



Association of  
**Workplace  
 Educators**  
 of Nova Scotia

# CONNECTING...

Volume 22

AWENS Newsletter is published twice yearly

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### Premier's Award

AWENS is pleased to congratulate the Skill Development Coordinators Team on their recent Premier's Award of Excellence – a well-deserved recognition for their leadership in responding to industry closures that have taken place in Nova Scotia in recent years.

Over the past few years, Maple Leaf, Trenton Works and Moirs have closed their doors, which resulted in over 1,000 job losses. The Skill Development Coordinators' Team played a lead role in responding to these closures by creating on-site and community response teams, conducting job vacancy studies in affected and adjacent communities, developing transition centres for displaced workers, and brokering and providing direct programs and services

to help workers transitions to new employment.

In the past two years, services have been provided to more than 1,342 individuals obtain the skills, training and confidence they require to re-enter the workforce.  
<http://www.gov.ns.ca/PSC/recognition/2009-recipients.htm>



Front row: L to R Renette Muise, Colleen O'Connor, Premier Rodney MacDonald, Robin Jardine, Judy Purcel, Louise Michalos. Back row: Raymond Lefort, Roger Peters, Joe Brown

## **Workplace Profile - Glades Lodge Long-Term Care Centre**

Submitted by Anna Ordinelli, Glades Lodge Project Team

### **Investing in life-long learning**

As a 124-bed, long-term care facility, it is our priority to deliver quality care to our residents. We work hard to foster a supportive, caring, compassionate and comfortable environment for all, and it is through investing in our staff that we can provide this exceptional care.

Life-long learning is one of the investments that we know makes a difference in the level of care we can provide our residents. Through the support of the Workplace Education Initiative, we have been able to provide employee-driven education programs that have had a tremendous impact on our workplace.

Our Workplace Education Project Team is made up of union and non-union employees, as well as management. All team members are committed to the importance of life-long learning, not only for themselves, but for their co-workers too.

### **Getting comfortable with computers**

In 2008, Glades Lodge installed computers in each of the care units for use with emailing, documentation and care planning. It was important to us that our staff felt comfortable using the computers, so we had an internal education needs assessment done which identified the need for a basic Computer Skills Course.

During the planning for the computer course, it soon became evident that the only way for staff to participate in this course would be to provide an in-house computer training lab.

The owners of Glades Lodge were approached and a computer lab, complete with 10 new computers, was set up for this purpose. The resulting convenience to staff and tangible evidence of Glades' commitment to staff education went a long way to ensuring the program's success.

Since that time five computer programs have been successfully delivered on-site with a total of 38 staff completing the requirements of the program.

### **Crucial skills in today's workplace**

Computer skills are a must for today's workforce. The computer program has given staff the computer skills they need now and into the future when we move into our two new computerized facilities in 2011.

Computer skills, however, are not the only area of skill development that we've focused. Over the past several years, there have been a number of other educational programs supported through the Workplace Education Initiative including: Communication Skills for Team Leaders, GED Academic Upgrading, Essential Skills of Documentation, and Leadership and Physical Assessment Skills.

An analysis of the participants end-of-program evaluations for each of the above programs indicated improvement in such areas as essential skills for reading and writing, computer skills and

knowledge, creating documents, charts, tables, forms, lists, memos, emails, presentations, and conducting internet searches, increased self-confidence, ability to work independently, work organization, team work and communication - all of which improve the overall quality of work life for our staff..

To celebrate the success of our staff, Glades provides a special graduation ceremony to collectively recognize the accomplishment of each and every graduate. It is also an opportunity to acknowledge and thank the instructor and the Department of Labour and Workforce Development. This Workplace Education Initiative is making such a difference in so many lives!

At Glades Lodge, the desire to learn seems to be as contagious as it is evident. The success of the programs is the result of our Team's efforts in making an ongoing commitment to life-long learning a priority. Collectively, we have proven that our organization is not only committed to learning, but to providing a workplace that contributes to the growth and well-being of our staff and residents.

