

## **SASKATCHEWAN ACTION RESEARCH NETWORK**

### **PROJECT REPORT**

**A. TITLE OF PROJECT: “Where I Come From...” Rebuilding Learner Commitment to Improve Retention After the Easter Break.**

**B. RESEARCHERS’ NAME(S): Janice DePeel, Dennis Warkentine, David Dubyk and Angela Letendre.**

**C. DELIVERY ORGANIZATION: Dumont Technical Institute – Level 3 & 4**

**D. LOCATION(S) OF PROJECT: Prince Albert (Learners returned to their home communities ranging from Rosthern to St. Louis, Cumberland House, Pinehouse Lake, Ille-a-la-Crosse, La Loche, Green Lake and Buffalo Narrows)**

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“It’s always good to remember where you come from and celebrate it. To remember where you come from is part of where you’re going”.

~ Anthony Burgess

**F. Overview: (include context and issue):** Dumont Technical Institute has been implementing retention strategies for several years with successful results. However, there is one area where the faculty felt attention was needed – retention after the Easter break in April. During this vulnerable time, we seem to lose a lot of learners. Whether it is because they return to the work force or simply leave school to pursue other options, we aren’t sure, but many of our learners were not completing their academic year, meaning they were not completing Level 3 or Level 4 in our Adult Basic Education program located in Prince Albert.

At the April 1, 2014 SARN workshop, our table group came up with a strategy to have learners, who were going home for the holiday, re-examine why they decided to relocate to Prince Albert in order to pursue their Level 3 or Level 4 education. We wondered ... if we asked them, “Why did you choose to come into this program?” and ask them to rethink/recommit/reaffirm why they made their education such a priority back in September, perhaps that would help motivate them to return after the break and complete their academic program to the end of June 2014. Our goal was to see our retention rate rise by 10% over last year (2012-2013).

G. Question Posed: “Will an introspective look at ‘Where I Come From...?’ help students focus on ‘Where I Want To Go?’ by motivating more adult learners to return to and stay in the program after the April break?”

The reason for this question was that by the time the break comes at Easter, learners are tired, they’re home sick and going home for that ten day break seems to lull them into a false sense of “life will be good here and I can go back and finish school anytime.” So, we wanted them to rethink why they were in the program then go home and take a look at the reasons why they relocated to Prince Albert to pursue their education. What can a completed Basic Education program do for them? For their families? What could it do to help their communities? Why not stay the course and complete their program(s)?

H. The Intervention (inc. Baseline & Timeline as applicable): We gave learners the assignment a few days before they left for the holiday, basically saying:

We notice how tired you are becoming and we recognize that you are on the final push before school comes to a close. Many of you will be graduating and moving on to other life goals whereas some of you will be returning to DTI in the fall. As a staff, we would like you to go back to your home communities and rediscover the motivation you had when you first came to school in September or February. We want you to relight the fire that you had when you first joined us at DTI.

At first we were a bit nervous what the reaction of learners would be—after all we are asking them to do a homework assignment while on holiday. The response was very positive and

amazing. They felt really inspired by it and the general feeling was that we, as a staff, were taking a personal interest in each individual learner.

On April 14<sup>th</sup> we distributed the assignment (see attached APPENDIX A) and we collected the information on April 28<sup>th</sup>. Level 3 and 4 both contributed to a class PowerPoint showcasing each individual learner.

Again, this study was conducted in our Level 3 and 4 program located in Prince Albert but the learners, a total of 45 learners, all Métis, were heading home to locations such as: Rosthern, St. Louis, Cumberland House, Pinehouse Lake, Ille-a-la-Crosse, La Loche, Green Lake and Buffalo Narrows.

#### I. The Findings:

A full 33% improvement in Level One, basically the same percentage in Level Four

Basic Ed Levels	2012-2013 totals	2013-2014 totals	Percentage Change
LEVEL 3	14 -> 7	12 ->10	50% vs 83%
LEVEL 4	19 -> 18	33 -> 31	94% vs 94%

Prior to the break, which ran from April 18<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>, 2014, there were 12 learners in Level 3 and 33 learners in Level 4. Following the break and this assignment, as of the end of May 2014, there remained 10 learners in Level 3 and this number remained into the month of June 2014 (83% retention rate). Likewise, there were 31 learners in Level 4 at the end of May 2014 and that number remained to the end of June 2014 (94% retention rate).

