



First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP)

Case Study:

**One Arrow: Essential Skills in the
Workplace Program**

One Arrow First Nation: Saskatchewan



Canada

This project is funded by the
Government of Canada's Office
of Literacy and Essential Skills



About the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Essential Skills Inventory Project (FIMESIP)

The Canadian Career Development Foundation (CCDF) in partnership with Employment and Social Development Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, the Assembly of First Nations, the Métis National Council and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami developed a comprehensive inventory of Essential Skills initiatives aimed at First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. The *First Nations, Inuit and Métis ES Inventory Project's (FIMESIP)* goal is to better understand the state of practice with respect to Essential Skills initiatives tailored to First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth and adults living in diverse communities throughout Canada and to share these insights and lessons learned with a larger community of practice. Through FIMESIP, we have identified factors ("markers" of promising practice) that contribute to the initiatives success. **The markers, inventory, case studies and evaluation toolkit are available at: www.fimesip.ca.**

CCDF gratefully acknowledges the support of the Steering Committee and Working Group of FIMESIP:

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FIMESIP Case Study: One Arrow: Essential Skills in the Workplace Program, One Arrow First Nation: Saskatchewan

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Overview

The One Arrow Essential Skills in the Workplace Program (OAESW) is a partnership between One Arrow First Nation of Saskatchewan and the local college, Carlton Trail Regional College, Wakaw Campus. The program was developed through collaborative discussions focused on how to support Aboriginal learners to obtain workplace training or employment. In its fifth year of operation, this local project aims to increase academic levels and enhance the Essential Skills (ES) of learners from the First Nation community in order to help them transition to further training or employment. Both the One Arrow community and the College are committed to putting the needs of learners first. Finding strategies to support their learning is integral to the ongoing success of the program.

In 2009, One Arrow First Nation and the College met to discuss how they could support one another to meet the education and training needs of Aboriginal learners in their community. One Arrow's objective was to help their members understand that gaining education could open doors to further training or employment and that it could also help community members develop a greater sense of self-confidence, identity, and pride. The College wanted to build better relationships with local First Nations communities and to develop programming that could better engage and benefit Aboriginal learners.

After some initial discussion, One Arrow and the College decided to conduct a series of academic assessments gather baseline data of the community members' educational levels. Bow Valley College's TOWES assessments tool was used. At these assessment sessions, community members also had the opportunity to attend a career development interview to explore ideas about their career and life goals. The career development session was supported by the use of the Educational and Industrial Testing Service (Edits) COPS System Career Measurement Package. Over the course of three weeks, over 165 assessments were conducted in the community by College staff. The resulting report concluded that, of those tested, about 65 (approximately 40% of the participants) were performing between grades 5 - 9 in reading, math and comprehension. Based on these results, One Arrow and the College decided to move forward with the program.

Each level of the program has 100 instructional days and 30 workplace days. When community members enroll in the program, they are assessed and then placed into one of four

course levels. The program is delivered at two sites: Learners at course levels 1 and 2 (who are assessed as being between grades 5 – 9) attend the program in One Arrow and learners at course levels 3 and 4 (who are assessed as being between grades 10 – 12) attend the program at the Wakaw Campus of the College. Initially, all levels of the program were delivered at the College campus, however, learners at levels 1 and 2 encountered a number of barriers to course completion when they were required to leave their community. By shifting the classroom to the community, the barriers for these learners were mitigated.

All four levels are infused with ES concepts. The program offers all students both in-class instruction and on-the-job work experience. The goal of the project is for learners in course levels 1 and 2 to complete level 2 and then decide to either continue on to levels 3 and 4 in order to receive a grade 12 Certificate, enter into the trades, enroll in work skills training, or look for employment. For those at levels 3 and 4, the goal is to have them complete their General Education Diploma (GED) and then either further their training or to look for employment.

In recent years, the program has expanded to include the Inspire Direction Equine Assisted Learning (IDEAL) program, developed and operated by the One Arrow Equestrian Centre. This is a local business operating in One Arrow that supports academic and work placement learning by assisting learners to discover more about their personal strengths and overcome challenges through work with horses and through teamwork. Since the addition of this element, students have demonstrated improved self-esteem and program retention rates have increased.