### **Instructor Profile** **Pat Thompson**

In the beginning,... "Oh, you don't want me to go that far back!"

#### **The Now**

Pat Thompson has her Nova Scotia Workplace Instructor certification and recently completed training as an organizational needs assessment

consultant delivered by the Skills and Learning Branch, Department of Labour and Workforce Development. Pat delivers Workplace Education computer programs at Glades Lodge. She also works part-time in the AWENS office.

#### **The Before**

Pat considered becoming a teacher after high school but chose instead to go to 'Vocational School' for a stenographer course, which she felt could help her if she decided to pursue a teaching career. Instead, Pat worked for almost 32 years for the provincial government. In the early '80s, the Municipal Social Services section of the Department of Community Services was converting to a computerized client database system. Being the youngest Supervisor on board, she was selected to be the 'expert' in the system design and implementation. The Department upgraded its system over the years and Pat was always in the forefront for system enhancements, testing, and for delivering the staff training.

#### **Transfer of Learning**

Shortly after her retirement in 2001, Pat applied to teach computer skills at the Seeds Career Centre (one of the earliest Older Worker Initiatives in Nova Scotia), and thus began a transfer of learning from her years of conducting computer training within government to instructing computer programs for older workers. In 2003, Pat joined AWENS and has delivered several workplace education computer programs.

Many learning transfer experiences regarding computer skills were shared with her from the staff at Glades Lodge – from taking computer skills learned to

teaching family members, designing forms for Glades, doing schedules and forms for work and outside organizations, and even being able to be exempt from taking a computer course for the RN program.

### **Philosophy**

Someone once said to her: “Wherever you go, there you are”. Pat believes that “while we’re ‘there’, we should make the best of it. Always be courteous, patient, engaging, open and willing to share knowledge and experiences. We are all gifted.”

Pat loves to go to hockey games, shopping trips to the States with her grandsons, spending time with family, gardening and doing puzzles.

### **Working To Learn**

Submitted by Jeff Brown, AWENS

Students, educational institutions, employees and employers seem to focus on technical and vocational skills, while essential skills like reading, writing and basic numeracy may be overlooked. This is a BIG problem, and it’s one that Carol Hawkins and Maria Gill from the Centre for Education and Work addressed at an all day workshop held in Halifax in January 2009.

The “Working to Learn Workshop” highlighted four key areas: 1) leveraging learning within an organization, 2) top skills requiring improvement, 3) why a company would want to be a learning organization and 4) in integrating essential skills into a knowledge based economy.

### **Leveraging learning from within**

The workshop started off with the topic of integrating essential skills into our knowledge-based economy. One of the key points of this presentation was that people really want to improve their essential skills, but they might not know what these skills are.

Interestingly, employers think colleges are doing a great job teaching technical and vocational skills, but they are finding out that the essential skills that they require are not being taught. Employers want more from their employees. They want them to be equipped with essential skills. Employers know that essential skills can make the difference between success and failure in the workplace.

### **Great tools for improving skills**

The second presentation focused on the top skills requiring improvement, as well as transferable skills. These essential skills can be developed in many places throughout an individual’s life.

Maria pointed out several tools currently being used to facilitate transferable skills development such as: 1) the [www.cewca.org](http://www.cewca.org) website, 2) training videos, 3) assessment instruments used by business in the workplace, and 4) the [www.magle.com](http://www.magle.com) website for assessing where individuals currently are in regards to their essential skills.

### **Thriving in changing environment**

The third presentation dealt with Learning Organizations. In short, a learning organization is one that acquires knowledge and innovates fast enough to

survive and thrive in a rapidly changing environment.

Becoming a Learning Organization is the key to addressing what the industry wants. Learning and respect are key components for employees within a business. Promoting from within and helping employees grow within the organization are important for workplace success.

