

Program Design for:

EMPLOYMENT AND LIFE SKILLS PROGRAM

Making Changes Association

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1. INTRODUCTION

Making Changes: Employment and Life Skills Program for Immigrant Women in Alberta is a program which focuses on developing skills in the areas of assertiveness, self-efficacy, career planning, information retrieval, job searches and job maintenance. It is designed specifically for immigrant women, particularly those who feel isolated in their homes and are frustrated by the obstacles that hinder them from participating more actively in their new society. This program is for immigrant women who are seeking changes in their working lives but do not have the knowledge, information, nor confidence to carry them out.

This program design and evaluation framework outlines the Employment and Life Skills Program's purpose, rationale, program design and theory of change, and updates the plan for monitoring and reporting outcomes.¹

2. PROGRAM HISTORY

The first Making Changes program was offered by Humber College in Toronto 35 years ago. Judith MacCallum, a West Indian woman working within her community, recognized that immigrant women, while sharing many of the same obstacles as Canadian women looking for work, had many difficulties that were unique to the immigrant experience. She therefore prepared a program that attempted to meet the special needs and concerns of immigrant women. Judith produced the first Making Changes manual and accompanying materials for facilitators.

In 1979, the Making Changes program was moved to the Cross-Cultural Communication Centre in Toronto. Shortly after its introduction it was apparent that in order to make the program accessible to most immigrant women, a language component had to be added. Thus, Making Changes: Employment Orientation for Immigrant Women (a participant workbook and facilitator manual) was developed.

In 1981, the Arusha International Development Resource Centre in Calgary introduced the Making Changes program into the programming of the Centre. Since then, the program has been revised and new material developed on an ongoing basis in order to

¹ A Program Logic Model and data collection plan for the ELS program does exist; the information gleaned from review of the literature was used to make small modifications to the outcomes and method of collecting the data.

meet the needs of immigrant women in Calgary. In 2008, the program was renamed Making Changes - Employment and Life Skills program.

Over the years, there have consistently been many requests from other centres in Alberta and nationally for information on the program and assistance in setting up similar programs. Currently, versions of this program can be found in other jurisdictions, such as Edmonton and Toronto².

3. GUIDING VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

This program recognizes the significant contributions that immigrant women make in Canada; it also recognizes that in order to achieve their full potential as active members in their new society, they must have the same access to retraining and desirable jobs as native-born Canadians.

In order to support immigrant women's full potential, the program operates on a number of guiding principles:

- Immigrant women's skills and personal qualities are included and valued;
- Immigrant women have a contribution to make to their new society;
- Integration into the workforce relies on overcoming low self-esteem and isolation;
- A diverse workforce enriches the local business community

4. PROGRAM PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

4.1 Purpose

The Employment and Life Skills Program supports immigrant women to critically analyze the factors that affect their own life situations and to develop strategies to deal effectively with the obstacles they face in order to become more active participants in

² Changing Together (Edmonton) and COSTI (14 different locations in the Toronto, York Region and Peel).

the workplace and Canadian society. Each immigrant woman in the program comes with her own needs, goals, level of understanding and awareness.

“Real” changes cannot happen in the space of a six or twelve week program, especially when it is not intensive. The program can “plant seeds” that may bear fruit many months after the program finishes. In regards to the Employment and Life Skills Program, it is often the case that after the participants leave the program, they use self-efficacy skills “planted” in the program to propel them further in their career and occupational pathways. Certain program content and skills are immediately internalized and put into practice by participants. However, it is often not until later that other, newly acquired skills are practiced.

The program helps women to work towards increased awareness, knowledge and skills in a number of areas:

- Critical awareness and reflection;
- Self-esteem;
- Self-reliance and assertiveness;
- Canadian (Calgary) employment and labour context;
- Canadian (Calgary) business culture;
- Conducting job searches;
- Preparation of documents.

In essence, the Employment and Life Skills Program is an empowerment process for immigrant women, increasing their personal power through participation so that they can take action to improve their circumstances. This empowerment process strengthens their ongoing capacity for successful action under changing circumstances (Staples, 1990).

4.2 Rationale

It is well-documented that immigrants are needed to fill Canada’s shrinking labour force, and as such, are being encouraged to move to Canada (Koert, Borgen & Amundson, 2011). As such, the minority population in Canada has quadrupled in the past 20 years (Tran, 2004). However, there is a growing recognition that after immigrants arrive in Canada, employers often do not recognize their qualifications (Kanter, 2009). The transitions and adjustments involved with moving to a new country along with unpredictable and

changing workforce opportunities often results in isolation, frustration and loss of self-esteem and confidence (Koert, Borgen & Amundson, 2011).

