

Working Together Project Year 3

EVALUATION REPORT SUMMARY

Project Led By:

Project Funded By:

Report Prepared By:



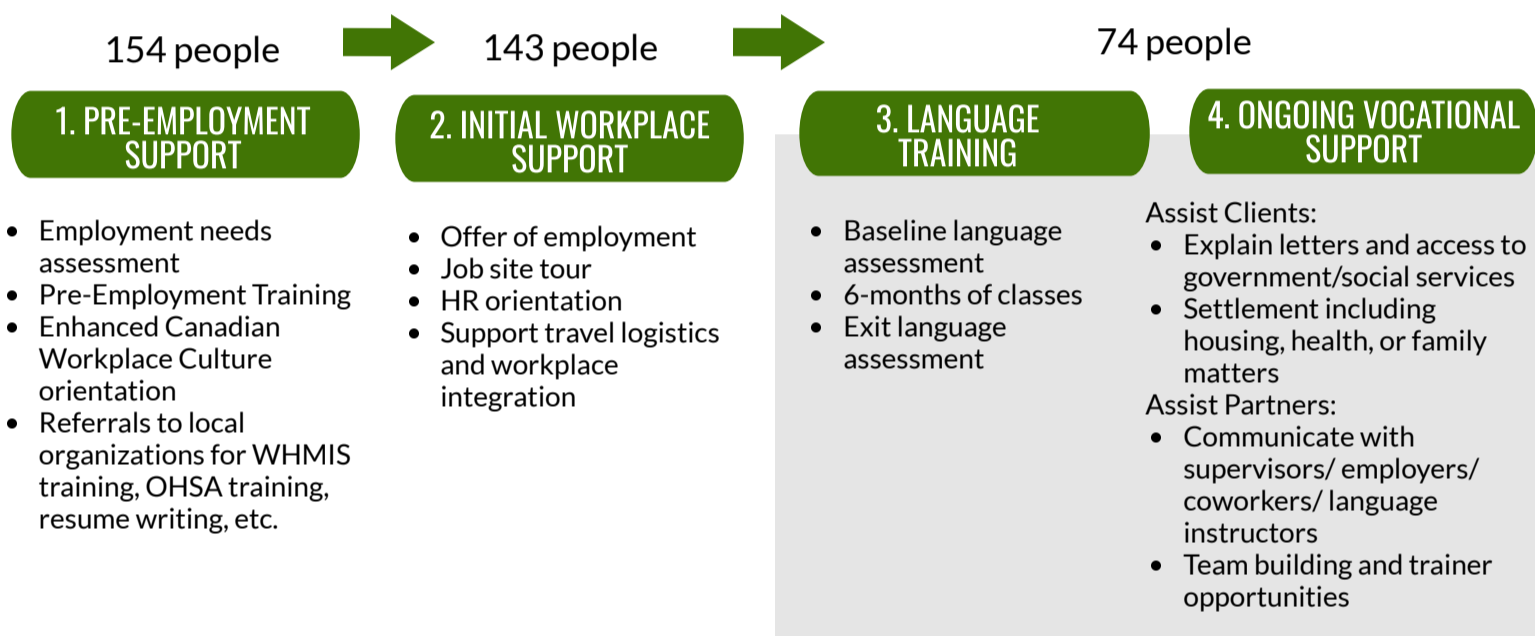
Project Partners:



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Working Together Project is a three-year pilot program (2018-2021) that supports Government-Assisted Refugees in Kitchener-Waterloo and neighbouring areas to find employment and learn English. The project is led by Reception House Waterloo Region and funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). Centre for Community Based Research led the developmental evaluation, which helped to shape program development.

Program Components



EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Purpose

- The extent to which the program was effective (process)
- The extent to which anticipated outcomes were met (outcome)
- How the program and its theory of change can be improved to better facilitate the employment and language acquisition of participants (future development)

Methods

- 1. Program tracking tool** - 154 participants' progress in the program was tracked
- 2. Participant surveys** - 46 baseline surveys and 46 follow-up surveys from year 1-3
- 3. Focus groups** - 8 program participants in two focus groups, all program partners and staff in one focus group, and an interview with the language instructor.
- 4. Case study** - a program participant case study made up of one participant interview and an employer case study consisting of a focus group with the JD Sweid partner and two staff.
- 5. Secondary document review** - material from partners and steering committee notes

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 154 people referred to the Project:

- Participants were largely high school (n=89) and elementary school (n=44) educated, male (81%), with an average (mean) age of 35 (ages ranging between 19 to 62)
- Most were between a CLB level of 0-4
- The majority (89%) arrived in Canada between 2016-2019.