### **Why should we bother?**

The last presentation of the day looked at why a company would want to be a learning organization. Carol focused on the following four points: 1) increased productivity and retention, 2) recruitment, 3) sustainability, and 4) the need for continuous improvement.

Overall, the “Working to Learn Workshop” illustrated how important essential skills and life-long learning are to workplace success. Business requires both of these to meet a changing world head on. Future success requires change now.

### **Targetted Initiative for Older Workers - A Well-Developed Plan**

Submitted by Juanita Hiscock, AWENS

Being supported with your project is fundamental to reaching the goals of that project. On March 10-12, there was an opportunity for people to participate in training designed to support current and future Targetted Initiatives for Older Workers (TIOW) projects, as well as for career practitioners presently working with older workers in Nova Scotia. These two and a half days were filled with information that practitioners could

take with them to build or enhance their respective projects.

You can twitter, e-mail, and teleconference all day long, but when you physically connect with the people who are working with the projects, all in one room, so many great ideas are shared. If anyone had a question, there were many answers and suggestions of ways to support the outcome. It was a time to reflect on how the projects worked and how we could add, change or remove what they thought necessary to support the participants of the TIOW projects.

The objectives of the two and half days were to:

- ◆ provide participants with fundamentals in understanding the issues, challenges, and opportunities for older workers
- ◆ Expose career practitioners to customizing their resources to support their work with older worker clients, and
- ◆ Training in the ACSBE Entrepreneurial Cycle and the Age Advantage program

The topics addressed were:

- ◆ Facilitation of the Age Essentials Workshops (nine essential skills as defined by Human Resources Skills Development Canada)
- ◆ Ageism and its role in creating barriers and challenges for Older Workers
- ◆ The transition process and the concept of re-storying
- ◆ Entrepreneurial problem solving, goal setting, and planning for the future

The training was co-facilitated by Eleanor Wright and Robert Racine from ACSBE and they did a fantastic job. I believe we were able to transfer to each other and the connection of our peers working toward the goals of the TIOW project. It was an excellent time, very educational, and really wonderful to see how much of an impact this project is having, not only on our participants, but also on everyone involved with the TIOW projects.

### **Aged to Perfection**

By Barbara Smith, TIOW Program Facilitator,  
NSCC Shelburne Campus

“I was amazed by the way this course changed the lives of everyone in the class by increasing their self confidence and broadening their horizons.”

- 2008 TIOW Participants

What is this person talking about? - A Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW) program offered at Nova Scotia Community College, Shelburne Campus.

As program facilitator, I watched as eight individuals between the age of 55 and 64 entered the classroom for the first time in more than thirty years. Feelings of insignificance and apprehension were evident in all, a common thread throughout the group. The only other commonality is the fact that they are all unemployed and unable to successfully re-enter the workforce.

Participants come from a wide variety of backgrounds, both culturally and socially. On the education front, some participants have as little as a grade four education while others have up to and including a Masters Degree.

Through the process of the program, group members bond closely and become a dynamic team that provides support to each other; for some, a cohesiveness that remains intact far after the program ends.

Observing the process of self-discovery that happens through the self-assessment portion of the program always amazes me as to how empowering this is. Participants reach deep into their past to identify skills, interests and values using the materials available through the Age Advantage Program, developed by Acadia Centre for Social and Business Entrepreneurship (ACSBE), as well as other resources. Many identify a mere handful of skills when they enter the program, but leave with a suitcase full that can be used to target specific employment opportunities.

Participants complete the Certified PLA Portfolio Development course through the Career Resource Centre on campus, a valuable course which helps participants with their self-assessment process. The result of this work defines a personal vision for each individual.

Career exploration further defines their individual career vision. Through a series of career exploration workshops, computer software tools and presentations by employers in specific fields, they are able to zero in on a new career focus.

Participants are given the opportunity to “test drive” this career through a four-week work experience placement. Employers in the local area have been very receptive to this and have made it possible to successfully implement this part of the program.