Comparing these numbers to 2013, in Level 3 there were 14 learners prior to the April break; in May the number dropped to 12 and by June there were only 7 Level 3 Learners (50% retention).

In Level 4, during the same time frame, there were 19 Level 4 Learners in April, 19 in May and 18 in June of 2013 (94.7% retention rate). While the retention rate remained the same in 2014 Level 4, we actually had many additional bodies in the classroom so this is an extremely positive success for us at DTI Prince Albert Campus. We felt we met and

exceeded our 10% goal for Level 3 for sure and, with the additional learners during the Level 4 intake, we felt we ended the year successfully with our Level 4 retention as well.

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#### J. Discussion and Recommendations for other Practitioners:

- The PowerPoint presentation which the returning students put together was a really good idea; however, at five slides per learner and 33 people (in Level 4) contributing to the overall project, the presentation is somewhat lengthy. Were we to recommend a change for next time, the Power Point would be reorganized and one faculty member should spear head the completion of the project. It is recommended that this person(s) will need some time outside of the classroom to work on it. The person(s) in charge of the follow-up needs to give some assistance to learners so that the project can be completed and learners can see how their contributions were used.
- In the end, the slides were compiled and a mark was given to each individual learner however, the presentation never made it into the classroom. Bits and pieces of it were shown but no one ever saw it completed in its' entirety. Nevertheless, the presentation will be used as an example for future projects similar to the one we did. Once we have completed editing the presentation, we will submit it to the Administration of the GDI Website ([www.gdins.org](http://www.gdins.org)) as an example of what one could expect to learn while attending DTI.
- Another way we have decided to adapt this assignment is to use it during orientation week as a way to help learners find focus past the first three weeks of classes during the transitions phase from work/home life to being a full time learner. We recommend such slide presentations can be used in such ways to build support for the program.
- The really great thing about this project is that a whole lot of computer knowledge isn't required for every learner to contribute. We left the creative aspect open ended so each learner could find success with the assignment. Then we scanned the documents (when required) and added their work to the collective PowerPoint assignment. It is quite breathtaking to see the diversity of interpretation learners used

in implementing and completing the assignment.

- The only other modification we made was once learners returned to school, rather than hand in the completed assignment on the 28<sup>th</sup>, we gave some class time which allowed peer teaching opportunities. Those who had more experience with PowerPoint gave mini lessons on how to add graphics, movement and sound to the slides once they were completed. This was a unexpected and pleasant addition to the assignment that we hadn't expected but were pleased to see. ☺ We highly recommend this be the way the assignment is followed up in the future.

Overall, those of us involved in this study were extremely pleased with the outcomes. While it is not obvious that this “Where we come from” intervention was the *single* reason that retention improved or stayed the same over last year, the strategy clearly helped motivate our learners to recommit to their program and to take a renewed look at their own commitments and goals. Further, it gave us insights into the lives of our own learners that we otherwise would not have known about. We highly recommend this strategy to other programs and instructors both to build retention and to build a stronger sense of self-reflection, pride and commitment in our adult learners – both current and into the future.

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## **APPENDIX A: Assignment to learners of DTI**

Where I Come From...

Due: April 28, 2014

Minimum: Five (5) Tasks

This assignment is a thematic project where you have the opportunity to tell your story. Each of you returned to school with a specific goal in mind. We'd like to hear your story ... in a series of quotes, stories, interviews, recipes, song lyrics and photographs select a task a day (listed below) to complete during your break.

Tasks:

- Interview an elder or a person that you deeply respect
- Take a photograph of something related to science then explain it.

- Depict your favourite part of being home
- People/places/things that influence you
- Where you were born
- Recreation and things you do for fun
- Friends, relations and special people
- Best memory
- When I come back here I want to ... (complete the sentence)
- My sacred place is .... (fill in the blank) because (fill in the blank).
- Example of culture or family traditions
- This is my inspiration and the reason I returned to school.

The interview can be done using your phone and you have the choice of doing just audio (voice), video (record the person you're talking to and we'll hear your questions) or written.

Pictures can be drawings, sketches, portraits, photographs or paintings. We encourage you to use your creativity and be as original and unique as you can – this is your story, these suggestions are our way of helping you get started.