Traditional models of career theory were developed with the assumption that all clients were the same. The five principles of traditional career counseling are: 1) individualism and autonomy of the client; 2) the assumption of affluence, which allows individuals the luxury to explore career directions; 3) opportunities are available to all individuals who work hard; 4) work is central to people's lives; and 5) that career counseling is a linear, rational and objective process (Neville, Gysbers, Heppner, and Johnston, 1998 as cited in Swanson and Fouad, 1999). Furthermore, as Herring (2002) explains, traditional career-theory models were developed to assist in counseling middle-class, American men of European origin. Recent literature recognizes that traditional theory includes aspects that are not applicable to ethnic minority populations (Herring 2002), and may especially be irrelevant for immigrant women.

The effects of migration and transition are not gender neutral; in fact, there is research to suggest that transition and acculturation is different for immigrant men and women (Koert, Borgen & Amundson, 2011). Immigrant women have been found to face unique barriers to successful adjustment into the occupational realm such as the need to balance responsibilities at work and home with little or no family support and having to put their own careers on hold while their partners retrain to find work (DiCicco-Bloom, 2004).

These unique barriers faced by immigrant women generate the need for employment programs that recognize the gendered realities of transition and acculturation. The lack of voice for immigrant women, coupled with isolation and alienation, means that effective programs need to address their need for mutuality, safety, relationship, acceptance, validation, commonality and interdependence. Programmatic responses need to understand that immigrant women come with a range of accredited and non-accredited skills and abilities arising out of their life experiences. For example, skills most commonly ascribed to women, such as being good listeners, are given little value and are viewed as part of the feminine personality as opposed to a learned tool (English & Irving, 2007). Unfortunately, as an outcome of this tendency to undervalue immigrant women's skills, there is a general tendency in employment programs to treat immigrant and refugee women as blank slates (Clayton, 2005).

Given these contextual factors and realities, there is a need for employment programming that embeds a gendered perspective into its philosophy as well as being based on empowerment models of delivery. Empowerment models are appropriate and necessary in

interventions and programming with disempowered women, who are, among other things, in situations of immediate and societal structural restraints (Parsons, 2001). Given these restraints, Borgen & Amundson (2011) indicate that immigrant women benefit from participation in groups and/or programs that focus not only on career issues, but personal issues as well (such as building of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy). Participation in this way will help build their sense of confidence and belonging, ultimately contributing to their future occupational success.

4.3 Approach

As mentioned above, empowerment models are appropriate and necessary in programming with disempowered women (Parsons, 2001). Empowerment programs for women should result in:

- Self-esteem (Parsons, 2001);
- Sense of control (Gomes, Coimbra & Menezes, 2008);
- Decision making skills (Gomes, Coimbra & Menezes, 2008);
- Development of knowledge and skills to negotiate their immediate world (Parsons, 2001);
- Greater propensity to take action and participate in a larger environment (Parsons, 2001).

One of the learning methods often used in empowerment models is “Popular Education” (Bosch, 1998). The Employment and Life Skills program was developed using the popular education approach to adult learning. This approach was pioneered by the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. Popular education is widely used in Latin America not only to teach people to read and write, but also to help people think critically about their situations and to empower them to take action to change their situation. It has been used to some extent in Canada in teaching English as a Second Language and for literacy. Research shows that popular education methods, when integrated into a well-designed employment program, can enhance the learning and outcomes for women (Bosch, 1998; Parsons, 2001).

The Employment and Life Skills program also uses a problem-posing model in its curriculum delivery. Each participant is encouraged throughout the program to critically analyze the causes and effects of her own situation so that she may take more control over it and transform her own life. Problem-posing and popular education models are bottom-up approaches, which emphasize female empowerment (Bosch, 1998).

Central to popular education methods is the creation of an authentic dialogue between learners and facilitators as equally knowing subjects (Bosch, 1998). This is in direct contrast to traditional models of education in which the teacher is the 'expert' who has the 'correct' answers and dispenses knowledge to the students, who are merely passive recipients. This model of education and learning does not support the student to develop critical thinking skills or skills for articulating concerns, or to take control over one's life (Making Changes Facilitator Manual, 2009).

