

ADULTS IN TRANSITION AND THEIR PLANS : REPORTS ON TRIALS CARRIED OUT BY FOUR SCHOOL BOARDS

Reception, Referral, Counselling and Support Services (SARCA)

Action Research Project on SARCA



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Foreword

This report presents the results of the action research project initiated by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) in four school boards. The project's goal was to highlight the importance to be attached to the adult's personal plan. School boards were asked to explore the theoretical and practical aspects of the personal plan in order to adopt practices that would foster its development and recognition.

The research objective was to create laboratories for trials that would benefit other school boards by inspiring them to make changes in their methods of guiding and supporting adult learners in their personal plans, particularly in the areas of reception, referral, counselling and support services (SARCA), but also in collaboration with the other services, including educational services. In carrying out their trials, the school boards were supported by researcher Jean-Pierre Boutinet, who is highly respected in the field of adult knowledge and the adult's personal plan.

The objective of this publication is to report on the process and results of these trials so that all school boards can benefit from the light they shed on adult learners and the implementation of their personal plans. In this document, the four school boards explain the origins of their projects, the procedure implemented by the research team, the tools, actions or processes offered to the adult learners and what the research team and the participants learned.

In addition, in Chapter 1, the Ministère presents the framework and process of the action research project, and in the final chapter, Jean-Pierre Boutinet provides a synthesis highlighting the main lessons to be learned from these four trials and outlining development possibilities. Lastly, some of the working documents produced during this research are included in the appendixes and will provide readers with certain theoretical benchmarks on the main themes of adult learning and the adult's personal plans.

The Ministère thanks the members of the school boards' various action research teams for their contributions and especially for their input to this publication.

Chapter 1



Action Research Project to Test Approaches to Adult Learners' Personal Plans

The major project to revitalize the reception, referral, counselling and support services (SARCA), undertaken by Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) as part of the Action Plan for the 2002 *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*, has several components. One involves suggesting new approaches to the school boards in order to facilitate concrete changes in their organizations and their ways of working with adult learners and the community. As a key aspect of this change consists in focusing SARCA interventions on the adult learner's personal plan—in other words, supporting adult learners as they develop and carry out a plan that is meaningful to them—the Ministère wants to help school boards to assimilate these concepts and develop the corresponding practices. For these reasons, the Ministère embarked on an action research project that called for school boards to carry out trials.

1.1 Nature and Objectives of the Action Research Project

In this action research project, the Ministère asked school boards to introduce or update, in the corresponding practices of people working in SARCA, a focus on connecting the adult learner's reorientation plan with the theoretical benchmarks and practices presented by the resource-person hired by MELS for this purpose. These theoretical benchmarks concern two specific themes: that of the adult learner and that of the adult learner's personal plan:

- What does it mean to be an adult in today's context? How does one enter into adult life as a woman or man or as a working or inactive person? Are there dominant models of adult life in which SARCA users are found?
- Usefulness and meaning of a personal plan: What are the prerequisites for a plan? What are the guidelines to take into account to support adult learners in their personal plans? How can professional guidance and support services be harmonized with the plan of the adult learner who is being guided?

In addition, the school boards had to be able to make adjustments during the implementation of their action research projects based on the findings of their trials. The school boards also had to document their work in accordance with the research needs and agree to share it with other school boards upon completion.

The action research project reported on here thus concerns two levels of reality:

- General: that of the Ministère, which initiated the action research project and oversaw the broad themes, framework and consistency of its evolution, while focusing on putting the lessons learned from the trials to good use in all school boards. This level is specifically discussed in Chapters 1 and 6 of this document.
- Specific: that of each of the school boards that carried out trials and whose experiences concern certain well-defined places and participants. This level is covered in Chapters 2 to 5 of this document.

1.2 Selection of the School Boards

The selection of the four school boards that participated in the action research was based on the following criteria. The board chosen had to be:

- a school board where all the SARCA service points are located exclusively in the centres
- a school board in which the SARCA have one centralized point of service (whose functions may vary) in addition to the other points of service located in the centres
- a school board in an urban setting with several adult education and vocational training centres
- a small school board located in a remote area
- a school board benefitting from the *Program to Promote the Return to School of People Between the Ages of 16 and 24*
- an English-language school board

The four school boards involved in this project were:

- the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands, in particular the Centre d'éducation des adultes Jean-XXIII
- the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière, all of the points of service of its SARCA and training centres
- the Commission scolaire de Laval, in particular its centralized service (the Guichet conseil), the Centre d'éducation des adultes L'Impulsion and the Centre de formation professionnelle Paul-Émile-Dufresne
- the Western Québec School Board, in particular the Maniwaki, Val-d'Or, and Pontiac centres as well as the school board itself in its cooperative efforts with participants from the municipality of Low

1.3 The School Boards' Projects

Each school board's choice of a subject for the action research was motivated by observed difficulties or problems for which it wanted to find solutions. In most cases, however, the approach adopted at the start evolved over time as actions were taken. This evolution is detailed in each school board's report, while the project descriptions in this introduction provide only a general summary of the intent.

Unexpectedly—but understandably—the four subjects address different, even complementary, dimensions of SARCA and thus cover a wide variety of situations that every school board has to deal with.

- *Beyond Absenteeism: The Personal Plan as the Adult Learner's Search for Meaning*

When the opportunity to do the action research project arose, the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands was about to offer orientation courses in different centres to counter drop-out rates and absenteeism that it considered too high. The Centre Jean-XXIII took advantage of this initiative and gradually added dimensions that, on one hand, allowed adult learners to invest themselves in their personal plans and make them meaningful and, on the other, enabled the centre's team to take on a collective counselling role with regard to adult learners' personal plans.

- *SARCA and the formation of an internal partnership to provide reception services for adults searching for a personal plan*

Given its experience in partnering with local organizations in SARCA, the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière wanted to use the same approach in deploying SARCA services internally, particularly its reception services (which were not available in all of the school board's centres) so that more adults could participate in a personal plan process. The joint efforts of the administrators at the centres, led by the school board's educational services staff, fostered cooperation among the members of the professional staff in all the points of services, which enabled them to change their approach to working with adults.

- *The passport and portfolio as tools to help in the development of the adult's personal plan*

To deal with the problems of maintaining the continuity of work with adult learners and helping them consolidate their personal plans, the Commission scolaire de Laval envisioned using two tools: a passport and a portfolio. It was a natural choice for the school board to test these tools in an action research project on SARCA.

- *How to approach isolated adults that no one can reach*

The Western Québec School Board was interested in adults in unstable employment situations with no access to SARCA. Working with a network of local partners, it sought to identify these individuals and offer some of them the opportunity to get involved in a collective or personal plan. This project differs from the three others because the school board has a huge territory and the four locations that undertook a project each developed their own action research project based on their situation and that of their

particular surroundings. This means that in the end, four different action research projects were carried out by this school board, with one central team providing coordination and support.

1.4 Carrying out the Action Research Project

1.4.1 Guidance and support for the school boards during the project

Two people associated with the Ministère guided and supported the school boards throughout the entire action research. Jean-Pierre Boutinet¹ generously shared his availability and interest, giving the school boards' research teams the benefit of his expertise in his areas of research: adults (their psychology and transitions) and the carrying out of projects. Reporting to Lino Mastriani of the Direction de l'éducation des adultes et de l'action communautaire, Élisabeth Mainka coordinated the project, handled its logistics and, above all, ensured that it was consistent with the progressive implementation of SARCA in the school boards.

The Ministère provided the school boards with two forms of guidance and support: group meetings with the four school boards and individual meetings. In the latter case, the two people from MELS travelled to meet the project teams in each school board. The original plan was to launch and close the action research of the school boards with group meetings and have three individual meetings in between. However, because of the extremely valuable interaction among the teams, a third group meeting was added at the halfway point.

These guidance and support sessions took place as follows:

- April 9 and 10, 2008: initial group meeting with four school boards; two boards subsequently withdrew and were replaced by two others
- May-June 2008: two-day meeting at each of the school boards present at the initial meeting to define their action research and a two-day orientation meeting with one of the new school boards
- October 2008: two-day meeting at each of the four school boards (initial meeting with the new board, project definition with the second, follow-up and interaction with the other two)
- February 2009: follow-up group meeting
- March 2009: meetings lasting from one to one and a half days at the four school boards
- June 2009: closing group meeting
- June and October 2009: two individual follow-up meetings with the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière, required due to its later entry into the project
- Fall 2009: start of the writing of the reports on the trials

¹ Jean-Pierre Boutinet, professor emeritus at the Université catholique de l'Ouest (Angers, France) and associate professor at the Université de Sherbrooke and the Université Paris X, is the author of many important books on adults, the adult plan and the guidance of adults carrying out a plan.

1.4.2 Development of reflection during this phase

All initial individual and group meetings included a presentation by Jean-Pierre Boutinet on theoretical concepts concerning the adult and the adult's personal plan. These presentations were included in the working documents and given to the four teams for their own use. The two documents are found in Appendixes 1² and 2³ of this report. These concepts were reviewed during both the individual and group meetings, with the projects under way in the four school boards serving to confirm or illustrate certain of the theoretical premises.

The second group meeting, in February 2009, was a turning point for the group, the research and each of the projects. Focused on the discussion of the four projects and interaction among the teams, this meeting concretely enriched each of the projects. In addition, a certain shared vision and awareness of the adults and their personal projects emerged. By highlighting the focuses of the different projects, the working document produced after this meeting provided a glimpse of this shared vision and the understanding of the area of intervention to be covered in the SARCA. This document is reproduced in Appendix 3.⁴

The last meeting, in June 2009, marked the end of the project and served two purposes. One was to look back, consider what was achieved and report on the trials for the benefit of all school boards; the other was to look to the future, anchor the experience in real life and apply what was learned. The lessons drawn from these trials are covered in this publication's last chapter, entitled, "Why Encourage Adults in Transition to Work on a Plan, and Under What Conditions?" The following are just some very general observations related to the teams' own project processes:

- The concept of a "plan" was useful for all the projects. It changed the participants' perception of adults.
- All action research team members became more strongly committed when they saw that their actions were important to the adult's personal plan. More broadly, the development of the teams' projects not only facilitated but became a condition for the development of the adults' own personal plan.
- The benefits to be gained from these trials come as much, if not more, from the process implemented by each school board to carry out its action research as from the tangible outcomes with or for the adults during the time the research was being conducted.
- The action research context enabled the school boards to explore avenues that they had not necessary dared to explore before, which benefitted both the boards and the adult learners they serve.

² Appendix 1: What Does It Mean To Be an Adult Today?

³ Appendix 2: Adults and Their Plans

⁴ Appendix 3: Strengths of the Action Research Projects Under Way in the Four School Boards

Chapter 2



Beyond Absenteeism: The Personal Plan as the Adult Learner's Search for Meaning

Centre Jean-XXIII

Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands

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Introduction

The team at the Centre Jean-XXIII of the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands developed a counselling project focused on the reception service for adult learners. How should the adult be received in a SARCA context? How should partnering be developed? How should adults be guided toward their “exit from training”? How should young adults be guided and supported in their personal plans? These were some of the questions we attempted to answer during the course of this action research project.

Following a meeting proposed by Michel Laurendeau, then Director of the Service éducatif aux adultes et à la formation professionnelle, with the five adult general education and vocational training centres in June 2008, we decided to join this research project in order to understand the concept of a plan for an adult learner.

Before reading about the action research project, it is important to understand the specific characteristics of the Centre Jean-XXIII. In fact, the project began with the centre’s needs, difficulties, limits and the reflections of its teachers. The project addressed educational issues along with the adult learner’s isolation in his or her personal plan and the development of internal and external partnerships.

This was how our action research project was born. The context of these changes led to major changes in the daily routine of both the learners and the various participants (teachers, guidance counsellor, special education technician, rehabilitation officer, secretary, custodian, education consultant, centre director). The trial that was held (and which is ongoing) shows that we cannot force people who work in education or learners to change or to take part in a project. To achieve results, a certain level of guidance and support must exist. Everyone needs guidance and support, and even we, who are doing the guiding and supporting, must be committed to the success of the project. We can thus provide feedback for the team and ensure that the steps taken are followed up.

2.1 Context of the Action Research Project of the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands

2.1.1 SARCA services in the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands

In 2005-2006, like most school boards, the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands had to produce an action plan for the revitalization of its reception, referral, counselling and support services. This led to the hiring in December 2005 of the first guidance counsellor for adult education and vocational training.

In June 2006, a resource person was hired to help write the action plan. In 2006-2007, this person became the coordinator for the implementation of SARCA services. In 2008-2009, support staff were added to help the counselling staff.

To follow up on the action plan and, in view of the size of the territory of the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands and the virtual absence of public transportation, the Service éducatif aux adultes et à la formation professionnelle (SEAFP) decided to decentralize SARCA and offer the services in the general education centres using the existing resources—that is, an academic information counsellor and a guidance counsellor. Since then, the SEAFP has focused on restructuring tasks, training personnel and sharing the philosophy of SARCA following the writing of the action plan.

It is also important to know that the SEAFP made adults the priority at our learning centres. For this reason, the secretaries at each of the adult general education centres regularly contact secondary school students who have dropped out during the school year. The centres have also tried to improve first- and second-level reception by better targeting the people to meet and by presenting group information sessions that allow general information to be provided more quickly to adults who want to pursue their education or training.

To date, revitalization of SARCA is progressing slowly but surely. SARCA have been implemented slowly at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands because some staff have left or were on maternity or sick leave and not replaced. Nevertheless, this has not stopped the general education centres from being creative and remaining sensitive to the needs of the population. Over time, the Centre de formation générale Jean-XXIII has developed an approach based on the adult's personal plan. It tries to support adults who come to the centre by offering a personalized reception focused on their personal plan. This new approach is the result of concerted reflection by the school team. It began with the action research project and reflection about the actions that the teams had observed during the various training sessions throughout the research process. The centre's staff takes concrete action to assist the adults: group meetings, academic information, career and guidance counselling, record of learning, counselling, etc. Furthermore, in order to help adults find the motivation to pursue their personal plan, the action research project participants implemented an orientation service for all new

arrivals at the Centre Jean-XXIII, the Centre du Nouvel-Envol and certain vocational training programs.

2.1.2 Socioeconomic context of the Centre

The Centre Jean-XXIII is located in Ormstown in the Montérégie region. Ormstown is a small village situated in the Upper St. Lawrence Valley, near the towns of Huntingdon, Salaberry-de-Valleyfield and Châteauguay. Its principal economic activity is agriculture, and its population is approximately 5000, half francophone and half anglophone.

In 2008-2009, the 161 adults who attended the Centre Jean-XXIII fell into four age strata: those aged 16 to 18 (70 adult learners), 19 to 24 (35), 25 to 30 (6), and 31 and over (20). Most of the latter group were in sociovocational integration services—that is, pre-employment training and literacy training.

The majority of these adults were in Secondary Cycle Two, but a sizable group was enrolled in sociovocational integration or literacy training. About 20 of these young adults were referred by the Centre local d'emploi (local employment centre); in other words, they were subsidized to complete a training program.

The social environment of the territory served by the centre is rural or semi-urban. The young adults enrolled in training come from the École secondaire Arthur-Pigeon in the Haut-Saint-Laurent area of Montérégie. They left secondary school at least two years ago. Their main academic weakness is French. Their expectations are vague, and their ambition to succeed is fragile. Work habits are poor, even nonexistent. Most had either dropped out or were headed toward dropping out of secondary school.

The secondary schools' misconceptions about adult education centres leave people with the impression that everything is easier in adult education. But adult education does involve disappointments, and it presents new obstacles. When young adults discover there is no magic formula, it affects their self-esteem and subsequent behaviour in school. A large part of the intervention with adult learners focuses on the work to be done and the high-level expectations they must meet throughout their training.

The region's economic situation is fragile. Unemployment is soaring, and job opportunities are few. The closing of all the textile mills in the region created a huge economic void. In the different villages of the region (with its dairy farms, large orchards and tourism businesses), a seasonal unemployment rate of 15% to 25% is the norm.

Low education levels and unstable jobs are also the norm. The region's socioeconomic environment has suffered devastating blows. When the Cleyn and Tinker textile mills closed, more than 800 jobs were lost, not including those of subcontractors. Working in a textile mill did not require specialization. The employees were undereducated. When they lost their jobs, many

did not have the minimum education needed for other jobs (a secondary school diploma) or the necessary prerequisites for vocational training.

The region's economy has paid the price, with loss of jobs in the services sector and families moving out of the area en masse. In an attempt to salvage the situation, new companies moved in offering unstable jobs with poor salaries (at or just over minimum wage). The instability of the job market creates insecurity in families, but even more importantly, young people in school have a pessimistic perception of the job market.

The agricultural sector is the second-largest contributor to the economy. It was also hit hard by whole-scale purchases of farms by large landowners that uprooted families from their communities and reduced employability.

Given the low education levels typical of families in this region, going back to school is not seen as a way to improve one's social and job situation.

2.1.3 The situation at the Centre Jean-XXIII

In 2007-2008, the team at the Centre Jean-XXIII carried out an analysis that led it to review its approach and reflect on its actions. Our first finding was that our ability to retain new students was weak. Absenteeism and dropout rates were, in fact, dramatically high. The other situation that raised questions was the number of students who had been absent from the centre for five consecutive days and then came back the following week, without any real update or review of their academic profile.

From the academic point of view, we were finding ourselves with courses that took more than 200% of the time allotted (and up to 1200%). This fairly unbelievable situation seemed "normal." In our practice at the time, the path for the entire duration of the adult's training was established upon admission to the centre. As a result, some stretched out over many months, even years. The lengthy paths suggested to the adults were discouraging, and that led us to reflect on our approach and on our guidance and support in the implementation of a personalized learning plan. A major change in the reception service and the adult learner's taking charge of his or her plan were proposed for the training path. The idea was to transform the exercise from a source of discouragement into an evolving learning plan. The learning plan was constructed as the training progressed. It was no longer just a list of courses to be taken and their codes but a portrait of the evolution of the adult learner's personal plan.

The arrival of young adults (16 to 19 years old) also forced us to examine our practices and habits at the centre. These young people triggered a profound reflection about our habits, our teaching models and our counselling approach. We were searching for a way of offering

counselling⁵ that would correspond to the characteristics of adult learners at the Centre Jean-XXIII.

In addition to all these situations, we as a centre team were wondering how best to help adult learners integrate into an institution that is not a school, but a training centre, and that takes into account the fact that they are adults. How could the centre play a role in this process? What is its role? Who can or should assist adult learners in their reflection and orientation process? All these questions led us to re-examine our role as interveners. All members of the centre team, from the secretary to the guidance counsellor and the director, have to understand their role and be open to this paradigm shift with regard to offering counsel to adult learners at the centre.

Finally, what could we offer as an alternative solution to adult learners unable to achieve the academic goals in their profile? Most of the attention is focused on this academic profile, which is the cornerstone of the adult learner's schooling process. Should it be the entire focus of the reflection and success of the adult learner?

2.2 Emergence of the Action Research Project

Our reflection was initiated by the centre team, which itself was critical of our services of reception, counselling, guidance and support, etc. This was the situation: We had a problem with absenteeism among the adult learners; our awareness of this problem did not seem to be translating into action. We wanted to create a link between adult learners and centre staff that would go beyond the purely educational aspect. Despite the decentralization, we were not involved in the SARCA project. The research team helped us structure and provide a framework for the changes we wanted to see made. First, it should be noted that we had never included SARCA in our reflection on the problem and its solution. Even though we had decided to decentralize SARCA, we could see no connection between the situation at our centre and the SARCA process. That was because we did not understand SARCA, which we saw only as one more acronym spawned by the Ministère.

The reception service, counselling, orientation, career choice, schooling—these were just a few of the elements that were pushing us to question our approach to working with the adults who had decided to enrol at our centre. As a centre team, we wanted to develop a work plan for ourselves that would enable us to provide a transition period between the past (leaving the school system, job loss, etc.) and a return to school. This led us to review our work methods

⁵ This was a key element in changing the centre's approach. By using the term "counselling," we changed our way of looking at the role of the guidance counsellor. She has become a source of information for the intervention teams; she suggests tools and reading material that might provide answers. Her role consists more in drawing the portrait of adult learners and offering them quality time based on the creation and confirmation of their personal and professional plan. Counselling is a team action geared toward adult learners.

and interventions with adult learners, acquire more knowledge about these new learners and develop an approach that took their expectations into consideration.

All of these elements involved us as a team and prompted us to review our approach—above all, to look at the different problems posed by adult dropouts. Despite this, we focused solely on the problem of absenteeism. Why were the people who had decided to return to school absent so much and again putting themselves in a position to fail? This problem took up so much of our attention that it masked the real problem.

At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, we devoted some time to reflection. We did not want to undertake a project that we could not handle, but rather one that we could carry out with concrete achievements and actions in daily life. We decided to work on the reception service and organization of the centre as a training environment. These two areas of operation would give us an idea of how to improve attendance at the centre (reduction of absences) and better meet training schedules (academic profiles).

The centre thus began its orientation service. The work plan that the administration suggested to the team had three steps. The first consisted in identifying the important problems to be dealt with: absenteeism, work methods and the dearth of academic information available to help in making choices. We proposed information workshops to meet that need. In step two, we developed a meeting schedule for these workshops at which we wanted to explain the problems, the values to be promoted and the guidelines for resolving them. The third step consisted of preparing and presenting the workshops. Each member of the team contributed. In establishing an orientation service, we wanted to present the values important to the school team and provide a framework for our interventions in daily life as well as in tutoring.

We established a reception structure: a nine-day orientation service course for all past, current and new adult learners at the centre. This program was intended to update academic knowledge by integrating diagnostic tools into the basic subjects. The actions we took resulted in further reflection and reassessment and a new perspective on adult learners at the centre. Despite the teamwork, close links among staff members and the partnership, there was no notion of a school team apparent in the actions or the daily life at the centre.

There has been a new awareness on the part of each member of the school team—teachers, educators, custodian, secretary—who felt engaged by the new vision of counselling. This approach led them to share their knowledge and personal and professional experiences with adult learners at the centre, enabling them to confirm their career and personal choices and to pursue their schooling process.

This new idea, which led all the members of the centre team to see themselves as resource people for the adult learners who were reflecting and developing their personal plan, injected a breath of fresh air and changed our perception of the role we played every day. Recognizing

that each team member was involved in building the adults' educational and learning plan allowed all team members to feel excited about the orientation service project.

2.3 Action Research Project

The orientation service course was tested for the first time at the beginning of the 2008 school year. It was entered into the adults' learning profiles with a course acronym that enabled them to obtain an optional Secondary V credit. The course was 25 hours long and consisted of workshops lasting from 75 to 150 minutes. We offered it to all adult learners, both returning and new. We integrated the workshops and evaluations into the timetable alongside the courses normally offered to adults not taking the orientation service course—that is, adult learners who had to complete one subject to obtain their SSD or who had just completed a course enabling them to take an equivalence examination. Appendix 2 provides an overview of a few workshops developed by the Centre Jean-XXIII team during the 2008-2009 year.

2.3.1 Preliminary trial

Even before the process began, we experienced several difficulties. The centre's renovations were not finished; the professionals were not available due to their many tasks that limited their presence at the centre; there were uncertainties about the proposed workshops, etc. All these elements placed the centre team in a precarious situation. Other mistakes of an organizational nature obliged us to modify our process and could have damaged our credibility: The number of people affected by the exercise (52) meant we had to form the groups instead of letting them form themselves. Not having a written timetable made both teachers and adult learners feel insecure. All these obstacles at least had the advantage of making us reflect, move toward working as a team—toward a rationalization of our efforts. At first, the teaching team took an overly cautious approach. Reasons given for inaction included questions about the exercise and relevance of the workshops and concerns about insufficient preparation time and too much work involved. Change always brings some feelings of insecurity, and we began to question ourselves about the relevance and necessity of our project. This situation affected even the most loyal supporters of the change.

2.3.2 Modification of the orientation service project

Following the implementation of the project, several observations were made, and most of them reassured us about choosing such a project. Appendixes 3 and 4 present the administration's comments, the issues discussed with teachers and the feedback from the adults who participated in the first orientation service session. These comments were made one week after the end of the first orientation service course.

We should, however, point out some errors and omissions in our process. The physical organization, including timetables and installation of equipment at the centre, needed revamping because it was an irritant at the beginning.

The participation of principal players like the guidance counsellor and the Centre local d'emploi (CLE) agents should have been better planned.

Furthermore, both the adult learners and members of the centre team felt the course was too long.

On a deeper level, this period marked a turning point in the team's vision of the project, "Beyond Absenteeism: The Personal Plan as the Adult Learner's Search for Meaning," and the commitment required for it to succeed. Members had to define their role, expectations and vision of the project. We reviewed each person's involvement and had to put back into context the reason for the project, our main goal and, above all, the paradigm shift that implementing such a project required from each of us. This shift was important because it forced each of us to review our place on the intervention team. We are no longer just teachers; we are guidance counsellors, tutors and helpers in the adult learners' personal plans. This new point of view brought an important change in the interactions between the professionals and adult learners. The outcome of this exercise was positive for continuing the project, but above all, it allowed the centre team to successfully take charge of the project. From this reflection, it is important to note the commitment and critical thinking that contributed to the development of the project and helped bring it to where it is now.

Appendix 1 is an excerpt from the guidance counsellor's mentoring logbook, which testifies to the change in her role in the adult's learning plan.

We saw that it was essential to change how time was organized in the orientation service course. Optimizing the time and workshops offered would ensure that the message would not get lost in the indifference that sets in when people feel they are wasting their time. Despite the difficulties and obstacles, it must be recognized that the adults who have enrolled and want to start their training feel a sense of urgency and are highly motivated. Instead of crushing this feeling, we have to put it to use in a reflective process that will lead to concrete actions.

The feedback from this first trial enabled us to identify elements that we used to modify the project and embark on the path that we had observed during the action research presentation meeting. The concept of the personal plan took an increasingly important place in our reflections and even more in our orientation service project. This idea of the adult learner's plan as the catalyst for reflection and the focus of our intervention breathed new life into our project and revealed that the most important thing was to focus on the adult learners and their needs. With this change, we shifted our focus from the teacher's needs (absenteeism and success of the profile) to those of the adult learner. It was a truly new vision that necessitated a change in our actions.

The team became aware of its role and actions with regard to adult learners. We were able to confirm that it was right to use tutoring as a working tool; it is of paramount importance when the adult learner's personal plan is what connects his or her career goal, the teacher and the subject. All the work on the orientation service course must be of the kind that can be applied in the centre's daily life, both in the courses and the operations of the centre. The development of this awareness on the part of the team gave added value to this first trial.

During this trial, we were also able to observe the difference in the way this new approach was received by the newly enrolled adult learners and existing students. The latter, who were more concerned about continuing their training, viewed the course as a waste of time. New students, although eager to start their training, found discussions about the personal plan and ways to achieve success meaningful. We noticed that they began their training with a spirit of openness to change.

In the first orientation service trial, we were stuck with the objectives we had set for ourselves—that is, attendance and compliance with schedules. We did obtain interesting results, but we felt that the other targets, those related to the search for a learning plan, had not materialized.

Taking the adult learner's personal plan as the catalyst was a very important change. As Mr. Boutinet explained at one of our meetings, the plan is the source of our actions with regard to the adult learner. It goes beyond the simple academic aspect and becomes the central focus of our actions. The adult is helped to refine his or her personal plan, and our actions should be aligned with that personal plan and its evolution.

This feeling was shared by all the members of the team. There was still a lot of work to do, but we allowed ourselves to propose other avenues that would take the adult learner's personal plan into account. We re-examined our organization, our instructional approach and even the services provided by the centre.

It was the same for the role of the guidance counsellor—not her participation, but her role with respect to adult learners at the centre. This change was not easy, but it was an important part of the new vision we were giving our project. This vision led to a change in our perception of adult learners as well as to the centre team's taking charge. The adult's personal plan also became that of the members of the centre team.

The second orientation service course was centred on the adult learner's personal plan. We welcomed 17 adults aged 18 to 35. The personal plan was the focal point of the workshop topics, and it was a basic element in all our interventions during this time. We rectified the mistakes of the first trial. There was only one group, and a written timetable was available. Having one teacher responsible for the orientation service course helped to structure and supervise the activity better. She was able to adapt more rapidly to needed changes (such as

the absence or lateness of a workshop facilitator, etc.) Adult learners had a focal point this time, which was reassuring and better helped them see and understand the objectives of the process.

We chose workshops that corresponded more specifically to our approach based on the adult learner's personal plan: academic information provided by the guidance counsellor (Cyndie Dubé); time management (Pierre Cholette); self-esteem and knowledge of the community (Kathleen Mathieu); the functioning of the brain (Lyne Valade); creativity; methodology, etc.

We reduced the length of the course from nine to five days. This choice, which was at first structural, became key to the smooth functioning of the training period. The outcome was proportional to the changes: The satisfaction rate was over 85%.

The last day of this orientation service session was devoted to a review in order to give participants the opportunity to update, criticize and improve their approach and, above all, to refocus on their personal plan and consolidate their work during the five days of orientation.

All these changes happened because they had been decided upon by the centre team, and the project continues to exist thanks to the team's ongoing work. Neither budgets nor collective agreements (unless these are exterior to the centre) nor administrative duties have interfered with the project's progress or rationale.

2.4 Provisional Findings

2.4.1 Effects of the action research project

The **orientation service** project is even more meaningful if we also look at it as an **exit from training** project. This change took place when we noted that our work addressed the reflection and process that adult learners must undertake in order to take charge of their personal plan. Our reflection, enriched by Jean-Pierre Boutinet's suggestions, led us to re-examine our project and to consider that for adult learners the process was one of achieving their expectations. Our entire process with adult learners is based on the consolidation of their personal plans. Whether it be personal, academic or career, we must keep in mind that the adult before us is in a process of reflection and achievement. The adult is in action. This change led us to reflect on the actions and frameworks to be implemented for this adult learner. A group tutoring session was added; it became an important element in the daily life of the training centre. The tutors met their groups of adult learners once a month on a voluntary basis to discuss how things were going and the development of their personal plan. This session gave tutors the opportunity to present tools to help them pursue academic success. It provided time for discussing various subjects ranging from local, provincial or world news to topics closer to their daily lives. In this way, support for adult learners became more than just academic monitoring. It became more interactive and based on the evolution of the adult learner's personal plan. The tutor became a counsellor, a critic, a partner—a tutor.

Support took a new direction, and the centre's counselling activities took a new form. The main actors now play different roles. The guidance counsellor has become a resource person—an additional element in the adult learner's training and implementation of his or her personal plan. The guidance counsellor also became a resource person for the centre team. Her actions can be of a general nature, but can also be personalized for each adult learner. No longer is obtaining a diploma the only reason for enrolling at the centre; it is just one of many an adult learner may have.

2.4.2 Research process

When the research team met us, we were in the midst of making changes. We needed more solid and scientific foundations on which to base our changes and process. This meeting enabled us to base our process on the concept of the plan: the plan as the driving force for adult learners at the centre, the plan as our focus in developing orientation service workshops for adult learners, the plan in its broadest sense, as far away as possible from education, the plan as the fulcrum of our centre. Based on this reflection, we began the process of taking ownership of this concept and making it the cornerstone of the orientation service project.

After the project had been under way for one year, we were able to make two observations about adult learners at the centre. Firstly, we observed a definite change in those who had taken the orientation service course when they re-enrolled for the 2009-2010 school year. That year, in the spirit of SARCA and of providing guidance, the guidance counsellor asked to meet all adult learners who wanted to re-enrol in order to update their file and review their personal plan. From these meetings it was evident that adult learners who had taken the orientation service course and attended the workshops had a clearer vision of their personal plan and spoke more about the possible avenues for carrying it out. In fact, 13 of the 23 adult learners in the January-March cohort re-enrolled, and only three of them did not have a clearly defined objective. Of the other 10, three achieved their objectives, four left to take a job, and three dropped out.

Secondly, we observed an increase in the number of academic information meetings and meetings with a guidance counsellor. It is particularly noteworthy that after the guidance and academic information workshops offered in the orientation service course, 15 adult learners asked to meet the guidance counsellor. We realized she does not have to approach adult learners as often to offer them her services and that adult learners themselves more often take the initiative to meet her. Their requests for information or services are also much more precise. It is worth noting that the adult learners who dropped out had never met the guidance counsellor after their orientation service course. There may be a correlation between the lack of one or more individual meetings with the guidance counsellor and dropping out. This made us think it would be appropriate to have at least one meeting with all the adult learners after their orientation service course in order to talk more about their personal plan and see how it is unfolding in their daily lives. A link may also exist between not having a career goal and abandoning one's educational path. Although two of the three adult learners who abandoned

their training did not have defined career goals, the sample is too small to allow us to draw conclusions.