Skill enhancement includes industry-specific certifications and basic computer skills (NSCC's Computer Applications I course). Industry certifications include Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System, Occupational Health and Safety, First Aid CPR Level C, Food Safety, Super Host Atlantic, Service Excellency in a Global Workplace and a variety of others as the need is identified.

In addition to the courses mentioned above, soft skill and job skill enhancement workshops are delivered, many of which are transferable. All nine essential skills are incorporated in the program and, in particular, working with others and a commitment to continuous learning is stressed and incorporated in the curriculum.

Job readiness training takes the form of effective job searching strategies, targeted résumé development, preparing for and participating in a result-focused interview, as well as exploring labour market information. An understanding of the current work environment and the labour market trends help the participants to realize the new approach that must be taken in seeking employment.

Increasing self-esteem and presentation skill enhancement help the participants in their job search efforts and increase their likelihood of securing employment and meeting their needs. The process is intense and the program is in-depth; however, participants emerge with a new sense of self-worth and a commitment to succeed.

The TIOW program is a federal-provincial cost-shared initiative, through Nova Scotia Labour and Workforce Development and Service Canada, with the primary objective of preparing participants for new and immediate employment.

And prepare it does – with the combined support and resources of the NSCC Shelburne Campus, the Career Resource Centre, the local employers and the financial support of the government, our current record of employment, for the two TIOW Programs of this format, stands at 100% having been offered employment and 85% accepting and still holding those jobs (in the career field of their choice).

Twenty-five percent of the participants pursue self-employment as an option, and in an area as economically depressed as Shelburne County, this option is highly viable.

Participants had this to say:

“This course has given my life a new purpose and direction.”

“It was a lifeline thrown to me when I was at my lowest.”

“The benefits gained by myself through the Older Workers Program are infinite – teamwork, computers, portfolio, self-esteem...”

“I like this class! It has been a big help to me and I have learned more than I have learned in forty years!”

“The Older Workers Program has been the best course for me, in a long time. Portfolio has helped me to do my resume. I will be able to find a job!”

“I am sure that what I have learned and integrated will directly benefit my new employer and everyone I come in contact with. The future looks exciting, inviting and I am headed in the direction I truly want to go. Thank you for this great opportunity. It has served as an essential portal to connect me from my past into my future.”

From the effects of ageism to embracing the belief of “aged to perfection”, these participants have summed it up nicely. I feel these quotes say it all!!

### **Cultural Diversity & Sensitivity**

Submitted by Peter Gouthro

Understanding how the nuances of cultural diversity and sensitivity can affect our students, their learning, classroom dynamics, and the relationship between the instructor and the student is crucial for a positive learning experience and outcome.

During my years with AWENS, I had taught Essential Skills at Membertou for Carpentry apprentices, Mathematics for First Nation pre-trade carpenters and Mathematics for First Nation Automotive apprentices.

When I heard about the Cultural Diversity & Sensitivity Conference entitled “Kekina’muek: Learning about the Mi’kmaq of Nova Scotia” sponsored by Literacy NS, I thought it would be an excellent fit for any potential AWENS Essential Skills programs for Mi’kmaq communities.

On the first day, presentations were made by Tim Bernard, Director of History and Culture; Gerald Gloade, Education Officer; and Bryan Brooks,

a Mi’kmaq student in the B.Ed program at St. FX. The three presenters introduced us to various sections of the “Kekina’muek: Learning about the Mi’kmaq of Nova Scotia” manual. The manual looks at a variety of aspects of Mi’kmaq life and history—past and present—and hopes to instill an interest that will leave the reader wanting to explore the story of the Mi’kmaq a little further.

On day two, the guest speaker was Candy Palmater who spoke on “Aboriginal Perceptions”. Candy is a public speaker with a reputation as a dynamic and provocative orator, who speaks with passion about the struggle and survival of her people. She has practiced both Aboriginal and labour law during her career as a lawyer and has many years of experience in the public sector. She is also a comedian and has appeared on television, the Montreal Comedy Fest and throughout Canada.. Her perceptions were intermixed with humorous anecdotes that added to the presentation.

