



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 2025 Annual General Meeting

The Portage Learning and Literacy Centre has come a long way since its inception in 1991, originally founded as Portage Plains Employment Programs Inc. and transitioning to the Portage Learning Centre in 1995. Since then, we have continued to grow and evolve in response to the changing needs of our community, all while remaining steadfast in our mission to support learning, employment, and settlement services for residents of Portage la Prairie and surrounding areas.

This past year, we continued to build on our foundational programs in Adult Literacy and Mature Grade 12, complemented by on-site childcare through TLC Day Care. These core offerings remain integral to our operations. At the same time, we expanded our services significantly across multiple program areas.

A major highlight this year was the official launch of our Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), which began on April 1, 2025. As a new program, we have focused on start-up activities such as hiring staff, setting up internal systems, and securing temporary housing units. We are now fully prepared to begin welcoming our first Government-Assisted Refugee families in the months ahead.

In addition, we are laying the groundwork for further physical expansion. Plans are now in place to renovate our current space to include a large classroom and two additional offices in summer 2025. This expansion will allow us to increase our program delivery capacity and improve client access to services in a more supportive and professional environment.

Throughout 2024–2025, our staff and volunteers have shown unwavering dedication. Despite staffing transitions and sector-wide challenges, our team has continued to deliver high-quality services with compassion and professionalism. We have served over 1,700 newcomer clients, continued delivering innovative employment programs, and improved access to identification, food security, and financial empowerment supports for low-income residents.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I extend sincere appreciation to our incredible staff, volunteers, and community partners for their contributions. Special thanks go to Cathy Dowd, our Executive Director, whose leadership continues to guide our organization with vision, integrity, and heart.

As we look ahead, we are excited about the continued growth and opportunities that lie before us.

Beverly Phillips, Board Chair

PLLC Program Activity Highlights (May 2024 – April 2025)

Newcomer Settlement Services

Our Settlement team provided support to 1,704 newcomer clients, including 961 Permanent Residents and 743 Manitoba-eligible clients (including Temporary Residents holding valid Work Permits or Study Permits; Canadian Citizens who identify as newcomers; Refugee Claimants, etc.) This year, we hosted a wide range of impactful events and launched new partnerships:

- A Holiday Season Celebration at Stride Place welcomed over 280 attendees and featured a horse-drawn sleigh ride, visit from Santa, cultural food, and family activities.
- The DiverseCITY Fashion Show was held in February 2025 at the Glesby Centre, in partnership with Prairie Fusion Arts & Entertainment, Fort la Reine Museum, and the Manitoba Agricultural Museum.
- With the Portage Friendship Centre and the National Indigenous Residential Schools Museum, we co-hosted workshops like Orange Shirt Day (70 attendees) and field trips to build understanding around Indigenous history and reconciliation.
- Workshops this year covered topics like Winter Driving, Benefits for Seniors, Parenting 101, Emergency Preparedness, and Self-Care.
- Our Family and Youth programming, in collaboration with the Family Resource Centre, included toddler and kids' book clubs, swimming lessons, and a new Community Kitchen initiative with the Salvation Army.
- We also ran a very successful Summer Youth Engagement Program, with over 80 newcomer youth participating in a variety of interactive, educational, and fun activities throughout July and August.

Language Training

ESL classes served over 65 registered learners. We delivered three LINC classes: Stage 1 (CLB 1–2), Stage 2 (CLB 3–4), and Stage 2 (CLB 5–8). The Stage 1 class also included literacy-level learners and CLB 1 students who received additional in-class support. All daycare spaces were filled and evening spaces continued to support parents attending those classes.

English for Work ran three times throughout the year, with 30 students attending in total.

Computers for Life, delivered in partnership with Altered Minds Inc. in Winnipeg, ran four cohorts this year with approximately ten students each. All participants who completed the sessions received a free refurbished computer.

Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)

This past year, the program was delivered by two dedicated SWIS Workers who worked in schools within the Portage la Prairie School Division and served over 250 newcomer youth. Earlier in the year, we expanded the program to include schools in the Prairie Spirit School Division. Students took part in resume building, peer mentorship, cultural sharing, and leadership training. The team also supported family engagement and referrals for additional supports in the community.

Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)

The launch of this new program followed extensive preparation and advocacy. PLLC applied for and was successfully approved as the only new RAP site in the Prairies and Northern Territories region. Following approval, we negotiated a new three-year agreement with IRCC, covering April 1, 2025, through March 31, 2028.

Launched on April 1, 2025, RAP is in the early stages of implementation. Staff hiring and training, internal procedures, and temporary housing units have been put in place in preparation for our first arrivals. We are funded to support 50 Government-Assisted Refugees in our first year, with capacity increasing to 100 annually thereafter.

Employment Assistance Services (EAS)

Over the past year, our Employment Assistance Services (EAS) program supported nearly 300 clients and facilitated over 130 successful employment outcomes. This figure does not reflect the many more individuals who benefited from quick supports such as brief resume updates, printing job application materials, or accessing a computer to apply for work opportunities.

Our Employment Consultant provided individualized job search support, resume and interview coaching, and delivered at least five different employment-related workshops. These covered topics such as career exploration, resume and cover letter writing, job search strategies, and interview preparation.

Throughout the year, the team enhanced our tracking and follow-up systems, helping to strengthen our ability to monitor progress and support clients through each stage of their employment journey.

Despite some staffing transitions, we ensured continued availability and support for all who reached out. We remained committed to helping clients build their confidence, develop their skills, and successfully enter or re-enter the workforce.

Portage Work Experience Program (PWEP)

PWEP continues to make significant progress under our funding agreement with Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC), through its Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS). This agreement supports a 44-month project, running from August 12, 2024, to March 31, 2028, with a total approved expenditure of \$1,447,500.

Over the past year, we have served 38 youth, representing 37% of the targeted 104 participants. Of those youth served, 29 have completed training, 31 have started Quality Employment Opportunities (QEO), 12 have completed their QEO placements, and 1 participant has returned to school. Training provided through PWEP includes First Aid, Smart Choices, Food Handlers Certification, Conflict Resolution, Emotional Intelligence, and Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) skills. Art therapy and DBT skills became core parts of the curriculum, offering participants tools to manage emotional regulation and build resilience. Many participants faced complex barriers such as disabilities, precarious housing, and mental health concerns. Despite these challenges, the program has achieved high rates of placement completion and permanent hires.

We are proud to partner with a variety of local employers to deliver meaningful QEO placements, including Sobeys, Portage District Recycling Inc. (PDRI), Family Resource Centre (FRC), Portage Community Revitalization Corporation (PCRC), Portage la Prairie School Division (PLPSD), Swan Lake First Nation, and the Portage Learning and Literacy Centre. These partnerships have been critical in creating inclusive, supportive employment experiences that align with participants' goals and abilities.

Portage Accessible Careers and Employment (PACE)

The PACE program is funded through ESDC's Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. This three-year project, running until April 10, 2026, is designed to support individuals with disabilities in building their employment skills and gaining meaningful work experience. In the past year, the program served 20 participants. Of those, 18 began work experience placements, and 11 successfully secured employment after completing their program outcomes.

A key component of the PACE program has been our partnership with Enabling Access, which has provided Occupational Therapy (OT) assessments to identify workplace accommodations and enhance career readiness. These assessments, combined with individualized support, skills training, and job placements, have helped participants overcome barriers and build the confidence and competencies needed to succeed in the workforce.

We partnered with a wide range of employers to offer accessible and inclusive work experiences, including local grocery stores, thrift shops, gas stations, IT service providers, non-profit organizations, the school division, and daycares. These partnerships have been critical in

creating diverse and supportive environments tailored to our participants' needs. The PACE team continues to refine its employer engagement strategies to strengthen these relationships and expand opportunities for future participants.

Central Manitoba Adult Literacy Program

Funded by the Province of Manitoba's Adult Learning and Literacy branch, the Adult Literacy Program is a self-paced initiative designed to help learners improve their reading, writing, numeracy, and digital skills. Each subject area is organized into three progressive stages to support individualized learning.

