

# **Labour - Community Training Collaborations A Summary and Synthesis Report**

**March 2009**

**by:**

**The Labour Education Centre and the Toronto Training Board**

## ***Background/Purpose of the Research***

This is the final report of an initiative to examine training/learning partnerships between labour and community - based agencies. Training/learning partnerships between unions and community groups vary in nature and purpose. They are usually developed to meet a variety of needs and outcomes including:

- To provide access to workplace training and learning opportunities for a specific group such as immigrants and/or internationally educated/trained workers
- To provide access to funding that one partner might not be able to receive alone
- To gather together collective expertise to direct a project or initiative

This project itself is a partnership between a labour organization, the Labour Education Centre, and a community - based organization, the Toronto Training Board. The initiative was funded as a research and knowledge exchange project by the Canadian Council on Learning's Work and Learning Knowledge Centre (WLKC), an initiative that is co-lead by the Canadian Labour Congress and Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters. The research was based on a small sample of labour - community training collaborations. The labour sectors represented the trades - carpentry, bakers, general; hospitality and tourism, manufacturing - steel and auto, and education. The community organizations represented employment assessment, literacy and apprenticeship.

These partnerships were used to identify themes and outcomes that would be of interest to a wider audience. The final results will be shared among different stakeholder groups including the networks of the Labour Education Centre, the Toronto Training Board, the Canadian Labour Congress and other labour, business and community networks.

The project builds on two prior initiatives supported by the Work and Learning Knowledge Centre and implemented by the Labour Education Centre. The report "Integrating Equity, Addressing Barriers: Innovative Learning Practices by Unions" and the February 2008 Roundtable: "Integrating Equity and Addressing Barriers in Education and Training: In the Workplace, In the Union". The project also builds on the partnership work the Toronto Training Board organizes and implements annually to respond to the issues identified in the "Trends, Opportunities and Priorities" (TOP) report.

## *Objectives*

The project was designed to meet the following objectives:

- To understand how these collaborations are funded
- To learn how these programs benefit the union and/or the community - based agency
- To clarify the advantages and/or disadvantages of these partnerships
- To identify best practices related to these training/learning partnerships.

## *Methodology*

A combination of qualitative and participatory methodology was used for the research. Prospective interviewees were identified based on previous research and initiatives. LEC and the TTB conducted a series of interviews with the groups, unions and organizations that were identified as involved in community - labour training/learning partnerships. The training/learning partnerships included in this research are:

- 1. CHOICE Program** - The purpose of this partnership is to connect youth from Toronto Community Housing buildings with pre-apprenticeship training in carpentry. The partners are Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), HSI Solutions (HSI), which is a subsidiary of TCHC, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), the YMCA of Greater Toronto and the Carpenters' Local 27 training Centre. The funding is provided by the MTCU and Local 27, while the YMCA provides support, initial assessment and funds for wage subsidies. HSI funded and provided the paid employment portion of the program for participants to receive real on-the-job experience. The Carpenters' Local 27 Joint Training Centre provides access to pre-apprenticeship training and help with moving on to apprenticeships after the program is complete. The youth receive health and safety and carpentry training at Local 27, and the on-the-job training portion of the program is done at various TCHC locations.
- 2. Bakers' Project for Immigrant Women** - This partnership between Working Women Community Centre (WWCC) and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), provided training in pastry baking to 20 immigrant women. Working Women Community Centre did the outreach, assessment and provided client support while the UFCW provided health and safety training. At the end of the project, 75% of the participants were employed as bakers or assistant bakers.
- 3. Community Organizing for Responsible Development (CORD)** - This collaboration brought together members of UNITE HERE Local 75, community agencies and residents to do community organizing and outreach related to the (proposed) expansion of the Woodbine Racetrack. UNITE HERE and CORD worked together to educate local residents about the development and to train community people in negotiating. The union also provided facilitation for training sessions for community leaders.

