

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 383 868

CE 069 192

TITLE Labour Adjustment Initiative Report. Validation Draft.

INSTITUTION Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, Toronto.

PUB DATE 12 May 93

NOTE 41p.

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Adult Basic Education; *Adult Literacy; *Basic Skills; Cooperative Programs; Delivery Systems; *Dislocated Workers; Foreign Countries; *Institutional Cooperation; Job Training; *Literacy Education; Models; Skill Development; Unemployment

IDENTIFIERS *Ontario

ABSTRACT

The Labour Adjustment Initiative was developed in Ontario to provide the ever-increasing number of laid-off workers with remedial basic skills training in order to prepare them for other jobs or further training. The model developed by the Literacy Branch of the Ontario government emphasized a collaborative approach that drew together all of the educational providers in a community to deliver preparatory training for laid-off workers while the community providers helped to ensure that workers received training funds and unemployment insurance. The model developed included the following major elements: (1) a learner-centered, goal-focused approach; (2) individualized curriculum; (3) small class size; (4) facilitated learning as opposed to teacher-focused instruction; and (5) work-related learning materials. The model was enthusiastically received by the workers and the providers. Following implementation of the model, recommendations for improvement were made in the areas of collaboration, assessment, the learning model, and administration. Especially recommended was collection of data concerning what jobs were likely to be available so that the curriculum could be focused in those areas. (KC)

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Report on the Labour Adjustment Initiative

Validation Draft

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Report on the Labour Adjustment Initiative

Executive Summary

Introduction

In 1991 the Ontario Government developed a number of initiatives designed to deal with the ever increasing number of lay-offs occurring in Ontario. One of these initiatives was prompted by a need in laid-off workers for preparatory training in basic skills. The Literacy Branch of the Ministry of Education with the support of the Ministry of Labour developed a model of collaboration and program delivery that was taken up by the literacy community. This executive summary gives a precis of a report that documents the efforts of the workers, instructors, literacy networks, delivery organizations and Ministry staff involved in the initiative. The three major elements of this initiative are summarized below and are followed by charts giving more detail and a summary of the recommendations included in the larger report.

The Partners

The model developed by the Literacy Branch emphasized a collaborative approach that would draw together all of the educational providers in a community to deliver preparatory training for laid-off workers. This partnership of community providers was set up to work cooperatively with government workers from the Literacy Branch and the Ministry of Labour and with plant committees (or action committees) set up in plants that were laying off workers. As well, the community providers had to work with the local Canada Employment Centre to ensure that workers could receive Section 26 funding to attend school while on unemployment insurance.

The Process

Regional literacy networks were approached by the Literacy Branch to become a partner in this initiative. If the network took up the project they then had to draw together the other community partners to create a LAI Committee. The committee hired assessors who liaised with the local plant committees to assess laid-off workers. After assessing the worker's needs, the committee set up preparatory training projects. These projects often had the participation of three or more educational providers who provided space, instructors and materials on top of their advisory capacity on the committee.

The Project

The model for the delivery of preparatory training incorporated the following major elements:

- A learner/worker centred, goal-focused approach
- Individualized, "work at your own speed" curriculum
- Small class size
- Facilitated learning as opposed to teacher focused instruction
- Work related learning materials.

This model for learning was received enthusiastically by the providers and workers.

The Project

Assessment

- ⇒ Meet with worker for comprehensive assessment
- ⇒ Ascertain educational and work goals
- ⇒ Develop Individualized Retraining Plan (IRP)
- ⇒ Find appropriate learning situation for worker

Student and Worker

- ⇒ Needs basic skills in reading, writing and maths
- ⇒ Desire to upgrade for purpose of further training or a job
- ⇒ Often has low self-confidence
- ⇒ Often feels depressed because of lay-off
- ⇒ Majority are over 30, male and on UI

