

Language Program Report

Submitted by: Rhoda Keck, Language Program Director

June marks the end of another successful—and eventful – 12 months of language classes! We would like to take the opportunity to thank our hard-working instructors, dedicated volunteers, and especially the many diligent students who dedicated so much of their valuable time, learned new technology skills and put in the hard work that is required in order to improve their English skills.

Here are some statistical highlights from the Language Program this year (July 1, 2019-June 30, 2020):

- 699 Unique clients attended classes at Regional Connections
 - 819 total registrations
 - LINC: 434
 - English for Work (at Regional Connections): 205
 - English at Work (in the workplace): 50
 - Literacy: 130
 - Clients attended classes in:
 - Winkler: 512
 - Morden: 95
 - Altona: 80
 - Morris: 12
- 98 Childcare spots used
- 236 CLB class placement tests for new clients

Program Highlights

- Morris: This past year we engaged in conversations with Red River School Division to help meet the adult language and literacy needs within their catchment. Focus groups were held in Rosenort, Lowe Farm and Morris and as a result, Morris School opened their doors to provide us with space and we were able to run an English class two evenings a week. 12 students enrolled in the class, and attendance was near perfect.
- OFE participation: In fall of 2019, we were able to partner with Opportunities For Employment and Friesens Corp. for the purpose developing workplace skills programming in our region. During this process, we were able to identify the employability and numeracy skills gaps in many of our clients, which have produced barriers to gaining and maintaining employment. While there are many programs in the area that address these needs, they are generally geared for higher level English speakers, and there is a real deficit in this type of programming for Stage 1 ESL learners. With this knowledge we were able to open an English for Work class designed to meet some of these needs and continue to work with the province on long-term program solutions.
- COVID Response: The greatest challenge of the year was of course, dealing with COVID-19, and the resultant changes that needed to suddenly be made to programming. Our teachers and students found ways to adapt and new skills were learned by all to move successfully to remote learning. All of our teachers quickly learned new computer programs in order to facilitate online

learning, and then taught their students how to use the various platforms. Zoom and WhatsApp were used extensively to facilitate teaching, along with authentic speaking and listening practice. In cases where many students did not have access to computer hardware and/or had low computer literacy skills, teachers continued to meet with these students by phone or WhatsApp, photocopied packages and dropped them off at their homes. Because of the incredible flexibility and adaptability of everyone, all of our classes continued without disruption and were completed successfully. Hats off to all involved!

- Spring classes: With all of our programming moving to remote delivery, many clients who were previously unable to attend in person classes, contacted our office and inquired about taking online classes. The interest in online learning was so great that four new classes had to be created in order to accommodate the need.

Success Stories (shared with permission)

- Helena Fehr immigrated to Canada in 2015 and started taking classes at RC in 2016. She has been working hard on her language skills by enrolling in our Literacy, Numeracy and LINC classes. In just 2.5 years, she has moved up two Benchmarks and will be given a LINC certificate of CLB 5 in speaking and listening and will be eligible to apply for Canadian citizenship. This past year Helena was awarded the Outstanding Immigrant Learner Award through TEAM (TESL Manitoba). This award is given to an ESL student who has displayed excellence in acquiring English as an additional language through demonstrated commitment to learning, showing a willingness to work with others, and making an effort to use English outside of the classroom, and comes with a prize of \$250. During the switch to remote learning, Helena quickly learned valuable computer skills which were completely new to her. She successfully learned to write emails, use Microsoft Word, WhatsApp and Zoom. Congratulations to Helena on her many achievements!
- This year, several students have attained employment through connections made in our English for Work classes. As part of our programming, guest speakers are brought into the classes and tours are arranged so that students will begin to make connections with people and places in the industry that they are interested in:
 - One of the classes we piloted this year is the English for Internationally Educated Educators class. As a direct result of the connections made through the class, two students, Oksana Dzyuba and Dimple Sharma, gained employment as Educational Assistants in local schools.
 - Cheryl Sarceno, who attended our English for Healthcare Workers Class, got a casual housekeeping job at the Altona Community Memorial Health Centre. She wrote to say, "I just want to THANK YOU for all the topics in our English for Healthcare class. It was really a big help to me. I am now a casual Housekeeping employee at Southern Health Hospital. Even though I'm not a Health Care Aid there, our topics in class help me a lot especially during my interview."
 - Barbara Aguilera made a difficult journey to Canada one year ago and obtained refugee status. This past fall, Barbara enrolled in our LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers

to Canada) CLB 1-2 class. She has been a dedicated student who wishes to study English in order to meet her goals of establishing a successful business here in Canada. She moved a step in that direction this winter when she opened the Sugar Factory, where they create delicious, professionally decorated pastries for their clients.



Childcare Program Report

Submitted by Diane Toews: Childcare Program Coordinator

The Childcare Program allows clients with pre-school children to take daytime ESL and Literacy classes by offering free, on-site childcare for students. As newcomers to Canada themselves, many children have little or no English and are unfamiliar with the Canadian way of life. Our caring staff provide a warm and welcoming environment for the children and parents alike. The children learn through creative programming facilitated by our experienced staff. We set time aside to communicate personally with parents to ensure a smooth transition into childcare as well as an ongoing positive experience for both the child and parent.

In our program we believe in an inclusive learning environment based on play. Qualified staff provide support for the children and their parents, allowing them to feel safe, welcomed and valued. Fun educational activities are planned to support the children's settlement into Canada while they learn additional language and culture. Each child's individual needs are recognized and their uniqueness is celebrated. The program provides children with opportunities to grow in all developmental areas at their own pace. The room is organized into designated play areas encouraging children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional and language development. All curriculum and activities are based on the children's interests, their age group and skill level.

Our program allows parents to attend classes that will help them develop their own language skills and to learn vital information involved in their settlement into Canada.

Our Childcare Program is also available for parents who are attending Literacy classes, Settlement meetings, and all other services that are provided in person at our Altona, Morden and Winkler sites.

We strive to provide care that the parents are comfortable with. When the parents are comfortable with the care that their children are receiving, they are then able to allow themselves to focus completely on their studies. This program is vital to the settlement of newcomers in this area.

New Beginnings

This year we were excited to move into our new Winkler location. The move was made in November, and we have settled in nicely. The new space includes a bathroom connecting two childcare spaces as well as a small kitchen. These additions to our program allow us to make better use of staffing and serve the most amount of clients possible. The space has been well accepted by our families and has helped us earn a higher level of respect from parents entering our space.

COVID-19

COVID-19 seems to have affected everyone across the world and we are not excluded from this. COVID caused an early closure of our childcare centres beginning early in March this year. This has affected our enrollment and has decreased our registrations just slightly compared to previous years.

In an effort to continue to offer support to our childcare families, we have developed several methods to continue to make connections. One of our key goals was to offer support without overwhelming parents and families during this already stressful time. Some of the ways that we have been able to interact with families remotely have been, through emails with helpful information regarding keeping

little ones busy and learning at home, YouTube videos with lead staff reading stories, and delivering packages to the doorsteps of our families with simple activities to help keep their young children busy while many parents are spending their time teaching school aged children at home. The response from parents has been very positive.

Stats:

- This year we registered a total of 98 children
- 49 children registered for preschool care
- 34 children registered for toddler care
- 8 children registered for infant care
- 7 children registered for short term care



Volunteer and Integration Program Report (Community Connections)

Submitted by: Alesha Hildebrand, Volunteer and Integration Program Coordinator

The Volunteer and Integration Program connects newcomers with community resources by linking them to volunteers, events, and opportunities in the community. We work closely with community partners to deliver services.