4. **Promoting the Skilled Trades to Youth and Communities** - Each year a Skills Canada competition and exhibition showcases the trades and trades training. Part of the event is a skills competition between apprentices who are in training from the participating unions or colleges. Skills Canada organizes the competition and the unions support the apprentices. The partners are the Joint Training and Apprenticeship Committee for the United Associated of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada (JTAC) Local 787 and Skills Canada.
5. **Literacy Program for Laid-Off Workers** - This partnership between the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Local 303 Action Centre and the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) delivered 18 weeks of literacy training to some of the approximately 400 laid-off workers. The workers, primarily immigrant women, identified a need for literacy training as part of a job search program that included English as a Second language (ESL) training, literacy learning, assessment and job search support.
6. **Literacy Links** - This initiative between the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) and Frontier College strengthens connections between schools, community organizations and parents. A series of forums called "Connecting Communities" were organized to discuss how schools and communities can work together more effectively to ensure student success. The forums were held in 14 locations across Ontario.
7. **True Colours Workshops** - The United Steelworkers (USW) and On Track for Women to provide workshops to women USW members who are laid-off. The workshops help laid-off workers clarify their career interests and their training and learning needs through assessment and skills identification.

Each interviewee was asked to describe the collaboration and identify:

- Funding mechanisms
- Benefits to the community organization and/or the union
- Best or promising practices

The information gathered from the interviews has been summarized for this report.

In order to enrich the research gathered through the interviews and provide an opportunity for collaboration partners to share their knowledge and network with other training/learning partnerships a Roundtable was held January 22, 2009 with all the interviewees to discuss, confirm and enhance our interview outcomes. The main objectives of the Roundtable were:

1. To identify the expertise each partner contributed to creating a successful collaboration;
2. To discover in what manner the partnerships built better relationships between labour and community groups.

## Synthesis from Interviews

### *Funding*

The issue of how funding is provided for labour - community training partnerships was one of the areas identified for examination through this research. In most cases government funding supported the partnership. In a few instances, the partners themselves were able to provide some funding for the work.

- A. **Government Funding** - The majority of the partnerships were funded by the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). This Ministry funded the CHOICE program, On Track for Women, the Bakers' Project for Immigrant Women, the Literacy Program for Laid-Off Workers and Promoting the Skilled Trades to Youth and Communities. Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) was another source of government funding. Frequently MTCU funded instructor time and equipment and TESS provided help with child care, transportation and case management, when necessary. The partnership between the Ontario Teachers' Federation and Frontier College was supported through the Ontario Ministry of Education.
- B. **Funding from the Partners** - In some cases, for example, the delivery of the On Track assessment tool, both organizations provided additional monies to the funding from MTCU. For the CHOICE Program, Local 27 contributed a significant amount of funding, close to \$100,000. The collaboration between UNITE HERE and the community in North Etobicoke was primarily supported by the union. The union funded the leadership development workshops for community members and supported the establishment of CORD. Other local community organizations also supported the initial organizing. In the case of the Skills Canada and JTAC Local 787 project, Skills Canada, through their funding from various government agencies, provides funding for the annual competitions.

### *Benefits of these Collaborations/Partnerships*

There were many benefits derived from the training - learning collaborations. In some cases these consisted of additional partnerships or projects, an enhanced profile for the union or community-based organization in the wider community and/or a better understanding of the needs of the partner organizations.

- A. **Heightened or Expanded Profile for Labour in the Community** - Cristina Selva of the Carpenters' Local 27 Training Centre noted that the CHOICE program expanded the knowledge about the union and its membership within the community. This was echoed regarding the Skills Canada Skills Competitions. Marc Hollin of UNITE HERE Local 75 also mentioned the importance of raising the profile of the union in the local community. Before this partnership there had been a great deal of suspicion and distrust of unions in the area. Residents working with the union to form CORD led to greater understanding and appreciation of trade unions. Through Literacy Links school boards are now aware of

the vast resources available through community agencies and there is greater trust between the various partners.