Popular education methods are process-oriented, encouraging participatory learning, as well as creating horizontal relationships between facilitator and learner, allowing interactive structures to develop (Bosch, 1998). This approach benefits immigrant women by helping them overcome isolation, socialize with others, share opinions and question role behaviour. When integrated into work-training programs, popular education services a link between short-term and long-term approaches. By promoting self-esteem and self-reliance, thereby increasing the individual's power, this methodology reaches beyond the programs six week timeframe and immediate objectives (Bosch, 1998). Many of the past participants of the Employment and Life Skills program remain connected to Making Changes in some capacity, and it is through this connection that long-term growth and success is observed. Unique programs like the Employment and Life Skills Program are successful because they link personal empowerment (long-term strategy) with the shorter-term need of income and employment.

There are certain activities used in the delivery of the program curriculum that facilitate a participatory learning atmosphere. Roleplaying is used extensively as a technique to example difficult situations and learn alternative ways of dealing with problems. Participants are encouraged to provide "updates" in order to explore how they are feeling that particular day, or what is happening in their lives at that period in time (Making Changes Facilitator Manual, 2009). Additionally, the physical environment is critically important to achieving a participatory atmosphere. Sitting in a circle, where facilitators are not at the "head" of the room but rather a member of the circle, encourage the sense of a two-way learning environment (facilitator as learner – learner as facilitator).

5. PROGRAM DESIGN

Designing social programs is both a science and an art that requires careful analysis and attention to detail. It is a creative problem solving process to complex social problems. Thoughtful program design takes into account sound research knowledge and best practices to determine the critical elements required to meet unique client needs and alleviate a particular social problem. The end

goal of program design is to establish the service or combination of services which have the best possible chance of achieving the program objectives and improving quality of life for clients (Main. 2011).

5.1 Program Structure

The program can be offered in a minimum of 36 hours; 6 hours, once a week for 6 weeks or 3 hours, twice a week for 6 weeks. Similar types of empowerment-based employment programs recommend this duration and frequency in order to achieve optimal outcomes (Bosch, 1998). The duration of the program can easily be increased, depending on funding and the special needs of the target group. The materials developed for the program are sufficient for at least a 60 to 80 hour program. Generally, the program has been running once during the week for 6 weeks from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm.

A critical feature of the structure of the Employment and Life Skills Program is that it addresses one of the key barriers faced by women: availability of childcare. Free, full day childcare is available to participants, thereby reducing one of the major barriers that women face when considering participating in an employment program. Programs that do this are considered more effective than programs that don't (US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1999).

The ideal number of participants is between 15 and 20, assuming there are two facilitators. The criteria for selection of participants for the program generally include:

- A minimum of an intermediate level of competence in spoken English (i.e., this would pertain to a level 3 benchmark classification; however, level 2 is also permissible provided the participant understands that she may encounter frustrations);
- A need for information on retraining or job search;
- A need to clarify career goals and skills;
- A need to develop assertiveness in interactions with others;
- An ability to deal with one's problems and seek solutions in a group learning environment.

To be effective in meeting individual needs, employment counseling, referral and follow-up must accompany the program. Some participants require more intensive individual assistance than is possible in a group setting. Career counseling sessions may be arranged with facilitators as needs arise out of each session. Participants are also encouraged to have on-going contact with other group members and facilitators. The Employment and Life Skills program works with educational institutions, community agencies,

professional associations, and the local business community to create partnerships that will enhance opportunities for participants to connect to local resources. This way of working is embedded within the larger organizational model of community development.

5.2 Program Curriculum

The curriculum for the Employment and Life Skills Program is comprised of the following interrelated components:

- Career planning;
- Information-sharing and the acquisition of skills in information gathering;
- Job search;
- Job maintenance;
- Language and assertiveness;
- Development of critical awareness.

These curriculum activities are very much aligned with research on pre-employment and empowerment program models (Bosch, 1998; US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1999). In their 1999 program design manual, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development stress that mixed approaches that combine job search and education have a greater impact on participants' income and long-term job retention than programs that focus exclusively on either job search or basic education (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1999). The first several components promote the attainment of employment, while the last components work to develop self-esteem and self-confidence so that they can make decisions and define personal and professional goals. This focus on technical training with personal development work to promote key outcomes of self-reflection and critical awareness (Bosch, 1998).