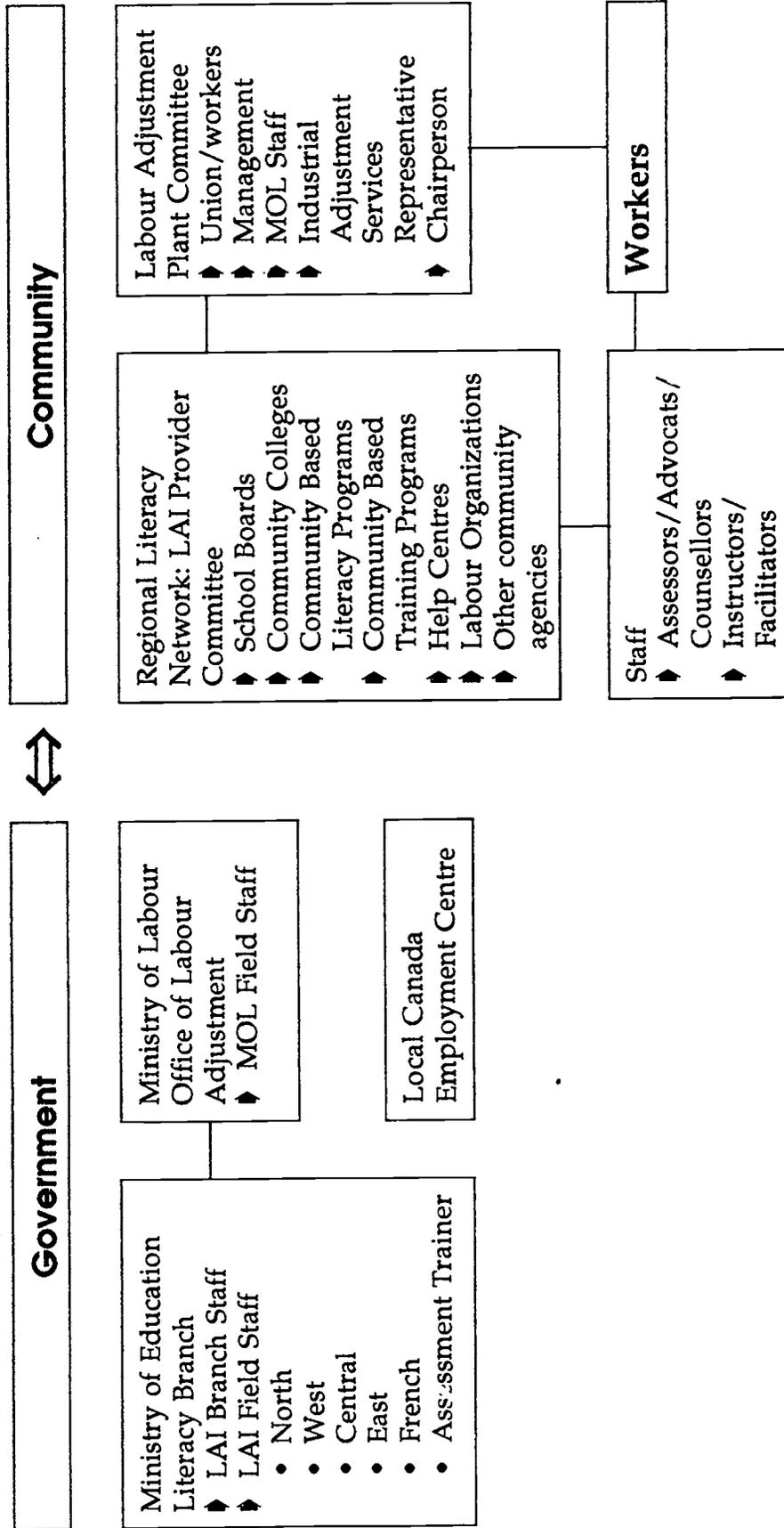
Instruction/ Facilitation

- ⇒ Worker Centred
- ⇒ Goal specific with a focus on skills needed for further training and work
- ⇒ Uncredited
- ⇒ Small class size
- ⇒ Materials relevant to training and work goals

Follow-up

- ⇒ Assessor will often help worker to move to next phase of learning and do some career counselling
- ⇒ Assessor and/or instructor will advocate for worker with CEC office and other training programs
- ⇒ Co-ordinator and/or instructors will document worker's progress and general statistical information

The Partners



Report on the Labour Adjustment Initiative, Ministry of Education, Literacy Branch, February 1993

The Process

Government ————— Community ————— Project

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➡ Develop model ➡ Introduce model to the community ➡ Provide funding ➡ Provide training and support ➡ Document progress and challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➡ Regional literacy network develops collaborative partnership with community and creates a LAI provider committee ➡ Model adjusted to local and/or regional needs ➡ Links made with plant committees, CEC office and MOL staff ➡ Assessments carried out for workers ➡ Instructors hired by provider committee ➡ Projects set up to respond to worker's needs ➡ New classes/projects set up by LAI provider committee as needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➡ Projects run by LAI provider committee ➡ Space, materials and instructors provided by providers on committee ➡ Assessors do assessments for workers ➡ Instructors facilitate worker's learning and work goals ➡ Training of assessors and instructors offered by Literacy Branch ➡ Documentation and reporting prepared by staff for LAI provider committee and government |
|--|--|---|

Report on the Labour Adjustment Initiative, Ministry of Education, Literacy Branch, February 1993

Summary of Recommendations

Section 1: Collaboration

- That the training needs of assessors and instructors be researched and where possible training be provided by a local person.
- That CEC regulations relating to labour adjustment initiatives be clarified at the provincial level and the information made available to all LAI programs, especially new ones.
- That the Literacy Branch develop guidelines and suggestions for working with CECs using the positive experiences of various LAI committees.
- That the goal of collaboration be made explicitly flexible to accommodate the different relationships amongst providers already developed in communities. The goal, although laudable, should not be a barrier to providing services to laid-off workers.
- In those communities where a single provider develops a preparatory training program, that guidelines be established requiring the provider to share information about the program with other providers and community agencies. This will ensure a minimum level of cooperation and accessibility to the program.
- In those communities which have chosen not to take part in the LAI, that other alternatives for the delivery of the program be explored. This may include approaching a single provider or a non-traditional provider such as a community centre, union or business organization. The same educational guidelines should apply to non-traditional providers.
- That the community development aspect of the initiative be further explored and encouraged. If the LAI becomes more financially stable, this might include: outreach into the community; active involvement of educators and trainers on business, labour and economic development committees in their community; drawing laid-off workers into LAI committees; workshops analyzing community education and economic needs.
- That laid-off workers sit on the local LAI committees.
- That accountability guidelines be expanded to reflect the lines of accountability that are possible in the structure of the project.

Section 2: Assessment

- That an educational campaign be mounted by adult educators, labour and the corporate sector (or any combination of the three) to educate workers about the economic and social values of life long learning.
- That any difficulties accessing plant labour adjustment committees be reported immediately to MOL and the Literacy Branch for the purpose of negotiating entrance for the assessor to the plant.
- That training be given to instructors and assessors in strategies for dealing with the emotional, financial and social effects of being laid off.
- That the role of the assessor be interpreted broadly to allow the LAI committee to use the skills of the assessor in the way most needed by the community.
- That a list of possible roles for the assessor be compiled and distributed to LAI committees. This list could be compiled by the Literacy Branch field staff who are in regular contact with the assessors in their regions.

Section 3: The Learning Model

- That the number of workers in a class not exceed 15.
- That research be done on what would constitute a minimum number of workers in a class. Financial and educational considerations should be taken into account when determining a minimum number. As well, flexibility should be built in, in order to avoid class shut downs while more students are found.
- Strategies for attracting more laid-off workers with basic literacy skills must be researched.
- That a process be established to do exit assessments which would be written down and attached to the original assessment and given to the worker.
- That work-related materials be developed in cooperation with laid off workers and their instructors.

Section 4: Administration

- That the Literacy Branch and the community develop methods for collecting data on what programs or jobs workers enter after the LAI program.

Introduction

In a small town in rural Ontario a group of adults sit around tables in an old public school. A teacher moves from adult to adult helping them with maths, reading, writing and computer skills. These adults are students in a government-sponsored labour adjustment initiative. All of these adults have been laid off from their jobs in the last year. All of them have come back to school to upgrade their skills in the hope of getting into further training programs or getting a job.

As our economy goes through enormous changes, so are the skills that will be required by future employers. Although no one can predict what specific jobs will appear in the new economy, economists can predict the job areas that are growing and those that are shrinking. The manufacturing, textile, pulp and paper and fishing industries are all shrinking, leaving unemployed vast numbers of people with many skills but not enough education. Jobs in the information technology, health and service sectors are increasing. Some of these new jobs will require more than 16 years of education.