2.4.3 Unexpected developments

During the research process, there were many unexpected and welcome developments (which have since continued). The centre's teachers developed a training plan and articulated clear requests related to their own continuing education. Professional development has become essential for teachers to continue to exercise their profession properly. Collaboration and openness among the various professionals have been effective and facilitated the changes at the centre. Greater communication within the centre team also made it possible to recognize each person's strengths, to put them to good use and to provide feedback. We were able to benefit from each person's experience, which led to the assumption of collective responsibility for the success of the project. The effects on the community were not negligible either; several community projects are being developed (a collective kitchen project, practicums in the workplace, etc.)

2.5 Possible Dissemination

When we reflect on the possible dissemination of information on the SARCA experiment in our school board, we also dare to dream, and even hope, that various elements will be taken up by other centres.

Setting up a SARCA working committee at the Service d'éducation des adultes will be a first step in trying to influence other centres. In disseminating our results, we will explain in concrete terms what the adult learner's plan entails. Raising administrators' awareness of the role of SARCA will play a major part in improving the quality (although not the profitability) of the services offered.

The orientation service course, intended to fully prepare the adult to define, clarify and provide the tools needed for his or her project, is one example of what could be done in other centres. In one adult vocational education centre, the course is already being given to adult learners in programs leading to a Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS) in health (Assistance to Patients or Residents in Health Care Establishments and Health, Assistance and Nursing care). We hope this course can be offered in other vocational training programs in our territory to develop the concept of the plan and to better guide and support adult learners.

We are even considering providing a different service to adults registered in distance education (DE) to help them achieve their plans. These adults do not generally come to our centres, and their high rate of course abandonment is prompting us to rethink our approach.

Regarding the possible dissemination of information on our experiment to the other SARCA, we can highlight our positive experience at the congress of the Table des responsables de l'éducation des adultes et de la formation professionnelle des commissions scolaires du Québec (TREAQFP) at the end of May 2009. Our workshop, *L'esprit SARCA dans un centre d'éducation des adultes*, was intended to present our approach and goals. We wanted our workshop to inspire other small centres such as our own, where the realities often differ, but to our great surprise, several people said they had had the same experiences in their large centres.

Dissemination continues with this research report and with the study days planned for 2010-2011 to acquaint the other school boards with our experience.

As for our external partners, this coming fall we plan to present this research to them and discuss possible avenues for improving our common services. The Carrefour jeunesse-emploi (CJE), the Centre local d'emploi (CLE), the Huntingdon Learning Centre and the Ormstown community organization Une affaire de famille are among the partners who could support and guide adult learners and enrich the project. We want to make our partners aware of the concept of the adult learner's plan as the basis for reflection of our actions.

Overall, our assessment of the action research project is very positive. Of course, we know we still have a lot of work to do to improve the orientation service course, but the current outcomes are more than satisfactory. The idea is not something new. Other general education or vocational training centres have or had such a course. In some places, it was shelved for various reasons (lack of participation, overly long duration, difficulties with managing timetables, lack of positive outcomes, etc.) We think our success is explained in part by the fact that all of the centre's staff participated and supported the project and also by the fact that we could rethink our approach; and in re-evaluating and renewing the content of our workshops, we also renewed ourselves, notably by requesting professional development sessions and taking part in them. Our project is evolving, and so are we.

2.6 Recommendations

Here is a list of recommendations we are making to keep the project alive and evolving.

2.6.1 For the project participants themselves

- Ensure that you have the community's support. Success isn't possible without the community as a partner.
- You have to try, even at the risk of making a mistake. Mistakes are the levers of change. Use mistakes pedagogically as a catalyst for learning.
- A project's success is directly proportional to how much engagement it fosters. If each of the participants is involved in carrying it out, the project can only improve and develop.

- It is essential that adult learners be guided and supported during a process of change. Reflective, interactive communication must be maintained in order to understand, question, change and provide feedback.
- All the staff participating in the project must work on professional development. It is essential to educate oneself and find resources to fully develop one's competencies. (How would you feel about a doctor or dentist who does not stay up-to-date with the latest advances in his or her field?)

2.6.2 For the school board

- Accept that educating adults does not consist only in schooling them.
- Take time to evaluate the positive impacts of the action research project.
- See how this guidance and support model could be applied by other services.
- Educate all school and centre administrators about the role of SARCA (the importance of the reception service in a personalized plan).
- Set up external and internal partnerships. Work on common issues with the youth and adult sectors. Develop the concept of the plan with partners.
- Take the time to reflect on the issues at stake in adult education, and evaluate the positive impacts of action research projects.

2.6.3 For other SARCA service points

- Take time to validate the plan with the adult learner. Take nothing for granted. Even if adult learners have an idea for their plan, it may not have been validated and chosen in an informed way.
- Set up a SARCA committee, establish a clear mandate, and constantly keep in mind the concept of the adult learner's plan and his or her exit from schooling.

2.7 Perspectives

Let us take a critical look at all the work accomplished over the past year and at the future.

Implementing the orientation service course gave the centre new life. It enabled the centre team to improve the centre beyond our expectations. Everyone on the team contributed, giving it a dimension and soul that convey beliefs and values. This project will inspire a profound reflection on the role of each member and the vision we have of the adult learner.

During this journey to the heart of education, we discovered the driving force of our process: the adult learner's personal plan. With adult learners at the core of our reflection and actions, we can no longer offer services without listening to them. Their personal plans have become the cornerstone of all of our actions: counselling, in which we must take the plan's development into account in drawing up a plan of action; the intervention of the tutors, which is based on what the adult learner presents to them as a plan; registration at the centre, which leads the adult to present us with a first version of the plan that brought him or her there. This approach now underpins everything we do at the centre.

We have come a long way since setting off on this adventure, and we still have several more steps to take. We embark on the second leg of the voyage with great optimism and a long-term vision of our hopes for the centre. This is our motivating force for the coming years.

2.8 Acknowledgements

Here is the list of the participants in the action research. Each in his or her own way supported and contributed to advancing the project.

Jean-Pierre Langlois, mathematics teacher and instigator of the project

Louise St-Germain, French teacher

Guyline Marchand, sociovocational integration teacher

Steve Côté, mathematics and science teacher, part-time

Isabel Benoît, French teacher, part-time

Michella Laniel, English teacher, part-time

Kathleen Mathieu, special education technician

Maryse Primeau, rehabilitation agent

Carole Quenneville, centre secretary

Natasha St-Hilaire, office clerk, test room

Denis Daneau, janitor

Cyndie Dubé, guidance counsellor

Pierre Cholette, Director, Jean-XXIII and Nouvelle-École centres

Lyne Valade, education consultant

Appendix 1: Excerpt From the Guidance Counsellor's Logbook

I became officially attached to the action research project in December 2008. Although I had been involved in the research, my responsibilities, particularly at the beginning of the school year, did not allow me time to work on the orientation service course. In fact, I was kept busy on a full-time basis by matters related to second-level reception (whether for registration or not), school organization, file analysis in general education, distance education and vocational training as well as the development of learning profiles. Also, when discussions about starting an orientation service course began in June 2008, I had the impression that it was mainly teachers who would be involved. At that time, we were focused on supervision and inculcation of a work method. It was only later that the plan came up in our reflections on the development of the orientation service course. I did not take part in the first orientation service course.

We then looked at the evaluation of that first orientation service course made by those who had taken it. I was particularly struck by the fact that the adult learners wanted more academic and vocational information workshops. I then examined my role and my possible involvement in the orientation service course. How could I rearrange my schedule so that I could participate actively? What academic information could I present? What guidance or information tools could I use in a group setting? What would promote both better self-knowledge and exploration of the world of work? What activities would encourage teamwork, discussion and information sharing? What would encourage adult learners to take charge of their academic and career path and the development and implementation of their learning plan? It was at this moment that I felt truly involved in the action research project. In addition, a school organization technician was hired to relieve me of certain administrative tasks, enabling me to find the necessary time.

In January and March 2009, I led my first workshops in the orientation service course. In each of these workshops, I had excellent participation from the adult learners. It was very encouraging. The positive comments made by participants during and after the workshops more than made up for the time I had spent developing them.

For me, the orientation service course and the action research project have changed the dynamic of the Centre Jean-XXIII. I feel more involved in the team. I also have the impression that my colleagues have a better understanding of my work as a guidance counsellor and that they have a better perception of how we can collaborate to assist adult learners in the process and achievement of their plan. The preparation and implementation of three-party meetings is a great example of this. I also feel that the adult learners have a better understanding of my counselling role and the various services I can offer. [*Translation*]

Appendix 2: Description of Workshops Offered in the Orientation Service Course

The school system

The objective of this workshop is to acquaint adult learners with the Québec school system and the different educational options available. It looks at the levels of education, the rules for certification, eligibility requirements for admission to vocational training, college and university, and the recognition of experiential learning (GDT, SSET, GEDTS).

Cursus classification

The purpose of this workshop is to familiarize participants with Cursus classification—that is, the different work domains (the living, matter, the human, management and culture) and the various families of trades and occupations associated with these domains. The workshop includes activities to help participants better understand the classification as well as activities involving reflection and self-assessment. We also make the connection between Cursus classification and the 21 sectors of vocational training. We explore them using the *Guide Choisir* to research programs and occupations. At the end of this workshop, adult learners have a better understanding of the professional fields that might interest them and have begun exploring them.

Holland's typology

This workshop is on Holland's typology. After being introduced to the different personality types (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, conventional and environmental), adult learners are asked to pick the one or ones that resemble them. They then answer a questionnaire that determines their summary code with more precision.

Repères

In this workshop, we introduce the Repères system and its different applications—how to access it, search by keyword, perform an advanced search and explore training programs using Cursus. Adult learners have an opportunity to create a list of trades and occupations that relate to their fields of interest and personality type and to explore the chosen options.

Creativity

The objective of this workshop is to help adult learners become aware of who they are and see how they can develop pride in themselves. The workshop covers six aspects: strengths, identity, development, relationships, work and balance (Appendix 1). In brief, it helps adult learners identify their strengths and become aware of their uniqueness. Developing pride in oneself is a continuously evolving process that requires time and balance between work and relationships with others and with oneself.

The functioning of the brain

This workshop essentially explains to adult learners how the brain works, what fuels it, how connections are made, how it develops, the factors that influence its proper functioning, etc. Adult learners really like this workshop because the use of images and examples from their daily lives make it meaningful. Each participant contributes to the benefit of the group.

Visits by representatives from vocational training centres

We were also visited by representatives from the vocational training centres of our school board. They presented the courses offered, admission prerequisites and job opportunities in each of the fields addressed.

Other workshops offered

Other workshops offered in the orientation service course include stress management, time management, the functioning of memory, work methods, self-knowledge and community resources. These workshops are designed in collaboration with all of the centre's staff.

Appendix 3: Staff Evaluation of the First Trial

Now that we have finished the nine-day exercise, we need to examine the work we did during this period. Here are a few questions for discussion.

Question 1

The orientation service session gave us a foundation for working with adult learners. Please give me your opinion on the gains we made during this period.

Question 2

After reviewing the workshops and meetings with the adult learners, what would you say was their importance and relevance for the next orientation service session?

Question 3

The length of time for the orientation service course was set arbitrarily. Do you think it was too long, too short or just right?

Question 4

Your place in the orientation service project.

I would like to have your personal assessment of your place in the implementation of this project.

Question 5

This last question is intended to be proactive. I am interested in your criticism and praise of the process we have just completed. The objective is to build on this year's exercise so that in the future we will be able to offer relevant services and a quality project.

Personal Report

Pierre Cholette, Director, Centre Jean-XXIII

I would like to share some perspectives about my work and supervision of the orientation service project. I will report on the preparatory work, the supervision of teachers and educators, the content of the project and the administration's role. I will then present a summary analysis of the workshops offered. Lastly, I will present some recommendations for next year.

Preparatory work

I raised awareness among the teachers and proposed grounds for reflection by presenting consciousness-raising situations, which resulted in a decision on the orientation service course. I outlined the main obstacles faced by our students in pursuing their education and provided scientific literature and assistance measures (education consultant) to support and guide reflection.

I did not, however, sufficiently supervise the work of the educators, and because of that, some of them did not meet expectations. I left too much in the hands of Jean-Pierre because I wanted to allow him the latitude he merited, but this meant that the work was not prioritized.

Supervision of the teachers and professionals

This element was lacking, and I am responsible for that. The staff must be supervised, deadlines must be set, help must be offered, and the school team needs to be instructed about the importance of this process.

The content of the project

The overall content proposed to the teachers was exhaustive and relevant. It took into account the difficulties that adult learners encounter and those that teachers experience every day. I think, however, that we have to improve the presentations and adapt them better to adult learners. If we tighten up the courses, we can reduce the training time, the objective being to give adult learners the basics and quality tools that will enable them to succeed.

The administration's role

The administration must play a role in leading and uniting its team. I did not play enough of a role in this area because I left too much in the hands of Jean-Pierre. I believe the problems were due largely to my hands-off approach. It is important to leave things in the hands of the team, but not everything! For such an important project to succeed, the administration must be involved in managing it on a daily basis, and that is where I made my mistake.

Summary analysis

Overall, this first trial had a beneficial impact on the perception of the adult's learning plan. Certain workshops gave the adults something to think about. It seemed to me that the duration of this trial was long. The lack of materials, shortage of workshops, complexity of coordinating all the timetables, lack of preparation for certain workshops, lukewarm involvement of certain members of the team and problems during the process are situations that may lead one to believe the project was a failure. I feel challenged by all this, and I think it is important to build on our experience to improve our provision of services to adult learners. To that end, I must guide and support the teachers. We must build a timetable based on the main objectives of this course. Finally, in accordance with the observations I have made over the year, I must take active charge of this project for there to be real change in the behaviours and habits of adult learners.

Appendix 4: Evaluation of the First Trial by the Adult Learners (responses from 35 people)

Question 1. Relevance of the orientation service course

Yes = 23 (66%) No = 8 (23%) Yes and no = 4 (11%)

Comments

- More on learning to know oneself but nothing on work methods.
- Because I just started, yes, but it was also a waste of my time.
- It was long but fun.
- I could have made more progress, but I still learned things.
- It is really relevant (?)
- Personally, I needed it! I learned a lot. For me, it was good. I learned some things because we learned new things.
- To find out what people do at school and why.
- They have come up with a good idea!
- Yes, but just for the new students. Above all, for the new students, it enables us to know the teachers and the rules.
- The different workshops will be useful.
- There were parts that were relevant, but more of the workshops did not concern me so I liked that less.
- It will certainly help someone.
- Yes to everything, except the reading out of the rules (we're adults so if we don't follow the rules—out, that's all!)
- It solidified my view of my future occupation. I learned to know myself, and I also discovered other occupations that might interest me.
- I would have liked to start with my upgrading. I could have made progress in my mathematics books.
- For how the classes operate and the sports, ok; but as for the others like how the brain functions, I didn't find them relevant.
- It helps a little in orienting us, but it's too long (3 days would have been enough).
- I didn't learn anything, and I wasted my time.
- I didn't find that it helped me that much.
- For certain people, but not for me.
- I don't believe it will be useful in my work.
- No, I didn't learn anything!
- More or less: how to underline was useless, but there were others that were interesting. Some courses are less interesting than others.
- There were workshops that were not in my fields of interest, so it didn't interest me.

Question 2. Should we give the orientation service course to all students?

Yes = 12 (34 %) No = 14 (40%) Yes and no = 4 (11%)

Comments

- Yes, because we get informed, but not two weeks of our time.
- It's interesting.
- To show everything there is in the school.
- Should have content that is of interest because there are topics that are less interesting.
- Everyone needs information.
- Yes, because each person learned different things.
- For those who want it.
- If you had been better prepared, everyone would have found it more relevant.
- Certain subjects are interesting, but there should be a registration sheet for each workshop.
- It helps us make new discoveries and learn.
- For good development.
- Maybe just those people who are interested in certain workshops.
- Not as long.
- The returning students have already been there; they know exactly what to do.
- Just for the new students. (10)
- It was boring and took time away from our courses.
- Some students are more serious than others; you need to sort the students.
- It's not useful for everyone, just the students who want it.
- I didn't like the fact that it was compulsory.
- Not nine days.
- Many students know what they want to do.
- In my opinion, I don't need that information at all.

Question 3. The workshop topics

Yes = 14 (40%) No = 10 (29%) Yes and no = 11 (31%)

Positive comments

- With Guylaine. (4)
- The one on emotions.
- Kathleen's workshop. (2)
- On the brain. (6)
- Self-esteem. (5)
- All. (7)
- Memory (I have epileptic seizures so it was interesting).
- Methodology.
- Motivation. (2)

- I discovered another occupation that interested me.
- Time management.
- The information was very clear.
- With Lyne. (6)
- How the classes work: very important.
- The audio-visual workshop. (3)
- Overall, most were.
- The one on the DVS.
- Centre des Moissons.
- The schedule.
- Some were fun, but of what use were they?

Negative comments

- On underlining. (6)
- Centre des Moissons.
- I didn't like anything.
- Time-consuming.
- Schedule. (2)

Question 4. Workshops that should not have been part of the orientation service course

Yes = 19 (54%) No = 13 (37%) Yes and no = 1 (3%) No answer = 2 (6%)

Comments:

- All were interesting. (5)
- I learned something from all of them.
- Underlining should have been offered only to those who wanted it. (6)
- Work method (the tutor can help you and suggest methods).
- Underlining and how to calm oneself down before an examination (we can go see a teacher we trust, and he or she can explain it to us).
- The one on taking notes, as I already know how to take notes. (2)
- Supporting and accompanying students. If students don't follow the rules—out.
- All were useful for new students.
- There are tools that can help.
- It depends, because some people are interested and others are not.
- The schedule.
- The ones on things that most of the students are already familiar with.
- The workshops on motivation, self-esteem and others of that nature.
- I don't really know, but there's a lot of talking.

Question 5. Other workshops? Which ones?

Yes = 13 (37%) No = 19 (54%) Yes and no = 0 No answer = 3 (9%)

Comments

- No idea.
- More on the DVS.
- No, but the facilitators need to be more present in the existing ones.
- I didn't see the point of the workshops, and if it hadn't been compulsory, I wouldn't have gone.
- Feeling more comfortable with my choices.
- On other centres like Moissons.
- No, it's a waste of time. I could have read a lot of my book during the nine days.
- It took time away from our courses. I found it of no use.
- We should introduce ourselves to others.
- More diversity,
- It's full enough, there's so much!
- How to register for CEGEP or the DVS.
- Yes, workshops that are more interesting.
- Arts, sketches.
- It was bad enough.
- Because I think 14 days is too much!
- We are already trained.

Question 6. Do you think the orientation service workshops as a whole prepared you well for your time at the centre?

Yes = 15 (43%) No= 16 (46%) Yes and no = 4 (11%)

Comments

- Lacked preparation.
- Helped me learn more about myself.
- And even more.
- I already knew all that.
- It didn't teach me anything about life at the school, things that will really help me at school, new things.
- I was already well prepared, and I already knew what occupation I wanted.
- I liked some courses, I learned things.
- To know the teachers.
- Should have been better prepared and should have had a timetable!
- I was really ready to start, but I had to take this orientation service course!
- The workshops were not related to school, only to the future.
- There were useful things, but there were useless things that delayed me.
- It enables one to acquire knowledge that is not related to secondary school education—for example, how the brain functions.
- It didn't help me with regard to the centre.

- Apart from the workshop on the agenda, none of them helped me at the centre. I was already sufficiently motivated and prepared to start my Math 416 course.
- Three-quarters of the workshops dealt with a subject I already knew.
- It demotivated me; it was long and sometimes useless.
- As I have already said, I know myself well, I know what I'm doing here, and I am strongly motivated to finish what I have to do.
- Because I don't always know what to do in my life or what I am going to do to figure it out.
- Because it was boring, I am anxious to start my regular courses, I am used to the course hours.
- Definitely, I guess ...
- Not all ... I already knew all that.
- I find that the facilitators were unprepared.
- I didn't make progress in my training.
- I find that the teachers themselves lacked motivation.
- Interesting tips; others weren't!
- It prepared us for adult education but it was too long.

Question 7. How would you rate the course on a scale of 0 to 10?

Average = 5.56/10

Comments

- Some long parts. (7) Lengths. (8) Too long. (6)
- Fantastic! (10)
- In general, I am repeating myself, it was good. (8)
- If you give it again next year, I won't take it because I already know these things. (10)
- Changing schedule. (8) It was fun. (8)
- Most of the things were old hat. (5)
- The workshop was interesting when I found the topic interesting. (5)
- More workshops that interested me than those that bored me, and I would take it again because the workshops were generally interesting. (8)
- I think it's important. (5)
- Good in general, but certain ones were poorly prepared, and I didn't like not knowing where I was going the first week. (6)
- I didn't need this long and boring training at all. (1)
- The idea is good, but not good enough. (4)
- No, never, it was long. (2)
- There were things that were pertinent and others that weren't. (7)
- Interesting, but held our work back a bit. (6) Some interesting tips, some not. (6)
- The four workshops with Lyne were about the only ones I appreciated the most. (4) Because Lyne gave two workshops plus the presentation on Moissons. (2 + 1)

- I already knew $\frac{3}{4}$ of what was presented. (4) These were things I already knew so it wasn't interesting. (3)
- Neither the teachers nor the students knew where to go, and the course on the agenda was useless. (9)
- It was good for the new students. (5)
- Not all of them were interesting, and several facilitators didn't know how to make their subjects captivating, or they didn't really know what they were talking about, or they were ill-prepared. (6)
- Many of the workshops weren't relevant and gave no information. (6)
- I liked it, but it wasn't stimulating enough. (5) Not too bad. (5)
- Didn't need it. (0) Not very important. (0)
- Because I'm a returning student, and I already knew all that. (4)

Question 8. More sports, explore certain subjects in more depth ...

Yes = 20 (57%) No = 14 (40%) Yes and no = 1 (3%)

Comments

- Exercises done as a group (yoga).
- On the DVS, occupations.
- The brain could have been explored in more depth. The one on the brain, its functioning.
- Art, creation, imagination.
- More sports. (10)
- Guidance service.
- The training was too long. I would have preferred to get down to work right away so I could go faster.
- Studies come first, and I'm anxious to get started on them.
- The new cancer. Cigarettes. Diseases. Killer insects.

Question 9. Improvements you'd like to see

Yes = 26 (74%) No = 14 (26%)

Comments

- More preparation. (4) More structured. Practice subjects so that they are learned better. Get the teachers to put more enthusiasm into their workshops.
- The timetable. (6) The organization. (4)
- Everything was perfect.
- You were mixed up, but next year you're going to know more.
- I would have spread the training over more days, but morning or afternoon only.
- More visual information, slides, television
- Don't give this training again.
- Explain how everything works, but in one day.

- Give a course on career choices.
- Give it over one week instead of two. (2)
- On the profile, write the group, and specify it on the wall, and don't change classrooms at the last minute.
- The less interesting subjects could have been more relevant if they had been presented in a different way.
- Shorter.

Question 10. Length of the workshops and length of the orientation service course

Yes = 17 (49%) No = 15 (43%) Yes and no = 3 (9%)

Comments

- Workshops were too long. (8)
- A change in the routine.
- The visit to the Centre de Valleyfield could have been better.
- Mix the orientation service course and the courses.
- Reduce the length of nine days. (11)
- Workshops were well done, the time was okay.
- It depends on the people.
- The length was perfect.
- Centre des Moissons too long.

Question 11. The facilitators were

Comments

- Okay. (4) Super. Perfect. Dynamic. Likeable.
- Interesting. (5)
- All were very good.
- Well-prepared.
- Not sufficiently prepared and not really in their area of expertise.
- Good, knew what they were talking about, some were boring and unmotivated; be careful about talking too much.
- Nothing to say about their personalities—smiling, energetic, and they explained everything well.
- There were some good facilitators. I really liked Lyne and Kathleen.
- Some were well organized and interesting; others were less interesting.
- They were amusing enough.
- Average, because they didn't know their subject, and they lacked practice, and yes, because they liked their subjects.
- They were okay, but I didn't like the workshops.

- Lyne was superb. I have the impression that she can make any subject interesting. I recommend that you use her for your next workshops Lyne was very amusing and well prepared.
- Pleasant, except the one on the Centre des Moissons. I really liked Kathleen, Lyne, Louise and Guylaine.
- The facilitators were good. It was the subjects that weren't.
- Tchill!
- Some were cool, and others not!
- There were some who made you want to know more.
- Yes, even so. (?)
- Not really (?)

Question 12. Final thoughts

Comments

- Thanks very much!
- Offer it on 12 alternate days.
- For each workshop, make a list of the people who want to attend, and only give the workshop if you have enough interested people.
- Thanks to the workshops, I found a subject that interested me a lot—horticulture.
- Workshops on health.
- Give students who cause a disturbance less of an opportunity to do so.
- Don't give this training again.
- Start your preparations for next year now!!! Hee! Hee! Hee!
- Provide lunches.
- To keep students in school, there should be something other than math, French and English. There should be more extracurricular activities: interschool sports, drawing club, chess club, etc.
- Offer young people more interactions.
- Keep it up; you're on the right track.
- Don't forget my 2 credits.
- Okay, I think I have work to catch up on.
- If you were to modify the training a little and get better organized, it would be good because this is a really good idea.

Chapter 3

Forming an Internal Partnership in Adult Education at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière to Improve Support for Adult Clients



Commission scolaire De La Jonquière

Project initiators

Jacinthe Bond, Director, Educational Services

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Guidance

Élisabeth Mainka and Jean-Pierre Boutinet

Introduction

In September 2008, the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière was given the opportunity to participate in trials involving the development and implementation of adults' plans. The school board's coordinator of reception, referral, counselling and support services (SARCA) at the time saw an opportunity for making ongoing improvements to the SARCA services offered.

This report relates the steps taken in the action research project. First, it explains the context and analyzes the situation that resulted in our choice of project.

Next, it describes the project over time, the issues involved and the project's working hypothesis, objectives and action plan.

The third section explains the research procedure, the implementation of the action plan, the difficulties encountered, adjustments made and our experiment with a group approach.

The fourth section presents our preliminary observations. It is interesting to read the outcomes, unexpected results and possible means of dissemination.

The fifth section provides a partial evaluation of the impact of the action research project on the project team, the adults involved and our partners.

The final section includes recommendations for pursuing the project and a list of pertinent services for adults and SARCA services.

3.1 Context of the Project at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière

3.1.1 SARCA Services Implemented in Collaboration With Community Partners

The Commission scolaire De La Jonquière initiated a first action research project on the reception aspect of SARCA in 2003-2004, more specifically on the state of reception services. The project led to the creation of a committee of local partners in Jonquière.

At first, the committee was made up of community organizations (employability support, poverty assistance), public agencies (the local employment centre, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, the Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion) and the directors of the school board's adult education, vocational training and business services centres.⁶

The aim of this collaboration was to improve reception services in the Jonquière area by offering adults access to the different services from every service point, independently of where they presented themselves. They could therefore receive reception, guidance and support services and counselling that would help them implement their plan.

The committee members focused on analyzing the reception and educational services provided by the different organizations and on understanding the limitations of each partner with a view to determining possible alliances and establishing links between the different services.

In 2005-2006, the partners collaborated on an action plan for the implementation of SARCA services at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière. The plan was tabled in December 2006. Our partners actively contributed to the implementation of SARCA services at the school board.

In accordance with the action plan, a full-time professional resource was hired in February 2007. The partnership, which was by then already well established, continued with work on the ground. The resource person established a special relationship with each partner. She met them at their offices in order to gain a more complete understanding of their actions and to create ties. Some entered into verbal agreements concerning SARCA. This made it easier to provide guidance for adults who were navigating the various steps in the successful implementation of their plan.

⁶ The Commission scolaire De La Jonquière has a Centre de formation générale des adultes (CFGA), or adult education centre; a Centre de services aux entreprises (CSE), or business services centre; and a Centre de formation professionnelle (CFPJ), or vocational training centre, located in three buildings.

The SARCA partnership committee is still very active today. Each member contributes to and benefits from the collaborative effort. The concept of referral has slowly given way to that of personalized support for the adults.

After strengthening their ties at the meetings, the partners analyzed actual case studies in order to anticipate problems and plan more effective combinations of services for certain clients. This exercise helped them determine how to better help adults and inform them of every possibility available to them. The meetings also made it possible to convince several practitioners of the need for assistance, guidance and support with a view to ensuring the continuity of services.

This objective has been expressed more concretely in the last year after changes in the composition of the committee, which is now made up of professionals who work with adults on a daily basis.

Because they wished to remain actively involved, the centre directors decided to hold two annual meetings where practitioners and decision makers could discuss common issues related to adult services.

3.1.2 Toward internal implementation: the Situation before the action research project

As was the case with the external implementation of SARCA services, there were no standardized reception and orientation protocols within the school board. At the time, SARCA services were provided by a professional in the reception service. This person dealt only with adults who did not have a specific plan and had been recommended by one of the school board's centres. Upon their arrival, adults were referred to first-level reception services⁷ (secretaries) or the professionals at the centres, who offered a second-level reception.⁸ There was no procedure for transferring adults to SARCA. If it was deemed useful, adults were given the contact information of the person in charge of the services.

However, since SARCA reception services were centralized at the adult education centre, the secretaries there could give adults appointments on site. In addition, some of the adults who ended up at SARCA were recommended by partners, as extensive promotional activities had been carried out in Jonquière and throughout Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean.

⁷ First-level reception services include first contact with any staff member at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière.

⁸ Second-level reception services include all interventions carried out by professionals at the school board's centres, as described in the document on the general framework of SARCA published by MELS in 2006.

Adults could call the person responsible for SARCA for access to services. That person also offered first- and second-level reception services as well as referral, counselling and guidance.

The school board had not established a SARCA philosophy in its institutions. Most of the time, employees provided first- and second-level reception services and referred adults in accordance with each centre's established procedures.

3.1.2.1 SARCA and the adult education centre

Because SARCA services were centralized at the adult education centre, practical ties had been forged between the centre's existing reception services and the SARCA service point. Since they shared the same space, the adult education centre and SARCA developed a joint reception procedure. This agreement made it easier to refer adults to the most appropriate services.

However, because of the diversity of the clientele, it was difficult for support staff to refer adults, even with the reception procedure in place. The arrival of SARCA created a certain amount of confusion concerning the role of the professionals responsible for second-level reception services. There was a fine line between adults with a learning plan and those without. How could support staff who provided first-level reception services accurately determine the real needs of an adult with only cursory information? There was also a question as to their role and that of the professionals at the adult education centre.

3.1.2.2 SARCA and the vocational training centre

There was no official protocol between the vocational training centre and the SARCA service point. Although the person responsible for SARCA held information sessions for personnel in the three buildings, collaboration basically involved certain support practices established by the guidance counsellors.

In recent years, the team at the vocational training centre has been providing group reception services. According to counsellors at the centre, these services are consistent with the SARCA approach.

The entire team is involved in these group meetings. Everyone from the janitor to the director has a role to play. Students are given information about the services available at the vocational training centre as well as those provided by other school board centres. Partners are invited to present their services. This group method has proven satisfactory for both new students and the team at the training centre. Meetings are held on specific days since adult learners begin their vocational training as a group on set dates. The groups are made up of learners who have been admitted to a vocational training program and are actively involved in the implementation of their action plan.

Such a system would be impossible at the adult education centre since adult learners are admitted throughout the year. Our clients are not yet enrolled. They are seeking information in order to determine whether the services we offer can help them. Some of them never enroll and, after the individual interview, are referred to other centres or partners.

3.1.2.3 SARCA and the business services centre

There was little cooperation between the Centre de services aux entreprises (CSE) and SARCA. The business services centre devotes most of its activities to businesses rather than individuals, so it did not immediately form ties with SARCA. Since the centre offers recognition of acquired competencies (RAC), more and more people are turning to support staff and the professional in charge.

In short, each centre had its own reception model and practices. Adults received different reception services depending on where they sought the services and who they saw first.

3.1.2.4 Recommendations and transmission of information

Internal recommendations were based on two types of situations. When first- and second-level reception services did not meet adults' expectations, they were referred elsewhere. This also occurred when adults expressed a need for guidance or when guidance counsellors at the adult education and vocational training centres believed adults needed help making choices.

It goes without saying that most of the people referred to SARCA were engaged in a more or less long-term course of action and that it took longer to help those adults who had not already confirmed their choices.