- B. **Better Understanding of the Different Organizations** - Frontier College developed a better relationship with the Ministry of Education and the school boards through their collaboration with the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF). The OTF found more effective ways to communicate with school boards and schools and gained an enhanced understanding of community needs and resources. In the USW/On Track partnership USW recognized that action centres are able to provide more than job search programs and that different communities need different approaches in order to succeed in finding a new job. The importance of working with the community rather than in isolation was emphasized for USW.
- C. **Replicating the Model** - The OTF has been asked to present their project to various other groups including some in other provinces that are interested in the model. The Literacy for Laid-Off Workers Program has been replicated in other Action Centres of the CAW. Marcie Ponte of the WWCC said that they will continue working with unions to deliver the Bakers' program and to start new programs. Many of the community partners said they are interested in or are pursuing conversations with labour to form additional partnerships.
- D. **Connections/Expanding Networks** - Shane McCarthy of JTAC Local 787 mentioned that this work "connects people to government, colleges and private organizations, employers and unions." Cristina Selva of Local 27 and Marc Hollin of UNITE HERE Local 75 both stressed this point. Local 75 also built stronger relationships with local City councillors. The Literacy Links partnership between OTF and Frontier College helped Frontier College make better connections with the Ministry of Education and school boards, which in turn increased their organizational capacity, as they were able to access additional funding. The Literacy Links partnership made important connections between communities, schools and parents in 14 different communities. The forums identified priority issues and activities the participants felt would lead to change in the community, such as parent workshops, homework clubs and establishing better relationships between community agencies and local schools.
- E. **Identifying and Working with Local Leaders** - Marc Hollin emphasized the importance of identifying and supporting natural leaders from the community. The community organizing supported by the union brought the local, non-elected leadership together and allowed those community representatives to have a forum to develop leadership skills. The union did extensive community outreach by engaging their own members who lived in North Etobicoke. They organized meetings in Toronto Community Housing Corporation buildings and other local community spaces where UNITE HERE members talked about their vision for the community based on opportunities that might be available through the Woodbine Live! re-development.
- F. **Bringing Out the Best from Each Partner** - Many of the labour and community partners underlined the importance of learning to appreciate the different skills, perspectives and strengths that each brought to the collaboration. Both the labour and

community - based agencies took advantage of opportunities to improve their organizational capacity while respecting each other. Marcie Ponte noted that “in the case of WWCC the relationship continues into other programs such as the delivery of settlement services for the UFCW.” This was also evident in the partnership between the CAW Local 303 and TDSB that resulted in literacy training for some of the 400 laid-off workers of Collins & Aikman, an auto parts manufacturer. CAW Local 303 and the TDSB developed a shared process for decision-making that supported joint control of the program.

- G. **Certification** - In the CAW/TDSB literacy training partnership, participants received certificates from the TDSB that will be useful in accessing further training and noting on their resumes when looking for employment. The pre-apprenticeship training provided by the CHOICE program allowed participants to go on into apprenticeship training or other courses in the local colleges related to skilled trades. The United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) provided the health and safety training and certification for the Bakers Project.
- H. **Creating Lasting Linkages** - This occurred in several of the partnerships. The OTF and Frontier College have continued working together and the project was beneficial in creating other partnerships between the schools and communities. In the case of the On Track/USW partnership these two organizations will continue to work together to create a pre-apprenticeship program for women looking to enter the field of skilled trades.
- I. **Learning Another Culture** - Working with labour was a learning experience that enriched the community organization. In the same way, the labour groups learned about the resources and values of community groups.

### ***Disadvantages/ Challenges***

Although there were numerous benefits, these collaborations also faced some unique challenges including managing expectations, crossing a cultural divide and historical distrust between the partners.

- A. **Different Cultures** - Unions and community - based training organizations have very different cultures, organizational structures and expectations. The OTF and Frontier College hired a facilitator to build their partnership and help develop Literacy Links.
- B. **Distrust Between Community Groups and Labour** - This was especially evident in the UNITE HERE/CORD development. The union learned the importance of having people on the ground who were part of the community and understood local interests. Local 75, with the help of community organizations and individuals found community organizers from the area. Some community members started these relationships with low expectations about what unions could actually achieve, but were interested in continuing to work with and/or for the union.
- C. **Union Interests versus Community Needs** - Union interest in growing membership may collide with a community group’s interest in keeping their membership intact. Non-unionized groups often have very little contact with unions. Marcie Ponte of WWCC

noted in her work with the UFCW that unions are “great at organizing their membership, but this hinders them in understanding the needs of a local community, as community development takes a long time and is directed at the needs the community members identify, rather than the needs of the organization”. Participants in the CHOICE project have had to deal with violence in the community and Local 27 is now reviewing the project to understand how to respond to violent incidents.

