



PORTAGE LEARNING & LITERACY CENTRE

110 Saskatchewan Ave. W. Portage la Prairie, Manitoba R1N 0M1

Telephone: 204-857-6304 Fax: 204-857-6358

E-mail: info@pllc.ca Website: www.pllc.ca

Chairperson's Report for 2024 Annual General Meeting

The Portage Learning and Literacy Centre commenced operations at our current venue in 1991, originally named "Portage Plains Employment Programs Inc." In 1995, through the joint efforts of numerous agencies, we transformed into the Portage Learning Centre and achieved certification as an Adult Learning Centre. We have consistently offered Mature Grade 12 and Adult Literacy programs, accompanied by on-site childcare through TLC Day Care—a subsidiary of Portage Day Care. These foundational programs are still active today.

We were pleased to add a new program to our suite of services, the Portage Accessible Careers and Employment (PACE) program, which offers specialized training and support to help persons with disabilities secure and maintain employment. Another major highlight from this past year, fulfilling a goal of our Strategic Plan, was the expansion of our programs into the adjacent building, significantly enhancing our capacity to serve our community more effectively. This expansion includes modernized facilities for all our programs, especially our employment programs, allowing us to offer services and skills training programs in a more welcoming and supportive environment.

Our Settlement Program has witnessed exponential growth, aiding newcomers in adapting to their new surroundings in Canada. Since 2007, the program has expanded from two staff serving 50 clients/year to 9 full-time and 12 part-time staff, accommodating the growing needs of our clients. With increases in staff and programming, and the recent influx in arrivals from Ukraine and other countries, PLLC is now serving over 1700 newcomer clients per year, which is a 30% increase from last year and 100% increase over past two years.

Thanks to our committed staff, volunteers, and community partners, we have enhanced the quality and reach of our services, now supporting over 3500 individuals annually. The Board of Directors extends profound gratitude to all staff for their exceptional dedication. Special acknowledgment goes to Cathy Dowd, Executive Director, whose keen insight into community needs has greatly enhanced our impact.

Looking ahead, we are optimistic about the continued growth and success of our organization.

Beverly Phillips
Acting Board Chair

Program Activity Highlights (April 2023 through March 2024)

Newcomer Settlement Services

The PLLC is funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and Province of Manitoba to offer settlement services for newcomers to Canada, including Needs Assessment, Assets, and Referrals; Information and Orientation: Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), Employment Related Services; Community Connections; Language Training (formal and informal). We also offer support services such as transportation, childminding, translation, and interpretation, and provide Notary Services and Commissioner for Oaths.

Newcomer Clients Served

Over the past year, our services have reached a significant number of newcomers, with 764 new clients enrolled in our programs, achieving 118% of our annual target. This group included 362 Permanent Residents and 402 individuals eligible under Manitoba's criteria, such as those holding valid work or study permits, refugee claimants, and recent Canadian citizens who still require settlement support. A noteworthy aspect of our service this year was the inclusion of 163 Ukrainian arrivals, who received comprehensive support ranging from job placement and housing assistance to language training and help with immigration-related documentation. Our ability to meet and exceed service demands is largely due to increased funding from the Manitoba government, which allowed us to hire additional settlement workers to address the growing needs of our clients. This expansion not only reflects our commitment to serving the newcomer community but also enhances our capacity to deliver tailored services effectively.

Language Training

PLLC remains committed to addressing the high demand for English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, currently offering three classes catering to 55 students with proficiency levels from Literacy (absolute beginners) to advanced (CLB 5-8). The structure of our classes is designed to accommodate the changing schedules of our students, many of whom are new entrants into the workforce. Often, those employed in physically demanding jobs or shift work find it challenging to continue their language education. However, we can quickly fill these spots with new arrivals or individuals from our wait list. Graduates who complete the required hours receive a LINC certificate, which is instrumental when applying for Canadian citizenship. Our targeted English for Work classes cater to those with at least CLB 5 proficiency, focusing on enhancing language skills crucial for the workplace. These classes, run in three 8-week cohorts, have been pivotal in boosting confidence and skills in key areas such as pronunciation, job-specific vocabulary, and business communication etiquette.