Also, there was no formal procedure for transmitting information. Adults could be referred from one centre to the other without personalized follow-up. If adults did not indicate they had already met with school board staff, there was no way of knowing. The reception process had to be repeated in order to obtain the necessary information. If the services were acceptable and the adult enrolled in a program, then the system was deemed effective. However, if the adult decided to return home to think about his or her options, no follow-up mechanism was available.

3.1.3 Summary of the current context

In the spring of 2008, after four years, several efforts had been made to establish appropriate reception services in partnership with organizations outside the school board. Measures had also been taken at the centres.

Despite these efforts, adults were giving up on their learning or integration plans and were ending up isolated and without services. Staff members responsible for reception services had little time to provide guidance and follow-up or even to meet adults more than once.

A review of the school board's SARCA action plan revealed that some of the objectives still outstanding involved the implementation of services within the school board. Consequently, we decided to focus on improving SARCA in the school board for 2008-2009. An internal SARCA committee was created to establish common guidelines and facilitate implementation.

At the time, the school board was given the opportunity to participate in the action research project. The need to provide SARCA services to assist adults with their plans was obvious. The action research project could help solve the problem.

3.2 Beginning of the project

The action research project began on October 20 and 21, 2008, when the team met for the first time with Élisabeth Mainka and Jean-Pierre Boutinet. The latter explained the principles underlying a good understanding of adults in today's context, establishing the context for the research project.

The first time project was discussed, the objective and working hypothesis were as yet unclear, and the team was not yet definitively established. The challenge was to get the directors and practitioners at the adult education centre, vocational training centre, business services centre and educational services to sit down at the same table. They all had their own idea of what SARCA should be, based on their own goals and needs.

A few meetings of the action research team were needed to define the issue. In November 2008, the team submitted a proposal to Élisabeth Mainka and Jean-Pierre Boutinet. In response to feedback, the proposal was modified and presented to the three other school boards participating in the MELS project in February 2009.

3.2.1 The Participants and their organization

To ensure effective implementation, it was agreed at the outset of the action research project that two teams would be formed. Since the experiment could lead to permanent changes in SARCA services in every centre, a second team was created to deal with more practical issues. The creation of the implementation team was one of the steps in the action plan for SARCA services in the school board.

The first team, which became known as the action research team, was made up of directors and professionals from the three centres as well as representatives of the school board's educational services. Its mandate was to ensure that the action research project proceeded smoothly, while fostering a collective exchange of views on the vision and issues associated with the implementation of SARCA services. In conjunction with the researchers, the team also developed a theoretical framework and objectives for the research project. The input of the directors and professionals was invaluable. Reflection, planning and action became team activities.

Also, in order to carry out the action research project, all second-level service providers had to meet to address the issue of internal partnership. At this point, a second team, known as the implementation team, was formed. It was composed of every professional in the three centres working directly with adults in the process of implementing their plans. These teams were joined by the professional specifically assigned to SARCA services and the coordinator of educational services.

Action Research Team	Implementation Team
Adult Education Centre	
Aline Laforge Director	Céline Bilodeau Adult education guidance counsellor
Ann Dombrowski Adult education guidance counsellor	Ann Dombrowski Adult education guidance counsellor
SARCA office	
Sonia Côté SARCA guidance counsellor	Sonia Côté SARCA guidance counsellor
Vocational training centre	
Yves Néron Assistant director	Martin Bédard Work-study program liaison
Sandra Tremblay Vocational training centre guidance counsellor	Sandra Tremblay Vocational training centre guidance counsellor
	Édith Ferlatte Vocational training centre guidance counsellor
Business services centre	
Denise Gagnon Director	
Nathalie Larouche Consultant, recognition of acquired competencies	Nathalie Larouche Consultant, recognition of acquired competencies
Educational services	
Jacynthe Bond Director, Educational Services, and Person in charge of SARCA services at the school board	
Martin Hudon Coordinator, vocational training, adult education and SARCA	Martin Hudon Coordinator, vocational training, adult education and SARCA

The entire action research team met for the first time during the second visit of Élisabeth Mainka and Jean-Pierre Boutinet on March 30 and 31, 2009. The aim of this meeting was to determine “how and why SARCA services are essential for adults implementing their plans.”

3.2.2 Objectives and working hypotheses

3.2.2.1 General objective

To develop an internal partnership at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière to promote a guidance and support project for adult clients.

The action research team assumed that if staff worked together more closely and found a better way to transmit information, adults would be more likely to succeed in implementing of their plans. The team also believed that standardizing reception services could lead to a shared vision of how first- and second-level reception services should be provided. It was important that the reception services offered at the school board comply with SARCA quality standards. The team wanted to ensure that reception services would encourage adults to express their needs and help them implement their plan successfully.

3.2.2.2 Working hypothesis

The commitment of internal partners to the consolidation of common reception and referral practices will help adults implement their plan successfully.

This hypothesis is based on literature concerning factors conducive to adults’ successful implementation of their plan. According to the Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS):

In today’s rapidly evolving society, people find themselves in a variety of situations, which makes it necessary for them to reconsider their options periodically throughout their lives. This process is often difficult. Personalized assistance can make the difference between a successful transition from one stage to the next or successful integration into society and withdrawal from society or marginalization. (Danielle Riverin-Simard, *Pratique d’intervention en orientation: l’adulte, les milieux éducatifs ou sociaux* [2006].) [Translation]⁹

⁹ As well, in a document entitled *TANDEM on Adult Learners’ Success* (MELS, 2008), the Ministère presents a summary of two research projects conducted as part of the Research Program on Student Retention and Academic Success in partnership with the Fonds québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture (FQRSC). According to the report, a well-defined learning plan is essential for adult learners enrolled in basic general education. Those who successfully completed their project had defined their plan with the help of reception and guidance personnel. Adult education centre staff emphasize the correlation between helping adult learners clarify their plan and their success.

SARCA is based on the principles set out in the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training*. The objectives of this policy are to ensure basic education for all adults in Québec, establish a culture of lifelong learning and promote the recognition of acquired competencies. The application of these principles throughout the school board will help personalize the reception services offered to adults.

A look at current reception services in the school board's centres reveals that many aspects are consistent with the principles of SARCA. However, there is room for improvement. Better reception services will lead to better guidance, orientation and follow-up services.

The following action plan will promote the development of an internal partnership at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière and foster guidance and support services for adults.

3.2.2.3 Specific objectives

A. To develop a harmonized reception protocol (first-level reception service).

This protocol will provide more specific instructions for first-level reception service providers at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière.

It will focus on two aspects:

Relational (attitude, “client-based approach”). All adults must be treated with cordiality and respect. First-level reception service providers must be trained in a “client-based approach,” which is essential to maintaining and improving relationships.

Instrumental (use of tools for welcoming adults and gathering preliminary data). The protocol and related tools will help provide consistent reception services despite the high turnover rate. These tools will help refer adults to the specific services they need.

Action Plan

First-Level Reception Services

Action	Those responsible	Timeline
1. Implement the reception protocol	SARCA implementation team Support staff Assistant directors	January to April 2010
2. Evaluate the protocol, and make any necessary adjustments	SARCA implementation team Support staff Assistant directors	April and May 2010
3. Highlight the main aspects of SARCA's philosophy	SARCA implementation team	June 2009
4. Develop a reception protocol for adults: 4.1 Do an inventory of available tools 4.2 Develop the necessary tools	SARCA implementation team	May to November 2009
5. Develop training in the reception protocol for first-level service providers	SARCA implementation team Centre directors	November 2009
6. Train staff in the reception protocol	SARCA implementation team Support staff Assistant directors	December 2009

B. To clarify and, if necessary, restructure the roles and responsibilities of counselling and support professionals within or outside SARCA (second-level services).

This will avoid confusion and foster collaboration. Thought should be given to follow-up procedures. This reorganization will also ensure that first-level reception service providers are better equipped to refer adults to the appropriate services or resources.

Creating a team of professional SARCA counsellors will make it easier to share information and tools and ensure joint monitoring of the quality of reception services at the school board.

Developing a simple harmonized reception protocol will establish the different roles and reduce the impact of turnover on reception services.

Entering information in MELS' Charlemagne system will provide a clearer overview of all the reception services offered at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière.

Action Plan

Second-Level Reception Services

Action	Those responsible	Timeline
1. Highlight the main aspects of the SARCA philosophy	SARCA implementation team	June 2009
2. Clarify the roles of second-level service providers at each service point	SARCA implementation team	May to November 2009
3. Discuss practices and the tools available to help adults see where they stand with respect to their plan.	SARCA implementation team	May to September 2009
4. Develop the necessary tools to provide better guidance for adults in their process	SARCA implementation team	September to November 2009
5. Help train first-level reception service providers, and monitor the implementation of the reception protocol	SARCA implementation team Centre directors	December 2009
6. Evaluate the restructuring of reception services at each service point with a view to providing better follow-up services.	SARCA implementation team Centre directors	April to May 2010

3.3 Action Research Process

3.3.1 Profile of the target population

This action research project focuses on adults who come to one of the school board centres seeking help. Enrollment at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière includes all four types of adults identified by Jean-Pierre Boutinet. They possess a wide range of characteristics.

Men and women aged 16 to 60 come seeking a variety of services. They are from every social background in the Jonquière area (economically disadvantaged, middle class, upper class) and have experienced various problems (mental health problems, learning difficulties, physical handicaps, diverse social problems).

They have different levels of schooling (basic education, presecondary, Secondary I through V, college, even university) and come to the school board for a variety of reasons (e.g. information, enrollment, guidance, help developing a personal plan, transcripts, analysis of their school records).

Reception services at the school board's centres must deal with this diverse clientele and quickly identify each adult's needs.

It is difficult to quantify the number of people the school board serves each year since there is no system currently in place for collecting data. According to the 2007-2008 annual report, 1402 students enrolled at the adult education centre, 1621 at the vocational training centre, and some 250 adults were received by SARCA. There were also others who contacted reception services but did not enroll.

3.3.2 The main steps of the process

The action research project encountered a number of obstacles. The steps required to achieve effective results ended up taking more time than anticipated. Forming an action research team was a difficult prospect. Coordinating meetings with the directors and professionals at the three centres and representatives from the school board's educational services was a complicated task. It became necessary to appoint a team coordinator in order to facilitate cohesion. The coordinator of educational services was given this responsibility.

The action research team's first task was to set up an implementation team of reception professionals from the adult education, vocational training and business services centres in order to implement the action plan. The first meeting was held on March 24, 2009.

The first goal was to present the action research project and the proposed methodology. The professionals explained the current reception, referral, counselling and support services in their respective centres. The coordinator wanted to see how they reacted to the action

research project, determine whether they were interested in participating and, above all, hear their suggestions.

The professionals found the project interesting, but they did not feel it would change anything for them and were very reticent to become involved. At that time, the members of the implementation team associated SARCA with an employee at the adult education centre. This perception was supported by the history of SARCA at the school board.

At the second meeting, the tools used for first- and second-level reception services in each centre were presented. The participants discussed the development and use of standardized tools in all three centres.

Two of the tools were universally accepted. The first was a map locating each of the school board's centres. It would be distributed to first- and second-level reception service providers so that they could show clients how to get from one centre to the other. The second, an organizational chart of the services provided by all three centres, would take the form of a desk pad and would be used primarily by first-level service providers, but also by second-level service providers. It would enable staff to find the required service at a glance.

At both meetings, participants discussed the transmission of information, the types of clients requesting services and the types of requests received.

The next two meetings focused on the role and tasks of each professional on the implementation team. This allowed members to learn more about each other and to discuss problems with current reception services. Some professionals shared their dissatisfaction with their work. Some felt they didn't have enough time to provide adequate services for certain adults in need.

Although they were still reticent about participating in the deployment of services, the professionals were obviously keen on exploring new solutions. Everyone agreed that this was a perfect opportunity to experiment with new professional practices. The more they worked together and discussed their personal experiences, the less they were satisfied with the status quo. The question was still: How can we change our practices without additional resources in order to offer better and more accessible services?

It is important to note that these meetings took place at lunchtime. Sharing meals helped the members of the implementation team develop a sense of involvement with each other. They also learned more about each other on a professional and personal level.

Some members of the implementation team were invited to attend a meeting in Montréal of the four school boards participating in the MELS project. There, representatives reported on the progress of their part of the action research project. This had a serious impact. First, each participant had to have a good grasp of the project and take responsibility for the process.

Travelling together and sharing their experiences during their stay in Montréal allowed the team members to forge closer ties than would have been otherwise possible.

After forming a SARCA team, sharing tools and discussing each person's tasks and the principles of SARCA, it was now time to develop a reception protocol. But first, it remained to be determined how professional second-level reception service providers would proceed and what changes would be made to reception services so that all service points could apply the SARCA approach.

A study of the tasks and roles of each professional revealed that second-level reception services were already being offered at every service point. However, no records were kept, and there was little follow-up, while adults directed to SARCA benefited from a second-level reception service with guidance and follow-up. There had to be a way to ensure that all professionals could do the following:

- Provide second-level reception services for all adults who needed them.
- Provide adults with guidance concerning other appropriate services.
- Keep a log of all adults requesting services.
- Follow up every case.

As they learned about each component of the desired model, several members of the implementation team began to see these new practices as an addition to their workload. Since high demand at certain times of the year required additional time and resources, the professionals could not see how they could apply the proposed model.

A critical meeting at which participants attempted to develop a procedure led to an impasse: There seemed to be no viable solution for the deployment of second-level SARCA services. Some professionals expressed serious doubt as to the possibility of finding new approaches. Since everyone's involvement was key to the project's success, nothing could be done without the commitment of each of the professionals involved.

The problem was mainly at the adult education centre. The centre welcomes almost 1400 adults a year, not including those who are received but do not enroll. During certain periods of the year, the two counsellors had meetings scheduled every 15 minutes to create a profile for each adult with a learning plan. Adults with other needs that required more time were referred to the SARCA counsellor. The adult education centre did not have the resources needed to hire more professionals to handle reception services.

During the discussions that followed this observation and in order to stay as close as possible to the established model, the director of the adult education centre asked the counsellors to devote 30 minutes to each individual interview. This was an attempt to improve the quality of service without too severely limiting the number of adults served. But

even then it was impossible to apply the SARCA approach. The only solution was to work differently with the available resources. During this period, everyone felt that the action research project was going nowhere, while the action plan was falling behind schedule.

3.3.3 Experimenting with a group approach

At the team meeting with Jean-Pierre Boutinet and Élisabeth Mainka on Friday, November 13, 2009, Jean-Pierre Boutinet proposed a solution. Why not meet adults at the adult education centre in groups? General information that was until then given in individual meetings could be given at a group meeting instead. That might free up some time for the adult education centre's guidance counsellors by reducing the number of individual meetings.

The proposal was not widely accepted. Several team members thought the adults would prefer individual interviews. Moreover, some professionals insisted that this change would benefit the centre rather than its clients. The new approach was difficult to imagine for some, and the team was still at an impasse.

Some team members could not see any significant advantages to group meetings and questioned the usefulness of such a change. The counsellors had difficulty seeing how they could analyze school records without meeting each adult individually. They feared the quality of services would suffer.

The action research team decided to test the approach and hold group meetings at each service point with adults who did not have a well-defined plan. Several team members considered this an interesting option. In addition, meeting with several adults at once and giving basic information once instead of several times would allow the quality of the information to be improved.

The plan had other positive effects. Waiting time would be reduced, and adults who wanted to implement a plan would no longer have to wait for a counsellor to be available to assess their course of action individually. The system might foster the development of a sense of belonging among adults in a given group, although some team members were unconvinced.

The fact that the adult education centre was having difficulty meeting adults' academic and career guidance needs was also raised during discussions. The group approach could also be used for this type of service. The team decided to form **academic and career guidance groups** for learners at the adult education centre in order to improve the level of services. Everyone agreed that this was a good idea. In addition, educational services might be prepared to contribute a few hours of overtime to the project. It was agreed that group guidance meetings would be implemented at the centre.

Although the formation of groups was not included in the initial action plan, it was necessary to attempt the new approach. The implementation team was tasked with developing the content of both types of group meetings, and the action plan was temporarily set aside.

3.3.3.1 Developing an instructional model

The implementation team first analyzed the needs of adults who were involved in a plan so that it could develop appropriate content. The team then produced instructional materials. It produced a poster for first-level reception staff explaining the objectives of the group meetings of adults in the process of developing a plan (see Appendix 1). The objectives were to help participants see where they stand with respect to their plan and begin thinking about their needs, to provide information on the possibilities open to them and to encourage them to take the next step. The team produced a participant's booklet that adults could take home (see Appendix 2). The booklet addressed several topics:

- What is a personal plan?
- What factors should be considered when developing a personal plan?
- Information on the life line
- Different possibilities available:
 - returning to school in vocational training
 - returning to school in general education
 - entering the work force
 - changing jobs
 - developing a business plan
 - participating in activities of community organizations
 - applying for recognition of acquired competencies
- Methods of financing the plan
- Thoughts on their personal plan

In addition to the participant's booklet, the team created a PowerPoint document in order to provide a variety of forms of presentation. It also established an evaluation checklist to determine whether the activity satisfied participants' needs and expectations (see Appendix 5).

Second-level reception service providers at all three centres of the school board would recommend participants for the group of adults who were developing a plan. Three professionals were chosen to facilitate: one from the vocational training centre, one from the adult education centre and the person in charge of SARCA services. After the group information meeting, the three professionals would meet with participants individually for a few minutes in order to refer them to the appropriate service. Some adults could make an appointment with a counsellor on site or be referred to other services.

3.3.3.2 Trials at the vocational training centre

The first group meeting at the vocational training centre was held on December 6, 2009. Three counsellors facilitated: one from the vocational training centre, one from the adult education centre and one from SARCA. Six adults attended. The meeting went well. It was surprising to see how enthusiastic the adults were and how they all wanted to share their experiences. However, the individual interviews were not as successful. It was hard to provide better service in just a few minutes. Moreover, it was difficult to refer adults to another service when they had already started talking about their experience. The adults, however, found the service excellent, as witnessed by the comments on the evaluation checklist. All this excitement revealed the counsellors' attitude, commitment and sense of belonging. They became a team.

There was no opportunity to try again with a new group of adults, as there were too few potential participants. It was difficult to find five to eight adults in a week, so the meetings were put off. Once there were enough participants, the next challenge was to mobilize the three professionals because their schedules were set weeks in advance. Since one of the basic premises of SARCA is to help adults as soon as they are ready to take action, it was ironic that they were made to wait for a group meeting.

Faced with this reality, the idea of holding group meetings with adults in the process of developing a plan was abandoned for all the service points of the school board. The group approach was more convenient for the school board than it was for clients. Those who attended a group meeting were unsure whether they should return to school and finish their secondary studies or attempt to re-enter the work force or reintegrate into the community. Those adults enrolled in vocational training and recognition of acquired competencies had already confirmed their choice and knew what they wanted. It was obvious that only those who came to seek assistance at the adult education centre really needed second-level reception services. The group approach would be attempted once more, but specifically with adults in the process of enrolling at the adult education centre.

3.3.3.3 Trials at the adult education centre

Although the widespread use of the individualized approach in adult education left little room for experimenting with group meetings, the exercise with the group of adults who were developing a plan had calmed the team's fears, and the procedure had been clarified. The trust built among the implementation team's professionals was a facilitating factor. The prospect of providing information to a group rather than individually to each adult was enticing. This time, the professionals showed less reticence. The team set to work determining which adults to meet in groups, establishing the content of the information session and developing a protocol. It also produced a new PowerPoint presentation adapted to the situation at the adult education centre and a new evaluation form.

The PowerPoint presentation covered the following topics:

- the importance of a personal plan
- courses offered at the adult education centre
- certification of learning
- an explanation of the training program
- how the adult education centre works
- recognition of acquired competencies
- services offered by certain partners
- a question period
- evaluation of the information session
- individual interviews

New groups of adults wishing to enroll at the centre met each Wednesday. First-time participants were recommended by the first-level reception service providers. Second-level counsellors at the adult education centre took turns facilitating. After the 30-minute information session, they met each adult for a few minutes in order to determine which ones would need to schedule a personalized interview. Appointments were made at the earliest opportunity. Other adults were enrolled immediately and could begin their program the following week. Because the peak period had passed, counsellors were able to meet groups of five to 10 adults at a time.

The formation of groups of adults wishing to enroll at the centre would have to be adapted during peak periods, when some 50 adults at a time come seeking information. It was obvious that at these times individual interviews could not take place the same day.

The group meetings continued for several weeks. Their effectiveness would be evaluated in June in anticipation of the fall season.

As we mentioned earlier, the group approach inspired another approach adapted to the more specific needs of academic and career guidance. Groups of 20 adults received full guidance services at once. Between January and March 2010, one extra guidance counsellor was hired to work two days a week organizing career guidance sessions for adults enrolled at the adult education centre. She spent a few weeks developing a procedure for forming groups and producing the necessary materials as well as promoting the adult education centre among potential clients.

Adult learners at the CFGA are usually offered guidance services. However, the guidance counsellor works only three days a week and is also responsible for other tasks, such as reception and enrollment.

The career guidance groups started meeting on Tuesday, February 2, 2010. Two groups of 10 adults were formed. One met every Tuesday from 10:15 to 11:45 a.m. (on February 2, 8, 9, 16 and 22, and March 9, 16, 23 and 30, 2010), while the other met every Wednesday at the same time (on February 3, 8, 10, 17 and 24, and March 11, 17, 25 and 31, 2010). In eight weeks, the adults met six times as a group and twice individually with the counsellor.

➤ **Evaluation of the group approach in career guidance**

Most of the adults said they were treated with respect. They believed they had received quality information that was both interesting and easy to understand. The participants were pleased to be able to ask questions, and they said they were satisfied with the outcome with respect to their career goal. They particularly enjoyed the workshop on the REPÈRES Web site, which helped them in their research.

Others complained that the training was spread out over two months. They would have liked it to be more intensive. Some said they had not learned much about themselves at the meetings, but that they had been able to validate certain aspects of their personality, career interests and values.

➤ **Career goals**

Of the 20 participants, only one dropped out (because of illness). Twelve decided to enroll in a secondary school vocational training program, one wanted to enroll in courses to obtain an Attestation of College Studies, four sought admission to a college technical training program, one joined the Canadian Armed Forces, and one hopes to obtain a Secondary School Diploma before undertaking further studies.

The group guidance meetings at the adult education centre addressed the following topics:

Meeting	Topics
First meeting	➤ Learners' expectations ➤ My personal profile ➤ My personal action plan ➤ Explanation of the Québec school system
Second meeting	➤ Administration of the GROP test
Third meeting	➤ Work experience ➤ Questionnaire on career interests
Fourth meeting	➤ Explanation of Holland's typology ➤ Interpretation of the GROP test ➤ Questionnaire on personality traits
Fifth meeting	➤ Questionnaire on personal aptitudes ➤ Questionnaire on career values
Sixth meeting	➤ Search for occupations in REPÈRES
Seventh meeting	➤ Review of the search in REPÈRES ➤ CURSUS self-evaluation
Eighth meeting	➤ Search for occupations in REPÈRES

These sessions were followed by individual interviews designed to meet participants' specific academic and career guidance needs.

3.3.3.4 Trials at the business services centre

The business services centre also organized two trial group sessions to experiment with the approach. Two groups were formed from among adults undergoing recognition of acquired competencies. The first group met on November 17, 2009. Of the four adults invited, only two showed up. A second group met on December 10, 2009, and three people attended. The aim

of the meeting was to explain the procedure for the recognition of acquired competencies and to distribute documents needed to create each adult's file (e.g. information sheets, applications) so that he or she could go on to the next step.

Although the goal was to meet as many people as possible and thus reduce waiting times, the professional in charge of the service said she didn't save time. She spent as much time on the group meeting as she would have had she met adults individually. Moreover, she noticed that participants were uncomfortable talking about their experiences in a group and that she had to meet with some of them individually in any case.

Although the trial was inconclusive, the RAC professional wants to repeat the experience in August 2010 since she is seeing a growing number of clients, and the waiting list for first meetings is getting unwieldy. She believes in the group approach and will perhaps proceed differently next time.

Unlike the professionals at the other centres, the RAC professional was the sole organizer and facilitator of the group meetings. In future, it would perhaps be easier to work in conjunction with a SARCA professional.

3.4 Preliminary Observations

3.4.1 Impact on adult clients

So far, 40 adults have participated in the group trials at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière. This number does not include adults beginning their training at the vocational training centre.

Since the objectives of the group approach are long-term, it is difficult to say whether the approach affects adults' motivation, sense of responsibility and perseverance. Those who participated in the different groups are registered in the SARCA database, and their progress will be monitored. However, the vast majority of them are active. A qualitative analysis of their experience could be done based on their comments and their answers on the evaluation form (see Appendix 5).

Although we were somewhat concerned about the adults' willingness to participate in group meetings, very few refused. Some were a little hesitant, but only a few asked for an individual meeting. We can therefore conclude that adults are comfortable with the idea of group meetings.

We confirmed that observation during the group sessions. Of course, there are exceptions, but we did not encounter any major problems. Participants expressed themselves and asked questions. It was surprising to see how eager the participants from the group for adults

implementing their plan were to share their experience. In short, only the RAC group seemed uncomfortable with this type of service. This is probably because adults who are implementing their plan are no longer merely considering their options. They are often active and interested in specific services. They want quick results. The next RAC groups may shed more light on the matter.

According to our analysis of the evaluation forms filled out at the group meetings of both adults in the process of implementing their plan and those interested in enrolling at the CFGA, the vast majority of adults were entirely in agreement with the statements proposed. The only ambivalent comments were about the PowerPoint presentation. One adult suggested having someone come and speak about labour shortages in the region. Participants in the group meetings said they were very satisfied with the service and that the approach met their needs. The adults must be met within a week of their request for information at a centre. A follow-up will enable us to determine whether group meetings have a positive effect on perseverance and motivation.

3.4.2 Profile of the adults in the group meetings

Group of adults in the process of implementing their plan December 16, 2009	
6 participants	
First-level reception services	Second-level reception services
4	2

Status of participants			
Employed	Community organization ¹⁰	FP applicant ¹¹	FGJ
3	1	1	1

Sources of income		
Employment assistance	Employment insurance	No income support
1	4	2

Number of participants by age group				Gender	
16-18 years	19-24 years	25-35 years	36-44 years	Female	Male
1	0	3	2	0	6

Schooling and diploma				
Secondary Cycle One	Secondary Cycle Two	SSD	DVS	DCS
1	2	1	1	1

¹⁰ In the process of implementing a plan with a community organization.

¹¹ Awaiting an answer.

Groups at the adult education centre	
Wednesday, March 24, 2010: 1 participant	
First-level reception services	Second-level reception services
1	0
Outcome	
Enrollment in FGA	Meeting with the SARCA counsellor
1	0

Wednesday, March 31, 2010: 5 participants	
First-level reception services	Second-level reception services
3	2
Outcome	
Enrollment in FGA	Meeting with the SARCA counsellor
5	0

Wednesday, April 14, 2010: 2 participants	
First-level reception services	Second-level reception services
0	2
Outcome	
Enrollment in FGA	Meeting with the SARCA counsellor
2	0

Wednesday, April 21, 2010: 1 participant	
Fist-level reception services	Second-level reception services
0	1
Outcome	
Enrollment in FGA	Meeting with the SARCA counsellor
0	1

Summary of characteristics of participants at the adult education centre					
Sources of income					
Employment assistance	Employment insurance	No income support	Employment income		
3	1	2	2		
Number of participants by age group				Gender	
16-18 years	19-24 years	25-35 years	36-44 years	Female	Male
0	6	1	1	5	3

Schooling and diploma			
Secondary Cycle One	Secondary Cycle Two	SSD	Literacy
3	1	3	1

Group of adults seeking career counselling at the adult education centre (February 2 to March 30, 2010)	
20 participants	
First-level reception services	Second-level reception services
0	20

Outcome: 20 participants enrolled		
Secondary Cycle One	Secondary Cycle Two	Presecondary
10	7	3

Number of participants by age group				Gender	
16-18 years	19-24 years	25-35 years	36-44 years	Female	Male
7	8	4	1	9	11

Goal of enrolled participants				
DVS	SSD	ACS	DCS	Canadian Armed Forces
13	1	1	4	1

The groups were very heterogeneous. They had different personality types according to Holland's typology:¹² some were "artistic," many were "realistic" and others were "advocates" and "enterprising." Their level of schooling ranged from Secondary I to V in French, mathematics and English for the most part.

The attendance rate at the group meetings was 75%. Students could be absent for reasons deemed important or motivating for their perseverance at school, such as attending the history course (the only formal course) or the physical education course (the students' favourite subject) or doing an examination in the evaluation room.

- **On the evaluation forms, 88% of students said they appreciated the workshops, while 12% said they did not.**

¹² John Holland, *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Careers*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973. For "advocates," see Psymétrik, "What is the GROF test?" <http://www.psymetrik.com/html/en/questceque.php>

RAC group						
Five participants						
Outcome: five participants enrolled in RAC						
Carpentry		Secretarial Studies			Accounting	
3		1			1	
Number of participants by age group					Gender	
16-18 years	19-24 years	25-35 years	36-44 years	45 years and over	Female	Male
0	0	1	1	3	3	2
Summary of the characteristics of participants at the CFGA						
Sources of income						
Employment insurance		No income support			Employment income	
2		1			2	
Schooling						
Secondary Cycle One	Secondary Cycle Two	Presecondary				
10	7	3				

Since RAC procedures can take time, we do not yet have results, although we know that the adults are still pursuing the RAC process. The data shows that those we met are active, i.e. in school, employed or in the process of developing or implementing a plan.

However, the data are insufficient to predict impact over time. More information will be gathered at follow-up meetings with participants.

The professionals who participated in the group meetings also appreciated the process. In vocational training, adult education, vocational guidance and RAC alike, giving information once rather than several times proved advantageous. Starting with small groups reassured the counsellors and allowed them to experiment and become familiar with the approach.

The interaction among adults at the meetings was beneficial for everyone involved. First, the ability to observe adults in a group setting provided information about the individuals. In general, except for the RAC group, the adults appreciated meeting each other. This made the first contact lively and dynamic. In addition, the approach allowed professionals to learn more about the adults before meeting them individually, which made the personal interview easier. The adults already felt they knew the counsellor.

The main goal was to free up time for the counsellors. As we write this report, we know their schedules are a little freer. They now meet new adults one half-day a week. This is a considerable advantage.

However, it is important to note that the trials took place in April, a slower month for reception services.

Since a professional must meet each adult for at least five or 10 minutes to evaluate his or her needs, three counsellors cannot evaluate the needs of 50 people in one half-day. Group interventions must take this into account. In addition, we should learn from trials conducted in other school boards.

The greatest advantage for the adult education centre guidance group was to be able to provide counselling services to adults who would have been on a waiting list. The initiative appears to have been appreciated by teachers and other professionals. The counsellor in charge found the experience very motivating.

The counsellors also discovered several disadvantages. The major inconvenience was that the facilities available were not conducive to group meetings. For example, the group at the adult education centre met in the conference room or in a classroom on the top floor. For each meeting, the counsellors had to set up the projector and laptop. After the meeting, everyone had to go back downstairs to the reception area for individual interviews so that the counsellors could have access to the tools they needed to evaluate the file or transmit information. The RAC group and the group of adults in the midst of developing a plan encountered the same problem. Each time, the counsellors had to find a room and set things up. Having a dedicated room would greatly facilitate the process.

Another disadvantage concerned the five- to 10-minute individual meetings. It is not always easy to identify the adults requiring second-level reception services. Those who were identified could not get the necessary services immediately and had to wait for an appointment. Since the others in the group were waiting for their individual interview, the counsellor responsible for the RAC group found the situation difficult to manage. The fact that she was working alone could be responsible.

It appears that the advantages justify the continuation of this process. From the outset, interview times with counsellors at the adult education centre were extended to 30 minutes, a tangible result of the action research project. Since then, the counsellors have experimented with the approach and are satisfied with the results. They say they now have time to provide second-level reception services, identify needs and schedule other meetings when necessary.

The group approach will continue at the adult education centre, but with more carefully targeted adults—for example, those who want to enroll in CEGEP, who come to the centre at

the same time of year, who need prerequisites for admission and who express the same needs.

The approach could also be used with adults coming from the school board's youth sector. It has already been tried with a prework training class in a secondary school at the school board.

Adults recommended by the local employment centre could also be candidates. A combination of longer individual interviews (30 minutes) and group sessions for some could be a successful strategy for the adult education centre.

In career training, the group reception services that have been offered for several years now will continue since everyone is satisfied with the results. The approach makes it possible to introduce staff members, allows counsellors to give information once instead of several times and enables adults to meet other people in the group. In addition, adults can get all the information they need to begin their training.

