The Literacy Link – Supporting you through change

February 2015

Performance Management Support

Literacy Link South Central is committed to providing performance management assistance to LBS service providers. Through this newsletter, LLSC will share tools and resources gathered from our partners around the province that can be used to impact your organization's performance management. If there are specific topics you would like to see in upcoming issues, please contact Literacy Link South Central at literacylink@gmail.com

Special Request from Literacy Link South Central!

Thank you all for your interest in the Performance Management newsletters created by LLSC. With the end of the fiscal year approaching, we would like to ask you to participate in a quick evaluation survey about your use of the newsletters.
The survey only contains 2 questions and will only take a minute to complete. To access the survey, click below:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/K9VGDLQ

Best Practices Webinar with Robyn Cook-Ritchie

On January 14, 2015 Literacy Link South Central hosted a webinar about Best Practices in LBS, which was facilitated by Robyn Cook-Ritchie. The purpose of the webinar was for participants to share their best practices related to outreach, assessment and delivery.
23 people in LLSC's region participated in the call.

This newsletter will contain the text chat summary of the conversation. To hear the entire conversation, you may view a recorded version of the webinar by following the link below. Once there, enter your email address and click on "Playback."
http://38.112.85.102/GP/main/0000006aea06360148c92d8b7c006511

Best Practices Webinar – Summary of Text Chat

During the webinar, participants were able to type questions/comments to other attendees. The text discussion was extensive, and contained some valuable information. Please view the summary below:

Introduction
Linda G: On a daily basis I introduce a short lesson of relevance to our program. Daily we chat about the lesson for the following day and suggest topics. Both the students and I then research the topic.

Linda B: We often do a SurveyMonkey survey after the end of a module to get feedback, but we also get anecdotal information during modules or training to get feedback. We've also added a comment box to the CS Survey.
Tamara: The analysis of a survey would be an interesting task for learners!

Closures
Katey: We have a database and contact our clients directly when there is an unexpected closure by email, phone or fax, depending on preferred method of communication. I believe our website will list planned closures as well.
Sue: Our agency has a policy that if the school boards cancel classes for bad weather, we do too. Tutors and students are informed of this.
Maxine: Learners are contacted by telephone to advise of emergency closure. Notices are posted for a planned closure.
Tamara: Are notices put on the doors of the agency?
Christina: For planned closures, we often give our students extra materials to take home, as well as access to the online program Aztec. For emergency closures, our learners are notified by telephone as best we can.
Maxine: Learner lessons are assigned with Evernote so they can access lessons from any computer with internet access.
Bob: Closures are announced on the radio and through the website.
Heather: We had a flood and were out of our offices for 4 weeks. This was a real test! Having a relationship with another agency was a huge help for us as they hosted us. We were able to keep up programming through use of this space and the public library. So leaning on relationships in the community was very beneficial for us.
Anne: Our learners and staff know that we are closed in bad weather when the building is closed. We have an answering machine that is set up for emergency closures.

Accessibility
Katey: We offer all information in alternate format – digital, large print, audio, Braille. I work at CNIB so we're all about accessibility!
Tamara: Thanks, Katey. I've recently learned that accommodations can be made with computers – font size, contrast, etc.
Colette: We have an elevator to access LBS on the second floor. We adjust the computer to display the learner's needs, if required.
Anne: Our building has an elevator.
Christina: We have Dragon software, as well as a big track ball mouse for all computers.

Referrals
Tamara: Our largest LBS provider has only had one request through EOSS.
Sue: Our admin assistant is supposed to check for inquiries daily, but I don't know if she does since we've only received one, and there was no response to our response. We also have a common referral form.
Linda: Our calls are streamed through our coordinator, Bob. He then gets back to the potential learner in less than 24 hours. The appropriate teacher is then contacted.