Community Connections

Our Community Connections program has been particularly vibrant this year, offering a wide range of in-person and online activities designed to facilitate newcomer integration into Canadian society. We hosted 124 Conversation Circles and 39 informational workshops on critical settlement topics such as Workplace Safety, Home Ownership, and interacting with crucial services like Service Canada and Canada Revenue Agency. The program also included significant events such as Halloween festivities and Winter Holiday Carnival, enhancing community engagement. The DiverseCITY Festival was a highlight, featuring cultural pavilions and performances from 15 different countries, drawing an audience of over 300 people. Our community connections extended through 15 educational field trips to local landmarks and institutions, providing newcomers with a deeper understanding of their new community. The program's success is also reflected in the activities of our seniors' group, which engaged in weekly social and educational outings, contributing to their ongoing integration and well-being in the community. In partnership with the Family Resource Centre, our Swimming program, funded by a grant called ParticipACTION, offered unique opportunities for youth to learn new skills while being active, fostering both physical health and community interaction. Additionally, this year, PLLC collaborated with Portage Sari-Sari Store to organize a men's basketball league. This initiative allowed community members to form teams and compete, further enhancing their connections within the community through a fun and inclusive sporting event. These activities not only provide practical support and learning opportunities but also play a crucial role in helping newcomers feel integrated and valued within their new community.

Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)

The SWIS program at PLLC continues to be a cornerstone of our efforts to assist newcomer students and their families, successfully operating across seven schools within the Portage la Prairie School Division. This past year, our dedicated SWIS team has supported over 250 newcomer youth through a diverse range of activities tailored to enhance their educational and social experiences in Canada. These services include assistance with school registrations, hosting informational webinars, and facilitating an in-school lunch program designed to foster community among students. A key component of the program this year was the high school leadership training, which not only equipped students with essential leadership skills but also engaged them in peer mentorship, empowering them to take active roles in promoting cultural sharing, anti-bullying, and anti-racism within their schools. Additionally, our SWIS staff helped numerous high school students to develop their resumes and hone their interview skills, many of whom secured part-time or summer employment as a result. This comprehensive support system underscores our commitment to ensuring that newcomer youth can successfully navigate the educational landscape and integrate into their new community.

Summer Youth Engagement Program

Now in its seventh year, the Summer Youth Engagement Program has made significant strides in providing engaging and educational activities for newcomer youth aged 6 to 15. This past summer, approximately 70 participants enjoyed a full slate of activities structured around weekly themes that catered to different age groups. For the younger cohort (ages 6-9), activities ran Tuesday through Friday, throughout July, featuring diverse and interactive sessions that included crafts, games, and educational outings. The older group (ages 10+) participated in August with a similar schedule, engaging in more age-appropriate activities such as wall climbing, bowling, and Go-Kart racing. Highlights of the program included visits to local attractions like the Assiniboine Park Zoo, Splash Island, and the Central Plains RecPlex in Southport, all designed to foster a sense of belonging and community among the participants. The program's success is largely attributable to the dedicated efforts of our SYEP staff members who meticulously planned and executed these activities, ensuring that each participant had a memorable and enriching summer experience.

Employment Assistance Services

The Employment Assistance Services (EAS) program, funded by Manitoba Workforce Training and Employment, has been a consistent offering at the PLLC since 1991. Annually, we apply for funding to sustain and enhance this program, which has witnessed notable growth in client intakes and services rendered over the past two years.

Under the supervision of a dedicated Employment Consultant, our Employment Assistance Services (EAS) program provides personalized support to individuals through one-on-one consultations. Services encompass assistance in job searches, resume and cover letter development, interview preparation, workshops, and other employment-related aid. Historically, we have supported an average of 200-250 clients annually through EAS. However, in the fiscal year 2022-23, demand surged, leading us to assist 388 individuals in securing employment within our region, achieving 141% of our target goal. This year, 2023-24, we are on pace to again serve over 350 clients.

Throughout the year, we conducted a variety of workshops, totaling 64, covering topics such as Outstanding Interviews, Resume Development, Effective Job Search Strategies, Cover Letter Writing, and Career Development. These workshops were predominantly held at the PLLC, with a subset conducted via Zoom. Additionally, we provided tailored workshops and individual support for internal programs, including the Portage Work Experience Program, Mature 12, and Adult Literacy program. Furthermore, we extended our services to the Indigenous Adult Health Internship Program (IAHIP) in Portage and Winkler, along with a recurring workshop series involving staff from the Manitoba Developmental Centre.

Portage Work Experience Program (PWEP)

The Portage Work Experience Program, funded by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) under the Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS), aims to support youth aged 15 to 30 in accessing training and work experience. Its purpose is to help them overcome barriers to employment and develop a diverse skill set conducive to active participation in the current and future labor market.

Initially contracted for three years until May 5, 2023, the program expanded with an additional project from the 2020 Fall Economic Statement (FES), running from September 7, 2021, to the end of March 2023. In early 2023, the project received an extension to conclude on March 29, 2024. This extension augmented funding to accommodate 28 additional participants, raising the total target to 160 youth served.