Last year, a total of 83 students participated in the program: 31 focused on Literacy, 23 on Numeracy, and 29 on both. The program recorded 48 completions, with many additional learners achieving shorter-term upgrades. Five Adult Basic Education (ABE) credits were also awarded. The summer program continued on a smaller scale due to staffing limitations, serving 12 students.

This year saw significant staff transitions across educational programs, including the departure of four team members. Two new staff were hired, and three existing staff assumed new roles—most notably in the Literacy program, where all current team members are new to their positions. This shift has created an opportunity to refresh and strengthen the program by clarifying roles and updating procedures.

PLLC continued its active role in the Literacy Stages Renewal Project in 2024. The initiative focused on aligning the Stages Framework with the federal Skills for Success model and developing new frameworks for Numeracy and Digital Literacy. Our Literacy Coordinator and M12 Math instructor led efforts to map out the new frameworks. Although the project concluded in March 2025, we are now implementing the newly developed materials and exploring funding opportunities to expand this work.

Portage Adult Learning Centre Program

The Portage Adult Learning Centre Program offers structured, in-class instruction for individuals pursuing their Mature Student High School Diploma or needing specific credits for post-secondary admission. In 2023–24, the program served 84 students, awarding over 100 credits and celebrating 18 graduates. Of these graduates, six advanced to post-secondary education and three became First Nations Police Officers.

Additionally, two students completed the 40-hour educational requirement for the Child Care Assistant Certificate through the 40S Applied Family Studies course. Staff supported both students through the certificate application process.

The program also offered a range of cultural and community-based enrichment activities. In partnership with the Portage Friendship Centre, students attended four workshops focused on traditional crafts such as dream catchers and medicine bags, and participated in a medicine-picking excursion. Other highlights included a visit to the National Indigenous Residential School Museum, a trip to the MITT Powwow to honour Indigenous learners, a Thanksgiving lunch, graduation and achievement celebrations, and participation in the Salvation Army's Collective Kitchen program.

TLC Daycare

PLLC has maintained a long-standing partnership with Portage Daycare for over 30 years to run TLC Daycare at our location, supporting children of parents enrolled in adult education and ESL programs. With a licensed capacity of 20 children, the daycare plays a vital role in enabling student success by providing safe, supportive on-site care, including evening services for ESL learners.

Staffing includes an Assistant Director (ECE II), two full-time Child Care Assistants, and three casual staff. The number of available spots varies depending on the ages of the children enrolled. In addition to childcare, the program offers parenting resources to support families more holistically. Daycare staff are consistently supportive, responsive, and do an excellent job of caring for the children in their care.

This year, the daycare facility received a significant upgrade with the installation of PVC paneling in the main room. As the program continues to serve families in the community, we strive to transition to a new, above-ground space connected to PLLC. This would include windows to meet licensing requirements and allow the daycare to operate for full days without needing to close over the lunch hour. However, financial barriers remain, and we continue to explore funding opportunities to make this a reality.

Volunteer Program

The volunteer program is a vital part of our organization and supports nearly every program area, including ESL, food security, literacy, and special events. This year, we had over 30 active volunteers who contributed their time and skills in various capacities. Throughout the year, we hosted a series of monthly training sessions for volunteers, covering topics such as plain language, financial literacy, and vicarious trauma. In addition to our Volunteer Appreciation Dinner at OM Indian Cuisine in the spring, we also organized an Open House and Meet-and-Greet event to help volunteers connect with PLLC staff and each other. We gratefully acknowledge the support of United Way West Central, whose funding makes this program possible.

Money Management Training

Partnering with SEED Winnipeg, we offered a series of Manage Your Money workshops covering key financial literacy topics, including Money Choices, Asset Building, Budgeting, Community Economic Development, Financial Services, Credit, and Debt. These workshops aimed to build participants' knowledge and confidence in making informed financial decisions. Over the course of the year, 57 individual participants attended at least one session, with most attending multiple sessions. In total, we recorded 243 instances of attendance across all sessions, demonstrating strong engagement and interest in building financial resilience within our community.

