually apply for a job. In the case of the Low German Mennonite women, they still have the problems of child care and transportation. In the case of the Oil and Gas training program, all of the participants got jobs, though not all in the Oil and Gas industry. “I don’t know what it’s like everywhere else but the Oil and Gas is a really hard sell for getting immigrants hired.”

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Modify other certificate bearing courses to make them more accessible to ESL learners.**

Many ESL learners are now in the work force. They don’t have time to attend ESL classes prior to getting a job. However, they are still expected to know and abide by all of the Occupational Health and Safety regulations, avail themselves of workplace training and stay up to date on the latest developments in the workplace. More of the training that is presented in the workforce needs to be rewritten, reformatted and restructured to make it more accessible to ESL learners. This will allow them to be contributing involved members of the workforce. It will also ensure that when they are in a course it is at an appropriate level for them and taught with appropriate strategies. In the course of implementing this project, two programs that were mentioned several times by different stakeholders were First Aid and Class 4 Driver’s License.

### **2. Build funding for onsite childcare and transportation into budgets for future programs.**

If the target audience for a class is immigrant women, onsite childcare and transportation will be necessary to remove barriers keeping them from attending. Some of these women are very isolated, do not have a social network to share babysitting and have no means of transportation. They will not be able to attend classes if these needs are not met.

### **3. Provide support for other communities to use the Industry Specific Pre-employment Language Training: Program Development Framework.**

Rural communities are being asked more and more often to provide training for local employers. They need a format to follow to set up a program and they need support for the first time they use the format. They need a resource person that they can consult and that can make suggestions for improvement, resources, and strategies. This will give

them a tool, the information, the experience and the confidence to be more responsive to their community's needs. They also need the funding to provide the time to develop a program.