The sort of shifts and changes the job market is going through now will become the norm in the future. Workers will have to buy into the idea of life long learning in order to keep up with changing technologies and ways of working. The skills required by workers to adapt to this evolving culture of work and training will include: English and/or French language written and oral skills, maths, computer literacy, problem solving, ability to work in teams and knowledge of how they best learn new skills. In order for employers to best respond to these changes they will have to: provide training, encourage a learning culture at work, support workers decision making role in the workplace and create consultative, democratic work structures.

Governments in Canada believe that even if there are not enough jobs now, that education and training of workers will give Canada the competitive edge that is needed in this new economy. To that end, the Ontario government has funded a number of different labour adjustment and training initiatives. The Literacy Branch of the Ministry of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour has coordinated one of these initiatives. This initiative has been aimed at helping workers acquire basic skills in reading, writing and computers in order to move on to another training program or to get a job.

Not only governments see education and training as a crucial element of economic recovery in the 1990's, but also many of the workers interviewed for this report were convinced that education was a key to finding better

employment. The adults sitting in that old public school in a rural Ontario town were pleased and surprised by their progress and their growing confidence in themselves. They had not found jobs yet but were planning to enter other training programs or to set up their own small businesses. The teachers in this program were convinced that these people were going to be successful in their next learning situation, whether it was in a work or school context.

The Globe and Mail reported on January 13, 1993: "Adult education is clearly a growing industry. According to Statistics Canada, 4 per cent of Canadians between the ages of 30 and 64 were taking credit courses of some kind in October, 1990, double the level of 10 years earlier." This is encouraging news for adult educators and trainers but not surprising. The enthusiasm of adult learners, the interest shown by the private sector and the waiting lists at almost every training program in the province is a sign that the Government of Ontario is on the right track in initiating quality adult education and training programs.

This report was written for the Literacy branch and the literacy field to document the efforts of the workers, teachers, literacy networks, delivery organizations and Ministry staff involved in the initiative. The report is not an evaluation of the initiative but does contain recommendations to enhance and make more effective the efforts of all of the partners. The information contained in the report was gathered from: face to face interviews with workers, teachers, assessors, coordinators and Ministry staff; telephone interviews; and documents produced by the Literacy Branch and the Labour Adjustment Initiative projects.

Section 1: Collaboration

Building a community response to economic change

Many Ontario communities have been economically devastated in the last two years. It is unclear where the answers for economic renewal lie. However, one thing is absolutely clear to the economists and to some governments: education and training for workers is key to surviving the current economic upheaval and adapting to the new order, whatever it may be.

Many education and training providers are just beginning to understand their role in changing the values we place on education and training and how they influence economic growth. This new understanding has come about, in part, because of the Labour Adjustment Initiative (LAI). One of the main goals of the initiative was to create a collaborative approach to providing preparatory training for laid-off workers. This required education groups and institutes to work together to assess workers' needs and plan programs which responded to those needs. It also required educators and trainers to work closely with various government field staff to ensure the most accessible and best possible training for workers.

This collaboration was characterized by some participants in LAI as "community development"; some participants described their community's efforts to cooperate as "disastrous". What follows is an analysis of how this collaboration worked in communities across Ontario and some recommendations.

Collaboration between community and government

The Literacy Branch of the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Ministry of Labour (MOL) were the leads in this initiative. The Literacy Branch developed the preparatory training model and explained the model to people in the literacy community. Many people interviewed said they were confused by the model initially. Other people felt that the model was being imposed on them and the initiative was top - down rather than rising out of the needs of the community.

The Branch worked hard to help people to understand the model and to buy into the process. The model required local literacy providers to cooperate in planning and providing preparatory training programs for laid-off workers with a learner-centred, goal-focused approach. The committee would send in an assessor into plants with lay offs of more than 50 workers. The collaboration spawned LAI provider committees who oversaw the project. These committees were often co-ordinated by the regional literacy network. These networks worked hard in many communities to mobilize the community to pull together on the project. The Branch felt that the model, developed by their staff, was

very responsive to current trends and concerns in the literacy community. There was room for the community partners to adapt the model to fit the particular characteristics of their region. The Branch believed that the assessment process and Individualized Retraining Plan (IRP) were essential to providing an effective service for workers seeking preparatory training.

The Literacy Branch hired regional staff and a trainer on learner-centred assessment to support communities taking on LAI projects. Also, Ministry of Labour (MOL) field staff were in touch with all of the Labour Adjustment Committees (LACs) in plants with over 50 workers being laid off.

Although it was not at all clear to people in the field at the beginning of this initiative, the role of the Canada Employment Centres (CEC) was absolutely central to the worker's ability to access the preparatory training programs. In order for workers on unemployment insurance (UI) to attend the training program they had to get approval from their local CEC. This approval is given under Section 26 of the UI Act. This required local LAI committees to educate their local CEC office about the preparatory training programs they provided and who was eligible for them.

The community and Ministry of Education collaboration

Community LAI committees were generally positive about the Literacy Branch involvement in the projects. They felt the field staff hired by the Branch were important as trouble shooters and helped to explain the initiative to providers. Because the field staff were in touch with all of the programs in a certain region, they were able to draw on the experiences of the many to solve the problems of individual programs.

The Branch also provided training in the preparatory training model. Many programs benefitted from this training, although some were initially reluctant to accept help from an outside source not aware of all their community's issues and concerns. Some of the instructors with many years of adult education experience resisted the training initially. However, as they saw their experience being valued and recognized that the process was focused on learners, they developed models to meet individual and local needs. As the initiative has progressed, the expertise and knowledge in the field has increased and training can often be provided by assessors from neighbouring areas or regional coordinators.

Recommendations:

- That the training needs of assessors and instructors be researched and where possible training be provided by a local person.

The community and Ministry of Labour collaboration

The MOL regional staff were key in providing LAI assessors access to plant labour adjustment or "action" committees. These committees are developed to respond to the needs of workers who are or will be laid off from the plant. The committees are made up of workers, an MOL staff person, an Industrial Adjustment Services representative, management and an outside Chairperson.

When the MOL staff person was cooperative and supportive of the preparatory training program, assessors were informed of all plant closures and given access to all plant committees. In some instances the assessor had trouble getting into plants to present to the plant labour adjustment committee. This only happened in a few communities and has slowly been worked out through meetings between Ministry of Education field staff, local LAI committee members and the MOL field staff.