The following table outlines the constructs explored through the curriculum:

Construct	Curriculum
Career Planning	• Clarification of goals • Identify skills and interests • Determine skills needed to acquire goals • Identification of obstacles
Information Sharing/ Information Gathering	• Individual career counseling • Group activities • Identification and learning how to get information from possible sources of information in the community • Emphasis on developing strategies and language for face-to-face and telephone situations
Job Search	• Job search process outlined • Opportunities to practice job search • Strategies and language functions developed for different types of encounters
Job Maintenance	• Strategies identified for success on the job • Knowledge about employment rights • Knowledge of particular legislation and regulations • Knowledge of dealing with unfair employment practices
Assertiveness Development	• Practicing ways of dealing with difficult situations • Roleplaying to learn alternative ways of dealing with problems • Recognition of cultural differences
Critical Awareness	• Analysis of the relationship between their personal problems and policies • Awareness of rights • Awareness of working with others around common concerns
Language Skills	• Learning appropriate language for different situations • Role play opportunities for interviews, phone calls • Practice vocabulary necessary to understand the labour market economy • Articulation of feelings, opinions, values, goals and skills

The development of assertiveness is one of the main threads running through the program. This is worked on over a period of time as the participants build up their self-confidence through greater knowledge of their skills, options, rights, and understanding of the obstacles that hinder them from achieving their goals. Frequent opportunities to express thoughts and opinions throughout the course also build confidence around assertiveness. Participants often practice ways of dealing with difficult situations and obstacles within a mutually supportive group environment. Through this, members become conscious that they are able to take greater control in situations in which they had previously only reacted (Making Changes Facilitator Manual, 2009). This is very much aligned to best practices in empowerment models of employment development, as programs that focus strictly on employment needs without building women's critical awareness skills may not successfully allow immigrant women to achieve long term employment success (Bosch, 1998).

The critical awareness component is also central to the program. In the case of immigrant women in Canada, there are a number of factors which have a direct bearing on the situations of immigrants. However, immigrant women often feel that their own situations and difficulties are peculiar to them and that they are somehow to blame for them. The program supports immigrant women to analyze and determine the relationship between their personal problems and the policies that affect their possibilities for training and learning English, the state of the Canadian labour market, and the impact of the new economy (Making Changes Facilitator Manual, 2009). This awareness of obstacles is alongside awareness of rights and the strength that they can have in working and struggling with others around issues of common concern.

5.3 Program Delivery (Facilitation)

The program can be successfully staffed by three persons: two facilitators and a childcare worker (or workers, depending on the number of children). Facilitators are involved in all aspects of the program, from doing intakes, running sessions, doing employment counseling and referrals (Making Changes Facilitator Manual, 2009). The facilitators should be women who are sensitive and knowledgeable in issues related to immigrant women, and have some knowledge and experience in language learning and teaching, in life skills and in career counseling.

For the Employment and Life Skills Program, the actual delivery of the program is as critically important as the content itself. In fact, research would suggest that the atmosphere or environmental culture may be the critical variable when working with women (Bosch, 1998). Creating an environment that is safe, allows interaction with others, identifies commonalities, builds trust, acceptance, validation and interdependence are all essential elements in empowerment programming (Parsons, 2001). Studies show

that the quality of the relationships between adult learners and the facilitators in the training context is in itself a strategy that creates opportunities for the development of psychological empowerment (Gomes, Coimbra, Menezes, 2008).

Facilitators need to understand that this kind of environment is central to the learning and empowerment process. An example of this can be seen in the first day of the program, through introductions. In many employment programs, this process is rushed through as a formality before moving onto technical content. In the Employment and Life Skills Program, the act of introducing oneself is part of the empowerment process. The job of the facilitator is to allow that process to unfold – if it needs to take the entire morning, then that is what needs to happen in order to create the environmental culture that can support personal and professional development.

Empowerment programs and popular education methodologies are centered around participatory learning, with facilitators creating horizontal relationships between facilitator and learner, and allowing interactive structures to develop (Bosch, 1998). The facilitators need to identify and raise questions and concerns that participants may have and suggest activities or resources to address them. In fact, this notion of “providing information to make decisions” is key in the Employment and Life Skills Program. Conclusions are not forced; the statement “you should” is not part of the Employment and Life Skills program delivery. Rather, facilitators need to openly demonstrate a belief in the program participants by asking them to do for themselves and challenge them to take risks (Bosch, 1998).