Of the 143 who have received initial workplace support:

- 107 at JD Sweid, 14 at Accumetal Manufacturing, nine at DC Foods, six at Tigercat Industries, three at Cherry Forest Product, three at OXI-CP Brite, and one at RDJ Bakeries Ltd
- 74 participants entered language training and vocational support
- 46 completed a baseline survey
- 26 graduated and exited the program

The 46 participants who successfully entered the workplace and language classes and completed a baseline survey have less education and a lower CLB level than the average person who was referred to the Project.

Research Question #1: Process

Overall, partners and staff reported **strong rapport** between Reception House, the partnering workplaces, and Conestoga College; however, the global pandemic created a **decreased connection** among some partners and between program participants and employers.

1. PRE-EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT



- Prepared participants well for the Canadian workplace



- The virtual shift due to the global pandemic created some challenges for delivering pre-employment support

3. LANGUAGE TRAINING



- The language instructor's flexible, creative, and innovative approach created a responsive learning environment
- The at-home online classes had benefits for some participants



- The global pandemic made it difficult to test participants' CLB level.
- Some participants reported that the different CLB levels made it difficult to learn

2. INITIAL WORKPLACE SUPPORT



- Most program participants reported positive relationships at work
- On-the-job training prepared participants to do their job well
- The workplace and Reception House created an efficient onboarding process

4. VOCATIONAL SUPPORT



- Reception House effectively supported participants to adjust to virtual classes and virtual services
- Ongoing vocational support effectively solved challenges participants faced

"Reception House follow[s] up with us on a regular basis. They were always in touch with our supervisors and admin, and they were a point of contact between us and the company. In addition, Reception House helps us a lot in many other aspects, with Ontario Works, in day to day activities if we need any help; they are always ready to help."

- Program Participant

Research Question #2: Outcomes

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

- Better prepared for the Canadian workplace
- Increased language skills and ability to communicate in English which meant greater societal integration for some
- More confidence to navigate life in Canada and a greater sense of agency
- Greater financial security
- Increased sense of belonging in Canada

Almost all participants (90%) moved up at least one (estimated) CLB level in 6-months.

At six-months into the program, **70%** of survey respondents strongly agreed that they felt more prepared to work in Canada, compared to **82%** at 12-months and **100%** at 18-months

COMMUNITY/SYSTEM OUTCOMES

Changes in the local labour market

- Increased employer awareness of the local immigrant talent pool
- Increased capacity of partner employers to hire newcomers
- More newcomer-supportive and welcoming workplaces

Changes in the newcomer system of support

- Increased cooperation among local organizations
- Increased capacity of community to continue supporting newcomer employment

"As you bring new cultures in the workplace, there is going to be some impact. We often think of incorporating immigrants and refugees as if they are doing the changing and accommodating. But it overlooks the positive changes they can provide to a Canadian setting."

- Employer Partner

Recommendations

ACTIONS FOR PROJECT PARTNERS

Pursue resources to sustain project learnings: This project was successful, with project partners learning throughout how best to deliver this innovative program. Reception House is pursuing avenues to sustain and build on project learnings.

Leverage internal workplace referrals: JD Sweid has developed an internal referral system which may continue to generate new hires of newcomer refugees.

Continue to provide flexible language training for newcomer refugees: Training should adapt to the various home situations, schedules, CLB levels, and learning preferences. There are benefits to incorporating online platforms for language training.

Invest in refugee digital literacy: Service providers should be skilled at using online platforms, secure technology for clients, and train newcomer refugees on digital literacy.

ACTIONS FOR OTHERS WHEN ADAPTING THE MODEL

Launch an effective partnership in your community: Choose partners wisely based on their level of capacity, commitment, and curiosity.

Identify a trusted lead resettlement organization: A resettlement organization can ensure that the project remains client-centered and coordinate efforts among partners.

Recruit employers with a long-term commitment: Employers' commitment and ability to prepare their existing workforce and collaborate closely with a resettlement agency is critical.

Engage a flexible language training partner: An effective language partner has the capacity to be flexible, creative, and innovative.

Build a culture of strategic learning: Similar projects should adopt a community-based approach to evaluation that is stakeholder-driven, participatory and action-oriented.

Invest funding in this project model. Funders such as IRCC and the Ontario Ministry of Labour and Training should consider investing in this project model.