According to MOL rules only plants with over 50 lay offs need inform the MOL field staff and LAI programs initially could only draw from plants that had MOL involvement. Many assessors and LAI committee members were concerned about workers being laid off in plants with under 50 lay offs. This rule was gradually relaxed as it became clear that some communities were able and prepared to provide spaces for workers from plants with under 50 lay offs.

Working with the Canada Employment Centre

This has been the most difficult working relationship. In almost every community visited, the local CEC was:

- a) bound by regional regulations which barred them from giving approval to UI recipients to attend literacy or ESL classes (which the Preparatory training program fell under),
- b) unaware of the provincial labour adjustment initiative,
- c) supportive but without funds for Section 26 people,
- d) only giving Section 26 status to workers ready for skills training.

In areas where the LAI program covered more than one CEC area, it was often confusing for the program staff because the regulations varied from one CEC area to the next. Some programs figured out early on that they must educate the local CEC staff who were then often very supportive of the initiative.

The experience of those programs who worked with supportive CEC staff was very positive. Often the CEC staff would follow up on workers granted Section 26 status and make sure that they got a seat in a local skills training

program. This helped the worker's motivation in completing the program that they had set as their goal.

Many instructors and assessors talked about the amount of time that was spent advocating for the worker with the CEC bureaucracy. This was a frustrating experience for both program staff and workers: workers especially felt intimidated and belittled by the experience.

Recommendations:

- That CEC regulations relating to labour adjustment initiatives be clarified at the provincial level and the information made available to all LAI programs, especially new ones.
- That the Literacy Branch develop guidelines and suggestions for working with CECs using the positive experiences of various LAI committees.

Collaboration amongst education and training providers

The collaboration of community providers was seen as a potentially powerful force in providing an effective labour adjustment program to workers. The idea that providers could come together and each put their best resources forward to create a mix of programming that would be relevant, learner-centred and goal-focused was exciting. In those communities where this vision was realized, the local LAI committees were excited and empowered by the role they are playing in responding to the economic changes in their community. In those communities where collaboration has not worked, access to programming for laid off workers has been affected.

Why collaboration worked in some communities

" There's a natural evolution of people learning to work together and it takes time to realize the merit of collaboration"

LAI Co-ordinator

Those communities that had well-established regional literacy networks had less difficulty in negotiating an acceptable LAI program for their community.

- When the decision makers in communities had a broad vision of "literacy" which included the ties between education and the economy, there was less resistance to the LAI model.

- In smaller communities where the LAI funding would not be that great, providers were less competitive and consequently worked well together.
- In some communities certain providers were not part of the collaboration because of strong differences with other providers or because they were already being funded to do labour adjustment. The absence of these providers may have helped the rest of the providers to collaborate more effectively.
- In areas, such as the North, where whole communities are economically devastated, money for labour adjustment (especially basic skills and upgrading) is needed. For these communities collaboration was not a problem.

Why collaboration didn't work in some communities

**" The intent of LAI is a good thing - to bring deliverers together to work on behalf of laid off workers - but it has turned out that the Board [of Education] and the College are setting up something separately which is to the provider's benefit not necessarily the worker's benefit."
*Community Based Provider***

- Competition for funding: when one provider wanted the funding it deterred their ability to cooperate fully and may have barred other providers from being fully involved in the initiative.
- Protecting established territory: some providers felt that they were already providing the services that the LAI program would offer and felt that this initiative would squeeze them out of work that they had spent a long time developing.
- In one instance, the power of one partner greatly outweighed the power of the other partners. In this situation, the collaboration seems to be working from the outside, but in actual fact the committee is run by one provider.
- In some instances collaboration hasn't worked because the committee of providers has never understood the structure or philosophy of the initiative or has disagreed with the process and/or content of the initiative. In these cases it is the collaboration between government and the community that has failed and not the one amongst the providers.

Recommendations:

- That the goal of collaboration be made explicitly flexible to accommodate the different relationships amongst providers already developed in communities. The goal, although laudable, should not be a barrier to providing services to laid off workers.
- In those communities where a single provider develops a preparatory training program, guidelines be established requiring the provider to share information about the program with other providers and community agencies. This will ensure a minimum level of cooperation and accessibility to the program.
- In those communities which have chosen not to take part in the LAI, other alternatives should be explored for the delivery of the program. This may include approaching a single provider or a non-traditional provider such as a community centre, union or business organization. The same educational guidelines should apply to non-traditional providers.

Collaboration with the broader community

When the collaboration part of this model works, then the broader community is drawn into the initiative: the sum of the parts becomes greater than the whole. In some communities the LAI program and maybe one other service are the only programs available for laid off workers. In these communities the instructors and assessors have expanded their role to include advocate, counsellor, liaison with more distant skills training programs and publicist for the program with local business and labour interests.

If labour and management in a plant closure or downsizing are welcoming to local educators and trainers, the possibilities for the laid off workers are much greater. In many cases, the local assessor has become quite involved in the plant LAC or Action committee and this has often meant many workers entering the local LAI program or other upgrading programs. It has also meant that the assessor takes on a valuable role of community developer, helping workers and committee members make connections with other services and people in the community.

Labour is often a powerful force in the life of a community and/or the lives of workers. During the LAI, labour-run education or help centres have either:

- been funded separately from the rest of providers,
- led and dominated the collaboration,

- actively supported the local collaboration but not sat on the committee, and/or
- actively resisted and spoken against the local initiative.

Recommendations:

- That the community development aspect of the initiative be further explored and encouraged. If the LAI becomes more financially stable, this might include: outreach into the community; active involvement of educators and trainers on business, labour and economic development committees in their community; drawing laid off workers into LAI committees; workshops analyzing the connections between community education and economic needs.

A note about accountability

In collaborative efforts accountability is often a confusing area. Although the vast majority of the people interviewed were clear about who they were accountable to, the line of accountability varied from community to community. Some instructors felt accountable to one person and were almost totally unaware of any "provider committee" or the regional literacy network. They often felt accountable to their usual employer (i.e. the college or school board). Some instructors felt accountable to the assessor who in turn felt accountable to the committee of providers. Many LAI committee participants felt loyal to their own employer for their role as the employer's representative on the committee.

Most committees and networks were clear that they were accountable to the Ministry of Education. One committee felt strongly that the accountability line was totally unclear and they didn't know whether to answer to MOL or MOE.

Although some program staff talked of educational accountability to the laid-off workers there was no formal line of organizational accountability to the workers.