Essential Skill Focus

The program focuses on [all nine ES](#). Level 1 and 2 courses use ES resources from Bow Valley College including, Building Workplace Essential Skills, In Focus Learner's Workbook and other supplemental ES resources as needed. In levels 3 and 4, ES learning is blended with academic course requirements required to earn a grade 12 Diploma. A list of the resources used in the program is available in the Resources section below.

The community learning group is limited to approximately 15 participants and they are supported by an Instructor, an Education Assistant, and a Counsellor available on-site two days a week. While learning ES and life skills in the classroom, they also engage in ES learning by spending one day a week at the IDEAL program, and one day in a work placement.

The development of ES is integrated throughout the program. The OAESW program carefully ladders this learning, starting first by addressing learner readiness for the training. Many of the learners in the OAESW program do not see themselves as learners and are afraid of learning based on past negative experiences. To overcome this barrier and move the learner towards developing their ES, the program uses experiential learning models, namely the IDEAL program. The IDEAL program uses the relationships that the students foster through their work with horses to help the students see themselves as learners and become invested in their own learning and development. The horse in the IDEAL program is simultaneously the 'learner' and the 'teacher' as it reacts to the instructions and communication coming from the student. The IDEAL program is holistic in approach as it engages all aspects of the student's mind, body, spirit and emotion to engage them in learning. For example, in the IDEAL program, students explore the emotion of fear of learning through an activity in which they move their horse from one place in the arena to another. Upon completing the task of moving the animal, the instructor facilitates a discussion, exploring the idea that if they can overcome their fear of moving a 1200 pound animal, they find ways to 'move' their own fear of learning and see themselves as capable learners. After this discussion, students are asked to write an entry in their reflective learning journal. Promoting the development of the ES of writing. This blend of experiential learning coupled with the introduction of ES has worked to facilitate learner confidence and further the development of ES.

ES learning is integrated into the classroom as well. In level 3, as much as possible, students identify topics of interest and the instructor finds ways to build ES lessons from these topics. Community current events and issues are also used, not only to develop learners' ES, but also to build community awareness and involvement. For example, students will be asked by the instructor to find a community newspaper article that interests them. They are asked to read it, summarize it by writing answers to the 5 W's (who, what, when, where, why) and then discuss in group their own 'take' on the issue being addressed in the article. Several ES are being developed in this activity (reading text, computer use, writing, oral communication, thinking skills, and continuous learning). It's an activity used in classrooms worldwide, but what makes an activity like this successful for this program is the interplay between ES development and community development. By practicing their skills to reflect on information, form opinions and communicate them, the students are better prepared to

engage in community band meeting discussions. This is a benefit for the student because they see their learning in action and it helps them connect with their community. It is also a benefit to the community to have more members engaged with the issues it faces.

Objectives

The objectives of the program are three-fold. First, the community has a long-term vision to see its members better educated, more employable and less dependent on social service interventions. The community believes that through better education, members can become more independent, have higher self-esteem, make better life choices and become role models to others. The community also sees a community development component. It believes that members who complete this learning will become more engaged in their community by being better able to understand the issues facing the community and participate more fully in decision-making discussions.

Second, prior to this project, the College had little experience working with the local First Nations communities. The College offered programs in Wakaw, which is close to One Arrow First Nation, but had not specifically tapped into the full opportunity of engaging and retaining Aboriginal learners in this community. Therefore, a goal of this project is for the College to reach out and create a partnership that will both enhance the educational opportunities it offers and build stronger awareness of First Nations culture and communities.

Third, in regards to the evaluation of the program, the core objective was to engage and retain learners, and have them complete levels 3 and 4 training and continue on to further education, training, or employment.

All of these objectives are long-term goals that are continually worked upon. Progress made to date has been made possible by the strong working relationship between the College and the community.

Promising Practice (Keys to Success)

Methodology/Approach

The methodology evolved from research of available tools and practices that the College's network recommended. The College's Development Team then evaluated what they thought would work

best, based on the needs identified through the assessments. Their approach to the ES component is to use materials that were already validated and available, such as the Bow Valley College ES resources.

For the pilot year, the College hired an Aboriginal teacher who had experience teaching with ES materials. This person was able to connect with students on a personal level, as well as integrate ES learning in the classroom.