Lots of our existing programs have continued with ongoing success. For example, our Mom's Conversation Group with the Family Resource Centre in Winkler continued throughout most of the year. This conversation group focuses on integrating newcomers with the programs and services the Family Resource Centre has to offer, practices English by networking and socializing with other parents, as well as getting to meet and learn about local resources with the added benefit of a guest speaker coming in each week to provide information and orientation regarding life in Canada and the local community. This conversation group covers important settlement areas such as local law, healthy eating, community resources and services (libraries, healthcare services, etc).

We also introduced some new programming through our Language Buddy Program. With COVID-19 impacting our community, we were required to rethink how Language Buddies could actively practice their English with volunteers with respect to the current and ongoing changing guidelines. It was evident that virtual connections were the way to go. We were surprised to see volunteers come from all over the province, willing to assist newcomers in accessing this type of service, and we are looking forward to expanding this opportunity as we slowly reintroduce social gatherings again.

Morden had an influx of newcomer families arrive within the 2019/2020 year, and with this we have seen our events and programs impacted by this increase. Our Taste of the Holidays event with the City of Morden sold out 200+ tickets within a week! We had record breaking numbers of attendees for Winterfest and our Newcomer Welcome Evening has been averaging about 20% steady increase. We are looking forward to expanding our host and sponsors to direct community organizations to be able to provide newcomers the opportunity to meet and learn about the different services in our community.

Altona and Rhineland are hard at work getting the new RNIP up and running. We are looking forward to providing newcomers who arrive through that program (and those living in the community) the opportunity to be partnered with a Community Mentor to assist them as they settle into their new community; their new home!

For CultureFest 2019, we partnered with the Winkler Harvest Festival for the 2nd year in a row. We expanded our event over two days to include indigenous music as well as welcomed back ethnocultural entertainers representing a wide variety of newcomer cultures. We added new kids activities that promoted cultural education, and continued to integrate attendees into learning about the diverse community we live in. We had 10 countries represented with a combined effort of 40+ volunteers who assisted throughout the weekend, over 1,000 Harvest Festival attendees came through CultureFest over the course of the two days.

Overall, this year has seen steady growth in the Volunteer Program. We saw over 300 volunteers provide over 6,000 hours of service. These numbers cover a wide range of volunteer opportunities for special events, community professional guest speakers, language buddies and classroom assistants. We value the work our volunteers and community partners do to assist us with our programs!

Pembina Valley Local Immigration Partnership (PVLIP) Report

Submitted by: Elaine Burton Saindon, PVLIP Coordinator

PVLIP is a project working with regional stakeholders and newcomers to develop and implement sustainable community-based solutions for the successful integration of newcomers. March 2020 marked the completion of the first phase of the project with the assistance of:

- Local Partnership Council: 22 volunteers contributed their expertise from law enforcement, health, education, employment, business, language, settlement, bi-lingual services, economic development, immigration, federal and provincial governments, and 4 municipal representatives (Rhineland, Carman/Dufferin, Stanley, City of Winkler, Town of Altona)
- Immigrant Advisory Tables (3): 23 volunteers from a variety of cultures and lived experiences from Winkler, Morden, and Altona
- Working Groups (3): Volunteers contributed their time and knowledge towards the implementation phase of the 3 priorities identified during Strategic Planning: Welcoming & Inclusive Community, Communication, and Mental Health

A Communication Study* was conducted to help inform the Working Group and stakeholders on the best methods for providing information on services and resources to newcomers.

A Mental Health Focus Group* was conducted with local newcomers to help further the mandate of the Mental Health Working Group. PVLIP will continue to use the information gained to implement the next phase of this priority.

PVLIP, in partnership with CPHR MB, conducted an Employer Engagement Session* to better understand the impact of immigration on local employers. The information gained will help to facilitate best practices for other employers exploring immigration to fill their vacancies as well as inform service providers of newcomers needs in the workplace to further ensure welcoming and inclusive environment.

As immigration continues to grow in the Pembina Valley, PVLIP will continue to focus on bringing stakeholders and newcomer voices together in a collaborative effort to improve integration, retention, and an overall sense of belonging.

**Reports available on the www.pvlip.ca resources page.*



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