Recommendations:

- That laid-off workers sit on the local LAI committees.
- That accountability guidelines be explained to reflect the lines of accountability that are possible in the structure of the project.

Section 2: Assessment

Changing community values in education and training

The assessor was hired by the local LAI or provider committee and, depending on the situation, worked out of one of the provider's spaces, the local regional network office, an independent space rented by the committee or from home. The assessment process involved an in-depth assessment which was conducted in a one-to-one situation and resulted in an Individualized Retraining Plan (IRP) designed by the assessor.

Assessors had to go into plants and talk to LACs about the preparatory training program. They also had to educate workers about the importance of retraining in our changing economy. As LAI provider committees got more involved in this initiative they saw the real, practical necessity of "life long learning" and saw their role as educators reaching out into the lives at the economic heart of their community. These workers were often people who would never have gone back to school if they had not lost their jobs and seen their skills made obsolete.

Attracting workers to retraining

" There are still guys that drive around a plant that was closed in 1990 to see if there are call back signs...the message that these are permanent lay offs doesn't always get through to workers."

Assessor/Advocate

" Perhaps distance and isolation, of both staff and laid-off workers, have slowed the 'training culture' thing that seems to be happening elsewhere."

MOE LAI Northern Staff

The success of the assessor in getting workers into programs was based on a number of factors:

- How broadly their role was interpreted by the employer: for instance, if a committee was willing to let the assessor take a leadership role and monitor their own activities, then the assessor often developed a job far beyond the original expectations (i.e. counsellor, advocate, community developer). This often meant a steady flow of workers in to the program. Many committees were impressed by assessors who took on these varying roles.

- The assessors access to plant committees: clearly, without access to the workers, the assessor's role is limited. In some communities assessors felt overwhelmed by the amount of work, sometimes doing over 100 assessments in one plant. In other communities, massive lay offs were occurring and the assessor was told that there was no need for preparatory training for the workers in these plants. The experience of most assessors is that there are always people in every plant who need preparatory training.
- The reluctance of workers to "go back to school": workers were reluctant to enter preparatory training for two reasons:
 - a) They were caught up in the emotional process of "labour adjustment" which simply put includes a number of phases: disbelief/denial; sadness/grief; anger; growth/change. Many of the LAI staff mentioned the need to give workers some time to get through the grieving of job loss. Many workers did not want to go into retraining because they believed the plant would reopen. They lived in the world of lay-off and recalls and couldn't believe that the plant would never open again or that their particular skills would not be needed again. The problem with giving workers time to grieve their job loss is that they then disperse and are hard to reach after they have left the plant. The time to direct them towards training is when they are still at the plant or involved with the Action Centre the plant has set up.
 - b) The workers had no self esteem about their ability to get through the course. Many workers said that they were amazed that they were back at school after 10, 15, 20 or 30 years away from a formal learning situation. They also said that they knew of other workers from their plant who would have benefitted from retraining but were too "proud" or afraid to go back. For many workers in the preparatory training programs, the real battle was to regain their self esteem after it had been injured by job loss and their long absence from any learning situation.
- The availability of training and education programs for laid off workers: in some communities, committees did not want to do assessments for workers unless they were absolutely sure that there were programs with space to take the workers. Many communities had periods where they had assessment dollars but not training dollars. If the local providers had space and/or funding of their own, the assessors would refer workers to these programs. Otherwise workers would be put on waiting lists. These issues were particularly difficult in the North, where distance and isolation have slowed the process down.

Recommendations:

- That a educational campaign be mounted by adult educators, labour and the corporate sector (or any combination of the three) to educate workers about the economic and social values of life-long learning.
- That any difficulties accessing plant labour adjustment committees be reported immediately to MOL and the Literacy Branch for the purpose of negotiating entrance for the assessor to the plant.
- That instructors and assessors be encouraged to document strategies for dealing with the emotional, financial and social effects of being laid-off.

Assessing assessments

In general, there were very few complaints about the actual assessments. People experienced with doing assessments in CEC offices, colleges and school boards were impressed by the quality and thoroughness of the assessments. A number of CEC workers, according to program staff, found the assessments helped them in their work and gave them more time to concentrate on Section 26 issues rather than finding the right training program for the worker.

Critiques of the assessment process included:

- Initially the assessment's effectiveness was limited with very basic level workers. Often assessors found that people requiring basic literacy skills were not ready to choose a career goal. Tying IRP's to career goals rather than educational goals, did not make sense for these workers. After working on basic skills and gaining some self confidence, workers were often ready to choose career goals and decide on what further skills they needed to get into a training program elsewhere.
- Assessments with workers needing ESL were often difficult and assessors met with issues similar to those with workers needing basic literacy skills. However, unlike literacy students, ESL students could articulate their career goals earlier because their confidence levels seemed to rise more quickly.
- Some providers were opposed to the individualized assessment process and felt that standardized tests should be given to find out the worker's "real" level.
- Although program staff originally saw the assessments as static documents, they changed their view when they realized that worker's goals were not static but changed and grew as the worker went through the program.

The changing role of the assessor

" It's really important for the assessor to maintain only one interest and that is the client."

MOL Staff

As assessors gained more experience with their communities and with the needs of laid off workers, their role expanded and changed. This was generally greeted positively by the local LAI committee. Most of the assessors felt that there should be a good balance between the involvement and support of the local providers and the committee giving the freedom to the assessor to adapt and change the emphasis of the job as the needs in the community became clear. The assessor was in the position of answering to many different groups and people: the worker; the plant committee; the LAI provider committee; the field staff of MOE and MOL. Often this situation was not a problem as most of the groups and people had a similar goal, namely the best possible service to the laid off worker. However, occasionally the assessor felt mired in a swamp of politics and personalities.

The assessors and workers in the North said that it was important for the assessor to know the community well and understand the economic and social issues specific to the region. In at least one area in the North the fact that the assessor and instructors were local people helped the program gain credibility quickly and operate more effectively. This experience was echoed in rural areas across the province. This concern was not mentioned at all by urban assessors or program staff.

The neutrality of the assessor was a key element in the effectiveness of the work of the assessor. Many people mentioned the importance of the assessor not being aligned with any interests other than those of the worker.