Sara: In Hamilton we have a referral protocol that lists program entrance criteria and a common referral form with contacts embedded. The network also offers information and referral so if practitioners are not sure where to refer, we can assist.
Tamara: Do the referrals get tallied by the network, Sara? Does each program keep track of its own numbers?
Sara: We keep track of all I&Rs but not if they are interagency specific. We will be looking at getting that information from programs in the future.
Bob: We have a log book of every contact and space for ANY referral.
Tamara: Bob, do you and practitioners log this info manually and then input it into EOIS-CaMS?
Bob: Yes.
Sue: All OW and ODSP clients are assessed by our network and then referred appropriately. We also have I&R forms on our desktops, and record I&R info there. At the end of the month, our admin assistant collects it from us.
Tamara: It helps to keep I&R front and centre. Having forms on desktops is a good idea.

Boutique Programming
Linda: I love the comment on boutique training. We do that as well and it is very specific to the learner. Some come to us with only a few months to be with us and we can devise an entrepreneurial plan.
Tamara: Boutique programming is becoming more plentiful. The Hamilton network will be compiling a list of such programming so that we all don't have to reinvent the wheel. They'll be doing that next fiscal year.
Mira: Short-term programs have really been a wonderful addition to our roster of services. More uptake now from OW than ever before.
Tamara: I see a couple of people have made inroads with OW as a result of short-term programs. Any particular type of program(s)? It's great to see how LBS agencies adapt – continuing to offer what they've always done well (longer-term programming), but branching out to short-term as well.

Intake and Learning Style
Heather: We have an Intake Rationale form with a checklist. We also try to tease out certain information prior to booking an appointment so that if they aren't eligible or suitable for our program, we catch it before they come in.
Linda: We try to work out priorities with the learner.
Sara: We actually embed some employment surveys into our initial assessment to help with goal path planning. We use Work Habits self-assessment from Ontario Skills Passport, Working in Canada – Skills and Knowledge Survey, and MTCU's Career Interests Inventory. We embedded the latter 2 in the Employment Goal Tracker, available on ABEA's website: www.abea.on.ca/projects andreports.html.
Maxine: Discuss with learner at intake their reason for wanting to join the program, their expectation of what they want to accomplish, and what is their next step after LBS. Based on the discussion, the goal path and competencies are selected. We use the ESKARGO welcome package to determine learning style.
Linda: We use the ESKARGO welcome package at initial orientation. Occasionally we get learners interested in law enforcement or related fields. We have developed sources of information, assessment

tool and tests as to suitability. We have accumulated extensive information about various occupations and employment related tests or expectations. We extensively use the aid of our student success advisor.
Colette: We use the LBS welcome package.
Janice: Clients are given a learning style assessment along with literacy and numeracy testing upon initial intake. They style is then noted on their learner plan.
Sue: We use the ESKARGO welcome package at our community-based agency. It would be good to get a list of learning style inventories. The one we use is not effective.
Sherry: We also use ESKARGO.
Mira: I feel it is important to make sure that we go back to learning styles and make it more of an ongoing reflection with learners. I find many people treat learning styles as a stagnant concept – something that is addressed at onset and never returned to with learners – but I encourage tutors to go back to it regularly. This is especially so because so many of our learners have not thought a lot about their learning style before they enter our agency. Plus the learning style may change a little depending on what is being learned.
Tamara: That's interesting, Mira, because learning styles are self-determined and based, to some extent, on self-knowledge.
Mira: True, Tamara, but we can increase our self-knowledge. In my experience, good learners tend to have high self-knowledge, but we work with people who have significant struggles.
Judy: I find I have to give learners a situation and then ask them how they would best learn. For example, how do they best learn a new hobby? How do they best learn to use a computer? I am not convinced that the oral, visual, kinesthetic framework makes sense to learners.