As we mentioned earlier, further trials with RAC groups will take place in the fall.

These observations are based on the trials conducted in the past few months. However, the small sample size does not allow us to draw permanent conclusions. We will have to review the organization of services in the coming year in order to continue the process of reflection.

3.4.3 Impact on organization

The initial action plan was motivating for the action research and implementation teams. They had reached an agreement concerning actions that might improve reception services at the school board's centres and make it possible to implement SARCA services. However, it was only when we began implementing the action plan that we ran into difficulties. The SARCA approach, as we had planned it, could not be applied without changing how the service points did business and the specific roles of each. We had not anticipated this problem. The group trials made it possible to overcome this obstacle, which would have been impossible otherwise.

We heard preconceived notions to the effect that adults don't like to receive group services or even that they are too diverse in terms of background and age to be able to benefit from group services. The trials revealed the contrary. However, group meetings are complex and require considerable effort. Now we can look at different ways of proceeding in order to overcome some of the difficulties encountered.

The creation of the implementation team, also known as the SARCA team, had a tangible effect. Originally set up for the action research project, the team became the cornerstone for the implementation of SARCA services. The research project began with centralized SARCA

services represented solely by the centre director and the SARCA counsellor. The directors of the other two centres and representatives of educational services joined later.

At the request of the director of the adult education centre, the coordinator of educational services took over the project. His mandate was to get all of the professionals and directors to work together. The objectivity of educational services with respect to the development of reception services, combined with the coordinator's active participation, gave credibility to the collaboration among the different organizations.

However, the collaboration among professionals was based primarily on the trust they came to have in each other and in the directors throughout the process. They did what they said they were going to do, and they all focused on the goal of providing adults with as much guidance and support as possible.

Today, the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière can say that its SARCA team espouses a philosophy of intervention. It is now responsible for the implementation of SARCA services in each of the centres.

Concrete examples illustrate this approach. Now, guidance counsellors meet secondary students and inform them about career training programs as well as all the other possible options, even those outside the centre. This open approach reflects a willingness to provide support for adults who are developing their plan. It demonstrates an important change in philosophy and is a definite advantage for adults who, from their very first meeting with a professional, receive the information they need to implement their plan.

The work environment has also changed. Discussions about SARCA are healthier. The atmosphere is much more relaxed, and there is less tension. A more open approach to sharing expertise has eliminated turf wars. The counsellors work together to help the adults. Their support is almost systematic. Information flows more freely among second-level reception service providers. The creation of the team has enabled professionals who once felt isolated to benefit from teamwork.

The group trials encouraged second-level reception service providers to consult and work with their first-level counterparts, who gave advice concerning the organization of the group meetings and appreciated being consulted.

Today, the implementation of SARCA services is a team effort. At the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière, two teams work side by side. A team of managers comprising the centre directors, the adult education and vocational training coordinator, and the director of educational services is responsible for support, decision making and organization. It helps the SARCA (or implementation) team do its job. The implementation team is made up of professionals from the three centres, the school board's SARCA counsellor and the

vocational training and adult education coordinator. Both teams work to continually enhance SARCA by improving services and developing new tools.

At present, SARCA provides all reception services for adults at the school board: those at the adult education centre, the three vocational training buildings, the business services centre and the administrative centre. Professionals at each service point provide reception services using the SARCA approach. In the next few months, the professional once known as “Mrs. SARCA” will be responsible for providing the other professionals and the first-level reception service staff with guidance and support, training and information regarding SARCA services. She will take on specific tasks in the development of tools and services. She will continue to sit on the regional SARCA committee and the youth cooperation committee. She will coordinate the SARCA partners committee, where she will assimilate information for transmission to the two SARCA teams. She will also provide support for staff members following up with adults receiving SARCA services, and she will continue meeting adults.

The initial implementation plan for SARCA has been revised. Appendix 3 contains a list of people involved in SARCA, which will be distributed to first- and second-level reception service providers and to regional SARCA and local partners. Appendix 4 contains the table that will be used to present the SARCA approach to professionals and first-level reception service providers in September 2010. The meeting in question will mark the beginning of a consultation concerning the deployment of SARCA. Participants will hear a report on the SARCA team and what it has done so far. They will also learn about tools they can test in order to suggest improvements. It will be a first step in integrating first-level reception service providers.

Ideally, in order to ensure consistency with the actions taken so far, a first-level SARCA reception team should be created. To complete the process, first-level reception service providers should be included next year. Since the approach used with professionals providing second-level reception services was a success, we should proceed in the same manner with first-level service providers. Thus, the school board will have an integrated SARCA approach in all its centres.

When the first-level reception service providers meet adults, they will convey the SARCA philosophy. The second-level professionals will then take over. The directors’ involvement and support will help ensure consistency among the resources at the different centres.

There is still much to do, even with respect to second-level services, but the groundwork has been done.

3.4.4 Possible dissemination of results

3.4.4.1 Within SARCA, at the school board

As suggested earlier, the SARCA team's implementation experience could be useful to first-level service providers, especially since the next step in the implementation process is the integration of employees at this level. Experience with the second level will provide valuable guidelines.

Also, the action research project could be presented to teachers at the centres along with the SARCA team's experience as an introduction to the implementation of SARCA services. Since teachers are the ones who follow up with adults once the reception process is complete, they will ultimately participate in the SARCA approach.

Because one of the objectives of the action plan is to provide SARCA services throughout the school board, presenting the action research project could be a good way to start. It could show those involved the importance of applying the SARCA philosophy at every service point.

In fact, the project should be presented to every department at the school board, in particular the youth sector. More cooperation between secondary schools and adult services would be a good idea, since young people sometimes transition from one institution to the other. The transfer of information would make it possible to take more effective action with young adults with difficulties. If staff in the youth sector knew more about the services provided at the vocational training, the business services centre and the adult education centre, they could present them as an option to certain students.

3.4.4.2 In other SARCA service points

Many Québec school boards are implementing SARCA services. Even if each location has its own flavour and specific characteristics, the implementation process can easily be shared. The idea is not to repeat the exact same process, but to realize that it is possible to do things differently and together. All that is required is time and effort to change and adjust our paradigms to our constantly changing clientele.

The trials showed that the SARCA approach is relevant to every centre. Although the services were initially associated with adult general education, experience showed that every centre should provide the same type of reception services. Vocational training, business services and even the head office are now involved in providing reception services for adults in the territory covered by the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière.

3.4.4.3 With the partners

Two aspects of the process would make it easier to transmit information to our partners about our experience. First, we could distribute the tools developed for first-level reception service providers. For example, the organizational chart of services, currently at the design stage, would allow partners to contact anyone at the school board and have direct access to shared information and available services. This would save time and improve the quality of the information given to adults.

Also, we would benefit from a dynamic partnership capable of adapting to the realities of the adults we both serve. Internal deployment would have an impact on all of the other ties between the school board and the other organizations serving the territory.

3.5 Preliminary Evaluation

3.5.1 By team members

The initial action plan remained sketchy. Only when the team had acquired experience was it able to develop the plan further. Although at some point team members had doubts about the process, they are now convinced of the need for change. They had to overcome certain obstacles before implementing SARCA services. Now all the conditions are there for implementation. Learning more about each other, wanting to work together, sharing a common goal: These are the results of the trials. They also broke down barriers with respect to how each team member sees reception services. We have come a long way.

As mentioned earlier, based on our experience between April and June, the group approach appears to be a success. However, the counsellors at the adult education centre believe it would be difficult to apply at other times of the year without making some changes. We will have to study a new model for busy periods. A different type of group approach might be considered. Ideally, we could offer extended individual interviews combined with group meetings for certain types of adults.

It remains to be seen whether the centre directors will agree to schedule meetings with the counsellors every half-hour instead of every 15 minutes. The counsellors appear to appreciate the new schedule, which gives them time to create files. However, they feel that at busy times this would lead to long waiting lists. All of these possibilities will need to be discussed.

The vocational training counsellors were already using the group approach for confirming choices and welcoming registered students. Unlike the meetings at the adult education centre, these meetings are not used to help adults choose a path.

According to the vocational training counsellors, the challenge lies in following up with adults who are not admitted to training programs and with those who abandon their studies during the year. These counsellors need to set up a guidance and follow-up service in collaboration with the other SARCA professionals.

The group approach was not a success for the RAC counsellor at the business services centre. Although at first she made an effort to adapt her approach to a group setting, the adults were each in a specific situation that was not transferable to other members of the group. For this reason, the time saved and the sharing of experiences did not apply. The challenge, according to the RAC counsellor, is to create learning groups for adults to complete their education.

3.5.2 By the adults

The aim of the group trials was to give the counsellors more time to provide second-level reception services for those who needed them the most. The underlying hypothesis was that if the counsellors have more time, they can apply the SARCA approach more effectively. In this respect, almost all the adults who participated in a group meeting appreciated the experience. It is, however, too early to say whether this will have a positive impact on their perseverance and success.

3.5.3 By internal partners

The working hypothesis was that the involvement of internal partners in the consolidation of reception and counselling services fosters adults' success. Consequently, if more counsellors at the school board use the SARCA approach, it should foster the expression of demand and the resulting outcomes.

3.6 Recommendations for Follow-up of the Project, for Services for Adults and for SARCA

3.6.1 For participants in the project

Now that the conditions for successful implementation of SARCA services are in place, we must return to the initial action plan. The SARCA philosophy must be transmitted to the first-level service providers. The same procedure will be used as with the second-level service providers—i.e. getting them involved and having them participate in the deployment of SARCA services.

For example, systematically informing reception staff of all available training options would give them the information in real time. However, we are aware that we must take small steps

and respect the individuals involved, and we believe that people must want to adopt this new way of doing things.

The SARCA team's involvement is essential for the success of the process. Although much has been accomplished with the counsellors, there is still a lot to do. For example, counsellors should become increasingly involved in activities with SARCA partners. Their knowledge of the services provided by these partners will enable second-level reception service providers to explain them to the adults they see. Explaining once again the components of second-level reception services could also help counsellors assimilate the approach.

Beyond the implementation of SARCA services, the team must work together to constantly improve services throughout the school board. As we saw earlier, it can participate in the introduction of new services for adults with special needs. The team is essential to the transmission of information and is the liaison between the centres and the school board.

The group approach will continue at the vocational training centre because it has proved successful for everyone involved. Also, some group meetings will continue to be held in accordance with the SARCA approach at partners' offices and in secondary schools.

The RAC counsellor intends to repeat the trial, but this time in cooperation with colleagues.

In adult education, we must establish target groups, improve the procedure, better integrate first-level service providers and, if possible, set up a room for the counsellors. Meetings with adults requiring guidance counselling services will be held again next year, this time over a shorter period of time.

Conclusion

There were several determining factors in the implementation of SARCA reception services at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière. First, the leadership provided by educational services in this area enabled us to proceed with a shared vision of reception services. It also ensured the neutrality of our actions.

The involvement of the centre directors in the action research project and in the implementation of SARCA services was another key element in the process. They were on board from the start and participated in meetings and discussions. Sometimes information was transmitted by the educational services coordinator, but the directors soon showed how open they were to the different deployment methods suggested. With their cooperation and input, we were able to quickly determine what was possible and what was not. Since the action plans were developed in collaboration with the directors, we could work on ways of implementing them. Their commitment was obvious when it came to giving counsellors time off work to attend meetings and develop tools for the action research project and the implementation of SARCA services.

Although the centre directors and educational services clearly realized the importance of the action research project and the deployment of SARCA, the participation of the counsellors was key to our progress. Their tolerance for insecurity and openness to new ways of seeing reception services were crucial to the advancement of the project. Their enthusiasm and effectiveness in the development of tools, sometimes on very short notice, were invaluable. Their willingness to improve reception services for adults was the driving force behind the deployment of SARCA services at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière.

Lastly, the action research project gave staff members the freedom they needed to try a new approach. It was a trial-and-error process that would have been more difficult to apply in real time. The idea of experimenting, analyzing and then making decisions concerning what was advantageous and doable allayed the concern that usually accompanies the implementation of new practices.

➤ **Conditions for success in the next steps of the process**

The first year of the deployment process was devoted to setting up the conditions for success. However, as we mentioned earlier, there is still much to do, and we must take into account several key factors.

The next steps will also require the commitment and openness of the centre directors, but certain practices will have to be changed. The directors must help the implementation team determine what is possible and participate in the implementation of changes in their respective centres. Their support is key for the implementation of new ways of providing

reception services at both the first and second levels. Lastly, staff will need time off work for training, cooperation and the development of tools.

Similarly, it will be important to maintain the SARCA implementation team, whose role, in collaboration with educational services and the centre directors, will be to implement the action plan developed by the action research team. Once again, openness, expertise and availability to develop tools will be key assets.

If the implementation of SARCA services is to succeed, it will also be necessary to adopt quality standards at the first and second level of reception services. In this respect, the document published by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport entitled *Continuous Improvement: SARCA Quality Standards* should be used as a reference.

➤ **Challenges**

One of the main challenges for the coming year is to maintain momentum in the concerted efforts of all the centres and first- and second-level reception service providers. The implementation of the action plan must continue. All the actors involved must continue investing the effort needed to achieve this goal.

Another challenge will be for the SARCA counsellor to adapt to providing support and follow-up services for adults who receive reception services from the other members of the SARCA team. This support should involve transmitting information to the different partners and maintaining ties with the second-level reception service providers.

Lastly, the approach should be extended to professionals in the youth sector, whether it be for young people who want to pursue their studies in a vocational training or adult education centre, or to provide their parents with information.

Some students from the youth sector transition directly to the adult sector. It would be easier if there were mechanisms for counselling students who are headed for the different adult education centres. Providing complementary services is key to success.

The implementation of SARCA services will continue next year. The aim is to take small steps in order to consolidate recent learning and respect the pace of each person involved.



Appendix 1
Invitation to a Meeting

**RECEPTION SERVICES FOR GROUPS OF ADULTS
WHO ARE IMPLEMENTING PLANS**

YOUR PERSONAL PLAN

Date

Thursday, January 28, 2010

Time

9:00 a.m.

Location

Commission scolaire De La Jonquière adult education centre

Purpose

Information session on the personal plan
Information session on the different options offered by the CSDLJ
and our partners

Target audience

People who don't know what they want to do
People who don't have a specific plan
People whose plans are unclear or ill-defined

Facilitators

School board guidance counsellors

Appendix 2 Participant's Booklet



Reception, Referral, Counselling and Support Services

PERSONAL PLAN

PARTICIPANT'S BOOKLET

Commission scolaire De La Jonquière

1. Agenda

Introduction of facilitators

Presentation of the workshop and the objective of the meeting

Explanation of the personal plan

Presentation of services offered

Reflection on your personal plan

Individual interview

Facilitators:

Sonia Côté, guidance counsellor, SARCA

418-547-4702, ext. 247

sonia.cote@csjonquiere.qc.ca

Céline Bilodeau, guidance counsellor at the adult education centre

418-547-4702, ext. 228

celine.bilodeau@csjonquiere.qc.ca

Édith Ferlatte, guidance counsellor at the vocational training centre

418-695-5195, ext. 229

edith.ferlatte@csjonquiere.qc.ca

2. Presentation of the workshop and the objective of the meeting

To allow you to start thinking about your personal plan.

To introduce you to the different options offered by staff at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière and by external service providers.

To help you implement your personal plan.

What do you expect to get out of this group meeting?

[illegible]

3. Personal Plan

A personal plan is any project that helps you enter the work force or improve your situation. A personal plan is important to you. It is a goal you want to achieve. When your personal plan is clear and specific, it motivates you to get through the different steps involved in implementing it.

To improve your chances of successfully implementing your personal plan:

Your plan must be realistic.

It must be broken down into well-defined steps.

You must get accurate information.

You must set short-term goals.

Factors to consider:

What is your goal?

Your interests

Your competencies

Available time

Your financial situation

Your limitations

Your academic background

Obstacles

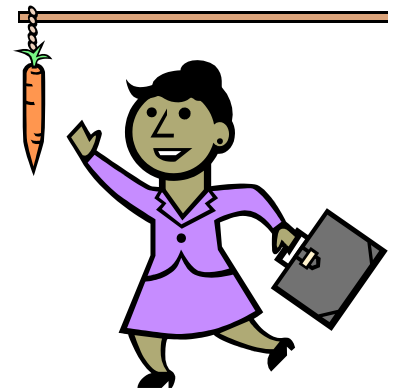


Your personal plan is important to you!

The Five Benefits of Work

The benefits of work are what motivate people to work and to develop and implement a personal plan.

- **Income**
- **Time and space management**
- **Interpersonal relations**
- **Achievement**
- **Status**



Why do people work?

Based on Jacques Limoges, *L'orientation et les groupes* (Saint-Laurent: Fides, 1998).

4. The Different Options

4.1 Returning to school

4.2 Learning a Trade

4.3 Returning to work or changing jobs

4.4 Developing a business plan

4.5 Applying for recognition of acquired competencies



4.1 Returning to school

Options

Acquiring competencies

- Improve your English or French
- Get computer training

Obtaining an SSD

- Enter the work force
- Get a better job

Getting the prerequisites you need for an academic program

- Vocational training (DVS)
- CEGEP (DCS)
- Continuing education and training (ACS)

Learning a trade

- Become a cook
- Become a lab technician

Guidance counselling

Meeting with a guidance counsellor:

- Verify your prerequisites
- Validate your career choice
- Obtain help with enrollment
- Commission scolaire De La Jonquière
- Carrefour jeunesse-emploi
- Accès-Travail-Femmes, Accès-Travail-Emploi
- Local employment centre

Explanation of the GDT (General Development Test)

For information and to register:

Édith Ferlatte, guidance counsellor, 418-695-5195, ext. 229
Sandra Tremblay, guidance counsellor, 418-695-5195, ext. 226

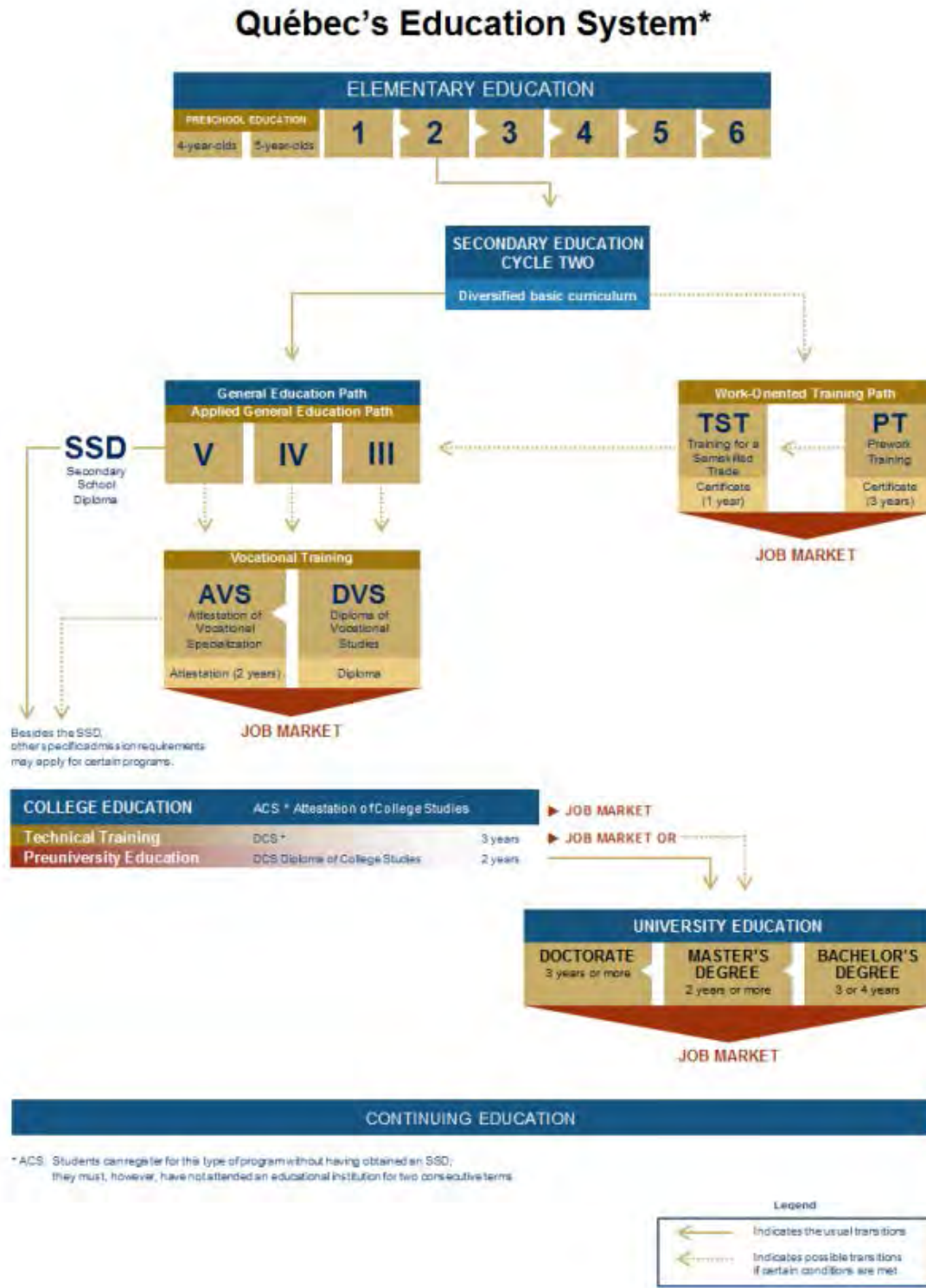
Provisions of the *Basic adult general education regulation* regarding the certification of studies

SSD*
54 credits
12 credits in language of instruction (Secondary IV and V)
6 credits in second language (Secondary IV)
36 elective credits Including at least 18 Secondary V credits

SSD (CEGEP admission requirements)
54 credits
6 credits in language of instruction (Secondary V)
6 credits in second language (Secondary V)
4 credits in mathematics (Secondary IV)
6 credits in physical science
4 credits in history

* In effect until July 1, 2010

4.2 Learning a Trade



*From PROULX, J.-P., (2009) *Le système éducatif du Québec - De la maternelle à l'université*, Chenelière Éducation, Montréal, p.13.

SUMMARY TABLE OF VOCATIONAL TRAINING

TYPES OF PROGRAMS	CENTRES THAT OFFER THESE TYPES OF PROGRAMS	PREREQUISITES	WHEN THESE TYPES OF PROGRAMS ARE OFFERED	DURATION	OBJECTIVE
SST Semiskilled Trades	Adult education centre	Secondary III GDT	Throughout the year	Minimum 900 hours	Work force
STC Skills Training Certificate	Vocational training centres (school board)	Secondary III GDT Depends on the program	When companies express a need	3 to 9 months	Work force
DVS Diploma of Vocational Studies	Vocational training centres (school board)	Secondary III or IV SSD AESS GDT + specific prerequisites	Usually in August, but also in October, November, January and March	615 to 1800 hours (8 months to 2 years)	Work force
AVS Attestation of Vocational Specialization	Vocational training centres (school board)	The corresponding DVS	After the DVS	330 to 650 hours	Work force
ACS Attestation of college studies	CEGEP continuing education and training centres	S Certain programs + prerequisites	Throughout the year	400 and 1600 hours	Work force
DCS Diploma of College Studies	CEGEP	SSD S + prerequisites	September	3 years	Work force

4.3 Returning to work or changing jobs

Resources

- Carrefour jeunesse-emploi
- Accès-Travail-Femmes and Accès-Travail-Emploi
- Cible-Action
- SEMO
- Service Relance
- SARCA
- Adult education centre (Sociovocational Integration Services)

4.4 Developing a business plan

Resources

- Carrefour jeunesse-emploi
- Business services centre — Starting a business
- Local development centre — Information session
- FEC — Fonds d'entraide communautaire

4.5 Applying for recognition of acquired competencies

Recognition of general education

- Done at the adult education centre
- Spheres of generic competencies
- SSET
- GED-TS

Record of learning in basic general education

- Service offered by the school board's SARCA
- To help you determine your academic status
- To help you take into account your life experiences

Reflection about your personal plan

Am I ready to take action right now?

If so, do I have an idea of what I would like to do?

Does my current situation allow me to focus my energy on implementing a personal plan?

Do I have an idea of the steps I will need to follow to implement my personal plan?

Appendix 3 SARCA Resources



RECEPTION, REFERRAL, COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

LIST OF RESOURCES AVAILABLE AT THE COMMISSION SCOLAIRE DE LA JONQUIÈRE SARCA

CENTRE

RESOURCE PERSON

TELEPHONE

FAX

SARCA SERVICES

FP and FGA coordinator

Martin Hudon

418-542-7551, ext. 4262

418-695-7105

First-level services

Clémence Paré

418-542-7551, ext. 4220

418-695-7105

Second-level services

Sonia Côté

418-547-4702, ext. 247

418-547-3374

ADULT EDUCATION

First-level services

Stéphanie Bérubé

418-547-4702, ext. 236

418-547-3374

Isabelle Gagnon-Munger

418-547-4702, ext. 235

418-547-3374

Denise Tremblay

418-547-4702, ext. 221

418-547-3374

Second-level services

Céline Bilodeau

418-547-4702, ext. 228

418-547-3374

Ann Dombrowski 418-547-3374	418-547-4702, ext. 229
VOCATIONAL TRAINING	
First-level services	
Saint-Germain:	
Nancy Gauthier 418-542-3720	418-542-8760, ext. 0
Mellon:	
Anna Beauchamp 418-548-0159	418-548-4689, ext. 0
Du Royaume:	
Caroline Leblanc 418-695-3156	418-695-5195, ext. 221
Patricia Simard 418-695-3156	418-695-5195, ext. 222
Second-level services	
Saint-Germain:	
Sandra Tremblay 418-542-3720	418-542-8760, ext. 224
Mellon:	
Sandra Tremblay 418-548-0159	418-548-4689, ext. 5228
Du Royaume:	
Sandra Tremblay 418-695-3156	418-695-5195, ext. 226
Édith Ferlatte 418-695-3156	418-695-5195, ext. 229
Martin Bédard 418-695-3156	418-695-5195, ext. 268
BUSINESS SERVICES CENTRE	
First-level services	
Cathy Cloutier 418-548-0312	418-548-7373, ext. 239
Marie-Ève Bourgeois 418-548-0321	418-548-7373, ext. 221

Second-level services

**Nathalie Larouche
418-548-0321**

418-548-7373, ext. 291

COMMISSION SCOLAIRE DE LA JONQUIÈRE SARCA COMMITTEE

**Martin Bédard, Céline Bilodeau, Sonia Côté, Ann Dombrowski, Édith Ferlatte,
Martin Hudon, Nathalie Larouche, Sandra Tremblay**

Appendix 4 The SARCA Philosophy

Principles

SARCA services are based on the *Government Policy on Adult Education and Continuing Education and Training* (2002).

SARCA services contribute to the achievement of the policy's objectives:

- * to provide basic education for adults
- * to establish a culture of lifelong learning
- * to maintain and continually upgrade adults' competencies
- * to acknowledge adults' prior learning and competencies

SARCA's focus is on the adult. The idea of organizational distance is very important. The services are tailored to the adult's plan.

The goal is to participate in the development of adults, in particular by helping them learn how to take control of their lives.

The idea is to help establish a culture of lifelong learning, in particular by fostering the expression of the demand for learning.

The Expression of the Demand for Learning

It is important to listen to adults, helping them express their situation and providing the help they need right now:

- * by taking into account the adult's complete story
- * by making available resources that foster the expression of their demand for learning

Services must sometimes be adapted to the demand.

The adult's plan does not necessarily involve returning to school.

Reception

Services must stimulate and foster the expression of the adult's demand for learning by:

- * active listening, information about decisions concerning a possible approach for a plan
- * being accessible to adults
- * maintaining a certain distance between the adult and the services offered

Complementary services work in synergy with other available services.

It is important to consider the whole story, taking into account the adult's different roles. It is important to welcome the adult with respect and trust.

The aim is to get to know the adults with a view to providing guidance, understanding where they are with respect to an eventual plan, providing information about them and about what might be useful in defining their plan, and having them choose from among the services available those that will be most effective.

The Adult's Course of Action

This consists in developing a plan that includes a goal and an action plan based on a better knowledge of oneself and society.

Guidance and Support

SARCA must:

- provide adults with the services they need to help them make a decision
- help adults determine appropriate methods of implementing their plan
- guide and support adults to learn more about themselves as learners and develop confidence in their abilities
- help, support and guide adults throughout the implementation of their plan
- deal with problems, questions and doubts throughout the process
- be familiar with all the training and other resources available in the community
- collaborate with the pedagogical team
- be able to offer more reticent adults the opportunity to adapt the process to their situation

A Proactive Approach

SARCA must reach out to isolated adults, who are often not members of the work force.

That means:

getting out of the office and making an effort to get to know the adults in the community better so that services can be adapted to their needs

keeping an eye on the population's needs

informing decision-makers about our centres, the school board and the Ministère

forging ties with organizations, providing information to groups of adults, making information and services more available and more accessible to adults

Partnerships

Internal and external partnerships are also necessary in order to provide complementary services and to ensure the continuity of services for adults who need them.

SARCA staff, other colleagues at the school board and our partners collaborate to provide compatible and diversified services in a given territory. Internal and external partners join forces for the good of the population.

Formal protocols and informal agreements as well as networking efforts ensure the provision of quality, complementary services that effectively satisfy a wide variety of needs.

Special Attention to Career Counselling

Provide short- and long-term guidance by offering a sufficiently wide range of effective career counselling strategies.

Appendix 5 Evaluation of SARCA Training



YOUR OPINION, PLEASE

Please check off the circle that best describes your level of agreement with each of the following statements.	Totally agree	Somewhat agree	Do not agree
1. The objectives of the session were clearly presented.	☐	☐	☐
2. The facilitators answered my questions.	☐	☐	☐
3. The facilitators were clear and accurate.	☐	☐	☐
4. The participant's booklet is easy to understand.	☐	☐	☐
5. The visual presentation was interesting.	☐	☐	☐
6. The exercises helped me see my progress on my personal plan.	☐	☐	☐
7. The session will prove useful in my approach to my plan.	☐	☐	☐

Comments and suggestions:

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Chapter 4



Passport and Portfolio: Helping Adults Take Action and Develop a Personal Plan Using the SARCA Process

Commission scolaire de Laval

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Collaborators

Élisabeth Mainka and Jean-Pierre Boutinet

4.1 Context of the Project at the Commission scolaire de Laval

The Commission scolaire de Laval covers the entire territory of the city of Laval and serves more than 40 000 students in the youth and adult sectors in its 77 educational institutions, which include eight vocational training centres and three adult education centres. Due to its proximity to the island of Montréal, it faces situations and challenges similar to those of neighbouring school boards: a high dropout rate, increased enrollment of immigrants and a shortage of skilled labour.

Because of its participation in the *Program to Promote the Return to School of People Between the Ages of 16 and 24*, the Commission scolaire de Laval's implementation of reception, referral, counselling and support services (SARCA) was delayed, and work began on developing an action plan in 2006-2007. At this stage, the concern of every member of the SARCA team was to set up a mechanism that would allow adults (people aged 16 and over) who had left school to return. We also wanted to enable them develop a plan, provide them with counselling, information and guidance to help them implement the plan and, ideally, improve the level of basic education among adult citizens of Laval.

The SARCA model at the Commission scolaire de Laval resembles a spider web. In the middle is the Guichet conseil, which is the entry point to SARCA. There we receive all adults who wish to develop a plan, regardless of the education and training offered at the school board. Around the Guichet conseil are the adult education and vocational training centres and schools, the administrative centre and our partner organizations.

SARCA Model at the Commission scolaire de Laval

Services are interrelated, complementary and integrated at every level. SARCA is not a place, an office or a group of people; it is a philosophy. All adults, wherever they are in their course of action, are entitled to relevant advice, appropriate reception services, useful information, and guidance and support.

The "approach" was the aspect of the action plan that appeared most abstract for the SARCA team and therefore the most difficult to define in terms of services. How can we help disadvantaged adults develop a plan? How can we encourage them to implement that plan? How can we help them record their efforts and the steps they have taken since they started the process? How can we improve our guidance and support so they do not give up?

During the first year of the implementation of SARCA services, we made important observations, and further analysis confirmed what we already suspected:

- Many adults were having difficulty developing a plan.
- Too many adults enrolled in educational or training programs were dropping out, some of them at the very end of the program.
- Their efforts, except for their formal education, were not recorded anywhere.
- It was essential to ensure continuity between our services and those of our partners so that adults would not have to repeat their story at every meeting.
- We should equip adults to help them grow on a personal and social level and encourage them to develop a sense of responsibility, autonomy and commitment to their plan.