Assessors as advocates:

In one area of the province the assessor is actually called an advocate/assessor. However, many assessors found themselves advocating on behalf of workers who were trying to get Section 26 from the CEC or trying to get into further training. The Section 26 problems created hours of work for someone in the program: that someone was more often than not the assessor and sometimes the instructor. The assessors were frustrated by these problems but they did not complain about working on behalf of the workers. Most of the assessors interviewed had a genuine concern and personal interest in the outcome of this learning experience for the workers.

Assessors as education and career counsellors:

"Assessors have become more like education counsellors...they find out information and pass it on to students...assessors must have a passion for learning and for people."

LAI Co-ordinator

After placing workers in preparatory training programs it became clear to assessors that part of their role would be to follow-up with these workers. In their follow-ups they did a number of different things:

- They re-assessed worker's goals and helped workers readjust their goals so that they were more realistic.
- They researched the availability and requirements of training programs in their area. Some assessors created a file of information sheets on various training programs that had previously not been available. This was often done cooperatively between assessors and instructors.
- They counselled workers on the availability and requirements of various training programs.
- In some areas of the North there was no career counselling available and assessors had to provide this service.
- If needed, they acted as a conduit to instructors for the concerns of workers about the quality of the course.
- They acted as an emotional support to workers having difficulty adjusting to unemployment and school.

Assessors as administrators:

In some areas the assessors also were the co-ordinators of the programs. This was often necessary because the program consisted of more than one class. In Metro Toronto all of the programs have more than one class operating at a time: most have between 3 and 7 classes. In these cases the assessor is also the administrator and people were hired who had experience in both areas. This has been a positive experience for all of the assessor/co-ordinators who were interviewed.

In most other areas the assessors do basic paper work but do not have to coordinate very large programs. Often the LAI provider committees will do most of the reporting to funders and deal with financial concerns.

Recommendations:

- That the role of the assessor be interpreted broadly to allow the LAI committee to use the skills of the assessor in the way most needed by the community.
- That a list of possible roles for the assessor be compiled and distributed to LAI committees. This list could be compiled by the Literacy Branch field staff who are in regular contact with the assessors in their regions.

Section 3: The Learning Model

Quality Time for Adults

" When you were a kid they had the upper hand, now the teacher respects us and even asks us questions."

Worker/Student

All of the workers, instructors and assessors that were interviewed agreed that the learning model was excellent. Both workers and instructors were excited and inspired by their work. The model incorporates the following major elements:

- A learner/worker centred, goal-focused approach
- Individualized, "work at your own speed" curriculum
- Small class size
- Facilitated learning as opposed to teacher-focused instruction
- Work related learning materials.

Although not all of the above elements were incorporated at the beginning of the programs, they became parts of the program by the end. The training provided by the Literacy Branch and the combined experience of the providers helped and guided instructors in their work.

The workers felt that they were treated as adults and given responsibility for their own learning. However, they did not feel abandoned by the instructors but said they were given more attention than in any of their other learning experiences. In almost all of the classes visited, there was a feeling of camaraderie or community. The workers were in similar situations often and were able to offer support and understanding to each other. Some instructors felt it was important to keep workers from the same plant together; other instructors thought that breaking up groups of workers from the same plant helped them to get used to new situations. In either case, the workers seemed content with their situation.

Inevitably issues arose about the content and process of the learning model. Most of these issues were minor but some continue to bother people and need to be addressed. What follows is a list of all of the issues that arose.

Class size

There was a wide variation between what people thought was a good class size: many people said 8 was the limit while others said that they wanted a minimum of 12 and preferably 15. Many classes that were visited were less than 8 and this concerned instructors and assessors. Partly the reason for the small numbers was that the classes were visited at the end of a funding period and many workers had moved onto other training situations or jobs. However, many instructors and assessors said that they had trouble getting enough people into classes but were sure that there were plenty of workers out in the community who could use the training. As mentioned before, convincing workers to enter programs and getting access to plant LACs has made the job of attracting workers to LAI programs difficult. Where this problem existed, staff were working on solutions.

In those situations where the class size was 12 to 15, the instructors and assessors felt the size was manageable. The workers in these classes were at a more uniform level than in any of the smaller classes visited. This meant that the instructors could do some whole group instructing/teaching and it would be relevant to all of the workers. Most of these larger classes were almost entirely ESL and discussion was an important part of the class.

Recommendations:

- That the number of workers in a class not exceed 15.
- That research be done on what would constitute a minimum number of workers in a class. Financial and educational considerations should be taken into account when determining a minimum number. As well, flexibility should be built in in order to avoid class shut downs while more students are found.

Educational levels of workers/students

" We don't know what 'literacy' is...it's very contextual...we can't say where it begins and ends."

LAI Staff

In rural areas and small towns, some instructors and assessors brought up their concern of including upgrading and ESL students, as opposed to their more traditional students requiring basic level literacy training. Although not basic literacy students, these students had some of the same issues experienced by literacy learners: low self esteem, fear of and/or hostility towards formal learning situations, difficulty training themselves in the habit of learning and

emotional and/or financial difficulties in their lives. The unique model of LAI helped many workers to deal with or overcome some of these issues. Many workers commented on the difference between their experience in the LAI program and their often negative experience returning briefly to a curriculum based program.

In urban areas, there were many more ESL than literacy students. The assessors and instructors did not mention any concerns about this situation. They also were not concerned about English-speaking students doing upgrading work rather than literacy.

When instructors were questioned about the low numbers of literacy students in the program, they seemed to find it hard to be critical about this issue because of the connection they had developed with the lives and concerns of the students already in the program. They were and are convinced that this program is crucial for a certain group of laid-off workers. They would like to see more literacy students but had no answers about how to attract these potential students to the program.

Recommendations:

- Strategies for attracting more laid off workers with basic literacy skills must be researched.

Duplication of services

Some providers on the local LAI provider committees talked of their concern that this program was a duplication of services already offered in the community. Often these comments came from providers who felt their own programs could do the same work, given the funding to provide small classes. In one community visited, one of the local providers had worked hard to accommodate the workers with IRPs into an existing program. This provider received no LAI training dollars but was impressed by the LAI model which they felt they were close to achieving in their adult day school.

When providers were asked if they could set up a program like the LAI model, they were often wary of answering with an absolute "yes". It was clear that although some providers had concerns about the number of people being served in the LAI programs and the possibility of duplication of services, they also saw the unique qualities of the program which would be difficult to maintain in a totally institutional setting.