CVITP (Community Volunteer Income Tax Program)

CVITP is offered as part of a Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) initiative, allowing eligible individuals to file their taxes for free. This year, we served over 800 individuals through our tax clinic in March and April, supported by 10 trained volunteers. Both appointment-based and drop-off services were available to low-income community members, ensuring convenient access to vital tax benefits and credits. CVITP continues to be one of PLLC's most impactful programs.

Food Security Program

The food security program continued to be a critical support for hundreds of students and their families participating in our programs. We provided snacks and emergency hampers to clients in need and supplied food for ESL classes, youth programs, and workshops. A major part of our success this year came from our regular food rescues, where we collected donated bread, bagels, and snacks from local businesses and distribution centres in Winnipeg. These rescues made it possible for families to access quality food items that may otherwise have gone to waste. We are especially grateful to Salvation Army, as well as Shoppers Drug Mart and Sobeys in Portage la Prairie for their generous donations, which significantly helped meet the growing needs of our clients.

Identification Services

We supported over 70 individuals in obtaining birth certificates, which are often the first step in accessing additional forms of ID. These documents are often critical for securing housing, banking, healthcare, and employment. In addition to ID navigation, we also provided over 600 passport-style photos to individuals in the community, including for permanent residency and citizenship applications.

Organizational Infrastructure and Transportation

This past year, PLLC made a significant addition to our infrastructure by purchasing a 15-passenger van from the Family Resource Centre. The vehicle has already been supporting our Food Security Program, as well as education and employment programs, and was even entered as a float in the Rotary Santa Claus Parade of Lights. It will also be essential for our RAP services, particularly for welcoming families arriving from the airport and transporting them to temporary housing. This investment enhances our ability to facilitate field trips, workshops, and client access to community events.

In addition, the Board of Directors approved the expansion of our existing space to build a new large classroom and two offices at the back of the adjoining building we acquired a couple of years ago. This expansion will add close to 900 square feet to our workplace—an essential enhancement to accommodate the introduction of the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) and to meet the growing needs of our clients.

Acknowledging Our Funders and Partners

The continued success of our programs and services would not be possible without the generous support and collaboration of our funders and community partners:

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) for funding our settlement, language, and Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) services and activities
- Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) for youth and persons with disabilities employment programs, as well as funding from Canada Summer Jobs for SYEP staff
- Province of Manitoba for settlement supports for all eligible newcomers to Canada.
- Province of Manitoba Workforce Training and Employment for funding the EAS program
- Province of Manitoba's Building Sustainable Communities Program for project funding that supported both Food Security and Identification Services initiatives
- Province of Manitoba – Green Team for funding SYEP staff wages
- Province of Manitoba – From the Ground Up – Safe Healthy Communities for All Program, funding to expand youth programs including delivery of Skills for Life programming
- City of Portage la Prairie for funding and support for our DiverseCITY Festival and Multicultural Fashion Show events
- Community Foundation of Portage and District for fund awareness and support
- Community Futures Heartland for providing funds through 100 Women Who Care event to support our adult learners snack program
- Portage Community Revitalization Corporation (PCRC) for supporting our Bike Lending Program through their Small Grants initiative
- United Way West Central for support and funding for our Volunteer Program

- SEED Winnipeg for supporting and funding the Manage Your Money workshop series
- First Book Canada for providing a grant to purchase children's books for our book clubs
- ParticipACTION for providing a grant to offer swimming lessons for newcomer youth
- Canadian Tire Jumpstart for grants to run swimming sessions throughout the summer and for offering an open house featuring a free yoga session for the community to join
- Prairie Fusion Arts and Entertainment, Fort la Reine Museum, and Manitoba Agricultural Museum for partnering with us on the Portage la Prairie DiverseCITY Festival
- Family Resource Centre, Portage Local Immigration Partnership, Portage Youth Hub, and other community organizations for event and youth programming partnerships
- Portage Daycare for partnering with us to operate the on-site daycare in our building
- Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology (MITT) for partnering with us to deliver the adult education programs at the PLLC

As we reflect on the achievements of the past year, we are deeply grateful for the continued trust and support of our funders, partners, volunteers, and community members. Together, we are building a stronger future—one that empowers individuals through learning, employment, and belonging. We look forward to the year ahead with optimism, commitment, and a shared vision of growth and opportunity for all.