More than 1500 learners in our adult education centres dropped out in 2007-2008. Less than 20% of them started up again the same year. Most of them were under the age of 24 and had

no well-defined goals. Some 500 learners in vocational training also abandoned their program that year. Many of them said it was because they wanted to change fields, often at the very end of their program.

We noticed that learners were getting younger, especially in our adult education centres, that there were more immigrants and that there had been a spike in the number of at-risk learners dealing with mental health problems, severe behaviour or learning disorders, adjustment difficulties, and family or financial problems. These adults were knocking at our door, then those of our partners, becoming overusers of services and expecting a magic bullet or miracle from us.

We had to find ways to help these adults develop a plan, provide them with guidance and support so that they would stick with it and give them the tools they need to face their responsibilities and take charge of developing and implementing their plan. The action research project proposed by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) came at just the right time. It gave us an opportunity to better define the “approach” aspect of SARCA.

4.2 Beginning of the Project

The adult education and vocational training service created a working committee made up of the assistant director of the Service de l'éducation des adultes et de la formation professionnelle; the counsellor responsible for implementing SARCA services; the Guichet conseil team (a guidance counsellor and a first-level reception service provider); the director and an education consultant from an adult education centre; and the director, the person in charge of reception and a teacher from a vocational training centre. The team was asked to define, implement and complete the action research project.

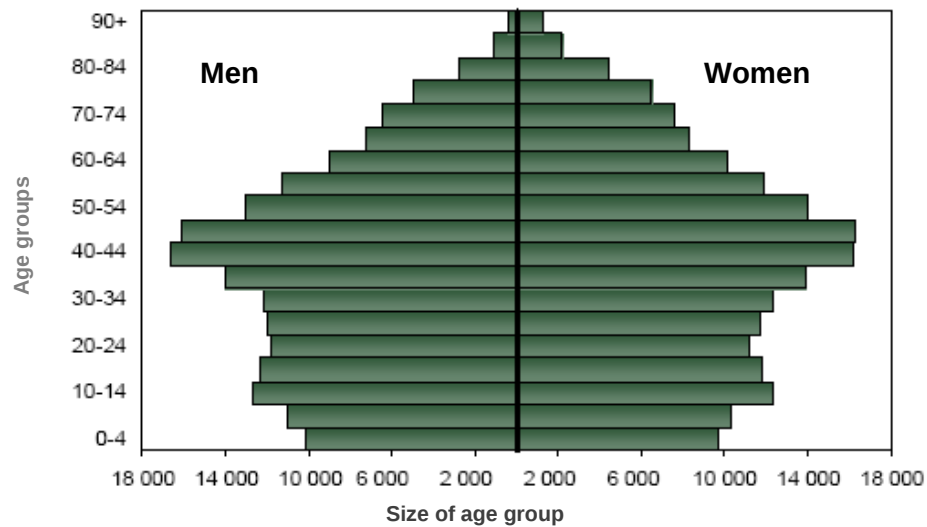
4.2.1 Adult clientele of SARCA

Before discussing our approach to the adult's plan, we had to define the characteristics of our adult clientele.

In 2007, Laval had 370 957 residents, 2500 more than in 2006. The population growth is mainly attributable to immigration and to the exodus of Montrealers toward the suburbs. Some 21% of the population is under the age of 18, 65% are between the ages of 18 and 64, and 15% are 65 years old or older. As in many regions of Québec, Laval's population is aging.

According to the 2006 Census, more than 20% of Laval's population is of immigrant origin. More

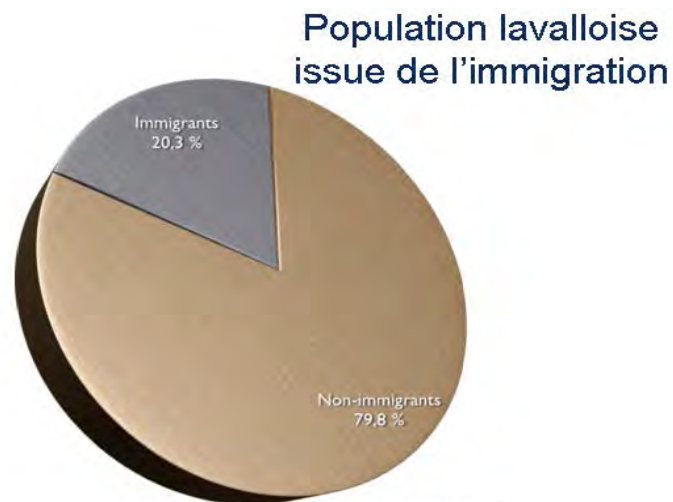
Graph 1 - Age pyramid, Laval, 2006



Source : Institut de la statistique du Québec, Direction de la méthodologie, de la démographie et des enquêtes spéciales.

than 13% of Laval residents use neither English nor French as their primary language at home. The proportion of the population that is undereducated is slightly lower than the Québec average. On the other hand, graduates in Laval tend to obtain a first diploma at a later age.¹³

Graph 2 – Immigrant Population of Laval, 2006



Source: Statistique Canada, recensement de 2006

¹³ MELs, *Automatisation de la gestion des indicateurs de la réussite (AGIR)* (2008).

The school board's action plan had determined that SARCA should target primarily:

- immigrants, since Laval receives the second largest number of immigrants annually in Québec
- young people aged 16 to 24 without a diploma and people over 45 without a diploma

It was therefore obvious that the action research team had to study populations in accordance with the SARCA action plan. However, we wanted to follow up not only with adults who weren't engaged in a learning plan ("external" clients), but also with those who were enrolled in our centres whose personal plan was not clearly defined. We wanted to study the impact of the process of developing a plan on a variety of age and ethnic groups and on adults in different training programs leading to a diploma, a qualification or the work force. We wanted to measure whether the process of developing a plan varies by age, cultural identity, gender or program of training. Upon reflection, the action research team decided to focus on the following populations:

- young people under the age of 20 without a learning plan
- immigrants of all ages without a learning plan
- young adults under the age of 20 with a vocational training plan
- young adults under the age of 20 with a general education plan in an adult education centre
- adults over the age of 30 with a vocational training plan leading to a qualification that would enable them to enter the work force
- immigrants of all ages with a learning plan

We began with two major observations:

- Some adults receiving SARCA services had difficulty developing a personal plan, whether it involves a career or other type of goal.
- Too many adults enrolled in school and receiving SARCA services were abandoning their studies. By SARCA here we mean guidance provided by internal resources (academic and career guidance counsellors, psychoeducators, mentors, tutors) and external resources (e.g. social workers at the Carrefour jeunesse-emploi, the nurse at the Centre de santé et de services sociaux [CSSS], Emploi-Québec officers).

Our objectives were to help adults develop a plan and to reduce the dropout rate.

4.2.2 Tools

After much discussion, it was determined that even if the Commission scolaire de Laval provided many guidance and information services, it was still difficult for adults to make

connections between the services offered and to properly analyze the information they were given since they often had difficulty defining their own needs. We thus wanted to develop tools that would allow them to record their efforts and keep a log of their “personal plan,” which would encourage them to persevere. We would develop two tools: the SARCA passport and the SARCA portfolio. We would offer targeted adults these tools, allowing them to opt out if they were not interested. Our hypothesis was that if they chose to use the tools, they would be more likely to persevere in their process and in developing their personal plan. Learners in our centres would be more likely to persevere if they chose to make use of the portfolio and passport. For adults outside the school board, keeping a log of their efforts would enable them to better define their plan.

We agreed on a few basic principles:

- The passport could be used independently of the portfolio.
- The portfolio, however, would include the passport.
- The passport would be used by practitioners to keep a log of the adults’ efforts and the steps they had taken. It would be filled out in large part by the practitioners, but could be consulted by the adults. Thus, thanks to the passport, adults would feel they were getting more support and would have less difficulty seeing the progress they were making.
- Adults would use the portfolio to take charge of developing and implementing their plan.
- Adults using the portfolio would receive the support of teachers, tutors, counsellors, external resources, etc.

In June 2008, a subcommittee was created to design the passport and portfolio. It was made up of a guidance counsellor, two education consultants and a secretary specializing in desktop publishing. The subcommittee studied existing documents as well as Web sites on digital and paper portfolios. The subcommittee agreed that the passport would include the information normally required by MELS at the second level of reception services. It studied the second-level reception services form suggested by the Ministère, which would soon be used to declare services. The members of the subcommittee discussed the passport with partners in the Laval region and asked them for suggestions as to what it should contain.

We wanted the portfolio to have separators that would make it easy for participants to find the information in the different sections. We also had to take into account that some adults might want an electronic portfolio, so the design and format should be easily convertible.

For both tools, we wanted an attractive and original presentation and bold colours. The subcommittee designed prototypes and sent them to participating centres in August 2008 for feedback and suggestions.

Taking into account the feedback from practitioners at the centres and the Guichet conseil into account, our internal staff began finalizing the material at the beginning of September. We would have preferred to have a team of graphic artists do the job, but there was no time. We wanted the documents to be easy to use and carry. The vocabulary had to be simple and easy to understand for immigrants and supplemented by images. Since the passport was meant to be submitted to several practitioners in different organizations, we made it smaller so that it could be slipped into a pocket or purse. After making the final adjustments, we printed 500 copies. We inserted them into plastic sleeves to protect them and so that adults could add business cards, leaflets and forms they collected along the way. Participants from the Guichet conseil would receive only a passport, without a sleeve.

The passport is made up of five 21.5 x 12.5-cm colour pages, printed on both sides and folded in half. It includes an *Identification* section, where adults can write their personal information, their goals and the services they have received from different organizations. The *Recognized schooling* section has space to indicate diplomas received, courses taken and competencies recognized. The *Education and Training* section gives a more detailed description of learning acquired in school or elsewhere, and learning still to be acquired. In the *Non-formal and informal learning* section, adults note the learning acquired in everyday life or at work. Lastly, the *Follow-up* section allows adults to summarize their meetings with various practitioners throughout their process (see the passport in Appendix 7).

The portfolio is a document measuring 21.5 x 35.5 cm. It includes six main sections (see the document in Appendix 8). In the *Resources* section, adults can list the organizations that could help them with their plan as well as contact information. The *Background* section helps them think about their childhood, family situation, values and interests. They can also list their strengths and areas they would like to improve. In the *Competencies* section, adults indicate which subjects they liked best at school, their talents, their interpersonal skills or the competencies they have acquired or would like to develop. In the *Learning Activities* section, adults indicate their education, diplomas obtained, training received in the workplace or the community and any special recognitions. The *Employment* section allows them to list their work and volunteer experience and to think about their most meaningful experiences and what they are looking for in a job. Lastly, in the *Plans* section, they reflect on their dreams and goals, develop personal, learning and networking plans, and consider their future. At the very end, blank pages are provided so that they can write personal notes or jot down any questions they may have.

4.2.3 Participants

We then decided who would participate in the action research project:

- Two groups of learners aged 17 to 20 enrolled in vocational training. One group would be made up exclusively of young women, and the other, of young men. We wanted to determine whether young men were more likely to drop out than young women.

- A group of learners aged 17 to 20 enrolled in adult general education.
- A group of learners over the age of 25 enrolled in sociovocational integration in the adult sector.
- A group of immigrant learners enrolled in literacy or common core basic education (presecondary, Secondary Cycle One).
- A group of Guichet conseil users, i.e. adults without a plan.
- A “community project” group in partnership with an organization.

The Centre d'éducation des adultes L'Impulsion and the Centre de formation professionnelle Paul-Émile-Dufresne agreed to participate in the action research project.

The Centre L'Impulsion offers four instructional services: literacy, general education (Secondary I through V, prerequisites for vocational training and college studies during the day, evening, full-time, part-time or at a distance), sociovocational integration and social integration. It takes in 1600 learners a year, plus 1000 in distance education. In addition to programs of study, the centre offers remedial courses in French, visual arts classes, film studies, activities outside the centre and evenings for parents of young learners.

Learners enrolled in vocational training are getting younger, as are those in distance education. The sociovocational integration and literacy programs cater to an older, mostly immigrant population.

At the Centre L'Impulsion, each new learner enrolled in general education is entitled to a half-day orientation session before beginning courses. Orientation is mandatory for all future learners who do not hold a Secondary School Diploma (SSD). The session aims to help them define realistic career goals and give meaning to their learning plan by seeing how it fits into their personal plan. About 20 learners attend the meeting, which lasts a little less than three hours. The guidance counsellor explains the guidance-oriented approach and how we intend to help them give their learning more concrete meaning. The counsellor has participants do the Groupements test, which provides a profile of their identity structure, then the Tétrault-Trahan psychometric test, which enables participants to determine their RAISEC code based on the Holland typology. In workshops, participants then use the Repères software to find two objectives or two trades they might be interested in based on their RAISEC code.

Then we analyze the learners' education path (from the youth sector to the present) and their results on the Groupements test. A summary is given to each of the learner's tutors and made available to all teachers and professionals at the centre as well as the director. An information sheet is produced for each learner (see example in Appendix 1).

The Centre de formation professionnelle Paul-Émile-Dufresne offers four programs leading to a Diploma of Vocational Studies (DVS)—*Hairdressing, Travel Sales, Professional Sales* and

Computing Support—and two programs leading to an Attestation of Vocational Specialization (AVS)—*Sales Representation* and *Starting a Business*. Learners at the centre are younger than they used to be, especially in *Hairdressing* and *Professional Sales*, and although they appear to have established their occupational goal, we often realize after their first failure that they are unsure. We also realize that they do not have a grasp of certain basic knowledge. This leads to a rather high rate of students abandoning studies: 56 learners at the Centre Paul-Émile-Dufresne abandoned their studies in 2007-2008, 20 of them from the *Hairdressing* program. Of the 56, 16 (or nearly 30%) left to enroll in a different program.

The Guichet conseil is open to all adults in Laval. It serves more than 1500 clients a year and is currently seeing a sharp rise in the number of users.

It offers the following services:

- Guidance services
- Diagnostic tests
- SSET equivalency tests
- Evaluation of records
- Attestation of competency according to Commission de la construction du Québec (CCQ) regulations
- Record of learning
- Academic and vocational information
- Referral to other organizations
- General Development Test (GDT)
- Learning plan
- Documentation centre
- Recognition of acquired competencies

The services are free of charge. Slightly more women than men seek help at the Guichet conseil, and users are becoming increasingly younger. We observe that more and more parents are providing their adult children with guidance in their process. In this case, it is important to determine whether the project is the parent's or really that of the young adult.

Our aim was to suggest that the Guichet use the passport and portfolio starting in September 2008. Time was short, but we were determined to meet our deadlines. We agreed that we would give adults who had decided to participate in the action research project a kit containing both portfolio and passport. Guichet conseil users would receive only the passport because it was difficult, if not impossible, to monitor these adults and provide support in the long term.

We also needed to inform our partners about our project and about how to use the passport and portfolio. We sent everyone an e-mail with an electronic version of our tools, explaining our goal and how to use the tools. We also offered to visit their offices if they felt this would be useful. Four organizations asked to meet us for further explanation: the Carrefour jeunesse-emploi, the Carrefour d'Intercultures de Laval, the Auberge du Cœur L'envolée and the Association Midi-Quarante. The regional office of the Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion

(MIDI) asked for the original tools so that the team there could learn more about them. We also presented the project and tools to members of youth forums and those of the local committee of the *Program to Promote the Return to School of People Between the Ages 16 and 24*. As a result, two external organizations agreed to participate in the action research project: the Carrefour d'Intercultures de Laval, which provides reception and support services for refugees and immigrants who wish to move to Laval, and the Auberge du Cœur L'envolée, a community organization that provides reception and support services for young people in difficulty aged 16 to 20.

In September, members of the working committee also met staff at the centres and organizations participating in the project in order to present the tools and explain their use. They gave concrete examples of the type of support and follow-up that the tools made possible. While some were very enthusiastic, others seemed to think it would be more work and were therefore sceptical. At this stage, the commitment and support of the centre directors and organization managers were key. Practitioners at our partner organizations agreed to test the kit as part of their reception and guidance process for students.

The director of the Centre Paul-Émile-Dufresne attended the meeting with teachers and clearly stated that she wanted to use the tools in the education and follow-up of learners. We agreed that the two teachers responsible for the target groups would pilot the project and try to incorporate the tools into the modules, especially in the modules *The Trade and the Training Process*, *Communication* and *Job Search Techniques*. The director and guidance counsellor at the Centre L'Impulsion agreed that the tools would be used differently depending on the target group. For young people under the age of 18 in general education, the guidance counsellor would present the tools at the orientation meeting, while teachers would do the follow-up. For the groups in literacy and sociovocational integration, the guidance counsellor and homeroom teacher would present the kit and explain how to use it, but the teaching team would then support its use.

It was more difficult to define a target group for our partner organizations and the Guichet conseil. The team therefore agreed on a number of participants to be recruited for the action research project between October and February: The Guichet conseil's goal was to hand out 50 passports, while the Carrefour d'Intercultures and the Auberge du Cœur would hand out 10 to 15 kits.

Lastly, we modified our databases to add a field that would allow us to monitor the progress of adults who decided to use the tools and those who opted out. We added flexible fields so we could check off whether the adults had taken or refused the SARCA kit. We did the same in the Access database at the Guichet conseil. We would gather data twice during the project: once toward the end of January 2009 from practitioners at the centres and organizations, and again in April 2009 from both participants and practitioners.

We had distributed the tools, selected the target groups, met and prepared the main players, including teachers, education consultants, guidance and training counsellors and educators, and notified our first-level reception service providers and partners in the community. We were ready to launch the action research project.

4.3 Action Research Schedule

Mar. 2008	Start of the project
Apr. 2008	Development of the project
May 2008	Creation of the subcommittee to develop the tools
June 2008	Development of tools
July 2008	
Aug. 2008	Printing and distribution of tools
Sept. 2008	Meetings with teams at the centres and organizations
Oct. 2008	Launch of the project
Nov. 2008	Adjustments
Dec. 2008	
Jan. 2009	First data collection
Feb. 2009	Analysis and meeting with other school boards
Mar. 2009	Preparation of the second data collection
Apr. 2009	Second data collection
May 2009	Draft report
June 2009	Final meeting with MELs and the other school boards
July 2009	Final report

4.3.1 The launch

By the end of September 2008, the working committee had distributed the kits and informed all the centres and partners of the content of the action research project. It had a few months to launch the project, collect and analyze the data, draw conclusions and write a report. The team was ready for action.

4.3.1.1 Centre L'Impulsion

We sent a total of 75 kits containing passports and portfolios to the Centre d'éducation des adultes L'Impulsion. The team initially sent 40 kits to the centre's guidance counsellors in September 2008, then at their request, it sent 25 more in October. In November 2008, we sent 10 more kits for the group of young people enrolled in a special work-study program, Lanceur-raccrocheur. A guidance counsellor explained the action research project and presented the tools to the targeted groups of learners, who could decide whether to use them or not. We did not want to impose the use of the kits or participation in the action research project on the learners.

Four groups of participants were targeted at the Centre L'Impulsion:

- a group of young adults aged 16 to 19 enrolled in general education
- a group of allophones aged 35 to 40 enrolled in literacy training
- a group of adults aged 25 and over enrolled in a sociovocational integration program
- a group of young people aged 16 to 20 who were returning to school and enrolled in a special work-study program

At a meeting of the working committee in October, it was already evident that young people were going to be more difficult to recruit for the action research project. Young people in general education have experienced many difficulties in school. Some chose to switch to adult education as soon as they were old enough because they had had negative academic and/or social experiences in secondary school and felt that an adult education centre would give them more independence and freedom. Others took time off school to work, discovered a passion for a trade and decided to go back to school to give themselves a better chance of success.

As planned, the guidance counsellor handed out the tools at the orientation meeting, explained how they were used and offered the adults the chance to use them. However, out of a group of 15 participants aged 16 to 19, only one was interested. It was obvious that the Centre L'Impulsion had to revise its approach to get more young adults to participate in the project. The modified strategy will be explained in detail later on.

Tools were offered to learners in the sociovocational integration, literacy and work-study groups in a meeting with a guidance counsellor during class, with the teachers present.

Centre L'Impulsion

	Program	Average age	Gender	Proportion of immigrants	Number of tools offered	Number of tools accepted	Number of tools refused
Group 1	Literacy	35-40 years	F: 17 M: 1	100%	18	18	0
Group 2	Young people in general education	18 years	F: 4 M: 8	0%	12	11	1
Group 3	Sociovocational integration	35 years	F: 15 M: 4	20%	19	19	0
Group 4	Work-study program	18 years	F: 1 M: 16	10%	17	17	0

The literacy group was made up of immigrants who spoke French reasonably well but had serious difficulties reading and writing, especially because they had had little schooling in their country of origin. Most had been unemployed since their arrival in Québec and were receiving financial support from Emploi-Québec during the course. For them, getting a diploma was a very long-term goal. Their primary aim was to be able to read and write French. When the project was presented, all 18 participants agreed to participate. The teacher would monitor their use of the portfolio and passport.

The sociovocational integration group was made up for the most part of unemployed workers or people receiving last resort financial assistance and who needed a short program to upgrade their skills and behaviours so that they could re-enter the work force as soon as possible. Some enrolled in the program because they were strongly encouraged to do so, while others were motivated, upset about losing a job that they had held for several years and concerned about finding work. The homeroom teacher was enthusiastic and positive about using the tools. She was even proactive, regularly reminding learners of the usefulness of the tools and opportunities to fill them out. All the learners in the group agreed to use the kit. The guidance counsellor met the group one month later for a follow-up: Although the learners had not yet begun to use the tools, they fully intended to begin soon. One month later, in February 2009, they had begun using the portfolio to prepare for their practicum in the workplace.

Lastly, the group of young people in the work-study program was made up of dropouts who had experienced learning difficulties and behaviour disorders in the past. They had also had difficulty keeping a job because of absenteeism, tardiness or poor performance. Learners in these groups have low self-esteem and a tendency to disregard authority, and they are slow to trust others. These learners had enrolled in order to pursue their studies part-time, while working 20 hours a week in a Laval business according to their interests. The program provides strict supervision by teachers and ongoing support. The homeroom teacher strongly encouraged them to accept the tools and even helped them fill out the portfolio in individual meetings. She followed up with learners who agreed to use the tools.

4.3.1.2 Centre Paul-Émile-Dufresne

The Centre Paul-Émile-Dufresne decided in the end to have two groups participate in the project, instead of one. The first would be made up of young men around the age of 20 enrolled in the daytime *Professional Sales* program. The second would be made up of young women around the age of 20 enrolled in the evening *Hairdressing* program. The teacher piloting the project in the *Professional Sales* program agreed to provide regular support for those using the tools. The *Hairdressing* teacher had to think about how the tools could be introduced into the program. The director invited the other teachers of these learners to use the tools. Once again, the choice of whether or not to use the tools was up to each individual learner.

At first, the learners in *Professional Sales* protested when they saw the tools. They did not see their usefulness. The teacher had to insist and almost impose the use of the portfolio and passport. Upon reflection, she was convinced that they deserved to be tested. Finally, only two learners in the group decided not to use them, but they changed their mind a few days later when they saw that the teacher referred to them regularly and that the other learners seemed to like them. They asked to have a kit.

The *Hairdressing* teacher was somewhat less convinced that the tools could be incorporated into the learners' activities. Nevertheless, she presented the project and the tools and offered to

let the group use them. Only five learners decided not to take them because they didn't see their usefulness. The others were given a kit.

Centre Paul-Émile-Dufresne

	Program	Average age	Gender	Proportion of immigrants	Number of tools offered	Number of tools accepted	Number of tools refused
Group 1	Hairdressing	20 years	F: 21 M: 0	0%	21	16	5
Group 2	Professional Sales	20 years	F: 0 M: 15	20%	15	15	0

The learners in the *Professional Sales* program were dynamic, curious and very active. Some of them had no idea what it means to make an effort. Everything in their computer-driven world is fast, easy and new. They like to win an argument. Some learners in the *Hairdressing* program were taking evening courses because the daytime groups were full, and MELS restricts access to the program.

Most of the learners in both groups chose a trade so that they could enter the work force as soon as possible, although some of them had a special interest in the programs and others had had difficulty in school. Some took a short break to work before enrolling.

4.3.1.3 The Guichet conseil

The Guichet conseil wanted to target adults who were not enrolled in school and, ideally, did not have a plan. Our objective was to distribute 50 passports to people who had been referred to the Guichet conseil so that we could accompany them throughout their experiences with other services. They would receive only the passport. The working committee believed that there would be no point giving them a portfolio if no follow-up could be made later on. At the second-level reception meeting, the counsellor would ask the targeted adults if they wanted to participate in the action research project. She would explain how to use the passport in individual meetings with each adult. If the adult agreed to participate, she would fill out the appropriate sections of the passport—i.e. the identification section and a summary of the meeting—at the first meeting at the Guichet.

The immediate reaction of Guichet conseil clients to the passport was less than enthusiastic. Most of the people we offered it to could not see its usefulness and were not interested in taking it. For the counsellor there was the matter of finding an effective way of incorporating it into her approach. We had to find a strategy for distributing more passports.

First, the counsellor placed the passports in a highly visible spot on her desk. She also targeted those adults who would be good candidates for the action research project before the appointment; for example, an adult looking for guidance services is more likely to develop a

plan. We also wrote a short letter explaining the action research project and the commitment it involved, and we gave a copy to potential participants. The letter was modified for the other groups and a copy inserted in every participant's kit (see Appendix 6).

Finally, we offered 47 passports, of which 27 were accepted. Fourteen men and 13 women between the ages of 17 and 58 participated in the project. Most of the adults who accepted the passport were looking for guidance services or academic and vocational information. Two of them came to the Guichet conseil to take a General Development Test (GDT) so they could enroll in vocational training.

	Average age	Gender	Proportion of immigrants	Number of tools offered	Number of tools accepted	Number of tools refused
Guichet conseil clients	33 years	F: 13 M: 14	56%	47	27	20

4.3.1.4 Partner organizations

Two organizations agreed to participate in the action research project. The tools and project were presented to practitioners at the organizations, and a letter explaining the project was added to the kits. The practitioners thus did not have to explain the goal of the action research project to every potential participant.

While some practitioners at the Auberge du cœur L'envolée appeared positive and enthusiastic, most of them questioned the usefulness of the tools for their young clients. They thought the young people were too disadvantaged to be interested. The director was open to the idea of participating in the action research project, but she did not want to impose the tools on her staff. We left 15 kits, which certain practitioners said they would offer to their young clients.

The director of the Carrefour d'Intercultures de Laval attended the meeting and wanted to participate in the project. The practitioners at the Carrefour were convinced that the kit would be very useful for immigrants who had been in Québec for a while, but perhaps less useful for refugees. We left them 12 kits.

4.3.2 Difficulties, opportunities and adjustments

During the action research project, the working committee had to revise certain procedures and make a few adjustments. Early on in the process, we realized that it would be more difficult to reach young people. The Centre L'Impulsion decided to revise the distribution process and to explain the procedure to teachers and practitioners in more detail. In the case of young adults enrolled in general education, the director and guidance counsellors decided that the tools would be distributed to a small group of learners already taking courses, who would be selected

by the tutors. The guidance counsellor would meet them four times at regular intervals to follow up on their use of the tools.

They met four tutors and explained the project. They asked them to select from among their learners young adults aged 16 to 19 who had a high absenteeism rate, who were doing poorly in school and who had no occupational goals. Twelve young adults were selected. Although the use of the tools was not compulsory, it was strongly recommended. Four mandatory meetings were scheduled with the young people. They took time off from their morning class to participate in the meetings, unless there was an examination scheduled. In the latter case, the counsellor met them individually. Between the meetings, the teachers were to monitor them and encourage them to use their portfolio.

At the first meeting, the learners participated half-heartedly, and the counsellor had to get them to open up by asking questions. At later meetings, however, there was more interaction between the participants, more discussion and friendly banter. They gave each other advice and congratulated each other on their talents and qualities. They asked the counsellor when the next meeting was because they were eager to get together again to discuss their plans.

While the young learners appreciated their group meetings with the counsellor, few of them opted for individualized follow-up with the teachers. They did not feel comfortable discussing their personal plan with the same people who corrected their exams. Since we had targeted young adults with difficulties, communicating with teachers was possibly neither easy nor meaningful.

Also expressing an interest in the kit were some learners enrolled in literacy, who were not immigrants and were much younger. We decided to give them the tools, but rather than including them in the group of immigrants for follow-up, we added them to the group of young people in general education who were meeting with the guidance counsellor.

For two reasons, teachers did not really follow up with immigrants in literacy. First, the targeted allophones had serious language difficulties, which meant they needed more help. Second, the literacy teachers were already very involved in the preparation and mandatory implementation of the education reform in common core basic education slated for the fall of 2009. They saw the action research project and the use of the tools as an additional burden and just too much to take on.

We had to revise our way of presenting the project at the Guichet conseil, explaining it better and emphasizing the advantages of using the tools. With each passport, we included a letter explaining the project so that participants could review the information, even after a few weeks.

Although we noticed a marked interest and even some enthusiasm among participants when they were given the tools, we had to find a way of sustaining this interest and making the adults want to use them. We observed that when the team of practitioners focused on the use of the

tools, the learners at the Centre L'Impulsion and the Centre Paul-Émile-Dufresne were more committed to their plan.

At the Centre Paul-Émile-Dufresne, we saw an opportunity to make a connection between the SARCA tools used by learners and the approach of the learners' assistance committee. The assistance committee is made up of the teaching staff, the guidance counsellor and the director, and it provides support, supervision and follow-up.

The *Professional Sales* teacher decided to devote time to discussing or working on the portfolio in class. She constantly emphasized the connection between the portfolio and learners' successes and experiences. The results are proving to be conclusive. The action research team understood that while it could not oblige all teachers and practitioners to incorporate the tools into their activities, especially since this was only a pilot project involving a handful of learners, it should provide better support to practitioners who were working with adults using the passport and portfolio.

In both centres, we were able to use the database to monitor the adults' progress on a monthly basis, determining whether they had dropped out and why. We were also able to follow up with those who had dropped out and guide them toward other services. A guidance counsellor was tasked with telephoning adults who had dropped out. What we observed was that the majority of learners participating in the action research project who had quit fully intended to return. Others had become involved in other activities.

Follow-up was almost impossible at the Guichet conseil. First, clients come and go, and there is little opportunity to establish a meaningful relationship with them. We would have needed more resources to telephone clients on a regular basis and check whether they were still using the passport. It would also have helped if our partners had been more involved, so that they, too, automatically filled out the passport or at least reminded the client to fill it out. We would have needed more time to develop an effective tool in collaboration with our partners. The passport would be more useful on a regional level, rather than merely at the school board. However, we were surprised to see an adult presenting his passport at one of our partner organizations. We also received calls from two organizations expressing an interest in using the passport after adults had presented it there. Four organizations requested a follow-up tool in electronic format. We did, however, receive a less congratulatory call from one practitioner at the Carrefour jeunesse-emploi, who thought we had plagiarized its Jeunesse en action material. We reassured him and decided this was confirmation that it would be far more beneficial to collaborate with our partners on a tool for recording adults' efforts.

Follow-up was even more difficult with our partners. First, although we presented and explained the project to practitioners and added a letter for participants to the kit, we were aware that we were losing control of the project in these organizations. Their practitioners were presenting the tools to adults. How were they doing it? What arguments were they using? To whom were they

offering the kits? Were they really explaining them? We felt that our partners were less than fully committed to the project.

We also experienced difficulties with follow-up. The adults who had received the tools from our partners were their clients, not ours, so we couldn't contact them directly. For reasons of confidentiality, we did not have access to all the information. In addition, neither participating organization had a good database, and neither had the resources to follow up with the adults. We gave them documents, but they saw that as more paperwork to fill out and too much trouble. It was therefore very difficult to collect data from the organizations.

Lastly, we also experienced difficulty communicating with the organizations. We did not always manage to reach each other, talk to each other or, above all, speak the same language. The organizations' objectives concerning the project were apparently not entirely the same as ours.

4.4 Preliminary Observations

Twice during the action research project, the working committee collected information with a view to getting feedback. The first data collection was in January 2009. We distributed follow-up sheets to the people responsible for the target groups (see Appendix 2) and asked them to fill them out, including any comments they had received from participants. In general, these comments were encouraging: The adults participating in the action research were enthusiastic and excited about the idea of using the tools. Apart from the picture on the cover of the portfolio, which they found a little simplistic, they thought the tools were attractive. They liked the coloured sleeves because they were easy to find in a bag or drawer. The challenge was to maintain this initial enthusiasm and get them to use the tools.