From the program's inception until March 2024, we have served a total of 174 youth, comprising 127 from YESS funding and 47 from FES funding. In the 2023-24 period, 36 youth were served under YESS. Among those served, 31 are currently employed, reflecting an 86% success rate, while 3 have returned to school. Notably, 72% of participants are Indigenous youth, 61% identify as persons with disabilities, and over half grapple with mental health challenges.

During the past year, McMunn and Yates emerged as the most engaged employer, hosting 8 youth participants, 5 of whom secured permanent employment, 2 of whom found employment elsewhere, and 1 returned to school, achieving a 100% success rate. Similarly, Sobeys employed 4 participants, with 3 retaining their positions after the placement and 1 returning to school, also achieving a 100% success rate.

Employers Participating in PWEP (May 2020 – March 2024):

ACL-Portage la Prairie; Ag World; Armwood Windows and Doors; Avena Foods; Boston Pizza; Chicken Chef; Circle Square Ranch; CMHA Central; Douglas Campbell Lodge; Dufferin Villa; Family Resource Centre; Fehr Automotive; genAG Portage la Prairie; Hi-Tec Industries; Homestead Co-op; Hope Arising (Countess Place); LA Quality; LA Custom Painting; Laws Automotive; Lions Prairie Manor; Long Plain First Nation Band Office; McMunn and Yates Building Supplies; Midtown Motor Inn; Panko's Food Centre; Portage & District Recycling; Portage Bear Clan; Portage Daycare; Portage Friendship Centre; Portage Golf Club; Portage la Prairie Community Revitalization Corporation; Portage Learning and Literacy Centre; Portage MCC Thrift Store; Portage Regional Library; Portage School Division; Prairie Fusion Art Centre; RHCS I.T. Services, ROK Central; Salvation Army; Shoppers Drug Mart; Simplot Foods; Sirius Protection Services; Sobeys; Southern HealthSanté Sud; Styled by Meraki; Swan Lake First Nation; Tornados Restaurant; United Way Central Plains; Visions of Independence; Watson's Roofing; West End Daycare; Youth for Christ.

Portage Accessible Careers and Employment Program

The Portage Accessible Careers and Employment program (PACE) is funded by the Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) through the Opportunities Fund (OF) for Persons with Disabilities. The program will run for three years, to April 2026, and focuses on supporting persons with disabilities in overcoming barriers to participation in the Canadian labour market, and supports employers to hire persons with disabilities.

Over the past year, PACE has served 11 participants with 10 either completed or are still active in the program, and one being referred to our Adult Literacy program for upgrading and to obtain their Grade 12 diploma. Placements are with the following employers: Visions of Independence, Homestead Coop, Family Resource Centre, MCC Thrift Store, Panko's Food, Sobey's, and the Portage la Prairie School Division.

PLLC Employment programs, including PACE, moved into the newly renovated building in October 2023. This allowed for a dedicated training room and offices for each program staff and has made a huge difference in being able to effectively run our programs, especially the new room for training sessions and private offices for confidential meetings with participants.

Employers Participating in PACE (May 2023 – March 2024):

Family Resource Centre; Homestead Co-op; Panko's Food Centre; Portage Daycare; Portage la Prairie School Division; Portage MCC Thrift Store; Sobeys; and Visions of Independence.

Central Manitoba Adult Literacy Program

The Adult Literacy program, funded by the Province of Manitoba, Adult Learning and Literacy branch, is a self-paced program that assists individuals to improve their numeracy, writing/reading and digital skills. Each topic is divided into three different stages.

During the 2022-23 school year, Literacy had a total of 83 students participate in the program. Of those students, 27 were Literacy students, 33 were Numeracy students and 23 were both. There were 48 completions along with many additional students who completed shorter upgrades. There were also five Adult Basic Education credits awarded.

The Literacy program once again ran over the summer months with a total of 23 students with 14 stage completions and one Adult Basic Education credit awarded.

This year the Literacy Co-ordinator and the Lead Teacher are part of an Adult Learning and Literacy's "Literacy Stages Renewal Project." This project involves improving the current Stages Framework so that it is more modern and more "user-friendly" for new Literacy practitioners

and so that it reflects the new “Skills for Success” model. Initially, the project was to end on March 31, 2024, but it has now been extended to March 31, 2025, to include creation of Numeracy and Digital Frameworks. This new phase of the project will continue to include the Literacy Co-ordinator along with the addition of one of our Literacy Instructors and our M12 Math Teacher.