- D. **Taxing on Time** - It is very time consuming on labour and community organizations to step outside of their normal sphere of operations and learn new ways of organizing and working in collaboration. Learning how to respond to the needs of a new partner is often a barrier to developing collaborations.
- E. **Varying Levels of Learning Among Participants** - In some programs participants had low literacy levels and this created barriers to funding and to some training/employment programs. Participants with low literacy levels needed additional programming, such as English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Others needed literacy training before participating in these programs. This was especially notable in some of the newcomer communities.
- F. **Relationships with Employers** - Community groups and unions often have very different perspectives of and relationships with employers. For the community groups, employers are a resource for clients, the final step in a training/employment program. For unions, employers are often seen as “management” and not as an ally in the process.
- G. **A Changing Economy** - This is creating demands for skills and knowledge that the participants in these partnerships can’t match. The qualifications for entry-level positions are becoming more and more inflated and workers with low literacy skills don’t qualify for these jobs.
- H. **Women’s Experience with these Programs** - It is useful to apply a “gender” lens to program design and program evaluation.
- I. **Sustaining these Relationships when Leadership Changes** - There is a long history of unions and community groups working together, but the history isn’t always passed along through new leadership and changing membership. In order to sustain the relationship it is helpful to be able to build on the relationships already in place.

### ***Best/Promising Practices***

Identifying the best or most promising practices in labour - community training partnerships was a key objective of this initiative. Identifying the best practices can help to replicate the project and/or can connect organizations to other potential partners.

- A. **Ensuring that the Right Partners are Involved from the Beginning** - Cristina Selva of the CHOICE Program said that “all the partners are essential, the union, the training provider, the employer and the government. You have to have the right partners.” Shane McCarthy of the Promoting the Skilled Trades to Youth and Communities project noted the importance of working closely with all partners to ensure that the youth benefitted

from the experience. Working with community members from the beginning and building in participation from program participants is also an important aspect of success.

- B. **Involving Union Leadership in Community Work** - UNITE HERE involved union leaders in community organizing. According to Marc Hollin, the more the leadership was involved, the more successful the organizing was. USW also noted the importance of, in particular, (the union) “Executive buy-in to the program.” At the Local 27 training centre there was also a level of “Executive buy-in”. This was also the case at WWCC.
- C. **Good Communication** - Communication is key. One partnership developed a detailed communication strategy at the beginning and that supported the work all the way through. Everyone interviewed stressed the importance of having clear channels of communication, setting goals, meeting at regular intervals to review progress and talking through issues that arose.
- D. **Respect** - Respecting the differences of approaches, organizational practice and culture was essential in ensuring the partnership was successful. For all the partners and the participants maintaining confidentiality about the participant’s lives was another important aspect of the collaboration.
- E. **Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities and the Various Contributions of all the Partners** - In the example of the partnership between CAW Local 303 and the TDSB the organizational roles were set from the beginning so there was very little friction as the program developed. This was also true for the CHOICE program, the Bakers’ Project for Immigrant Women, Literacy Links and the True Colours Workshops. Because each of the partners was able to make a significant contribution relative to their own resources or expertise, the partnership was successful. Clarifying from the beginning what each partner was able to contribute and receive was useful. Marcie Ponte of the Bakers’ Project for Immigrant Women stated that “a clear goal and vision is what is needed to steer the program in the right direction.” The partnership between the OTF and Frontier College also benefited from a clear and shared vision for their project. Clearly defining the roles of the partners helped to strengthen the partnership and build a foundation for future collaboration.
- F. **Taking the Time to Build the Partnership** - This was an essential piece of doing this work. All of the partners acknowledged that taking the appropriate time at the beginning to understand each other’s culture and approach led to building a strong working relationship. There will be tensions, but use them as learning opportunities. Ensuring that representatives from both the community group and the union have leadership positions from the beginning also helped. Sometimes it’s useful to have a neutral coordinator or facilitator to bring the partnership together as in the case of the OTF and Frontier College collaboration.

- G. **Including the “Whole” Worker** - In some instances the partnership included the families of the participants not just the individual and the training was adjusted to the needs and availability of other family members.
- H. **Appropriate Assessment** - Doing an assessment at the outset to ensure that participants understood the program and are qualified for their career of interest, for example that they actually wanted to be on a worksite early in the morning in every season or work in an industrial kitchen, was an important component of participation and therefore program success. In some cases this included a practical or hands-on demonstration of the training/ learning.
- I. **Performing a “Safety” Audit on the Program or thorough Program Review Helped to Ensure that the Program would be Successful** - Understanding or examining the risks of the partnerships or program from the beginning to the end was an important aspect of ensuring the success of the partnership. Sometimes it is useful to start with a pilot, review the program/partnership and analyze (get feedback) to evaluate and improve for the next round.
- J. **Sharing the Load** - Ensuring that all partners had the same amount of responsibility for the program was essential.
- K. **Joint Management of the “Groan Zone”** - Developing and implementing these partnerships takes time and can be a difficult learning experience for all partners. It was useful that the partners were equally involved in managing complaints from participants.
- L. **Building in Flexibility** - These successful partnerships were able to adapt to changing conditions, funding or other unexpected variations to accommodate the needs of partners and participants. The partners did not enter the collaboration with preconceived assumptions about each other.
- M. **Sustainability** - The formal partnerships were more sustainable as there was a strong foundation and the partners were clear about expectations. In addition, the program could demonstrate success to the funder.
- N. **Building on the Expertise Each Partner Contributed to the Program’s Success** - In the example of the Bakers project, the union was not able to find employment for the participants at the conclusion of the project. The community agency then hired someone to help the women find work. The union’s expertise was in providing health and safety training and working with the women, while the community organization was able to help with employment placement.