Formally acknowledging workers' learning achievements

**" This program often makes people more job ready than a Grade 12."
MOE Field Staff**

Many workers mentioned their disappointment at not receiving formal credit for the work they had done in the class. For some workers this was not a concern because they saw their goal as passing the tests required to enter further training programs. However, it was clear that there needed to be a more formal acknowledgement of worker's learning achievements.

In some programs graduating ceremonies with certificates were organized. This was a great success, according to instructors. Both instructors and assessors discussed the possibility of a formal exit assessment which would document the levels achieved and materials used by the worker. With their original assessment, this final assessment would constitute a record of learning that the worker could carry with them through their future training. One program sent workers to job interviews with up-to-date assessments. Both employers and workers found this very helpful.

Recommendations:

- That a process be established for assessors to do exit assessments which would be written down and attached to the original assessment and given to the worker.

Learning Materials

The lack of good work related materials was a concern for all instructors. They often mentioned the time spent searching for materials that related directly to the worker's goals. Almost all of the instructors had developed materials of their own to fit with the worker's IRP. Although instructors had not expected to spend this much time on developing materials, they seemed excited by the challenge to their teaching creativity. Indeed some of the materials developed would not have been found anywhere because they were so specific to the life and goals of the individual worker.

Recommendations:

- That work-related materials be developed in cooperation with laid off workers and their instructors.

Lack of training spaces and jobs for workers

" In small places where the only industry has closed, what do you train for? [It's] hard to commute 100 miles to the next mill or mine - and you can't sell your house either."

MOE Northern LAI Staff

Workers interviewed expressed an odd mix of emotions about their situation. They were often very high about going back to school and their self-esteem was being bolstered by the experience; on the other hand, they were often very depressed by the economic future of their families and their communities because there were very few jobs and a limited number of training spaces in colleges. Many workers were also struggling with the grim reality that they might have to take jobs at half the pay they had made in their previous work.

Instructors, assessors and LAI committees were concerned about the lack of information about what jobs were the best to train for in their area. Without this information they were hard-pressed to advise workers about their futures. In some communities in the north it was not clear that there ever would be jobs again. These terrible scenarios did not stop assessors and instructors from encouraging workers to return to school: their rationale was that it was better to upgrade your education now while things were slow so that people were ready for the economic changes when they came.

A note about labour-run LAI programs

There are major labour run LAI programs: one in Hamilton run by the Worker Education Centre(WEC) and one in Toronto run by the Metro Labour Education Centre (MLEC). Each of these centres provides pre-closure and post-closure training for workers. They have set up extensive labour adjustment classes. Over 400 workers have gone through comprehensive programs in the two centres. These classes are either partially or wholly funded through LAI funds.

Worker Education Centre, Hamilton

The Program:

An assessment is done with each worker who enters the LAI program which specifies job and education goals. The program is union-based and protects the "dignity and worth of working people" and makes workers aware of their rights as unemployed workers. The program prepares workers to re-enter the job market or enter further training.

WEC provides education in the following areas for unemployed workers:

- ▶ ESL
- ▶ literacy and upgrading
- ▶ math, including geometry and algebra
- ▶ problem solving
- ▶ economic context of worker's unemployment
- ▶ job search/job interview
- ▶ vocational planning.

Partnerships:

WEC sits on the Board of Directors of the Adult Basic Education Association in Hamilton. That association has set up their own Labour Adjustment Initiative for non-unionized workers. WEC's LAI program is designed for unionized workers. Although there is very little crossover between the two programs, there appears to be an agreement to ensure that the needs of all laid-off workers are handled by either organization. WEC does not work with the Help Centre. WEC has worked well with the Literacy Branch field staff and are pleased with the support they have received.

Metro Labour Education Centre, Toronto

Like WEC in Hamilton, MLEC had been doing labour adjustment training programs for a number of years, previously with federal funding, before this initiative came along. Although they will serve any unionized and laid-off workers, they concentrate on workers-of-colour, ESL speakers, and women.

The Program

" We use language training to empower people to take control over all areas of their life."

Co-ordinator, Labour Adjustment Unit, MLEC

MLEC uses a worker-centred approach and provides education in reading, writing and speaking English, math, labour studies (health and safety, human rights, history of labour movement, etc.), job search/interview skills, studying skills, etc. MLEC feels strongly that it is important to prepare workers/students for their next learning/training experience and provides bridging programs for entering further training.

MLEC has training advocates who work with laid-off workers so they can help themselves in problem areas in their lives. They also help with job and training counselling and advocate on larger issues which affect the training of workers, employed and unemployed.

Partnerships:

MLEC works independently to deliver their programs but has an excellent relationship with the Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy, which is the regional literacy network. They often do referrals between the programs they are running and help each other with assessments. There appears to be no competitive edge to their cooperation. MLEC is also very happy with their partnership with the Literacy Branch and noted that the Branch was interested in how the program served the needs of the workers and less with how the program fit into the rules.

Conclusion:

Both centres feel it is very important to keep the union focus and worker-centred approach in their programs. The Literacy Branch labour adjustment initiative has been flexible and accommodated the specific needs of unionized workers and union deliverers. As with all of the LAI programs, the labour programs adjusted the model to fit the needs of the workers in their community, while maintaining a worker/learner centred approach.

Both of these centres expressed excitement at the partnership developing between labour, the community and government. WEC and MLEC have been involved in labour adjustment and workplace education for many years and are very pleased at the commitment made by the government in this area.

In 1980, Hamilton had 45,000 unionized workers; it's now down to 30,000. This trend is also present in other areas of the province. If the trend continues, these two centres will have a lot of laid-off workers on their hands looking for retraining in order to find a job.

Section 4: Administration

The paradox of year-to-year funding

" The timing [of funding] is awful - it will directly affect access to training for workers -CEC will not give Section 26 status to workers until the LAI program can guarantee 26 weeks [of training]."

" It's hard to keep committee [provider committee] members because we are perpetually [on the brink of] closing down."

LAI Program Administrator

LAI staff and committees did not seem concerned about the administration of the program. They were required to send in quarterly reports and meet with field staff occasionally. As the projects progressed it became clear that it would be useful to have much better stats on the workers and where they went after the LAI program. Although many staff mentioned this issue they were also strapped for time and money and felt that they couldn't do the necessary follow-up without more staff time. In some areas this follow-up was being pursued and will hopefully be useful in reflecting on changes or priorities in the LAI program.

Recommendations:

- That the Literacy Branch and the community develop methods for collecting data on what programs or jobs workers enter after the LAI program.

