

LIFE LONG LEARNING IN THE IMMIGRANT SECTOR: Carolyn Arrell, Senior Host Program @ Calgary Catholic Immigration Society

Hello and a very warm welcome to fellow learners!

What does “life long learning” mean to you?

Are the clients we serve any different from us as service providers in their quest for life long learning?

The focus of this conference is “client centered services” –we at CCIS Senior Host Program follow that premise. We do not believe that “one size fits all”. We follow the community development model; the community dictates our programs (within reason). Our CIC funded program focuses on CIC eligible seniors being included and assisting them with enhancement of their English language skills. This is happening with 1:1 volunteer matches and/or some conversation circles, so volunteer lead and others, for which there is a small monetary fee are lead by a paid ESL instructor.

We have received frequent inquiries about dealing with basic health concerns such as reading a label on a prescription, talking with doctors either in person or on the phone. Many of these same questions surfaced regarding pharmacists and other health care professionals as well.

We hired an ESL/ELL practitioner/specialist and researcher to undertake the task of writing a resource book for us that would help us and our tutors to serve the client group better and more effectively.

The first component identifies and expands best practices for working with immigrant seniors in the realm of ESL in a learner centered module with context based on;

- *Oral skills; vocabulary, pronunciation & comprehension
- *Structured, yet flexible programming to meet the individual needs of learners
- *Small groups or 1:1 tutoring with a volunteer
- *Curriculum development through the lens of cultural competency
- *Authentic learning
- *Supported learning environment
- *Thematic approach

Adult learning principles have guided the approaches throughout each module with common goals in each activity designed to build literacy and language skills in: 1)knowing what questions to ask; 2)giving information verbally; 3)listening to instructions and information and 4) recording same. Before writing this module our researcher, in the development process, held focus group sessions with volunteers, tutors conversation circle leaders and paid instructors as well as senior learners.

In the book, "Seniors speaking and listening for their health" the modules are; *Talking on the phone*, *Talking with your doctor or nurse* and *Talking with the pharmacist*. Complete lesson plans for each of these 3 activities is designed to span a 6 – 10 week period with each about 2-3 hours at minimum. Remembering that this is a guide, . . .to be expanded as the opportunity dictates.

This module has been introduced and used in many of our ESL settings. We have worked with and are again at the present time, CAT (community action team) student nurses from the U of C who have worked through this module with a group of very culturally diverse immigrant seniors. These senior adult learners (who live in an independent apartment complex setting) have told us they find it easier to talk to their health care practitioners and will now make their own medical appointments, by phone, since working through this series. And, the student nurses reported that experiencing these activities with the seniors have better prepared them for their work ahead as community health and/or geriatric nurses.

In addition, the manager of this apartment complex has indicated that because of these learnings, the residents have certainly increased their community awareness and independency skills .

The second book, "Find out about the Law", follows the same guiding principles of best practices for adult learning and as with the health module is written in "plain language". An interesting quote in regards to legal concerns, comes from a 1st century writer, Quintillan, who says, "One should aim not at being impossible to understand – but at impossible to misunderstand!" (we could all learn from that quote!)

The 3 activities, with their lesson plans, guides and suggestions are: 1) the law-what is a lawyer?, 2)wills, powers of attorney and living wills, and 3) human rights. Before going to print, the contents of the book had been reviewed by our volunteer lawyer and by a lawyer who was employed by the same law firm as one of our volunteer tutors.

This book too, has been used in ESL classes; including having a volunteer lawyer come to help the seniors better understand wills by working through a very simple, yet completely authentic and legal, will.

We have heard throughout the past 2 days about collaboration and cooperation---we live this! One of my co-workers hosts "Legal workshops", funded by Alberta Law Foundation as was the development of this module. Therefore, conducting a "wills" workshop was a natural collaboration within our Immigrant Services Team. I will add that to reinforce the learning and understanding of the complexity of this topic, the workshop, like others of this topic, was conducted in a dual language setting (English as well as the first language—this was a homogenous language group) a recognized practice in ESL learning.

We have found that the local pharmacists are very willing to come to a session to explain their role, just as the lawyers have.

Both books contain relative definitions, examples and references to accompany all activities. By using tools such as these in an ESL setting the learning is very real and therefore has significance to daily life and therefore has meaning, resulting in greater interest and retention.

The learnings in the law book have made a significant impact on our seniors, considering that many folks come from a country where wills were unheard of and human rights didn't exist. With no basis to rely on for this new learning it is both challenging and rewarding for the instructors, leaders, volunteer tutors helping the seniors in yet another area of their "life long learning". The quest and thirst for knowledge never ceases.

My thanks to Audrey Gardner and Janet Pringle for the wonderful work they did in researching and writing these resources for CCIS and which we now have the opportunity to share with you. They were designed with seniors in mind, but are indeed very suitable for an ESL adult learner. Books and CD's will be available at a nominal cost (to cover printing). Should you wish to download the information on your own, please email me at: sreduc@ccis-calgary.ab.ca and I will be pleased to send you them as attachments.