The second data collection took place in April 2009. We sent a questionnaire directly to participants and asked them to fill it out. In some cases, especially in the case of adults who were not enrolled at the school board, we reached them by telephone, and a secretary asked them the questions and filled out the questionnaire (see Appendix 3). This gave us more direct and detailed feedback from participants.

4.4.1 Centre L'Impulsion

The project appears to have had a special impact on participants at the Centre L'Impulsion. Of the 66 adults who were given kits, 18 dropped out of their program (or 27%). These 18, however, did not give up on their plan. The young adult who decided not to use the tools was forced to interrupt his schooling as he was suspended. He was apparently incapable of conforming to the centre's code of conduct.

One adult in the literacy group decided to pursue her education at another centre, another had to drop out because of illness, and two had to suspend their training because the local employment centre was cutting off their financial assistance.

Only one adult in the sociovocational integration group had to abandon his project, and this, because of illness. There were more departures among young people under the age of 20: eight of 17 learners in the work-study program and five of 11 in general education. However, not all of them abandoned their plan. Some decided to work full-time, while one wanted to pursue his education at another centre. Of the 13 young people who abandoned their learning plan, however, only two had defined very specific objectives: to obtain the prerequisites they needed to enroll in vocational training.

Program	Average age	Gender	Proportion of immigrants	Number of tools offered	Number of tools refused	Number of departures	Reasons for departure
Literacy	35-40 years	F: 17 M: 1	100%	18	0	F: 4	• Transfer to another centre (1) • End of relationship with local employment centre (2) • Illness (1)
Sociovocational integration	35 years	F: 15 M: 4	20%	19	0	M: 1	• Illness (1)
Work-study balance program	18 years	F: 1 M: 16	10%	17	0	M: 8	• Temporary suspension (1) • Change of field (1) • Personal and family reasons (2) • Full-time work (2) • Lack of motivation (1) • Too many absences (1)
General education	18 years	F: 4 M: 8	0%	12	1	F: 3 M: 2	• Transfer to another centre (1) • Too many absences (2) • Lack of motivation (2) • Temporary suspension (1)

Young people under the age of 20 were more reticent to participate in the action research project. They had no specific goal when they began to implement their learning plan. In the end, almost 45% of the those who agreed to use the tools had to interrupt their learning plan. The same is true for the learners who did not agree to use the tools. Of these, none resumed their learning plan, not even those who had been temporarily suspended. Remember that these

learners had initially been chosen to participate in the project because of their high rate of absenteeism and their poor academic record: They were already at risk of dropping out or being suspended. It would be interesting to see whether some of them take further action in the coming months.

The adults who participated in the project greatly appreciated the counsellor's follow-up. The meetings they attended during the year helped them reflect and use their portfolio. While they found the portfolio very useful, they did not really understand the purpose of the passport and did not use it much. In particular, they mentioned that the portfolio was like a personal diary, fun to fill out and helpful for learning more about themselves. The process gave them the opportunity to think about themselves and different areas of their life. Many indicated that they would have liked to have a similar tool when they were in the youth sector.

As we mentioned earlier, only the group of immigrants in literacy received less follow-up in terms of the tools. The teacher mentioned to the guidance counsellor, however, that she would like to try again next year, but with a few targeted students. It must be pointed out that all students at the Centre L'Impulsion, regardless of whether they are participating in the SARCA action research project, can meet guidance counsellors, the psychoeducator or their tutors as needed.

4.4.2 Centre de formation Paul-Émile-Dufresne

The impact of the project was far more striking at the Centre de formation professionnelle Paul-Émile-Dufresne. No one in the *Professional Sales* group dropped out, and all of them have now completed their practicum and are prepared to enter the work force. Three students dropped out of the *Hairdressing* program—two because of relapses after detoxification treatment and the other because she was pregnant.

The *Professional Sales* students liked the tools better than the *Hairdressing* students, in large part because of the teachers' involvement and the time they were given to use the tools. The *Hairdressing* students admitted that the lack of time and support was discouraging. Most of them would have liked to consult and fill out the portfolio, and many criticized the fact that there was no follow-up. Some mentioned that they would have liked to have access to a resource person for guidance and information about available financial or psychological assistance. They did not believe the passport could provide more motivation to stay in school, but they did appear convinced that the portfolio could help them manage and organize their efforts and would recommend it to other learners.

Program	Average age	Gender	Proportion of immigrants	Number of tools offered	Number of tools refused	Number of departures	Reason for departure
Hairdressing	20 years	F: 21 M: 0	0%	21	5	F: 3	• Pregnancy (1) • Personal problems (2)
Professional Sales	20 years	F: 0 M: 15	20%	15	0	0	

Comments from the *Professional Sales* students were very positive. They appreciated being able to write down their dreams clearly and precisely because this encouraged them to take steps to achieve their goals. The tools, especially the portfolio, gave them the opportunity to take a step back and assess their situation. They stated that using the portfolio allowed them to aim higher and gave them more confidence in their abilities. All of them appreciated being given time in class with the teacher to think things over and use the tool. Some would have liked to be given the time to use the portfolio at the beginning of each week. They did not use the passport. While they understood its purpose, they preferred keeping the business cards and leaflets from the organizations they consulted in their kit.

The teacher who supervised the project noticed that her students were very enthusiastic about it. She believes that the process was very useful, that it helped create a group spirit and a trusting relationship between her and the learners, and that it enabled the young adults to improve their self-esteem. She would like to repeat the experience with future groups, though with more planning and supervision.

4.4.3 The Guichet conseil

Of the 27 participants who received the SARCA passport, nine could not be reached at the end of the project: Four had a new telephone number, and five did not return our calls despite our leaving several messages. Of the 18 participants questioned, two filled out the passport and presented it at another organization, two filled it out but haven't had a chance to use it yet, although they would like to, six vaguely remembered having received the passport but had never used it, seven did not remember the passport at all, and one admitted having lost it a few days after his visit to the Guichet conseil.

Of the 18 participants, seven embarked on a process after their consultation at the Guichet conseil and are currently implementing their personal plan, six took steps but had to interrupt the process to return to work, one enrolled in a program but had to drop out because of severe learning difficulties and is now considering re-entering the work force, and four put their plan on hold temporarily.

It is clear that the guidance counsellor at the Guichet conseil was not as committed to the project as those in the other two centres. Handing out a tool and explaining it is one thing. In this

action research project, more follow-up was required, and perhaps a new approach. Maybe there was a shortage of time and resources. We need to study the possibility of having group follow-up meetings on the portfolio and passport and to have first-level reception service providers participate more actively in the process.

4.4.4 Partner organizations

It was very difficult to follow up with adults not enrolled in the school board. However, we did manage to gather participants' comments through the practitioners who were giving them guidance.

The young people at the Auberge du cœur L'Envolée either did not want to use the tools at all or were very unenthusiastic about them. We believe that this lack of interest is largely due to the fact that the practitioners didn't really incorporate the tools into their practices. In all, three kits were handed out, but the practitioners lost contact with the young people in question, and it is impossible to know whether they are still actively implementing their plan or whether they ever used the tools.

All 12 kits at the Carrefour d'Intercultures de Laval were handed out. Young immigrants were inclined to use them, while the older ones were more reticent. According to practitioners at the Carrefour, older immigrants have more difficulty speaking French, which would explain their hesitation to use the tools: They don't feel comfortable filling out forms in French and have a hard time understanding the meaning of all the words. Young immigrants, on the other hand, often have access to more resources—teachers, friends, colleagues—and are less hesitant about writing texts, even if their French isn't perfect.

While the adult immigrants didn't necessarily understand the purpose of the passport, they were not afraid to present it when they went to meet practitioners. Like many other adults, however, they had a tendency to forget or lose it.

4.4.5 Unexpected results

Some participants made interesting suggestions. While we were counting on their enthusiasm, we did not expect them to provide so many useful ideas and comments. They suggested setting up a forum where they could discuss their learning plan and creating a link to the portfolio on Facebook, which could make young people more interested in using it and filling it out. However, they insisted on the importance of confidentiality and would not want others, even their friends, to be able to consult their portfolio. One suggested adding a page to the end of the portfolio listing the services and resources in the region and examples of aptitudes, competencies, qualities and even encouraging words to help participants describe themselves. Apparently, personal reflection would be easier with the help of examples.

Several participants suggested including the passport as a tab in the portfolio so that there would be only one tool. Many said that a similar tool would have been very useful and greatly appreciated in secondary school. We presented the kit to a teacher and guidance counsellors in individualized paths for learning in the youth sector (training for semiskilled trades, prework training and vocational training), and they asked us if they could study the possibility of using the tools or developing their own along the same lines.

The conclusions of the action research project will be presented to all adult education and vocational training centre directors. We can't force directors to use the tools, and we don't want to. However, we believe that when they see the results, other centres will show an interest in incorporating the tools into their reception and guidance processes. Obviously, there will have to be integrated, planned and regular follow-up.

Our partner organizations are following the action research project with interest. Three of them have expressed a desire to collaborate on a regional tool in order to ensure continuity. The idea of the passport appears to be more interesting to practitioners than to the adults for whom it is intended.

Lastly, while we realize that using a portfolio is not unheard of in our school board, the action research project allowed us to draw conclusions that we hope will help other SARCA departments interested in using similar tools.

4.5 Summary Evaluation

While the action research project required considerable work from the SARCA team in a very short time, the team members are satisfied and happy to have participated. They have a positive outlook on the possibility of incorporating the tools in their reception and guidance processes. We understand, however, that more needs to be done in terms of the supervision and guidance of adults implementing their plan, not only by members of the SARCA team but by all personnel. We also need to set aside periods of reflection so that the adults can fill out their portfolio. If the portfolio is to play a key role in developing their plan, it must be used under the supervision and with the support of a teaching team, tutor, mentor or others. We are now planning year two of the project.

Whether the adults received just the passport at the Guichet conseil or the whole kit at a centre, they did not write much in the passport. It appears that a tool to follow up on the adults' efforts would be more useful for practitioners. We do believe, however, that it would be useful to include a roadmap in the portfolio so that adults who so desire can record their efforts. We are now convinced that we need to collaborate with our regional partners on the development of a logbook or passport that our partner organizations would have to use. This tool would guarantee the confidentiality of adults' personal information and ensure the continuity of services, and it could be used to record the steps taken as well as their choices and path changes. We need to

collaborate with partners on the tool's design, then establish a communication plan to inform all practitioners involved as well as the target population.

We cannot be certain that adults who decide to use these tools are more likely to persevere. Similarly, we cannot say for sure that those who decide not to use them are more likely to give up. However, the experience of participants and practitioners and the comments we have received confirm that the use of tools in guidance services allows adults to learn more about themselves, to more clearly define their plan, their expectations and their goals, and to develop more self-esteem. In these respects, the tools made a difference.

The action research project illustrated how important graphic design is for young adults. It is often more important than content. A number of young adults refused to participate in the project or were unenthusiastic about using the portfolio simply because they found the cover page childish. We will need to take this into account when we develop a new version and will probably have to entrust the design to communications specialists so that the tools are attractive to both young and older adults.

We believe that students should learn how to make plans, define their dreams on paper and reflect on possible paths long before they consider enrolling in adult education or vocational training. In the guidance-oriented approach, the Commission scolaire de Laval might incorporate the use of a portfolio and logbook (or passport) into its secondary-level programs.

Lastly, since the commitment and participation of all practitioners are important in such a project, we know that in the future we will have to provide teachers and staff at our partner organizations with more information and support so that they become more comfortable with the tools and more conscious of the role they play in the process.

4.6 Recommendations

The comments from participants and practitioners at the centres and at the Guichet conseil as well as those at our partner organizations will be extremely useful in planning the next stage of the project. We must continue following up with the adults who participated in the action research project this year. We suggest setting up a mechanism allowing the Relance office to contact adults who abandoned their learning plan in order to encourage them to try again or to provide guidance with a new plan.

We must determine how we will disseminate the results of the action research project to the other directors at the school board. It would be good if the tools were used properly in other vocational training centres and the school board's adult education centres as well as in individualized paths for learning in the youth sector.

The following recommendations concern the tools in particular:

- Incorporate the passport into the portfolio under a special tab.
- Review the graphic design with communications specialists since the look is very important, especially for younger adults.
- Add a glossary and examples to make it easier to use the portfolio, especially for immigrants.
- Add the contact information of useful resources at the end of the portfolio.
- Create an electronic version of the tools, but give users the choice of having a paper copy.
- Make sure that the tools are used within a guidance process and that the adults are given time to reflect and fill out their portfolio.
- Plan information and training sessions for teachers and practitioners in the centres and organizations that use the tools.
- Create a passport-like follow-up and referral tool for practitioners, in collaboration with other Laval organizations.

The jury is still out on the creation of an electronic version of the tools. Regardless of their age, while some participants much prefer the electronic format, others say they would not use the tools if they were not on paper. Some participants said they needed to have a hard copy in their hands. Others are not comfortable enough using computers. On the other hand, some participants reproached us for not going green with the project and strongly advised us to develop an electronic version to save paper. Still others see possibilities and advantages in using an electronic version. Therefore, we conclude that in the short and medium terms, we cannot replace the paper version with an electronic version. We will have to offer participants the choice. In the case of the electronic version, we will have to plan a short introduction to the interface so that participants are comfortable with the tabs and aware of all the possibilities. The tool should be accessible on the Internet and allow participants to restrict access using a password. In the longer term, we can assess whether we can set aside the paper version and go entirely with the electronic version.

Conclusion

While not all of our initial hypotheses were confirmed, we are satisfied with the results of the action research project. We know that our clients do not travel in a straight line to achieve their goals. They face many forks in the road, transitions and changes. They live in a society, in which speed of execution and access to information are more important than time for thinking and the ability to analyze, where mobility and adaptability to change are key qualities. We must offer them guidance in the implementation of their plans and provide them with the tools they need to take charge of the process.

We are convinced that the SARCA tools we developed helped adults more clearly define their plan and benefit more from their learning, achievements and strengths in their process. In this spirit, we are determined to continue to perfect our project and to share the results of our experiences with other school boards and organizations.

Appendix 1: Summary of Guidance-Oriented Reception

GUIDANCE-ORIENTED RECEPTION

Summary

Family name	XXXXXXXXXX	First name	XXXXXXXXXX
Date of birth	August 4, 1986		
Last school attended	Schooling		
Leblanc	In special education since Elementary 6, put in Life Skills Education in last year of secondary school (2002-2003)		
Reason given by the learner for his or her enrollment in adult education			
I need my Sec. IV to take a course in my chosen trade.			
Occupational goals			
Hairdresser, school secretary, sexologist			

Holland code according to Tétreau-Trahan		
Social	Artistic	Investigative

Identity structure according to the Groupements test
Almost totally non-reflective. Possible anxiety, impulsiveness or passivity. Needs help to make connections. Several signs of immaturity. "Tells herself stories" like a young child. Needs reassurance.

Note from Maxime Labelle, guidance counsellor
Considering the subject's education path so far, the identity structure and my observations, I think this young girl has severe learning difficulties. She has trouble giving meaning to her experience and making connections. Unrealistic occupational goals. (In my opinion, even being a hairdresser might be unrealistic.) Send her back as soon as you confirm her difficulties. I will then request a cognitive evaluation.

Appendix 2: Follow-up Sheet for the First Information Collection

Action Research Project on How Adults Approach Their Plan

SARCA Passport and Portfolio

Follow-up of Participants

First name	Number	Date portfolio given	Date of first follow-up	Date of second follow-up	Date of third follow-up	Date adult dropped out	Reason for dropping out	Comments
	CAN1							
	CAN2							
	CAN3							
	CAN4							
	CAN5							
	CAN6							
	CAN7							

Comments and observations:

Appendix 3: Guichet Conseil Questionnaire for the Second Information Collection



SARCA

Full name: _____

Telephone: _____

Follow-up Questionnaire for the Action Research Project at the Guichet Conseil

1. Did you take steps to implement your personal plan?

2. Did you use the SARCA passport that you were given during your visit to the Guichet conseil?

3. If not, why?

4. If so, what did you like the most?

5. Was the passport useful in your implementation of your plan? If so, how?

6. Did you show your passport at other organizations? If so, where? If not, why not?

7. Could we add something that might encourage you to use the SARCA passport?

8. In your opinion, should something be removed from the SARCA passport?

9. Would you change the format (e.g. size, colours, content)?

10. If there had been an electronic version available on the Internet, would you have used it?

NOTES: _____

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for the Second Information Collection

Follow-up Questionnaire for the Action Research Project (Passport and Portfolio)



SARCA

Your age: _____

Centre: _____

Program: _____

1. Did you appreciate the tools in the SARCA kit you were given? Why? _____

2. The kit contains two tools: the passport and the portfolio. Which one was more useful, and why? _____

3. If you did not use either of the tools, or if you only used one, please indicate why. _____

4. If you used them, what did you like the most? _____

5. Was the passport useful in implementing your learning or career plan? How? _____

6. Did you present the passport to others for follow-up? If so, to whom? If not, why not? ____

7. What could we have added or done to encourage you to use the SARCA tools more? ____

8. In your opinion, should something be removed from the SARCA passport or portfolio? If so, what? _____

9. Would you change the format (e.g. size, colours, content)? _____

10. Would you recommend these tools to other learners? Why or why not?

If an electronic version had been available on the Internet, would you have used it?

Other comments: _____

Appendix 5: Letter Included in the Kits for Participants of Other Organizations



SARCA Passport and Portfolio

This year, the adult education and vocational training department at the Commission scolaire de Laval, in collaboration with its partners, is participating in an action research project on adults and SARCA conducted by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. We would like to test the hypothesis that if adults have a personal plan and follow the steps of the process, they are more likely to persevere until they achieve their goals.

To foster perseverance in their process and to help adults define their personal plan, we have developed two tools: the SARCA Passport and the SARCA Portfolio.

If you agree to participate in the action research project, we will give you a kit containing the passport and portfolio to help you in making decisions or taking action.

The SARCA Passport enables you to keep a record of your efforts:

- It allows the different practitioners you meet to see what you have done so far, and it allows you to record any relevant information that will help you in your course of action.
- It allows you to keep track of all the steps you have taken, to remember what was said at each meeting and to keep track of the contact information of the organizations and people who helped you implement your plan.

The SARCA Portfolio allows you to take stock of your competencies, resources, needs and dreams. It will help you write a résumé, clarify your priorities and determine the steps to take to implement your plan.

If you agree to participate in the project, for the next few months you will have access to the passport and portfolio. We will contact you in or around April 2009 to hear your comments and appreciation of the tools.

Thank you for participating in our research project.

SARCA committee of the Commission scolaire de Laval

Appendix 6: Letter Included With the Passport for Participants From the Guichet Conseil



SARCA Passport

This year, the adult education and vocational training department at the Commission scolaire de Laval, in collaboration with its partners, is participating in an action research project on adults and SARCA conducted by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport. We would like to test the hypothesis that if adults have a personal plan and follow the steps of the process, they are more likely to persevere until they achieve their goals.

To foster perseverance in their process and to help adults define their personal plan, we have developed the SARCA Passport.

If you agree to participate in the action research project, we will give you the passport to help you in making decisions or taking action.

The SARCA Passport enables you to keep a record of your efforts:

- It allows the different practitioners you meet to see what you have done so far, and it allows you to record any relevant information that will help you in your course of action.
- It allows you to keep track of all the steps you have taken, to remember what was said at each meeting and to keep track of the contact information of the organizations and people who helped you implement your plan.

You can fill out the different sections yourself or ask the practitioners with whom you meet to help.

If you agree to participate in the project, we will contact you in or around April 2009 to hear your comments and appreciation of the SARCA Passport.

Thank you for participating in our research project.

SARCA committee of the Commission scolaire de Laval

Assessment of non-formal and informal learning

☐ Work experience	☐ Community and volunteer experience
☐ Family and personal situation	☐ Social and cultural life
☐ Volunteer work	☐ Community work

Comments:

On-the-job training: ☐ basic ☐ specific

Non-formal education:

Accomplissement

Volonte

But But But But But But But But

A vibrant collage of motivational words in various colors and shapes. The words include: 'Confidence' (green, dashed border), 'Will' (green, dashed border), 'TRAINING' (purple, dashed border), 'Determination' (blue, dashed border), 'Learning' (red, dashed border), 'Success' (blue, dashed border), 'Knowledge' (purple, dashed border), 'Plan' (black, dashed border), 'Achievement' (black, solid border), 'Future' (red, solid border with stars), 'Perseverance' (blue, dashed border), and 'CHOICES' (blue, solid border). There is also a central graphic with the word 'Goal' repeated six times around a hexagon.

Reception, referral, counselling and support services

Brief overview of competencies acquired (e.g. Communicates orally in a second language, Uses a word processor, Interacts socially, Perseveres):

Brief overview of competencies to be developed (e.g. Writes a variety of texts, Is familiar with the job market, Deals with situations using mathematics):

Other useful information:

Education and Training

Program: _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

Notes: _____

Program: _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

Notes: _____

Program: _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

Notes: _____

Program: _____

Date: _____ Location: _____

Notes: _____

**Dépassement
de sol**

DÉCOUVERTES

Études

Follow-up

Resource referral: _____

Telephone: _____ Date of appointment: _____

Service recommended: _____

Summary _____

Goal achieved: _____

Notes: _____

Resource referral: _____

Telephone: _____ Date of appointment: _____

Service recommended: _____

Summary _____

Goal achieved: _____

Notes: _____

Détermination

Réussite

Projet

Identification

PLACE
PHOTO
HERE

Last name: _____
First name: _____
Date of birth: _____
Permanent code: _____
Mother tongue: _____
Languages spoken: _____
Telephone: _____

Service point visited: _____

Name of practitioner: _____

Telephone: _____

Date of meeting: _____

Client's signature: _____



AIMS

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ Establish an occupational goal | ☐ Return to school |
| ☐ Validate an occupational goal | ☐ Enter the work force |
| ☐ Evaluate acquired competencies | ☐ New academic and career path |

Other: _____

SERVICES RECEIVED

Service: _____

Year: _____ Organization: _____

Service: _____

Year: _____ Organization: _____

Service: _____

Year: _____ Organization: _____

Service: _____

Year: _____ Organization: _____

Service: _____

Year: _____ Organization: _____

Recognized schooling

Diploma: ☐ Secondary ☐ Vocational training

Program: _____

Language of instruction: _____ Level: _____

Second language: _____ Level: _____

Mathematics: _____ Level: _____

PRIOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- ☐ Vocational training (other) ☐ Postsecondary education

Specify: _____

FORMATION

Connaissances

Confiance

RECONNAISSANCE DES ACQUIS

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ AESS | ☐ GDT |
| ☐ GED-TS | ☐ Francization |

Level: _____

Number of competencies recognized in a program leading to a DVS: _____

Comparative evaluation of studies undergone outside Québec: _____

Other information about the client's education path: _____

- ☐ No schooling recognized in Québec ☐ To be determined

Notes: _____

Appendix 8: SARCA Portfolio

	Plans				
Employment					
	Learning Activities				
Competencies					
	Background				
<table border="1"> <tr> <td data-bbox="261 1052 992 1146"> Resources </td> <td data-bbox="992 1052 1300 1808">     </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" data-bbox="261 1146 1162 1808"> Who can help me? Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____ Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____ Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____ </td> </tr> </table>		Resources	   	Who can help me? Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____ Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____ Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____	
Resources	   				
Who can help me? Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____ Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____ Organization: _____ Resource person: _____ Contact information: _____					

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Chapter 5



Helping Adults in Difficult Life Situations Work on a Plan

Western Québec School Board

Project initiators

Ruth Ahern, Director, Educational Services
Nicole Gravelle, Consultant
Hélène Leboëuf, Consultant
Debra Madill, Teacher and person in charge of SARCA (Val d'Or)
Beth Mulville, Teacher and person in charge of SARCA (Maniwaki)
Lenny Prost, Teacher and person in charge of SARCA (Pontiac)
Liora Richler, Guidance Counsellor

Guidance and Support

Élisabeth Mainka and Jean-Pierre Boutinet

5.1 Action Research Project at the Western Québec School Board

5.1.1 Context of the project

The Western Québec School Board (WQSB) covers a vast territory measuring 90 000 km² and encompassing two administrative regions. Its five centres offer training and other services in English to a diverse population of adults in urban and rural communities over a wide range of territory. Given the size of the territory, the WQSB has adopted the orientations of the 2002 *Government Policy on Adult Education and General Education and Training*. The orientations of the policy, which are supported by the MELS action plan, are to provide basic education for all adults, to maintain and continually upgrade adults' competencies, to recognize acquired competencies and to remove obstacles to access and retention. The school board has relied on these orientations to strengthen already effective adult education and vocational training practices and improve those that were less effective. We needed to work on guidance services and a proactive approach, and the implementation of reception, referral, counselling and support services (SARCA) provided an opportunity. The WQSB offers SARCA services in two very distinct ways: centralized services in the urban core of its territory and decentralized services with support at its centres in rural areas (Appendix 1). Reaching adults is always a challenge regardless of where they live. However, it is even more difficult in rural areas because the population is spread out over greater distances.

The WQSB's action research project encompasses several projects that share the same approach. Implemented at MELS' invitation and based on a prior action research project, *Towards a Referral Project in Rural Communities* (2009), this centralized project gave the WQSB the opportunity to improve the SARCA services offered in its territory and in particular to adopt a proactive approach and form partnerships in the community. More specifically, we needed to study and apply new methods of making contact with hard-to-reach adults and to create and consolidate proactive community partnerships with that aim in mind.

Towards a Referral Project in Rural Communities taught staff at the WQSB and its centres a lot about our situation. Begun several years ago, the action research project clearly showed that

the SARCA team at the WQSB should become actively involved in a proactive community approach and create partnerships if it wanted to successfully serve the adult population. Since the WQSB is the only English school board in administrative regions 07 and 08, the rural centres often complained of feeling marginalized, isolated and forgotten—in a word, “invisible” outside the anglophone community. *Towards a Referral Project in Rural Communities* resulted in the creation of a list of partners in each rural area and allowed the school board to forge ties, albeit at times fragile ones. More importantly, it led to a change in culture at the centres, which acknowledged that they needed to be more proactive in their manner of approaching potential partners. We hoped that the project would bring about more “openness to the outside.” Unfortunately, we soon realized that our ability to fully commit to this new community vision was limited by the available human resources, our budgets and the reality of small rural centres. Many members of the SARCA staff have other tasks in the centres, such as teaching, administrative support or support for adults with a learning plan. In some cases, linguistic difficulties complicate the situation, both for staff members and clients. Expanding SARCA services to the desired level was slow and frustrating. We were at the point where we needed a catalyst, and that is the role this action research project played.

5.1.2 Our project

The objective of the WQSB's action research project was to help make contact with and mobilize hard-to-reach adults by carrying out a constructive project with a network of partners in the community. By reaching out to potential partners in the community and encouraging them to come to us, we thought we could provide better services for our adult clientele. At any given time, these partners can affect adults in ways that we as a school board cannot. We wanted to extend our reach and make our services more accessible to the population in our territory.

5.1.3 Organization and target groups

Our action research project was divided into four smaller projects, each one a reflection of its own community but sharing the same approach. For this reason, the target groups differ depending on the project. They are described in the individual project reports later in this chapter. Generally speaking, they involved adults not currently benefitting from the school board's services.

5.1.4 Coordinating team

The structure of the WQSB's project is based on a central coordinating team made up of Ruth Ahern, director of educational services at the school board, H  l  ne Leb  uef, the consultant in charge of providing support for SARCA at our rural centres, and Nicole Gravelle, the consultant in charge of the recognition of acquired competencies (RAC) and SARCA. In addition to their central role, the three members of the coordinating team played a role in the four individual projects (Appendix 2):

1. Ensuring that the centres' projects were consistent with the spirit and aim of the action research project and the SARCA philosophy
2. Developing a common approach and providing support for each project team
3. Facilitating and supporting the successful implementation of the centres' projects

1. *Ensuring that the centres' projects were consistent with the spirit and aim of the action research project and the SARCA philosophy*

This was the coordinating team's basic function. Ensuring that the essence of the action research project was transmitted to each of the individual projects was key to guaranteeing the ongoing expansion of SARCA in Western Québec as well as the success of the action research project. The team insisted on a few key elements: the autonomy of adults in the creation and implementation of a plan, the importance of partnering with community organizations in a proactive approach and the need to get out of the centres to mobilize adults in informal settings where it is recognized that learning is a lifelong process and can be both formal and non-formal.

2. *Developing a common approach and providing support for each project team*

The coordinating team developed a common approach that provided guidelines for the implementation of the action research project in each centre. Although the evolution of the individual projects was based on the needs identified or expressed in the community, the common approach allowed us to determine the most effective method of reaching and mobilizing potential partners and our target clientele. Discussions and reflections on the approach and its effectiveness were an integral part of the meetings of the broader WQSB team (the coordinating team and individual project teams).

3. *Facilitating and supporting the successful implementation of the centres' projects*

The third role of the coordinating team was to facilitate and support the successful implementation of the centres' projects, which it did by actively contributing to and participating in each individual project. Its members provided feedback and advice on what approach to take. In addition, each one was a member of one of the four project teams and, as such, provided guidance and support for the successful implementation of the project while participating actively in it.

The broader school board team met several times to facilitate the successful implementation of the action research project. Between April 2008 and June 2009, each team met the two MELS representatives assigned to help us with our project. We discussed how we could provide guidance and support to adults working on plans. The teams also discussed the progress of the action research project. To this end, the WQSB's teams met four times between August 2008 and August 2009 to encourage each other and provide assistance.

5.1.5 The individual projects

The concept of the three-member team was used in every one of the individual projects. Each project was led by a team of three principal members, with the support of other collaborators as needed.

The project teams were led by the person in charge of SARCA at the centre. They met regularly during the different phases of the action research project. They also met occasionally with the central coordinating team. These meetings were essentially intended to facilitate the sharing of information and ensure constant support and supervision during the project.

5.1.6 A common approach

Each of the projects was a reflection of the individual centre, but they all adopted the common structure and approach developed by the coordinating and project teams. The approach involved the following steps:

- Find partners in the community.
- Meet potential partners.
- Use a standardized questionnaire to guide preliminary discussions with partners in order to identify possible target groups and their needs and the roles partners could play in our efforts to reach these groups (Appendix 3).

Once the target groups were defined for each project, the approach was modified to fit the specific characteristics of the centre and the targeted adults.

A description of the four projects appears on the following pages. It is a valuable account of the action research project as we experienced it as well as of the learning and knowledge it afforded us.

5.2 Low Project

Team: Ruth Ahern (Director, Educational Services, WQSB), Lynn Visentin (Coordinator of the Community Learning Centre) and Scott Cavers (Principal of St. Michael's High School).

5.2.1 Background

The circumstances under which the action research project was implemented in Low differ from those of the other three WQSB projects. In this case, the idea of creating a partnership to meet the needs of the local population came directly from the community. Having identified a need, the community came knocking on the door of the school board's adult education and vocational

training department. Represented by coordinator Lynn Visentin, the Community Learning Centre (CLC) approached the school board in June 2008 with a view to obtaining services for the Low region. CLC is an initiative of the MELS department known today as the Secteur des services à la communauté anglophone, des affaires autochtones et du Plan Nord. A number of CLCs were created in socially and economically disadvantaged areas served by English school boards in order to foster ties between schools and the community.

Located in the building occupied by St. Michael's High School, the Low Community Learning Centre has several community partners on its board of directors, including the coordinator of the CLC, the principal of St. Michael's and representatives of the CLSC, Québec en Forme, the Low municipal council, the Royal Canadian Legion, the Low Senior Citizens Club and local businesses.

Low, which is located 45 minutes north of Gatineau, is one of the 18 municipalities that make up the regional county municipality of La Vallée-de-la-Gatineau. Its population is only 955, but the school and the town serve a larger population from neighbouring areas. Approximately 48% of Low's population (or 465 people) is anglophone. The municipality, which is largely made up of farmland, has few businesses, with the exception of a wood processing plant, a few stores and a CLSC. It does not presently have adult education and vocational training services.

5.2.2 Target group

Before the action research project, the community of Low, in collaboration with the coordinator of the CLC, had identified young adults without qualifications as a group requiring assistance. These young adults without a secondary school or vocational training diploma became the target group for the action research project.

Specifically, the group comprises young adults aged 16 to 24 who attended secondary school but failed to complete Secondary IV or V. These young people often have no confidence in their ability to get ahead in life. Generally speaking, they did poorly in school, and they have little confidence in the education system. They also lack perseverance and motivation, and are either unemployed or working at precarious seasonal and other low-paying jobs.