The work experience component of the program, in the pilot year, was built from an established partnership that the community has with a local employer who was able to provide work placements to the students.

Based on the outcomes of the pilot, the methodology and approach was adjusted to build on the successes of and address the challenges of the first year. In the second intake of the program, level 1 and 2 learners took the program in the community. A personal counsellor was hired to work with students two days a week and students had ready access to an Elder. The Elder also taught lessons in the classroom and Band Council members also spoke to students about the importance of learning in becoming more involved in the community. In the fourth and fifth intakes of the program, the IDEAL program was introduced. The work experience component at one-day per week is more manageable for the students, employer and the College.

Structure of the Program

One Arrow First Nation and Carlton Trail Regional College are the lead program partners and are supported by the One Arrow Equestrian Centre and multiple employers who offer work placements.

The program is structured as a two-step learning approach, with components delivered in a community setting and at the College's local campus. Step 1 is tailored to learners at levels 1 and 2 (those at grade 5—9) and is offered in the First Nation community. Step 2 is for learners at levels 3 and 4 (those assessed at grade 10—12 level) and is delivered at the community campus in Wakaw. The One Arrow community class is supported by an Instructor who teaches both academic and ES for levels 1 and 2, an Education Assistant, and a Counsellor available two days a week. In Wakaw, there is a Teacher for levels 3 and 4 and a Counsellor.

The program is marketed to community members through mail,

community notices, community gatherings, and the use of social media. Now that the program is in its 5th year, it is well-known in the community and is seen positively by those who have attended. Part of the program's sustainability can be attributed to the strong partnership between the community and the College. The increasing number graduates also supports the sustainability of the program because they share positive stories and act as role models, encouraging others to go to school.

The program continues to evolve in order to better meet the needs of learners and address barriers. The Program Team is constantly integrating lessons learned into program delivery. One Arrow and the College are currently looking for a way to deliver levels 3 and 4 in the community in order to address students' need for childcare.

Content of the Program

The program uses a learner-centered model that supports both academic and ES curriculum delivery. In addition to the Bow Valley College ES resources, other resources include those from Grass Roots Press, the Saskatchewan Model for the Circle of Learning Concepts, Guiding Circles, and Saskatchewan Literacy Network (these resources are listed in the Resources section below). The staff also makes use of content from websites, YouTube, local newspapers, and community notices.

The ES, cultural teachings, and life skills components are infused throughout both program level deliveries. Instructors use local community news and events as learning content as much as possible to help students relate their experiences in school to everyday life. In addition, to help maintain students' interest, teachers will build a lesson around topics selected by participants.

Additional learning experiences are provided through the equine program, work experience, and First Nation community events or meetings.

Delivery of the Program

Level 1 and 2 are delivered to participants in One Arrow First Nation. Students transition to the Wakaw campus of the College for levels 3 and 4.

Students are supported with academic and ES training by an Instructor and Education Assistant. To assist with personal supports, there is a Counsellor available 2-days a week who schedules regular meetings with each student to check on their

progress. The Instructor, Education Assistant and Counsellor are recruited and hired by the College.

To support the cultural component of the program an Elder visits regularly with the students to talk about traditions, spirituality, teepee teachings, and share stories to help the students identify their own strengths and build self-confidence. Additionally, the Elder works with students to conduct ceremonies, learning about traditional medicines, how to follow protocols, and how to live a balanced life in terms of the four aspects of mind, body, spirit, and emotion. There are also times when the Elder stops in to see how the program is progressing and offer advice to students and the Instructor. All of this provides a sense of cultural grounding for the participants, but also provides them with teachings they can carry with them beyond the program.

Throughout the program, the College and community are in constant communication to ensure that the delivery of the program is going smoothly, that learners' needs are being met, that opportunities for learning are utilized, and that the delivery is meeting the program's goals.

Outcomes of the Program

The program submits formal reports to the provincial government on its progress and outcomes for the classroom and work placement portions of the program. Staff collects the data and compiles it at the completion of the program. In the initial pilot, 15 out of 20 students completed level 1 and 2 courses. Of this group, 15 out of 18 went on to complete level 3. Another 18 graduated with their grade 12 in the level 4 class.