At the end of the conference, I felt I had acquired a great amount of knowledge that I can use if I have the opportunity to work on the Unama’ki ASEP training project, a multi-year, multi-million dollar Federal Government training program for the Unama’ki-Five Cape Breton First Nation communities.

There are eight key components to the Unama’ki ASEP training project. They include Life Skills and Essential Skills, Construction Specific Courses, Occupation Health and Safety Training, Trades Training, University Training,

including environmental and engineering programs, on the Job Training as well as Aboriginal Business Development or Entrepreneurship training.

(As a side note: One of the participants from the Literacy division got a call while there that she had just won a home on the QE 2 Lottery.)

### **Instructor and Skill Development Forum**

On July 13, 2009 a joint forum between Skill Development and AWENS was held to gather points of view on the concerns and/or challenges faced by instructors and skill development coordinators in the delivery of the Workplace Education programs.

Following the discussion question, challenges were broken out into four categories: communication, recruitment and retention, evaluation, and access to resources.

A range of recommendations were made and a priority action item emerged for an evaluation sub-committee to meet and discuss the scope of an evaluation strategy around performance measures.

The committee results will be shared at AWENS annual general meeting in June 2010.

All of the recommendations will be reviewed and used to inform AWENS strategic and business planning.

## **Resources**

### **Websites**

#### **Workplace Learning Assessment Tool (WESLAT)**

<http://www.cewca.org/weslat-draft>

WESLAT is a tool to assess learning in an organization. The tool provides information to organizations about their workplace learning to identify strengths and learning gaps. It is free and easy to administer. WESLAT consists of 6 Essential Skills dimensions that measure:

- Continuous Learning
- Communication
- Working with Others
- Critical Thinking
- Organizational Vision
- Workplace Culture

#### **Soft Skills Discussion Resource**

[http://www.learning-resources.com/library/lri\\_general/SoftSkillsDiscussionDevelopmentResource-Brief.pdf](http://www.learning-resources.com/library/lri_general/SoftSkillsDiscussionDevelopmentResource-Brief.pdf)

Examples of mini simulation tools developed by Learning Resources, Inc.

“These tools can be integrated into academic or work experience courses to help learners better understand the soft skills employers are looking for.”

#### **Sharp Brains**

<http://www.sharpbrains.com/teasers/brain-games-and-teasers-top-50/>

Top 50 brainteasers--Fun experiments on how brains work!

## **SUBMISSIONS**

**Submissions, suggestions and comments are always welcome!**

We will be preparing for our next issue of AWENS newsletter shortly. Your contributions are important to us, whether it's short newsy items, photos with a sentence or two of explanation, a seminar or workshop you've attended, or perhaps there's a resource that you used in your classes that worked exceedingly well.

Reports from our regional reps and skill development coordinators are encouraged.

Please send your contributions to [awens@eastlink.ca](mailto:awens@eastlink.ca)

## ***AWENS Objective***

The objective of the Association of Workplace Educators of Nova Scotia (AWENS) is: to provide a forum for the promotion and advancement of excellence in instructional practices by networking, creating professional development activities, responding to trends in the field, and representing the interests of educators.

## ***AWENS Mission***

To promote excellence in the field of workplace education

## ***AWENS Vision***

A strong professional network of partners, supporting workplace education in Nova Scotia

## ***AWENS Values***

**Collaboration** – We value collaboration with all sectors and regions of the province and with our partners at all levels.

**Forward Thinking** – We value forward thinking and maintain awareness of and are responsive to workplace trends with all our partners.

**Support** – We value the support of our membership by providing ongoing contact, networking opportunities, and updates.

**Commitment** – We will take on only those initiatives that fit with our goals, and we will incorporate our values into everything we do.

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