Portage Adult Learning Centre Program

This program is a structured classroom credit program for individuals who would like to obtain their Mature Student High School Diploma or require specific courses to apply to a post-secondary institution. During the 2022-23 year, the Portage Adult Learning Centre provided instruction to 89 students resulting in over 100 credits and 23 graduates.

This year the ALC program was able to access an Adult Education Barrier Reduction grant. The grant was received through Portage Community Revitalization Corporation’s funding from Communities Building Youth Futures program. This funding was designed to assist our programming in the areas of food security, transportation, technology/resources, and honorariums/workshop fees. As a result of this grant, our program was able to provide breakfast and snacks, emergency grocery and gas cards, access to rides through a local shuttle, purchase of books and other student supplies, workshops, and field trips. We were also able to update our digital technology and this summer we will install new computers in the computer lab that is shared by both adult education programs and the ESL classes.

Both education programs took part in the making of a documentary on adult education in Manitoba. The documentary is called “Live and Learn” and was made by Kevin Nikkel of Five Door films. It shares the stories of adult learners in literacy and mature student high school programs. Kevin spent a day in January at PLLC interviewing students and filming at the centre. The project was funded by the Adult Secondary Education Council, the Manitoba Research Alliance (MRA)—in collaboration with Jim Silver, University of Winnipeg Professor Emeritus—and additional funding from Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology (MITT). The finished film is now available for free online.

TLC Daycare

TLC Daycare provides fully subsidized daycare to children of students enrolled in both the Adult Literacy and Adult Learning Centre programs. Portage Daycare operates this program. Children ages 12 weeks to 6 years old are eligible to attend. In addition to the Daycare Supervisor (ECE II), there are two casual full-time Child Care Assistants that work in this program as well as two extra casual staff. The number of spots varies depending on the age of the children attending

the program. The support offered through this program is invaluable to student success. It not only allows parents to have their children cared for onsite while they complete their studies, but also provides parents with resources to help them navigate the parenting process. The daycare also runs an evening program for children of newcomer parents attending ESL classes. There are three staff who work for the unlicensed evening program.

This year saw a growing demand for both PLLC student and community daycare spots. Thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation of Portage and District, a second washroom was added in the daycare to accommodate five additional spaces for children. The daycare is now licensed for twenty children – four infants and sixteen preschoolers.

Money Management Training Program

Through a partnership with SEED Winnipeg, the PLLC has five trained facilitators on staff to offer a variety of Manage Your Money workshops to anyone in the Central Plains region. The different topics include Community Economic Development; Assets; Money Choices; Budgeting; Basics of Banking; Credit; Debt; and financial institutions.

Throughout 2023-2024, we offered 26 workshops, mostly in-person and a few online over Zoom. We had a total of 136 participants for all the sessions, which included 69 unique individuals, with many attendees attending more than one workshop. It is also important to note that 81% of our participants identified as being Indigenous or Metis. This past year we were able to receive a \$5,000 grant from SEED Winnipeg through this partnership.

Volunteer Program

The PLLC extends its gratitude to United Way Central Plains for its annual funding, which has proven indispensable to our Volunteer Program's sustenance. With these resources, we have maintained a Volunteer Coordinator position, dedicating one day a week to recruit, manage, and acknowledge our volunteers.

We have persevered in rebuilding our volunteer base over the past year, resulting in a current roster of 45 active volunteers. Recently, we hosted a successful Volunteer Appreciation Event on April 15 at Om Indian Cuisine, with over 25 volunteers in attendance. The event featured prizes, games, and delectable cuisine, fostering a sense of appreciation and camaraderie among attendees.

Our volunteers play a pivotal role in meeting the diverse needs of our students and clients. From mentorship to ESL classroom assistance, event support, tutoring, and more, their contributions are invaluable.

Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP)

Every year PLLC participates in the CVITP through Canada Revenue Agency. Our tax clinic and services run for the months of March and April. We have at least 6 volunteers trained to help provide free tax filing services to individuals and families with modest incomes. In 2023, we filed 343 tax returns, and in 2024, we have been extra busy filing over 500 returns.

Identification Services

In the past year, with support from the Manitoba Building Sustainable Communities Program, PLLC has introduced a significant new service. This initiative assists individuals in obtaining original government-issued IDs, covering associated costs for those facing financial constraints. During this period, we aided 63 individuals in acquiring their government-issued IDs. Additionally, we have offered official passport photos and residency photos at a nominal fee of \$10 per person. However, due to rising operational costs, this fee has recently been adjusted to \$20 per person. In the past year, we provided photo services for 612 individuals.