Learning Activities and Milestones
Sue: I get most of my learning activities from the QUILL Portal. We have developed a list of "soft" milestones that are more easily attained by emergent leaders, since we have so many of them.
Nancy: GCF Learn Free is used a lot in programs.
Maxine: QUILL Portal, GCF Learn Free, YouTube, BBC Learn.
Linda: I agree with you, Robyn. It's ongoing based on competencies. Top 3 learner needs set the competencies and milestones.
Nancy: Some programs are also using the Northstar Digital Assessment online tool.
Katey: We look to the milestones and decide which one best suits the learner's goal.
Linda: We've mapped out milestone #s on our math checklists. We try to get culminating tasks a week or two before they're going to leave.
Heather: We work primarily with learners working on skills at Level 1. I've been finding that the fewer we start with assigning, the better. 1-3 max. We have identified some particular milestones that learners tend to be more successful with before moving onto other milestones. For example, if numeracy is identified as a need for the learner, I'll now often start with the milestones for use measures or manage time, before the manage money milestone.
Heather: We also assign milestones for GED learners based on what skills they need to upgrade, and where those fall in the OALCF framework guidelines and/or ESKARGO resource.
Tamara: So many programs are doing actual pre-GED now, that some consistency with Milestone assignment would be awesome!

Maxine: We assign milestones based on learners' goal paths and how long they plan to spend in the program. Most learners do an average of one every two months.
Colette: I use Heather's sub-goal worksheets all the time. It keeps me focussed and the learner focussed on their progress. It's a great organizational tool.
Maxine: We developed a simple learner plan with the headings Competency, Learning Activities, Level, Milestones, Date Achieved. These are completed as the learner goes along.

LBS Staff Training/Retention
Sara: Literacy Basics is great.
Heather: We've created some of our own resources, but CLO has some great training resources, as well as CESBA.
Katey: I came into the program just under 2 years ago and was in that situation. I had no idea what to do! I am now succession planning and making a training manual.
Bob: Same 2 great teachers for 12 years!
Allan: CaMS input is the challenge. Staff are leaving for other positions because of CaMS not being intuitive enough to work with.
Sara: We have built a training plan for new staff that we check off as they go. It starts with LBS infrastructure and a lot of reading.
Mira: What is the average length of time people stay in any one agency? In my agency the newest staff member came 3 years ago and the oldest 22 years ago. Although we may not pay the best, there is high job satisfaction and we try to provide lots of flexibility with scheduling as a job perk.
Sherry: CLO Literacy Basics, webinars, staff mentoring, LLO, CESBA, AlphaPlus.

Learner Plans and Duration in Programs
Maxine: Only one person has access to the milestone portal in CaMS. Completed milestones and other personal files are locked in a cabinet to which only one person has access. Learner plans are developed after 4 weeks, after seeing what level the learner works at, the learner's next steps, and goal path. Duration is dependent on the pace at which the learner works. As a community agency, we tend to have learners who are at the lower level and spend long periods of time in the program. We also offer a few boutique style programs and these short-term learners spend about 8-12 weeks in the program.
Heather: I find timelines and duration particularly challenging.
Heather: Our learning plan activity sheets ensure that the learner plan is always up to date and that the learner is involved in the plan.
Sue: We aim to have review meetings with learners every 12 weeks and revise the learner plans at that time.
Tamara: Wow – every 3 months is impressive. Is it common among programs to review learner plans every 3 months?
Angel: Short-term plans are reviewed weekly and longer-term plans are reviewed monthly. We have OW caseworkers asking for short-term programming for their clients.
Mira: We try to meet with learners every 3 months as well. It isn't always possible with everyone, but we aim for every 3 months.
Heather: I oversee tutor-student matches, so it's important to book those review meetings. Every 3 months is our goal.

Transportation/Training Supports

Sue: We offer bus passes rather than bus tickets to learners who attend 3 times per week or more. A bit of an incentive for increased attendance.

Maxine: We offer 2 tokens to each learner who attends each day.

Allan: We have gas cards too for rural areas where there is no bus service.

Angel: We only use travel dollars for learners. We have forms we have the learner sign, which also require a signature from both staff and learner when money is exchanged.

Heather: I discuss training supports during our intake meetings. We have a training support document that has to be completed and approved to ensure they are eligible. Most often this is bus tickets. Bus tickets are handed out each time the learner comes in and is tracked.

Sherry: OW, taxi, ES, paying senior support services (will drive eligible seniors to their appointments for a fee), mileage, bus passes.