Informally, the program and its partners take time to celebrate success with students and the community on a regular basis. Almost every month, there are community meals or gatherings and updates on how the students are doing in the courses are shared. All of the celebrations are held in One Arrow First Nation and build toward the continued success and retention of students.

Transferability

Partners, educators, and community members highlighted a number of elements that are required to successfully administer this program in another jurisdiction:

- Invest time to build a strong and trusting relationship between the community and the education partner;

- Craft a long-term vision with realistic short-term goals for the project that is supported by the Band Council, the community and the education partner;
- Have continual communication among partners and the Instructors to work through challenges and find solutions;
- Have a clear student orientation process which includes: information about what to expect in the classroom and an explanation from their Income Support Worker that explains the responsibilities that the learner has for attendance and how their income support is affected if they should leave the program;
- Build a team approach so that the policies of the education institution and the policies of the community are supported and upheld by each organization in a reciprocal manner;
- Engage employers early into the process and be clear about their role and responsibilities. In the OAESW program, the employer partnerships were initiated by the community which worked to demonstrate to students local work opportunities and helped students complete their work terms locally;
- Instructors need to understand the culture and the community where their students are coming from so they can relate to them in a more engaging and respectful way. Also, educators need to be flexible, design assignments to reflect different learning styles and be able to adapt an activity when it is not working;
- Have facilities to run all program components at all levels in your community;
- Make use of the funds of Income Assistance or Personal Training Assistance when possible to support students while they are in school;
- Aim to address all students' barriers.

"It only takes one barrier to interfere with students' success,"

Lisa Irlbeck, Adult Basic Education Coordinator,
Carlton Trail Regional College

Lessons Learned/Challenges

From pilot to 5th intake, there have been a number of lessons. The key lessons learned are:

- Offer the program, especially initially, to participants in their

home community. Participants did better in the program when levels 1 and 2 were delivered in the community. By offering the training in the community, the program could better address issues of anxiety of returning to school, transportation and childcare. When students progressed to level 3 at the College's campus, they had established study habits, writing skills and were generally better prepared for the experience. The result of this approach was increased student retention.

- Offer students access to personal, educational and career counselling support a few days a week.
- Limiting work experience to 1-day per week is much more manageable for students, the employer and the College.
- Integrate academic, ES and life skills training. Originally, these pieces were approached as separate units (teaching one week of each on a rotational basis). The Program Developers found that this was not as engaging or easy for students.
- Although a community may receive a lot of push-back from its members when administering education assessments, gathering baseline data will eventually demonstrate the program's worth to community members. The Program Developers found that after being able to demonstrate the success of the program, future information sessions or assessments were well attended and welcomed by the community.
- Ensure that the program supports the cultural ways of learning and life of the community.
- If required, arrange for transportation for students to attend the program.
- Do not plan learning activities when there is a community event or Band meeting scheduled.

Benefits

The evaluation from the pilot and the subsequent intakes have found the following overall benefits:

- The community is more educated and community members participating more frequently in community activities and are informed about community issues.
- There has been an increase in volunteerism.
- Self-esteem among students has increased.

- More than half the students went on to complete their grade 12 Diploma.

From the interviews conducted for this case study, Instructors, community leaders and members, employers, students and the College told us that:

• Community Benefits

- * Returning to school is now viewed as a much more positive experience -- as a stepping stone to future possibilities. Due to increased interest in the program, there is a waiting list to take classes.
- * Current and past graduates have become role models in the community and encourage their friends and family members to enroll in the program. There is a sense of pride among students that they have accomplished something significant:

"My grandkids say, "We are gonna be like you grandma - go to Grade 12."

Marie Jeanette Paul, Program Participant

• College Benefits

- * The College now has a strong partnership with a First Nation Community that is allowing them to learn and grow in their cultural awareness and competency in working with an Aboriginal community. They have earned the respect of the community leadership and its members and the College is viewed as a good learning place.
- * The educators in the program benefit from the relationships they are building with students and the community. A program like this requires innovative thinking and creativity to engage and retain learners and working with this curriculum, the Instructors told us, is challenging and offers them an experience to put their passion for teaching into practice.

"I didn't really like school when I was younger... now nothing is really holding me back, so I want to finish."

Lillian Koller, Program Participant

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