5.2.3 Objectives

The aim of the action research project was to get together a group of hard-to-reach young adults aged 16 to 24 who were in a precarious position because they lacked a secondary school diploma. We wanted to get them involved in a group plan that would meet their needs. The action research project would help them develop and implement their group plan and, at the same time, create permanent ties with the community.

5.2.4 Main steps of the process

During the year, we met several times with our partners to provide follow-up. Below is an overview of the main steps in the action research project.

1. Meeting with the board of directors of the CLC – June 2008

We met at the initiative of the CLC's coordinator and discussed the community's desire to have access to adult education and vocational training services.

2. Meeting with the coordinator of the CLC – August 2008

The objective of this meeting was to see how the action research project could help identify and satisfy the community's needs.

3. Second meeting with the board of directors of the CLC – October 2008

The objectives of this meeting were to identify the target group and establish an action plan for reaching the adults in question. We decided to target young adults without qualifications and prepared a draft action plan.

4. Meeting with the coordinator of the CLC – January 2009

The objective of this meeting was to find young people to act as ambassadors to help reach the targeted adults. Final touches were made to the action plan.

5. Meeting with potential ambassadors – March 2009

The CLC invited seven young people to the meeting, and five attended. The objective of the meeting was to inform them about the action research project and their potential role in it. We also held discussions with the young ambassadors for the following purposes:

- to verify their experience with respect to obtaining a secondary school diploma.
- to learn their point of view on how to reach the target group.
- to plan information activities.

6. Meeting with the coordinator of the CLC – May 2009

The objectives of this meeting were the following:

- to confirm the choice of young ambassadors
- to establish a schedule and action plan for activities to reach the target group
- To set the date or dates for the information activity

5.2.5 What we learned

The Low project was more than simply an opportunity to explore ways of making contact with hard-to-reach adults in precarious situations. We and our new partners also learned a lot, and the experience allowed us to forge and consolidate ties with the community.

The project started when the community contacted the school board to discuss the absence of services for adults. After our first meeting, we realized that the challenge was not necessarily the lack of services as such, but rather the difficulty we were having reaching young adults without a diploma. Faced with this reality, we realized that we really needed to join forces to meet the challenge, which would in the end benefit everyone. The experience showed us the advantages of sitting down together to identify the challenges associated with the target group. One of these advantages was the chance to share our perceptions and develop a more accurate view of the situation, making sure we were in agreement as to the direction we should take to support the community. We were establishing a collaborative effort. As we continued meeting, we observed a change in our language: There started to be more “us” than “them.” We were taking the first steps in establishing a spirit of cooperation with a view to achieving a joint goal. We learned that having the same understanding of the problem was key to ensuring a successful partnership.

Although the target group had been defined at the outset, one of the greatest difficulties was figuring out how to reach the adults in question. Even though members of the community were certain that young people aged 16 to 24 without a diploma need services, they had difficulty reaching these young people and especially getting them to become involved in a group plan. Initially believing that it would be sufficient to advertise a class, they soon realized the limitations and ineffectiveness of their approach. By participating in the action research project, our partners finally realized that simply requesting services from the school board and offering them to the community was not always enough and that it was necessary to collaborate on a way of drawing these young people in. This observation changed the point of view of committed citizens of Low and transformed the supplier-client relationship between the school board and the community into a full-fledged partnership.

One of the most interesting aspects of the project was the appointment of young ambassadors and our meetings with them. Selected by the coordinator of the CLC, these young people aged 18 to 25 were recognized as active and involved in the community. They had all finished secondary school, and some were pursuing their education at the postsecondary level. Many of them had taken a roundabout way to where they were now, abandoning their postsecondary studies, then returning after some time in the work force. One of them had opened his own business after graduating from secondary school. All felt an attachment to their respective schools and communities. Five of them agreed to participate in the project. During our interviews with them, it became clear that they also found it difficult to figure out how to get their peers to consider going back to school. They did not have a magic bullet or even an idea of a “trigger” to motivate young adults to do something about their life by returning to school. They all

found the task difficult and discouraging. Many of them told us of conversations they had had with friends who were generally not interested in returning to school and who had merely shrugged and said, “What’s the point?” All of the young ambassadors believed that we needed to launch a general information campaign to make young people aware that they were being offered a service (counselling and courses) in their own area and at a time that fit their lifestyle (not between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.) They suggested launching the campaign in the summer or fall at the same time as a popular community celebration. We are now in the first stages of planning, and we will finish by the end of September or the beginning of October 2009.

Throughout the project, the WQSB’s director of educational services, the coordinator of the CLC and the principal of St. Michael’s High School observed the dynamic in the community and studied the double role that SARCA and the CLC could play in this and future projects. Although we have not yet succeeding in reaching or mobilizing the young adults in question, we have solidified our partnership. The CLC agreed to become an active partner in promoting SARCA in the community. Also, we are seriously looking at the possibility of providing services one day a week in the community. This experience will undoubtedly lead to more joint projects.

5.3 Maniwaki Project

Team: Beth Mulville (SARCA representative in Maniwaki), Liora Richler (guidance counsellor) and Nicole Gravelle (consultant).

5.3.1 Background

The WQSB has one adult education centre in Maniwaki that offers courses in both general education and vocational training. The centre has a SARCA service point for the region’s anglophone population. Maniwaki is the largest community in northern Outaouais and has a population of approximately 8000, not counting the more than 20 000 people in the regional county municipality (MRC) of La Vallée-de-la-Gatineau. There are two First Nations communities very close to Maniwaki, the Anishinabeg Kitigan Zibi (Algonquins) and Mitchikanibikok Inik (Algonquins of Lac Barrière). These communities constitute approximately 80% of Maniwaki’s English-speaking population.

For many years now, the Western Québec School Board has been working in close collaboration with these two First Nations communities. Kitigan Zibi offers its members educational services from kindergarten to Secondary V. The community of Lac Barrière provides education from kindergarten to Elementary 6. The WQSB also offers young people educational services from kindergarten to Secondary V. However, it is the only organization to offer English educational services for adults, whether in general education or vocational training. The Maniwaki centre serves a diverse clientele from the two Aboriginal communities. Over the years, different projects have been undertaken jointly by the WQSB and these communities,

including special adult education courses and vocational training courses to meet specific needs.

5.3.2 Target group

The group initially targeted for the action research project at the adult education and vocational training centre in Maniwaki was composed of young Aboriginal males aged 16 to 24. Our decision was based on needs observed earlier in the general population of Maniwaki as well as on conversations with one of our principal future partners, the Algonquin Chief of the Kitigan Zibi community.

5.3.3 Objective

The objective of the project was to reach and mobilize the target group in order to provide these young people with guidance and support in the development and implementation of a personal plan.

5.3.4 Our experience

5.3.4.1 An unexpected twist

Our project began with a meeting with the Chief of Kitigan Zibi in December 2008. The aim of the meeting was to verify and confirm the characteristics and needs of the target group. The Chief explained the importance of autonomy in finding solutions to the needs of community members. He said he doubted it was possible to meet the needs of young Aboriginal males within the framework of a research project like this one, although he recognized our good intentions. Faced with this disappointing and unexpected response, we re-evaluated both our approach and the target group.

5.3.4.2 Changes, opportunities and difficulties

The decision to target young males in the general population aged 16 to 24 was promising, but also difficult. However, the situation allowed us to solicit the entire community of Maniwaki for ideas on how to reach our new target group. The ensuing meeting with staff at community organizations, including the mayor of Maniwaki and representatives of Emploi-Québec, Carrefour jeunesse-emploi (CJE) and the community of Lac Barrière, was positive. It allowed us to announce the existence of SARCA services for the anglophone population, to define the community's needs and to demonstrate our willingness to attempt to satisfy those needs by participating in the research project.

At the time, however, many of our potential partners were unable to participate. Once again we had to revise our approach for reaching the target group. We decided to model our efforts in part on the Low research project. Our approach was different, though, in that it involved the

recruitment of ambassadors from among adult learners at the Maniwaki adult education and vocational training centre. This idea had potential from a number of angles: Participating in a real community project would be a unique learning opportunity for these adults, who could also accumulate credits toward their secondary school diploma. From the team's point of view, the participation of adults provided a more direct avenue for reaching the target group and, more importantly, would lead to a new definition of "partner" by acknowledging their involvement in the project.

The recruitment of adult learners as ambassadors and partners created new possibilities for mobilization, but it also posed a problem. Women participants were easy to find, but it was more difficult to recruit adult males for the project. Since their participation was key to reaching the target group, we had to become even more proactive.

Other difficulties appeared throughout the Maniwaki project, especially in terms of the team's management of time, the distances to be covered and the need to help team members learn more about the school board and the social, political, cultural and regional disparities in the region.

5.3.4.3 What we learned in the process

The action research project helped us rediscover Newton's first law of physics concerning inertia. Inertia is:

"That property of matter which manifests itself as a resistance to any change in the motion of a body. Thus when no external force is acting, a body at rest remains at rest and a body in motion continues moving in a straight line with a uniform speed (Newton's first law of motion). The mass of a body is a measure of its inertia."¹⁴

We were forced to re-examine our methods of overcoming our own inertia in the community (we were not proactive enough) and to make an effort to eliminate all internal and external obstacles. We learned that by adopting a proactive team approach, both at the school board and at the centres, rather than working in a vacuum, we could change the perception of the SARCA offered by the centre and the delivery of these services in response to the needs of the anglophone community in general. We also understood that we would need time and that all of us would have to make a concerted effort to provide the necessary impetus. That helped us understand that partnership would be a key element in the implementation of the project and that it would be essential to partner with an ambassador in the community. Ideally, these partnerships would help us reach and mobilize the target group and learn more about their needs and those of the anglophone community in general.

¹⁴ Entry on "inertia." *Answers.com*, accessed February 19, 2013, <http://www.answers.com/topic/inertia>.

The ties we forged with partners in the community of Maniwaki were very useful. For example, they provided relevant information about the needs of young people in the region. We came up with the idea of using young adults as ambassadors to reach the target group.

Including ambassadors as front-line partners showed us that young people are interested in participating actively in change. The adult learners who participated in the Maniwaki project were creative, empathetic toward the target group and keen on being a part of the solution. As adult learners, they could take a leadership course in order to better prepare for the project. Regardless, their participation was inspiring, and we realized that partnerships, in addition to being important, can take unexpected forms.

5.3.4.4 Materials developed during the project

Four young Aboriginal adults, two women and two men aged 17 to 21, agreed to become ambassadors and help us reach the target group. In order to determine their specific functions, we had to establish criteria for evaluating their competencies with respect to the task each of them would take on. As part of their course work, the adult learners will develop promotional materials for the project, such as leaflets, posters, a Web site and radio commercials.

In three of the four phases—planning, production, contact and action—the adults will be able to develop leadership, teamwork, communications and marketing skills.

We decided that the ambassadors would be awarded credit for participating in the project. We met them on May 7 to determine each one's strengths and duties, the promotional materials needed and the steps involved in developing these materials. When we included a Web site as a promotional tool, it became obvious that the adult learners would need to acquire knowledge and skills in the use of software.

5.3.5 Unexpected results

Our approach had a number of unexpected results, such as the possibility of offering adult learners acting as ambassadors credit for developing a promotional strategy and creating and disseminating advertising materials. It also revitalized collaboration among existing partners. For example, the community of Kitigan Zibi contacted the WQSB to ask it to offer a carpentry program to meet the needs of the target group. Consultations with Emploi-Québec during the process led to offers of financing and the possibility of courses in French as a second language and employability training for Aboriginal people. Our collaboration with Emploi-Québec was extended to a study of regional disparities, especially with respect to policies for First Nations young people aged 18 and over. In addition, new partnerships were created thanks to improved communication and cooperation with existing partners. For example, an education consultant in Kitigan Zibi invited two members of the project team to a brainstorming session at Nipissing University within the framework of a community mobilization strategy. Maniwaki's adult

education and vocational training centre and the Kitigan Zibi education council may even collaborate on a job or postsecondary education fair in the fall.

5.3.6 Progress report

Several challenges remain, including maintaining collaboration with our designated partners, providing additional courses and support for our ambassadors, and developing a concrete action plan to reach the target group. We also intend to help the young adults we reach by guiding them in their course of action, which we hope will allow them to develop and implement an individual or group plan.

5.4 Pontiac Project

Team: Lenny Prost (SARCA representative in Pontiac), Liora Richler (guidance counsellor) and Nicole Gravelle (consultant).

5.4.1 Background

Our action research project is being implemented in the county of Pontiac, which is in the westernmost part of Québec and is separated from Ontario by the Ottawa River. Covering a vast territory of 13 848 km², Pontiac has a population of 14 600, 57% of whom are anglophones. Since 2008, it has suffered a serious economic slowdown marked by several plant closures. The county now faces a growing unemployment rate. Many of its inhabitants have low literacy skills and are difficult to reach.

The WQSB offers general education and vocational training for adults at three centres in the county. There is also a SARCA service point in Campbell's Bay for anglophone clients.

5.4.2 Target group

In order to define the target group, we and our partners studied challenges and unmet needs in Pontiac: bilingualism, a high unemployment rate resulting in part from layoffs of forestry workers, illiteracy, tourism, etc. After considering a wide range of groups, we selected parents who had children in elementary school, were hard to reach and had little schooling (presecondary education or literacy training).

5.4.2.1 Characteristics of the target group

Given the stigma associated with low literacy skills and academic failure, we and our partners in the community realized that parents with low literacy skills may have feelings of shame, embarrassment and low self-esteem. For this reason, some of them hesitate to take risks and do not like to work in groups. They may also find it difficult to identify their skills, access

available resources, make important life decisions and plan their future, or at least examine their options.

To overcome everyday difficulties, some middle-aged parents have developed compensatory skills and found original ways of planning and organizing their daily activities. Some, for example, rely on their spouse or friends to perform everyday tasks such as filling out forms.

Parents with low literacy skills can, however, be more motivated to improve their situation. The desire to provide their children with a better life can push them to make positive changes.

5.4.3 Objectives

We wanted to work with our partners to reach out to parents with low literacy skills who were currently not in the work force and difficult to reach.

Our objectives were to find new ways of reaching this group and to invite these parents to develop an individual or group plan suited to their talents and consistent with their needs, with our guidance and support.

5.4.4 Main steps of the process

The project involved many steps. In order to define our target group, we began by examining different possible groups and evaluating the needs of the community. At the first meeting of the Pontiac project team with the Club de recherche d'emploi du Pontiac (CREP) on September 19, 2008, we hoped to identify other potential partners and other target adults in Pontiac who were not in the work force and who had unmet needs.

The Pontiac project team met again in October 2008 to identify potential regional partners and invite them to the first potential partners' meeting on November 25, 2008. The objective of the meeting was to study needs and issues in Pontiac and to define a target group. The project team met again in December 2008 to assess the first potential partners' meeting and define the target group. We then invited those partners who had expressed an interest in the chosen group to attend our first official partners' meeting on February 10, 2009.

With these partners (Emploi-Québec, the Western Quebec Literacy Council, the WQSB's literacy consultant and the Quebec Literacy Working Group), we developed a profile of the target group, identified potential difficulties and determined ways of reaching these adults. The meeting also allowed us to learn more about the services currently offered by our partners.

At our second meeting on March 10, 2009, we discussed and evaluated the information gleaned from our partners' research on the target population. Before the third meeting with our partners, scheduled for May 5, 2009, the project team met twice (on March 25 and April 14, 2009) to

complete the preparations for the meeting. We also decided to invite other partners, including Bouffe Pontiac.

Before the end of the school year, we scheduled the third partners' meeting (May 5, 2009) so that we could prepare an action plan for reaching the target population and inviting adults to a first meeting. We also discussed the location, date and time of the first meeting.

We intend to meet our partners (including a representative of Bouffe Pontiac) at the beginning of the next school year to prepare an action plan to reach the target population and invite them to a first meeting.

5.4.5 Our experience

We learned a lot from this action research project. We discovered new possibilities and encountered unexpected difficulties. We felt openness and support on the part of our partners with respect to meeting the needs of adults in Pontiac. Our partners' experience with adults with low literacy skills was invaluable. We joined forces and worked together. We also learned that clear communication is key to a successful partnership. Our experience revealed the importance of remaining open and flexible in order to adapt to situations as they arise. Making a definitive choice of target group, changing the dates and times of meetings, and adapting to personnel changes are all difficulties we overcame by being flexible.

The Pontiac team encountered several difficulties during the project. In addition to having to adapt to change, we had to travel great distances in order to work with the other members of the team and face the complex task of coordinating the partners' and team members' schedules, not to mention the fact that the team members wear several hats at the school boards and have responsibilities outside the action research project.

Our partners also provided examples of difficulties our participants were apt to encounter. In addition to transportation problems, they mentioned how difficult it was to encourage parents to leave the comfort of home and take the risk of getting involved in the process of working on a plan. They also pointed out that it would be hard to spark their interest and mobilize them to undertake a personal or group plan.

This made us more aware of the situation in which these adults live. We intend to use our new understanding to improve our services. The project also gave us an opportunity to forge closer ties with our partners in the community and to form new partnerships.

5.4.6 Materials developed

During the action research project, we were obliged to develop tools to communicate more effectively among ourselves and with our partners. We produced information sheets, PowerPoint presentations and a leaflet explaining SARCA and the action research project. We

are also in the process of designing a poster that our partners will use to recruit the targeted adults.

5.5 Val-d'Or Project

Team: Debra Madill (SARCA representative in Val-d'Or), Nicole Gravelle (consultant) and H  l  ne Leb  uf (consultant).

5.5.1 Background

In Val-d'Or, the WQSB has one adult education centre and a SARCA service point serving the anglophone population in the region. In the last census, the population of Val-d'Or was 30 600. Of these, about a thousand are anglophones, not counting the First Nations population, which itself comprises a large proportion of English speakers. Many Aboriginal people live outside their community. A large number visit to take advantage of health care services or to get an education. The opening of the Pavillon des Premières Nations at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) and the Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue helped increase the presence of Aboriginal people in the region. Many come from the Far North with their family to study in English, which leads to an increase in the anglophone population of the region. These families need services and support, which are almost nonexistent in English.

There are very few Aboriginal people in the work force. A number of factors can influence their employability, including prejudice sometimes due to a lack of understanding of their culture. Also, some Aboriginal people appear to have difficulty holding down a job. Since many are unemployed, their situation is precarious.

5.5.2 Characteristics of the target group

Faced with the growing number of Aboriginal people in the Val-d'Or region and the dearth of services available in English, we decided to focus on this population with the goal of serving it better. After consultation with our partners in the region, we decided to target women in particular since they often play a low-profile role in their community. Discussions with our partners enabled us to identify some characteristics of these women. Many are single mothers, and they often feel very alone when it comes to the challenge of raising a family in today's society. The need to develop organizational and parenting skills was mentioned more than once. With little schooling, many lack self-confidence, and their low self-esteem prompts them to live in isolation. Most of them have difficulty integrating into society and are unemployed. It was also observed that they lack perseverance and motivation.

We decided to target these Aboriginal women, and we clearly expressed this intention to our partners: We wanted to approach these women where they live rather than wait for them to

come to our centres. We wanted to reach out and learn more about them, discover what drives them and help them develop a plan that was meaningful to them.

5.5.3 Objectives

In collaboration with our partners in the community, we wanted to reach Aboriginal women in precarious situations with a view to inviting them to undertake a plan. The objectives of the action research project in Val-d'Or were as follows:

- To bring together a group of Aboriginal women who are not in the work force
- To encourage them to become involved in a group plan
- To help them implement their plan

5.5.4 Main steps of the process

The action research project involved several steps, including meetings with partners and weekly meetings with the the group of Aboriginal women. In the next section the meetings are described individually in chronological order. For the meetings with partners, we have included the objectives and a summary of what was accomplished. A monthly account of our meetings with the Aboriginal women follows, with a summary of what was accomplished there. Later, we recount the experience from the point of view of the research team and the Aboriginal women.

The first meetings with the Aboriginal women were prepared by the research team, which consisted of the person in charge of SARCA in Val-d'Or and two resource people from the school board. Since the distance between us didn't permit us to sit down together to work, we met by telephone conference more than once to plan meetings and evaluate our progress. We also communicated regularly by e-mail. After each meeting with partners or the Aboriginal women, we wrote a report and gave it to each member of the research team. This allowed us to keep a record of what we had done and the decisions we had made.

5.5.4.1 Meetings With partners

1. Meeting with potential partners: October 2008

The first meeting with our partners in the community had three objectives: (1) To produce a profile of hard-to-reach Aboriginal adults in the Val-d'Or region, (2) To define their needs, and (3) To find concrete means of making contact with them. We also wanted to explore labour needs in the community. At the end of the meeting, four partners that were more specifically involved with the target population expressed an interest in participating more actively in the project: Val d'Or First Nations Human Resources Development Services, the Native Friendship Centre, the CEGEP and UQAT.

2. Meeting with official partners at their offices: November 2008

The team met each of the four partners at their offices in order to learn more about the services they offer and the specific needs of the target group.

3. Workshop on the situation and issues in the Anishnabeg communities: January 27, 2009

At the first meeting, our partners had emphasized the importance of learning more about the First Nations people. To this end, the Val-d'Or team attended a workshop on the situation in the Anishnabeg communities organized by Val d'Or First Nations Human Resources Development Services. This would guide our future efforts in working with Aboriginal adults.

4. Meeting with partners: January 2009

At this meeting, we presented an integrated project, developed a realistic intervention plan (see Appendix 4) and assigned responsibility for the different areas. The integrated project included ideas suggested by each partner in previous meetings and consisted in creating a support group for Aboriginal women with little education and helping them develop and implement a group plan.

5. Meeting with partners: April 2009

The project was taking off, and the aim of this meeting was to discuss our progress and make any necessary changes. We also discussed our next move.

6. Meeting with Emploi-Québec: April 2009

Although Emploi-Québec was not present at our meetings with partners, it had always expressed an interest in our progress, and the team provided regular updates. At a meeting in April, we presented a report on the meetings held with the women's group and discussed possible contributions on the part of the agency.

7. Meeting with partners: May 2009

A meeting was held at the end of May to discuss the project and evaluate the progress made by the group of women. We also discussed potential new avenues.

5.5.4.2 Weekly meetings with the Aboriginal women

1. Three meetings in March 2009

The first three meetings with the Aboriginal women were aimed at consolidating the group. The women took the time to get to know each other and explore their personal and common interests in order to come up with ideas for a plan. Each woman was encouraged to share her talents, skills and personal qualities with the group. The women

also explored their dreams in order to come up with a plan they could implement as a group. The meetings demonstrated the advantages of teamwork in the development and implementation of a group plan.

2. Three meetings in April 2009

The aim of the three meetings in April was to explore ideas for a plan and to make a decision. The following questions were given as guidelines: (1) what is the vision of each plan? (2) what do we need to do to implement each plan? (3) what are the advantages of each plan? The women then chose an ambitious plan: to set up a shelter for battered Aboriginal women. The subsequent meetings were spent developing the plan, exploring similar experiences and contacting resource people in the region.

3. Five meetings in May 2009

In May, the group became even more excited with their progress. Their telephone calls, meetings with resource people and Web searches had provided important information for their women's shelter. An invitation to attend a meeting of the Table régionale d'accessibilité des services en violence conjugale in June was an incredible opportunity to meet key people in the community and to further their cause.

They had also discovered that a centre for Aboriginal women in Ottawa held its annual meeting in June. With great enthusiasm, they began exploring the possibility of attending. When they learned that there were still tickets available, they devoted several meetings to planning the trip: registration, transportation, babysitting, camping equipment, meals and financing. They organized fundraisers and asked for financial assistance from the community.

4. Five meetings in June and the trip from June 11 to 14, 2009

A meeting was scheduled early in the month to make the final preparations for the trip. The women prepared a short presentation for the Table régionale and had three meetings with the Table's members: The first allowed them to introduce themselves, and in the other two, they helped prepare an application for a subsidy from the Table de concertation régionale en matière de violence faite aux femmes. The Table de concertation's project, along the same lines as that of the women's group, involved opening a multicultural centre offering bilingual services for battered women.

After preparing the activity, the group travelled to Ottawa and attended the Women's Gathering 2009, organized by Minwaashin Lodge, a support centre for Aboriginal women. The aim of the trip was to consolidate ties and to visit Minwaashin Lodge. In a meeting with one of the directors, the women learned how to set up a shelter for women who had experienced violence. After their fruitful trip, the group met to discuss their experience.

5.5.4.3 The experience

Throughout the project, the research team, its partners and the women's group encountered unexpected events, opportunities and difficulties, and sometimes had to adjust their course. Both the research team and the women learned a lot. The highlights of the experience are presented from the point of view of the research team and partners, and from the point of view of the women's group.

Point of view of the research team and partners

This action research project was an opportunity for the Val-d'Or SARCA team to explore new ways of making contact with hard-to-reach adults. The research team, consisting of the person in charge of SARCA in Val-d'Or and two resource people from the school board, planned a first meeting with regional partners working with Aboriginal adults.

Several community and government organizations working with Aboriginal adults attended the meeting. It was the first time that the WQSB had sat down with these partners to discuss a common problem. The meeting was stimulating and enabled us to produce a preliminary profile of the situation in the different Aboriginal communities in the region. At first we had considered meeting with a group of Aboriginal adults in the weeks that followed, but the partners explained the importance of working in close collaboration with them to reach the target population. Their message was clear: The project should be carried out "with" and "by" Aboriginal adults, and this message guided us throughout the project. We also realized the importance of learning more about the Aboriginal population if we wanted to effectively reach and work with its members.

To help us better understand the situation of the Aboriginal population, one of our partners invited people from our adult education centre and the research action team to attend a workshop on the situation in the Anishnabeg communities. It was an ideal opportunity to learn more about the Aboriginal culture and to consider ways of helping our target population.

Throughout the project, we recognized that it was important and potentially rewarding to forge ties with our partners. Our meetings at their offices helped us learn more about their mandate and services and to determine areas where we could work together; we realized that all of us could benefit from collaboration. It was an opportunity to strengthen our partnerships, which led to actions beyond the mandate of the action research project, including follow-up of individuals referred to our adult education centre by the Urban Aboriginal Strategy and the presentation of SARCA services to Emploi-Québec officers.

During the action research project, a group of four partners joined forces to help the research team. At our meeting in January, where we presented the integrated project based on ideas suggested by each partner, we were surprised and greatly encouraged at how well the proposed project was received. The partners could see the benefits, as witnessed by this

excerpt from the report on the meeting: “We feel that the project might foster the development of an entrepreneurial culture that will have an effect on both participants and the community at large. The women’s plan could serve as a model for other projects.” We felt that it was no longer the WQSB’s project; it was “our” project. The language had changed, the group felt responsible for the project, and each partner was actively involved. All of the partners participated in planning the first meeting of the women’s group in accordance with the resources available. What a success!

Reaching Aboriginal women was a big challenge since they are often isolated. But thanks to the help of our partners, who suggested going to talk with them directly or with a member of their family, we were able to succeed. We were realistic: We did not expect to get a large group, but we hoped to recruit six or seven women. We believed that would facilitate discussions. Also, one of our partners suggested that we act as a support group for the facilitator of the women’s group. She would meet us on occasion to keep us up to date.

Circumstances beyond our control prevented most of our partners from attending the April meeting. Only one person showed up. We presented a report on our meetings and discussed the best approach to take with Aboriginal women. Our partner helped the facilitator see a new way of dealing with the attendance problem in the women’s group. In the final analysis, the meeting was very fruitful.

Our partners were unanimous in their belief that the project had exceeded all expectations. In an e-mail, one wrote: “It was a pleasure to participate in the SARCA meetings. The results were pleasantly surprising.” The partners acknowledged the exceptional work of the women’s group facilitator, who was able to sustain their interest and support them throughout the process. We discussed the future of the women’s group, agreeing that we would not leave the women to their own devices, but that we would have to re-examine their needs at the end June to see how we could continue helping. All of the partners were prepared to meet again in September to reassess the situation and consider new projects.

Working with our partners was an incredibly enriching experience. We improved our relations and gained a better understanding of the situation and common problems we could address together. What was special in this action research project was our approach with partners. Rather than merely offering services or courses as usual, we decided to work together to solve a common problem.

The project was innovative in that we had no preconceived ideas about what the women’s group would do. The facilitator encouraged them to take responsibility for the plan, guiding them in the process with flexibility and openness. The project centred on the women and their needs. They set their own goals, and the facilitator helped them plan the different steps involved.

Lastly, we believe that certain conditions helped these women plot a successful course of action. First, they were recruited by partners who are recognized in the community, and they

voluntarily agreed to participate in the project. We believe that the fact that we approached the women directly encouraged them to get involved and that their voluntary participation was essential. Other conditions put in place by our partners helped make the project a success, including their contribution to transportation, babysitting services and a meeting room. The women also provided winning conditions, including regular meetings and sustained commitment to every step in the process.

Point of view of the women's group

At first, the research team had decided to target Aboriginal women with little education, but as we went along, we realized that finishing school was only one of the difficulties these women faced. Looking for and holding down a job were both major challenges. Consequently, we changed our target population to Aboriginal women who were not in the work force.

At the planning meeting with our partners, it had been suggested that the meetings take place at the same time on the same day every week. It was impossible to follow through on this suggestion because the facilitator got a new job. Changes were made to the schedule, which varied from week to week. This may be a factor in the attendance problem, but we don't know for sure because there could be many other contributing factors. Once a month, the facilitator gave the women a schedule.

Despite all that, absenteeism remained a problem, and some participants did not arrive at meetings on time. Although taxis were reserved in advance and the women confirmed their presence the day before the meeting, this did not necessarily mean they would be there. More than once, a taxi was left waiting for a woman who never showed up. One of our partners suggested setting limits and explaining to the women that this was a closed group, that they were implementing their own plan and that if they did not attend meetings no progress would be made. Also, if a taxi had been reserved, they would have to respect their commitment. If, on the other hand, they were no longer interested in participating in the group plan, they could withdraw, no questions asked. This improved the situation. Then, gradually, each woman who needed a taxi was asked to make the call herself 24 hours in advance. One of the reports mentions the decision made by the facilitator and a partner: "We believe it is important that the women in the group start taking small steps toward independence and that they start to take responsibility. Calling for a taxi is one way of doing this."

To help participants be available for meetings, our partners requested babysitting services from the Maison de la famille. At first this appeared to be a good solution since it was inexpensive (\$3 per child for the morning). However, spaces were not available every day since regular users had priority. The problem was solved by the Native Friendship Centre, which paid for babysitting services at home under an existing program.

The meetings were to be held exclusively in English, but since one of the participants was francophone and was eager to participate, we decided on bilingual meetings. The facilitator

translated comments and information as needed. This situation had no ill effect on the functioning of the group.

We had not counted on the women having such far-reaching dreams. Some of their ideas and plans had broad implications and involved long-term commitments—for example, a shelter for battered Aboriginal women, a summer camp for children, an invitation to a well-known Aboriginal speaker to address the issue of parental skills and a place where Aboriginal children could live together during the school year rather than alone in foster homes. As we seriously considered each idea, we discovered possibilities that we could not have imagined at the outset. The women did Web searches and created a network of contacts in the community to collect the necessary information. The facilitator acted as a liaison with key individuals in the community. Pooling their results was very useful. For example, for the past two years, some people in the community had been participating in a regional committee to improve access to services for women experiencing violence and to better meet the specific needs of Aboriginal women and women with multiple problems. Thus, the group saw an opportunity to contribute their strengths and ideas to existing projects.

After exploring the different projects, the group opted for the idea of a shelter for battered Aboriginal women, with the hope of incorporating a second project involving traditional arts and crafts (sewing, beading, decoys). They also decided that their first step would be to visit Minwaashin Lodge, a support centre for Aboriginal women, and to attend the Women's Gathering 2009 in Ottawa. Despite the short time remaining before the event (six weeks), they rolled up their sleeves and dove in. Together, they took care of transportation, babysitting services, registration, accommodations, meals and, of course, financing. The latter was definitely a difficult challenge, but the women planned fundraisers to help them realize their dream. Different activities, including a day-long bake sale and written applications for subsidies, provided them with the money they needed to cover expenses for the trip. They also received support from our partners. The experience afforded them considerable learning in a short amount of time: planning every aspect of a trip, writing letters to apply for subsidies and to thank donors, and making a budget.

Once the women had established their plan, a change took place in the group. The facilitator described it in her May report:

Today the group really came together. There are four women from three different nations. Everyone was on time (even early) and was excited to come today. Everyone participated. . . . The difference is palpable now that we have a goal and we know where we're headed.

Their enthusiasm helped them achieve success in this first step of their dream.

