

Mark

Mark is forty, diabetic and has some mental health issues. He has been living in housing where there have been problems with damp and cockroaches. He did quite well in school but over the years has found that health issues, both mental and physical have prevented him from holding down a job. However, he has been volunteering with a national poverty group and is thinking seriously about how he might get out of the “poverty trap”.

The executive director of the poverty group gave Mark the telephone number of the local Employment Services centre and Mark made an appointment to meet with an employment counsellor. She knew Mark had been out of school for a long time and so she asked some questions about his current skills and discovered that, because he hadn't used his literacy skills much they had deteriorated quite a lot. She asked him how he felt about filling out the form and Mark admitted that he found it challenging. The employment counsellor called the regional literacy network and they discussed possible options which the counsellor then shared with Mark. He decided that a Literacy and Basic Skills program at the school board would work best for him.

He completed the intake process and met his instructor. They decided that Mark would start by reviewing basic math operations. The instructor also noted that Mark needed to rediscover how to become a learner. He was very passive and it took a while for him to get the confidence he needed to participate in developing his training plan. The instructor spoke openly with Mark about his needs and she clearly laid out the program's expectations for him.

As he had a phobia of needles and his physical and mental health issues had been exacerbated by his living conditions, the instructor connected him to a mental health team at the local community centre and they were able to give Mark support, encouragement and monitor his medication.

However, it was clear to the instructor that the new medication seemed to be responsible for his lack of motivation and concentration and mood swings. Mark was only attending sporadically. As Mark had signed a release of confidential information form she was able to discuss the issue with a member of the mental health team. Subsequently she arranged a meeting where Mark, his mental health worker and herself could discuss the issues. Finding out how Mark was functioning on a daily basis enabled the mental health worker to make some changes to his medication and dosage. It also turned out that Mark had not been taking his medication correctly. He had been taking all his medication in the evening rather than taking it twice a day. This meeting was very productive and with Mark's input they developed a plan. However, it involved Mark changing to an afternoon class as the medication meant that Mark had a lot of trouble getting up in the morning. The instructor shared information about sustainable learning eligibility criteria

from *Working Together*,¹ a document created by Ottawa Community Coalition for Literacy (OCCL).

Mark had an intake assessment interview at a small community-based literacy program with learners working independently with staff in the afternoon. Mark was thrilled to find that this program was just right for him.

Mark also warned his new instructor about some of the signs that would show that he was not doing well. When she spotted the signs she would make a quick call to the mental health team and they would arrange a meeting with Mark. This worked really well as Mark could explain the signs but couldn't spot them happening to him. Mark attended class regularly now that he had a system in place to support him.

Once Mark started to attend regularly he began to review his math skills and he was soon able to work successfully on decimals, fractions and percentages. This early success helped Mark to feel good about himself. His English skills took a little longer but the instructor encouraged him to concentrate on work-related skills and eventually they started to see more progress. This motivated Mark to continue and finally he was ready to think about the type of job that might suit him.

He made an appointment to see the employment counsellor that he had first met a year ago. Luckily she was still working at the same place and so Mark felt comfortable going in to talk with her. She was pleased that Mark had done some work around résumé writing and that he had begun to think about jobs that might be suitable. She arranged for Mark to meet with a colleague to continue work on employment planning and preparation and from there work with a job developer and get placement support. Meanwhile, Mark is planning to stay in the Literacy and Basic Skills program for at least the next six months. He feels that, while he has met his initial goals, continuing to improve his essential skills will help him as he looks for and eventually begins a job.

¹ *Working Together* is a pamphlet intended to help anyone who may be thinking of referring a client to an LBS or Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) Program. It can be found at <http://www.occl.ca/working.htm>