Colette: When using taxi supports for a learner, I get the learner to call the taxi themselves to avoid any unnecessary charges if the learner sleeps in, etc. This helps teach responsibility, social skills, punctuality, etc.

Learner Retention/Program Design/Motivation

Allan: 1:1 progress reports every 7 weeks (generated in-house, aligned with learner plan) and a "celebration of learning" at the end of the 7 weeks, including food.

Mira: In terms of being able to be responsive to changing learner needs, our group coordinator keeps Wednesdays open for emerging programming. Just yesterday we realized we didn't have enough people to run a computer group, so there will now be a basic computers instruction on Wednesdays throughout February.

Maxine: We offer 3 boutique-style programs: Refresher Math, Math for Carpenters, and Computer Basics. We have a small group setting and learners work individually by accessing their lessons through Evernote. We offer snacks to learners. Learners can opt to attend 9:30-12:00 or 1:00-3:00pm (or they can attend both sessions) based on their availability. The learner is working on different competencies at each agency.

Bob: Keep it light, fun, entertaining, uplifting.

Linda: When we do a module concerning readiness for the employment interview process, we inject a little humour. I dress up as an unlikely candidate and have a student interview me for a phantom employment opportunity. Once we have seen what not to do, the learner then assesses a mock interview of a more serious nature. They explore the positives and negatives of the interviewer and interviewee based on a list composed (scoring from 1-3). We have a lively chat about the probability of success.

Susan: We have game days every couple of months. We play Scrabble, Boggle, Charades, Pictionary, etc.

Tamara: We have interesting initiatives here in London that highlight games that promote strategy and learning – if you're looking for different or more games to play.

Sherry: Communicate with program coordinators and learners to ensure no duplication. It is also bridging from one program to another.

Maxine: We have 2 tablets that learners share to work with apps that reinforce concepts. We also use YouTube videos for demonstration and review of concepts. Links to online quizzes and games are included in learners' Evernote notebooks. We hold potlucks before each major holiday.

Tamara: The use of technology can be very motivating. Food can be very unifying!
Linda: As one motivator, we have a "garage sale" day once or twice a year where we bring in any gently used items for a free sale. We work through the morning, then set everything on tables. Students select any items they wish to take home. It also provides me an opportunity to clean out the basement. We then celebrate our finds with pizza. Any items left over are donated.
Meaghen: In my computer class we do an activity called "google a day" where the students type a question into google and then find the answer. It is a great activity that we enjoy before and after class. We have also done Music Fridays where the students pick songs that motivate them. This was very helpful when we were typing.
Tamara: The tie in with music is cool. And knowing how to effectively google anything is a great skill. Good to practice that in a fun way.

Follow-Up
Karen: We collect emails at intake and use email for follow-up. We've found this extremely effective.
Sherry: Everyone has an email. At exit, we update the info and ask for alternate contact info with answering machine. We also recently implemented texting to staff emails.
Sara: I've heard from some practitioners that some learners can get annoyed by being called again and again because maybe their situation has not changed. Not sure if this is common.
Maxine: Ensure each learner has an email address. For those who do not have email, we help them create one. At intake we highlight that the funder requires us to keep in touch for a year after they exit and we would like to use email. When the email is sent, we place a copy in the learner's file and responses received are also filed.
Tamara: Are practitioners finding that you're able to connect with learners at 3, 6 and 12 months?
Maxine: We usually do at 3 months but the numbers start decreasing at 6 months.
Colette: I have someone do the follow-ups for me. Not all exited learners are able to be contacted. The main reason is that their cell phones are no longer activated. They don't all answer emails.
Sara: In Hamilton we are going to be piloting a common exit survey that we can discuss at frontline worker meetings.
Meaghen: I am in the process of developing a class website that will allow the students to stay in contact with each other and me.
Tamara: We've talked at some of our LSPs about some of the challenges with staying in contact. I just wondered if these additional methods (like texting) are increasing follow-up contacts.
Sherry: Tell learners during intake to drop in anytime once they are done the program. This encouragement actually results in people stopping by to update how they're doing.

Questions about this newsletter? Please contact us at 519-681-7307 or literacylink@gmail.com