Overall, facilitators for empowerment employment programs should have expertise in career counseling, as well as skills in engaging and utilizing community resources and partners that provide information for adults in career transition (Bhat, 2010). In addition to these qualifications, facilitators need to be active and directive, supporting and encouraging, as well as fostering an environment where members support each other (Bhat, 2010).

6. THEORY OF CHANGE

6.1.1 Anticipated Outcomes

This program is designed to support outcomes in 6 key areas:

- Community Connections;
- Career Planning;
- Job Search/Maintenance;
- Language Development;
- Empowerment;
- Critical Awareness.

Short and longer term outcomes are identified in the Outcomes Framework below:

Outcomes Framework			
Development Area	Short Term Outcomes	Medium Term Outcomes	Impact
Community Connections	Volunteers have increased awareness of newcomers’ needs and contributions	Participants are connected to the local labour market and broader community	Newcomers find employment commensurate with their skills and experience
	Volunteers are engaged in newcomer settlement		
	Mainstream service providers are aware of ESL Program services		
Career Planning	Increased ability to identify skills to achieve their career goals	Participants have the skills to find and apply for employment	
Job Search/ Maintenance	Increased knowledge of employment resources	Participants are connected to the local labour market and broader community	
	Increased knowledge of employment rights		
	Increased knowledge of Canadian business culture		
Language Development	Increased English language skills	Participants feel a sense of control of their lives	Newcomers are empowered to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of Canada
	Increased ability to use appropriate language for different situations		
Empowerment	Increased ability to articulate opinions		
	Increased ability to describe skills and experiences		
	Increased self-confidence		

Critical Awareness	Increased awareness of skills and behaviours to be successful		
	Increased sense of social support		
	Increased awareness of obstacles that hinder the achievement of their goals		

6.1.2 Assumptions

The following assumptions reinforce the Employment and Life Skills Theory of Change:

- All participants come into the program with assets and capacities. We are supporting women to apply their existing assets and capacities in a new condition.
- The experience of the women needs to be validated. We can only speak to our own experiences, and not presume to know the immigrant experience. Using co-facilitators who themselves have gone through the program or who can speak to the immigrant experience is critical in creating and facilitating safe spaces for women to express themselves.
- Change occurs differently for different participants depending on where they are at that time. We cannot expect that all participants will benefit in the same ways at the same time throughout the course of the program.
- Participants cannot be expected to integrate content immediately. Time in between sessions allows for reflective learning and integration of course material.
- The creation of different types of networks are critical to success in the Calgary environment. The program supports women to connect to each other, as well as to program volunteers and guest speakers. Through these kind of connections, our community is enriched.

6.1.3 Theory of Change

Making Changes Employment and Life Skills Program theory of change is illustrated below:

Theory of Change: If predisposed immigrant women are supported to develop the awareness, knowledge and skills in the areas of assertiveness, career planning, information retrieval, job search and job maintenance, they will be able to find employment commensurate with their skills and experience, allowing them to contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of Canada.

Program Elements (pgs. 8-9)

- 36 hours of employment related services programming
- Guest speakers
- Facilitator(s)
- Group support
- Free childcare
- On-going employment counseling, referral and follow-up
- Connections to community and business groups

(Predisposed Individuals pg. 8)

Immigrant women with a minimum level of competency in spoken English needing information on job search or retraining, clarity of career goals and skills, assertiveness in dealing with others, who have the ability to address problems and seek solutions in a group environment.

Outcomes (pgs. 13-14)

Career Planning: Increased ability to identify goals needed to achieve their career goals.

Job Searches and Maintenance: Increased knowledge of employment resources; increased knowledge of employment rights; and increased knowledge of Canadian business culture.

Language Development: Increased English language skills and increased ability to use appropriate language in different situations.

Assertiveness: Increased ability to articulate opinions; increased ability to describe skills and experiences; increased self-confidence.

Critical awareness: Increased awareness of skills and behaviours to be successful; increased sense of social support; increased awareness of obstacles that hinder achievement of their goals.

Assumptions: (1) All participants come into the program with assets and capacities (2) The experience of the women needs to be validated (3) Change occurs differently for different participants depending on where they are at that time (4) Participants cannot be expected to integrate content immediately (5) The creation of networks are critical to success.

Sense of Control (pg. 6)

Increased skills to find employment and create connections to the local labour market and broader community

Impact (pg. 14)

Newcomers contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of Canada.

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