Food Security Program

With funding provided by the Manitoba Building Sustainable Communities grant and the Community Services Recovery Fund from United Way Winnipeg, PLLC has implemented a Food Security Pilot project. This initiative comprises three main components: 1. Snack Program catering to learners attending adult education and ESL classes; 2. Food Rescues aimed at acquiring perishable items from various businesses and restaurants promptly, considering their limited shelf life; 3. Emergency Food Hampers for short-term assistance to clients in need.

Collaborating with Second Harvest, we have conducted 38 rescues from 10 different businesses/restaurants, resulting in the rescue of 2,609 meals valued at \$8,078. These rescued food items have been distributed to our students and clients, contributing significantly to their food security.

Throughout the past year, we have supported and enhanced food security for 410 clients and their families through this initiative.

PLLC's Ongoing Actions for Reconciliation

Over the past several years, PLLC has actively engaged in initiatives that go beyond discussing reconciliation to more practicing it in our daily operations.

We demonstrate our support by prominently displaying the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action at our front reception. Additionally, as we expanded into our new space with our employment programs, we made sure to hire someone qualified to perform smudging throughout the entire building. We participate in important campaigns such as Red Dress Day, Orange Shirt Day, and engage in community activities, including with the Portage Friendship Centre for National Indigenous Peoples Day.

Our educational offerings have been enriched with more Indigenous content, particularly in our adult education, ESL classrooms, and our skills training programs. This integration allows both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, including ESL learners, to explore Indigenous histories in Canada, fostering discussions and a deeper understanding of each other's perspectives. Notably, over 70% of our students/clients (outside of settlement program) are Indigenous, underscoring the importance of these educational enhancements.

PLLC staff also actively participated in a week-long Indigenous-led course titled "Igniting the Power Within," a unique, five-level certification series of workshops tailored for community advisors, counselors, and educators.

PLLC has organized a variety of activities, events, and workshops aimed at raising awareness among newcomers to Canada. These include presentations on Land and Treaties, Indigenous Diversity, and experiential learning opportunities like participating in Indigenous ceremonies and Story Stick workshops. A poignant moment this year was a joint field trip to the National Residential School Museum with newcomers, Literacy, and ALC students, where personal stories shared by the tour guides and students led to impactful discussions and follow-up assignments.

In collaboration with the Portage Friendship Centre, we facilitated workshops on Dreamcatchers and Medicine Bags and hosted an Indigenous Dance presentation. Additionally, staff members participated in a Ribbon Skirt Workshop, which included teachings about the garment's significance and a hands-on skirt making session. These collective efforts exemplify PLLC's dedication to learning about and engaging in reconciliation through comprehensive educational and cultural initiatives.

Additional Funding Grants:

Arts, Culture and Sport in Community Fund – Community Celebrations Grant to organize the DiverseCITY Festival at Glesby Centre on November 4, 2023.

Building Sustainable Communities Program Grants – Approved multi-year funding to run a pilot project to assist our clients in achieving food security and obtain the equipment and funds required to do so. Also approved to run a pilot program to offer ID services at our centre.

Canada Summer Jobs and MB Green Team Grants – Approved funding to hire a total of 8 youth to help run our Summer Youth Engagement Program in July and August.

Canada-Manitoba Job Grants – Approved funding through this cost-shared program to be able to offer staff training in areas such as: communication; resilience in workplace; counselling skills; mental health; DiSC Assessment; diversity, equity, inclusion; First Aid & CPR, and more.

City of Portage la Prairie Community Grants – Approved funding for DiverseCITY 2024.

Community Foundation of Portage and District Inc. – Approved funding to help pay for an additional washroom in the daycare, which allowed an expansion of our daycare spots from 15 to 20, for both daytime and evening programming.

Enhancing National Sector GBA Plus Capacity Pilot Project – Selected as one of two organizations in Manitoba to participate in the Enhancing National Sector Gender-Based Analysis (GBA) Plus Capacity Pilot Project and will receive an honourarium.

JumpStart Grant – Approved a grant to offer swimming lessons for newcomer youth throughout the Summer Youth Engagement Program.

ParticipACTION Community Challenge – Approved funding to run a swim program including swimming instruction and supports to reduce barriers for 60 youth in June.

Southern Health-Santé Sud's (Re)Connecting with Nature and Neighbours Grant – Approved funding to provide newcomer senior activities exploring nature and getting active outdoors.

United Way Brandon and District Approved two-year funding that will allow us to effectively run our volunteer program to help us support students and clients.

United Way Winnipeg (UWW) for the Community Services Recovery Fund – Approved funding to cover costs to initially set up and staff the Food Security program and build capacity in PLLC.