The most pressing administrative problem experienced by LAI committees and staff was the funding process. The funding works on a year-to-year basis as do many government programs in these fiscally difficult times. Most administrators, being fiscally cautious, would begin to wind down the project. To be optimistic about the possibility of funding meant taking a risk by continuing the program and staffing: many programs could not afford to take this option. Problems faced by programs because of this paradoxical situation included:

- Programs cannot provide staff with stable jobs which creates higher staff turn-over. This in turn can destabilize the atmosphere of the classes and slow down the learning process. Resources for training staff are limited and high turn-over stretches these resources.

- The credibility of the program suffers in the eyes of other agencies in the community. For instance, in some areas the local CEC office sees the program as "fly by night" and is wary about referring workers.
- The instability of the funding means that the sponsoring agencies are either winding up the program to get classes running or winding down the program so that it will end when the training dollars are used up. If more training dollars do appear, the sponsoring group then has to re-hire, find old and new students, re-claim the space, etc.
- The timing of funding often does not coincide with the CEC's budget preparation. This may mean that there will be a shortage of CEC Section 26 funds for LAI programs.
- In some instances, programs have had to provide shorter courses than are required by the workers because of funding constraints. This is a disservice to the worker who needs more time and to the model which recommends more time. The policy of continuous intake is hard to maintain when the training time available is short.

Conclusion

In many cases, the assessment and training provided to displaced workers through this initiative has helped them to:

- enter employment or further skill training;
- reduce the total time spent in preparatory training; and,
- remain eligible for federal income support.

The initiative has created or enhanced local planning and collaboration among delivery organizations and other community partners, including Canada Employment Centres. Local planning and collaboration has led to more cost-effective, targeted training for displaced workers and to more effective working relationships for training organizations and related services.

Both the local planning and individualized assessment components of this initiative will have lasting value as models for providing effective literacy training for adults.

APPENDIX

Summary Report on the Basic Skills Labour Adjustment Initiative for francophone workers

French Strategy

The Literacy Branch developed a strategy for delivering the labour adjustment initiative in French. This strategy took into account the different obstacles and opportunities faced by the Franco-Ontarian community, including:

- many francophones work in English-speaking workplaces and may be unaware of the opportunities for training in French;
- identifying francophones in the workforce can be difficult for adjustment committees; and
- developing and offering services in French may require additional time and resources.

As a part of the strategy, a portion (approximately 18%) of the overall funding was allocated within the Literacy Branch to support French programming. The money supported the same kinds of activity (information sessions, local co-ordination and assessment of workers, training) as the English initiative. A provincial co-ordinator for the francophone initiative was hired and based in Ottawa. This position provided consultative support to the francophone labour adjustment programs.

To launch and develop the initiative, the provincial co-ordinator held a series of information meetings around the province. These meetings were attended by community literacy groups, colleges, school boards, social service agencies, Canada Employment Centres and other interested stakeholders. Members of the community discussed and developed plans for the most effective way to meet the needs of francophone displaced workers in their community.

Labour adjustment programs developed in 15 communities:

- Cornwall
- Elliot Lake
- Hawkesbury
- Hearst
- Kirkland Lake
- North Bay
- Oshawa
- Ottawa
- Penetanguishene
- Sault Ste. Marie
- Sudbury
- Timmins
- Toronto
- Welland
- Windsor.

In each community, a community literacy organization received funding to support a co-ordinator. The co-ordinator organized a "table de concertation" or labour adjustment committee for the community. Members included adult literacy organizations (community literacy groups, colleges, school boards), local social service agencies, other training organizations, community organizations, CEC representatives, and others who could provide support services to francophone displaced workers. These committees made sure that workers were assessed and that their training needs were identified and met.

Benefits / Positive Outcomes

Among the benefits and positive outcomes from this initiative are:

- development of collaboration and partnerships among service providers, including adult literacy programs and other community agencies;
- development of resource materials for assessing individual worker's needs;
- development of new training courses or modifications of existing courses to meet the needs of displaced workers;
- raising of awareness among employers of the need to train francophones in French;
- opportunities for francophone workers to access training and other services in French; and
- development of expertise among francophone community literacy programs in marketing and delivering services.

In many cases, the "table de concertation" represented the first time that different organizations in a community had collaborated to plan and deliver training. In some cases, displaced workers entered existing training courses; in other cases, a new or modified course was developed to meet their needs. Local collaboration and co-ordination was not easy to develop, but was considered beneficial and an effective approach to using available resources. In some communities, it facilitated the planning and development of a training plan for the region.

Obstacles / Limitations

Among the obstacles and constraints of this initiative are:

- difficulties in identifying francophone displaced workers;
- dependence of trainees on Section 26 Income Support from CEIC to be in training;
- need to develop collaborative process among stakeholders in a short period of time; and
- gaining access to plant adjustment committees and displaced workers at an appropriately early time.

In some communities, most displaced workers were not involved in large plant closures where a plant adjustment committee was formed. They would not be aware of services which could be provided to them. In some large plant closures with adjustment committees, the committee had to respect confidentiality and rely on workers self-identifying as requiring literacy and basic skills training in French. Many workers are unwilling to do so, especially when they have just been laid off. These factors made it difficult to identify those workers who needed services.

Each adjustment situation is unique, making it difficult to develop one process that will always work effectively. French labour adjustment programs had to market themselves actively to employers and workers to make themselves known. They also had to develop working relationships with the Ministry of Labour about how they could be included in the process. In some regions, a process was developed which allowed French labour adjustment groups to participate effectively in identifying and meeting workers needs. Similarly, groups had to develop links to local CEC's who controlled Section 26 funding approval, to ensure that displaced workers would maintain income support if enrolled in literacy / basic skills training programs. All of these collaborative arrangements had to be developed quickly in order to provide services to francophone workers.

Recommendations

- the labour adjustment initiative continue based on the model of local collaboration and co-ordination;
- local adjustment committees ("tables de concertation") continue to develop and co-ordinate assessment and training for francophone displaced workers;

- the Literacy Branch continue to develop effective working relationships with the Ministry of Labour and Canada Employment Centres to ensure maximum co-operation on client service in the field;
- a common marketing approach be developed for all programs to use to make their services known to employers, plant adjustment committees and francophone workers; and,
- "tables de concertation" be identified and linked to local training and adjustment boards as they are created.