There is a long and productive history of unions and community groups working together in Toronto. Community groups have been involved with campaigns to organize workers in textile factories and unions have worked with the community to provide English-as-a-Second Language training in the workplace. Community leaders and labour worked together on the Pay Equity

Coalition and on Employment Equity in Ontario. There is a firm foundation to build on and expand these partnerships. The lessons learned from these 8 examples will be useful in replicating these efforts and developing new and innovative partnerships.

## Appendix A: Literature Search

During the preliminary research of this project one of the findings was that there are very few resources that speak directly to union/community training or learning partnerships. Below is a list of the limited Canadian sources found.

1. *Integrating Equity, Addressing Barriers: Innovative Learning Practices by Unions.* Labour Education Centre, Toronto, 2007.
2. Kumar, Pradeep and Chris Schenk. *“Paths to Union Renewal: Canadian Experience.”* Toronto, 2006.
3. Ladd, Deena and Cynthia Cranford. “Community Unionism: Organizing for Fair Employment in Canada” *Vol. 3, Just Labour*, Fall 2003.

## Appendix B: List of Interviewees

- Program:** Pre-Apprenticeship CHOICE Program  
**Interviewee:** Cristina Selva, Director of Training, Carpenters' Local 27  
Colleen Dignam, Employment Program Director, YMCA of Greater Toronto
- Program:** Bakers' Project for Immigrant Women  
**Interviewee:** Marcie Ponte, Executive Director, Working Women Community Centre
- Program:** Community Organizing for Responsible Development  
**Interviewee:** Marc Hollin, Researcher, UNITE HERE Local 75  
Judy Shum, Project Coordinator, North Etobicoke Revitalization Partnership
- Program:** Promoting the Skilled Trades to Youth and Communities  
**Interviewee:** Shane McCarthy, Training Director, Joint Training and Apprenticeship Committee for the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipefitting Industry of the United States and Canada Local 787
- Program:** Literacy Program for Laid-Off Workers  
**Interviewees:** Justine Lilley, Coordinator, Canadian Auto Workers Local 303 Action Centre  
Carol Visser, Program Officer - Literacy and Basic Skills, Toronto District School Board
- Program:** Literacy Links  
**Interviewees:** Cyndie Jacobs, Director, Curriculum and Assessment Ontario Teachers' Federation  
Sandra Huehn, Community Coordinator, Frontier College  
Laury Roy, Literacy Links Project Manager, Ontario Teachers' Federation
- Program:** True Colours Workshops  
**Interviewees:** Marie Heron, Executive Director, On Track for Women  
Dave Parker, Coordinator, United Steel Workers Toronto District Action Centre

## Appendix C: January 22, 2009 Roundtable Agenda

### Labour Education Centre and Toronto Training Board *Roundtable: Labour – Community Training Collaborations*

Thursday January 22, 2009  
Centre for Social Innovation  
215 Spadina Ave., first floor, room 120  
10:00am - 2:00pm

#### Agenda

9:30-10:00 *Coffee*

10:20-10:30

Review of draft report: “Labour-Community Training Collaborations”

10:00-10:20

Opening/Introductions

- ❖ Welcome from LEC/TTB      10:30-11:15 Union/Community training partnerships
- ❖ Introductions
- ❖ Challenges: Name specific examples
- ❖ Advantages: What expertise did each partner bring to the collaborations to make them successful?

11:15-11:30 *Break*

11:30-12:15 Building on the Experiences

- ❖ Best practices and recommendations: How do the partnerships build better relationships and opportunities between labour and community?
- ❖ History: past experiences

12:15-12:30 Closing remarks and wrap-up

12:30 -1:30 *Lunch*