During the trip to Ottawa, the women made new discoveries. First, they had the chance to meet the director of Oshki Kizi Lodge, which is affiliated with Minwaashin Lodge, and discuss the

different steps involved in setting up a centre for battered women. They had the opportunity to ask questions and visit the lodge. They also gathered the information they needed for their plan to set up a women's shelter in Val-d'Or.

They also attended the Women's Gathering 2009. This seems to have made an impression on them. They participated in arts and crafts workshops where they learned to make porcupine quill earrings, dream catchers and medicine bags. They experienced traditional female Aboriginal rituals in various ceremonies and workshops. They learned more about their culture by spending time with the other women. In her report on the trip, the facilitator said the various experiences helped the women improve their self-esteem:

The different experiences gave them self-assurance: setting up a tent for the first time, making a pair of earrings out of porcupine quills, creating other arts and crafts pieces, spending time in a sweat lodge, raising funds and simply being part of an organized women's meeting where women are encouraged to take charge of their lives and taught how to be independent, where the emphasis is on respect for all women and for individual differences, where women are encouraged to express themselves through song, drums, dance and talking circles.

After spending so much time together, the women grew closer. It was also a satisfying experience for the facilitator, allowing her to learn more about Aboriginal culture. One woman in the group told her, "You are white, but after this weekend, you will have the heart of a Aboriginal person." The experience drew them closer, and they now meet even outside the group to support and encourage each other.

While they were planning the trip, the group was also making contact with the Table régionale d'accessibilité des services en violence conjugale. In June, the facilitator and one of the women presented the group to the Table régionale. The women became members of the Table régionale and helped fill out a subsidy request for a project to prevent violence toward women. Everything happened very quickly and brought incredible energy to the group, as the facilitator mentioned in an e-mail: "It's all going VERY fast, and it's VERY exciting! A woman called me and was very excited about everything she did and learned this afternoon. Her energy was palpable." The women are currently awaiting a response to their subsidy request. They are positive and say they want to continue working with the Table régionale. They do not feel ready to take over, but they want to help.

5.6 Thoughts on Our Approach

After the action research project, every team in every region looked back at what they had done. Below are some comments that came up more than once. They include the highlights of the project and recommendations for other SARCA teams that might like to undertake a similar

process. Although the action research project is over, we would like to point out that projects are still ongoing in all four regions.

At the beginning of the project, we were asked to define our research project and establish how we would implement it. This activity gave us the impetus for a team project. *At the central office as well as in each of the regions*, our team approach raised questions and ideas and revealed experiences that encouraged us to go on or to make adjustments in how we were doing things.

Working in a team was sometimes frustrating, but it was also a very enriching experience. Time management was a major challenge, especially since we had to constantly revise our priorities as well as fulfill our obligations. Scheduling conflicts and distance were both problems, although every member of the team made an effort to adapt insofar as their official and growing responsibilities allowed. The need for members of the school board to learn more about SARCA, and the expectation that they would implement the services and participate in the project, posed other time constraints and slowed things down. Although it was necessary for the project, the obligation for members of the school board team to quickly become familiar with the problems in different regions (political, social and cultural dynamics) caused difficulties at first and took the wind out of our sails for a time.

However, the project was worth it on many different levels. From the point of view of the members, being part of a proactive team broke the sense of isolation common in rural areas, allowed us to hope for change and to acquire the assurance that we could do something and be part of the solution to the community's needs. The possibility of sharing ideas and making a consistent and ongoing effort with the support of a dynamic and proactive team was particularly enriching.

Working together made all the difference. We could appreciate the value of teamwork. The ties we created fostered a greater sense of belonging. We had the privilege of sharing joy in each member's achievements. In addition, because our strengths were complementary, we could provide each other with support.

Looking at the four projects, we observed that the target groups are still difficult to reach. However, once a relationship is established and the adults start to work on a plan, the experience generates enthusiasm that enables them to succeed. In Val-d'Or, for example, the women were energized, and their vitality was contagious in the feedback sessions after each meeting. According to the final reports, their efforts were successful since they are now no longer inactive.

Throughout the research project, we observed the importance of partnership for the vitality and strength of a joint venture. We also learned the value of establishing and maintaining relations with our partners, which helps us contribute to the community in concrete ways.

We felt considerable openness on the part of our partners as well as a marked interest in satisfying the target adults' needs. Sharing strengths and first-hand experience fostered a collaboration that was advantageous for everyone, as witnessed by the following excerpt:

We also learned about existing problems, shared ideas and made constructive changes in a concrete community project that really helps meet the communities' needs.

In each region, the project helped established more effective relationships with partners, including Emploi-Québec. Despite the lack of services available in English, these relationships—in some cases, first contact—started a dialogue on the anglophone community's needs and led to new joint efforts. As the members of the Maniwaki team said, the impact of these closer relationships is an important gain not only for them, but for all of the regions:

For political, social and cultural reasons, previous attempts to extend services in the community and to form partnerships were at best limited. The effects observed were more autonomy in terms of effectiveness, a better understanding of the needs of the anglophone community and of the limitations of SARCA services as they were offered in the past, an awareness of the need to extend services and an understanding of the importance of forming partnerships in the meetings with the director of Emploi-Québec in the region. These needs revived interest in finding ways to meet the anglophone community's needs and created a willingness to establish partnerships for projects already under way.
[Translation]

Moreover, participating in the project allowed members of the school board team to learn more about the differences and challenges in each region. We believe that policies must be adapted to the situation in rural communities.

5.7 General Recommendations for SARCA

5.7.1 The people involved

After the research project, we realized the importance of getting adults actively involved in the process because the more they felt responsible for their plan, the more motivated they were to continue. We believe that ongoing support throughout the process is key to enabling them to take stock of their situation, become aware of the benefits of the process and discover what they learned. All of this gave them a taste of real success at different points in the process and encouraged them to pursue their plan.

5.7.2 The SARCA team

It is important that the different teams share a common vision of SARCA and are fully familiar with the role of each member so that everyone is on the same wavelength. These clarifications facilitate communication and enhance the promotion of SARCA services. We believe that each SARCA team has a role to play in promoting services among key people at the school board and in the community.

Implementation of this research project was made possible by the unwavering support of management and the hard work of each team. We recommend working in teams of three. The presence of a third party is an advantage in discussions, decision making and the distribution of work. Unlike teams of two, teams of three allow members to alternate roles. For example, at any time during a discussion, one member can take a step back to observe and offer a different point of view. The dynamic of a three-person team fosters more effective sharing of knowledge and expertise with respect to the project.

5.7.3 Implementation of a regional project

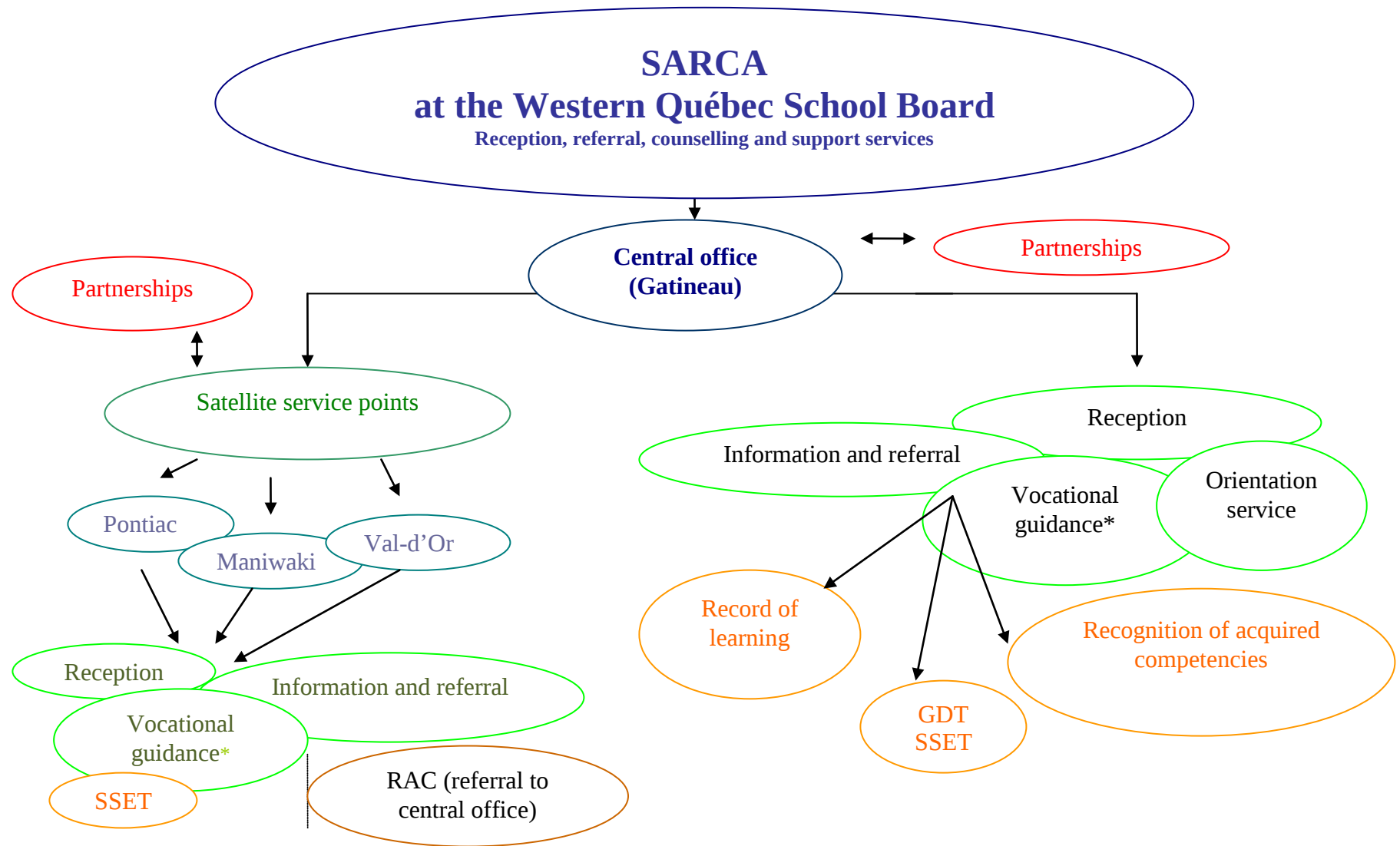
Our experience has shown it is important that the project be implemented with and by people in the community. They don't necessarily have to be in charge, but they must at least be actively involved. A good knowledge of the situation in the community is essential. Collaboration with different partners—some of whom already work with the target population—is key to reaching the target group. Because they work in the field, they are a very valuable source of information not found in the literature.

5.7.4 The process

To run smoothly, a project requires preparation, openness, flexibility and transparency. We also observed that a approach structured and adapted to the target population's culture gives life to our actions and fosters greater collaboration. The fact that the process allowed us to make constant progress at the participants' pace was also greatly appreciated.

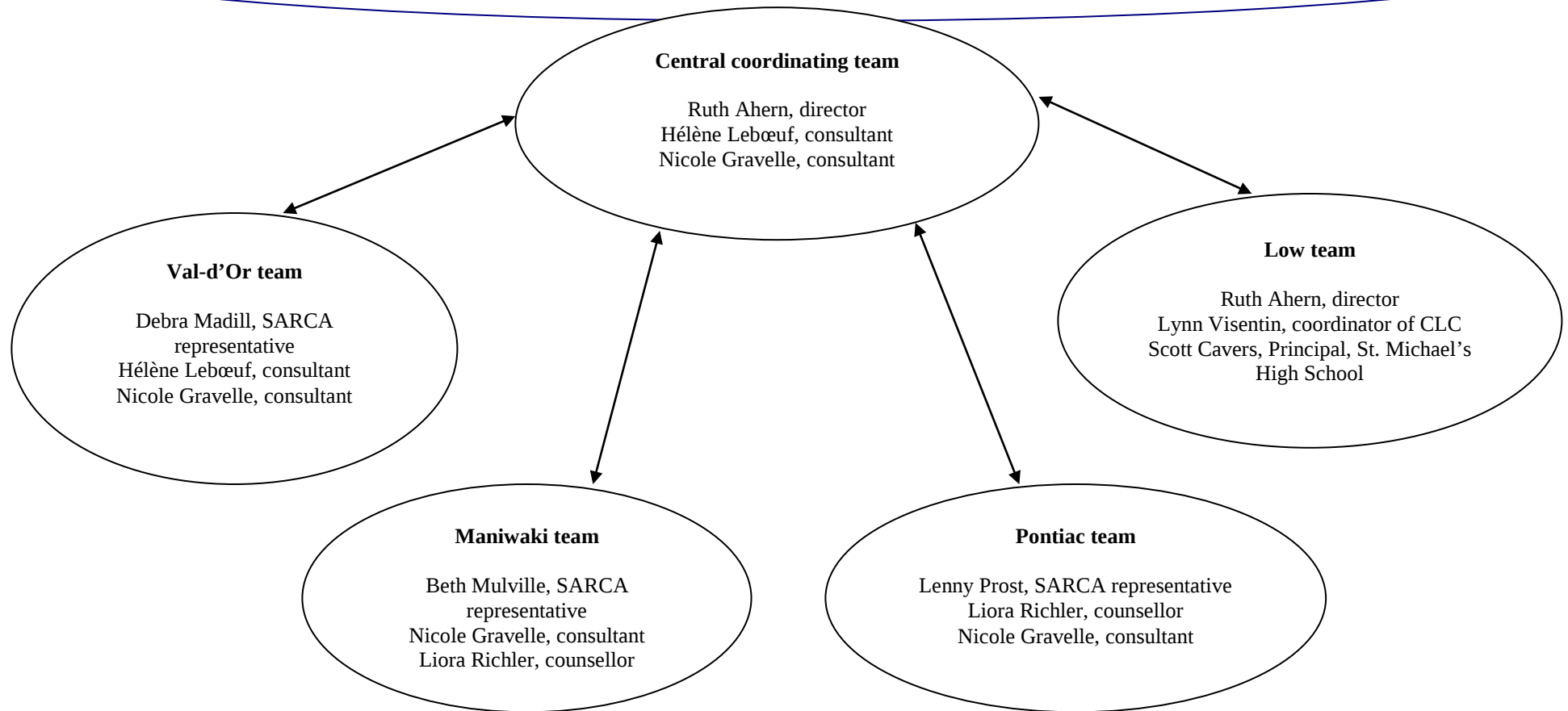
Greater flexibility with respect to the schedule and action plan is essential to prevent the process from coming to a halt: "We made suggestions, we adjusted, we acted, we revised.... And then we started all over again."

Appendix 1: SARCA at the Western Québec School Board



Appendix 2: Action Research Project Teams at the Western Québec School Board

* Partnerships: Emploi-Québec, Immigration, social services, school board, CEGEPs, Carrefour jeunesse-emploi, SADC, local development centre, community groups, etc.



Appendix 3: Meetings With Partners

- I. GREETING
INTRODUCTION OF PARTNERS

- II. PRESENTATION OF THE WQSB–MELS ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT
 - a) Context: implementation of SARCA
 - b) Main objective of the action research project: to plan a project with adults and offer assistance and advice throughout their process
 - c) Target group

- III. OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING
 - a) To define the target group
 - b) To determine how to reach it
 - c) To identify needs in the community
 - d) To target companies that might be interested in our project

- IV. DISCUSSION ABOUT THE TARGET GROUP
 - a) Profile
 - 1) What do you know about the target group (age, gender, civil status, education, occupation, etc.)?
 - 2) What are the needs of people in this group?
 - 3) What challenges do they face?
 - b) Relationships between the community and target group
 - 4) What are the labour market needs in your community?
 - 5) How could the target group help meet the community's needs?
 - 6) Do you know of any organizations, stores or companies that would be interested in the project?
 - 7) What indicators would show whether the process was a success?
 - c) Mobilization, accessibility, outreach
 - 8) Where can we reach the target group?
 - 9) How can we reach the target group?
 - 10) Where should we meet?
 - d) Added value of the project
 - 11) What benefits do you think the target group would get from participating in a process like this?
 - 12) Could you participate actively in the process? If so, how?

- V. FINAL WORD
THANKS TO PARTNERS FOR THEIR COLLABORATION
Photo

Appendix 4: Action Plan—Aboriginal Women’s Group Plan in Val-d’Or

October 7, 2008

Objective of the project: To create a support group for Aboriginal women with little education so that they can develop and implement a group plan.

Process	Responsibilities	Deadline
1. Recruitment • Contact potential participants • Make a list of interested parties (maximum 15)	• Partners • SARCA representative	• January-February • February
2. Logistics of meetings • Find a room • Establish the frequency (partners’ suggestion: every two weeks) • Facilitate the women’s meetings ◦ Plan the meetings • Find transportation and babysitting services • Offer snacks	• Native Friendship Centre • SARCA representative and women’s group • SARCA representative • SARCA representative and two WQSB consultants • Native Friendship Centre and Maison de la famille • WQSB	• March 8
3. Call to participants to meet	• SARCA representative	End of February
4. Evaluation of progress • Reflection on the meeting procedure • Readjustment if needed	• Team and partners	

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Chapter 6



Why and Under What Conditions Should Adults in Transition Be Encouraged to Work on a Plan?

Jean-Pierre Boutinet

This document reveals an unexpected and remarkable phenomenon: The four action research projects described appear to be entirely complementary in their focus on one of the major concerns of SARCA in the reception, counselling and guidance of adults looking to integrate or reintegrate into society or the work force and often seeking to take courses. The Commission scolaire De La Jonquière examines the formation of partnership networks in order to establish essential cooperation with institutions with similar objectives, in particular vocational integration, such as Emploi-Québec and Carrefours jeunesse-emploi. The Western Québec School Board (WQSB) focuses on elusive adult clientele that no one is able to reach in their isolation and precariousness and takes an original approach to reach out to some of these groups and get people to participate. The Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands addresses the flow of adults through adult education and vocational training centres and attempts to do something about the abnormally high drop-out rate. Planning reception and guidance services for adults in these centres with a view to ensuring their sociovocational integration requires the development of appropriate and effective tools: This was the objective of the Commission scolaire de Laval in creating the passport and portfolio.

These four complementary experimental approaches provide a possible model for SARCA. On a broader scale, for a community, city, province or country, the key components identified in the four trials can be considered basic ingredients in the development of a policy for the empowerment and guidance of adults who are too mobile or too sedentary, which makes their sociovocational integration difficult. The aim is now to formalize the model based on the information gathered by the four school boards.

The four action research projects along with their associated actions and comments also shed new light on how individuals and groups in difficult economic and social situations struggle against fate and the inevitable by turning to creative and innovative methods. What does the SARCA approach teach us about how we deal with the inevitable by creating the appropriate conduits for plans that transform isolation into creative potential? In a word, what do the personal and group plans described in the previous pages teach us about the way in which adults of all ages develop and implement personal and group plans, and what do they say about the impact of the process of working on a plan?

Adults receiving SARCA cannot be treated in as mere students. They are men and women of all ages, people with a story in the midst of building their life experience, destabilized by a postmodern civilization with vanishing points of reference. They are at sea, seeking help from professionals who are themselves adults, undoubtedly far less vulnerable because they are employed, but nevertheless caught in the same imperative of performance and autonomy, liable to the same weaknesses as their clients. What happens when, within the framework of educational or integration services, fragile adults come seeking help from slightly less fragile adults? Who are these adults, these professionals on the one hand, clients on the other, who cross paths at SARCA service points? What do their words and actions tell us about adulthood today?

Based on the four research projects, the following sections will attempt to model the SARCA process, identify the key components of a personal or group plan, describe the particular characteristics of adults who seek SARCA services and extract a few recommendations.

6.1 The Culture and Four Guiding Principles of SARCA Services

Each of the four action research projects described in this document focuses on one of the four guiding principles of SARCA and thus provide a comprehensive description of the SARCA culture. We will discuss each of these four points in succession. Although one principle dominates in each of the projects, all of them are present. We will discuss the principle addressed by each project as well as its context.

6.1.1 Reaching adults in isolation

Reaching adults in need of education, training and guidance services with a view to ensuring their sociovocational integration is a challenge for SARCA. This is the challenge that sparked the WQSB's interest in particular. It wanted to find hard-to-reach adults, "invisible" adults who appear to live self-sufficiently in more or less precarious situations, such as young adults aged 16 to 24 without a diploma, without a job and in a precarious situation (the Low and Maniwaki projects). These young adults, marked by their academic failure, lack self-confidence and are very defensive when it comes to the education system. Short on perseverance and motivation, they have precarious and ill-paying seasonal jobs at best. The challenge is to reach out to these young people and encourage them to participate in the development of a personal or group plan that might satisfy their needs.

Also in the WQSB, Pontiac chose another hard-to-reach target population: parents of elementary school age children with low literacy skills. These parents have very little education and appear to have a sense of shame and poor self-esteem with respect to their children. They have, however, developed compensatory skills and may be inclined to improve their situation by making positive changes in their life.

There are also the anglophone Aboriginal populations in the north targeted by the Val-d'Or project, many of whom live outside their community. Among these, the Val-d'Or project focused specifically on Aboriginal women, who often play a low-profile role in their community. Many of them are isolated, particularly single mothers. This solitude is not particularly conducive to facing the challenge of raising a family in today's society. These women with little education lack self-confidence and self-esteem and live in precarious situations, finding sociovocational integration difficult and sometimes living with violence.

In order to reach adults without a plan or those seeking education or training, SARCA must consider those isolated and silent adults whom no professional has been able to reach. How

can we identify and approach young adults without a diploma who are facing academic failure, parents with low literacy skills and isolated single mothers?

6.1.2 Helping adults find a way out by welcoming them in

One of SARCA's essential missions is to help adults with insufficient schooling complete their basic education and improve their skills. As long as these adults are in the work force, they are unconcerned about their education. It is when they find themselves without work that they—or their prospective employers—start thinking about their level of education. SARCA can help guide them in developing a plan and considering different types of programs. For more vulnerable adults, seemingly rejected by the work force, everything depends on how they are received at the centre and at the start of their program. The Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands project aims to provide counselling services for adults entering a program by personalizing reception services and setting up a gateway to the appropriate program. This offers a certain reassurance, unlike more impersonal reception services, where the lack of support often leads adult learners to drop out. The school board's counselling project is intended to support adults in the development and implementation of their plan, the cornerstone of the SARCA philosophy. It involves setting aside enough time for the professionals to focus on first-level reception services for individuals and groups.

The Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands, aware that such reception services can make it easier down the line, developed a project to help adults entering a program by allowing them to start off by structuring their own learning plan. A complete learning plan must include a strategy to exit the program and transition into the work force. The school board decided to develop a new type of reception service: Adults who came to the centre seeking help would take an orientation service course for a period that was initially set at nine days and later changed to five. They would be offered workshops in a variety of areas: personal life (time management, self-esteem), academic life, social life (knowledge of the community), work life and recreational activities. At these workshops, the facilitators would use diagnostic tools to measure their knowledge of the basic academic subjects.

Unlike the process of admitting students to school, the act of enrolling adults of any age in a program involves taking into account their life experience, current life situation and expectations. In school, the program is supreme. In continuing education and training, the primary focus is on the adults, which is why regular education teachers are ill-prepared for adult education. It is easy to understand the “lukewarm involvement of certain members of the team” that was noted by the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands because the logic of school and the logic of training are more often diametrically opposed than complementary. The team at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands aptly points out that providing support for adults means more than merely monitoring their academic performance. It is a matter of taking the school out of learning. But can the teachers assigned to the task do it? At least the everyday terminology has begun to change in SARCA: The term “adult learners” has replaced “students.”

The Commission scolaire De La Jonquière, for its part, sees reception services as a two-level process. The first level is the adult's first contact with SARCA, usually to request information. First-level reception service providers must be trained in a client relationship approach so that they can receive adults with warmth and respect. Second-level reception services are provided by a team of professional counsellors, who must also receive training. These services usually involve information, counselling, education or training, and guidance.

When adults come looking for a basic education or qualifying training, the first step is to help them establish a distinction between their present context and the logic of schooling as they previously experienced it. This means we must provide personalized individual and group reception services with a view to learning about their experience outside school, so that we can more effectively guide them in their learning and integration plan. Counsellors must also help adults plan their exit from the program and their transition to the workplace.

6.1.3 Using appropriate tools to guide adults in their education or training from reception to exit

Professionals use tools in an effort to provide support and supervision and facilitate learning in a manner that is neither mechanical nor repetitive. However, while some learners are reassured by this, others feel excluded. In other words, there is some controversy surrounding the usefulness of these tools. Nevertheless, they are essential to success as long as they are used as a means to a very precise end. Here we are discussing for the most part communication tools. The WQSB's Pontiac team developed information sheets, a PowerPoint presentation and a leaflet to better communicate with its partners, while the team at the Commission scolaire de Laval appears to place more importance on attractive graphic design and user-friendliness than on content.

The passport developed by the team at the Commission scolaire de Laval helps adults learn more about themselves by providing a record of their achievements and indications concerning their potential. While the passport is filled out by practitioners, who record the adults' activities and achievements and their validation, the portfolio is kept by the adults themselves. It includes documents of importance to them, which illustrate their competencies, needs and dreams, give meaning to their present experience and may facilitate sociovocational integration at a later date. The passport, which can be used on its own, and the portfolio, which is always used alongside the passport, are intended to help adults develop and implement a personal plan, offering a written record of steps taken or yet to be completed that will help them persevere. The passport contains an identification sheet containing the adult's contact information; a record of his or her academic career along with the diplomas received, courses taken and programs recognized; another sheet exploring informal and non-formal learning and life experience; and a final sheet devoted to meetings with various practitioners. The portfolio itself includes six main sections listing the adult's resources, life story, competencies, learning activities, previous and current jobs, and plans.

As mentioned earlier, the tools developed by the team at the Commission scolaire de Laval were met with ambivalence. Some professional partners were enthusiastic, but others, who doubted that the tools would prove useful for their young clients, had reservations. Also, the tools were seen as creating more work. The professionals on the team were satisfied with the tools they had developed. However, the adults who were meant to use them did not see their usefulness and were reticent to take them. The young adults who agreed to use the tools, while reserved and distant at the first meeting, soon became more active, open and friendly. Nevertheless, the passport appeared to be more suited to the practitioners than to the adults.

The creation of a reception service at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands for adults entering a program can also be considered a useful guidance tool, as can the different workshops organized as part of the service.

The team at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière developed different tools for providing reception services and gathering information at both levels of the process. It made a map of the school board's centres and distributed it to professionals to help them show adults how to get from one centre to another. It also produced an organizational chart of all the services offered by the school board's centres in the form of a desk pad so that professionals could find the services adults need. Its third tool, the reception protocol, explains SARCA and helps first-level reception service providers identify targeted adults. The team also developed a participant's booklet containing all the information adults would need, including an evaluation form to assess the adults' level of satisfaction with the services offered.

For tools to be useful, they must provide structure for adults who find themselves in increasingly communication-oriented environments, where there are fewer major points of reference and more and more useless data. Indeed, we are living in a communicational paradox where there is a dearth of points of reference on the one hand, and an excess of points of reference on the other hand, but a lack of those that provide structure, hence the need for the tools. We are always measuring the challenges of the "R" (as in "reference") of the French-language acronym SARCA, which stands for "referral" and evokes the two states between which many adults find themselves torn today: absence of "R" or too much "R." Both states lead to a lack of structured "R."

6.1.4 Creating interdependent networks of sociability

SARCA involves several levels of sociability, including partnerships with organizations such as Emploi-Québec, the Ministère de l'Immigration, de la Diversité et de l'Inclusion, social services, CEGEPs and Carrefour jeunesse-emploi as well as with community organizations.

For several years now, the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière has been forming partnerships in the community. At first, its Table des partenaires was made up of representatives from public and private community organizations and the school board's centres. Its aim was to improve reception services in the school board's territory. It wanted to

provide adults with more than one avenue for accessing the different services, inform them of all the possibilities and ensure the continuity of services in order to guide them their process of working on a plan.

Other SARCA services, too, realized that forming partnerships was key to the success of their project. To make contact with hard-to-reach adults, the WQSB formed and consolidated what it calls proactive community partnerships (notably with Emploi-Québec, Carrefour jeunesse-emploi, the local First Nations communities and the university) in order to prevent the marginalization, isolation and sidelining of the target group. The WQSB's Maniwaki Centre considers these partnerships key to the successful launch of its project. The Val-d'Or team held regular meetings with its four partners working more specifically with the target group of Aboriginal women in precarious situations.

In addition to this first level of partnership that the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière calls "external partnership," there is a second level of sociability that is just as important: partnerships within each school board and, more specifically, within each SARCA service point. The Commission scolaire De La Jonquière calls this "internal partnership." It involves teamwork among professionals, which avoids the situation seen at some school boards where everything comes under the responsibility of a "Mr. or Mrs. SARCA," as the team at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière puts it. The WQSB refers to this level of sociability as a proactive team approach: an action research team playing the role of facilitator in the development and implementation of plans. The approach helped launch the project when the team partnered with ambassadors representing the target population in the community. At the WQSB, the proactive team for each of the projects was made up of three people.

At the internal level, the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière set up two teams. The first, referred to as the action research team, was made up of directors and professionals from the school board's three centres as well as representatives from educational services. This team was responsible for planning the action research project and establishing its issues and orientations. The second team, referred to as the implementation team, worked in the field and was made up of all the professionals at the three centres who work directly with adults involved in a plan as well as the professional once unfairly known as "Mrs. SARCA" and the coordinator of educational services. Since the external partnerships were already established, the two teams formed an internal partnership at the school board's adult education department in an effort to improve guidance services. The team meetings, many of which took place at lunch time, were an opportunity to share meals. This helped team members develop a sense of belonging and commitment, particularly in the case of the implementation team. This team had a significant impact, becoming the cornerstone of the implementation of SARCA services, which had originally been centralized but was increasingly taken in hand by a cohesive team. The determining factor in this collaboration among professionals was the mutual trust that developed between professionals and directors: Personal bailiwicks gave way to sharing expertise. Information now circulates more freely among second-level reception service providers, and adults receive guidance services almost systematically. The creation of this team has meant

that professionals are no longer isolated; they are happier working as a team. This experiment has now made its way to the first level of reception services. First-level reception service providers were asked their opinion about how to organize group meetings, which gave them a sense that their work is recognized as a valuable contribution.

The third level of partnership is mutual assistance among the adults themselves—for example, having young ambassadors act as mediators between SARCA professionals and isolated adults in Low. The Commission scolaire De La Jonquière replaced personal interviews with group meetings, which were made optional and shorter. The adults said they were satisfied with the information conveyed in the group meetings and the opportunity to develop collaborative relationships. They appear to have appreciated the group approach, as did the counsellors who facilitated the group meetings.

Ideally, the three levels of partnership in SARCA interact, thus avoiding a situation in which the partners do their thing, the professionals do theirs, and the adults, well, can take care of themselves! This melding of the different levels was obvious in the WQSB's Low project: By actively approaching members of the community, the professionals helped the people of Low change their perception by transforming the supplier-client relationship into a partnership. What led to the change was appointing the young ambassadors. These young people aged 18 to 25 were acknowledged by their peers as being active and involved in the community. In the WQSB, the Val-d'Or team's scheduling of regular SARCA meetings with partners and the creation of a group of Aboriginal women led to mixed meetings where everyone realized that their respective projects shared the same goal: to help Aboriginal women experiencing family violence by opening a multicultural centre offering bilingual services. Lastly, the achievements of the WQSB's action research groups and their partners were extremely enriching, helping participants understand their respective situations and the problems they shared.

These levels of partnership are not the result of spontaneous and mysterious generation. There must be a unifying vertical force: a hierarchical connection that values a partnership culture. In the conclusion to its report, the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière stresses more than once that the interest shown by the directors in the action research project and in the deployment of SARCA was key to the project's success. The directors were there from the outset and participated in the different meetings and discussions. They collaborated in the decision-making process and provided guidelines concerning what was feasible and what was not. Their commitment and openness were essential. This attitude had a positive impact on the counsellors' involvement, which was another determining factor. Their tolerance to relative insecurity, their openness to new ways of looking at reception services and their enthusiasm in the development of tools were crucial to the project's success.

The levels of partnership needed to foster adults' sociovocational integration must adhere to two complementary rationales:

- a horizontal rationale fostering partnerships between institutions, cooperation among the professionals involved and discussions among participants
- a vertical rationale involving a commitment on the part of school board management to the types of partnerships it wants to foster

Thus, the four missions—to make contact with hard-to-reach adults; to provide reception services for adults entering a program and help them establish an exit plan; to produce tools for reception, learning and guidance services; and to create partnership networks at different levels—are the four principles of the SARCA philosophy reflected in the action research project. The SARCA philosophy relies on adult education and continuing education and training to ensure basic education for all adults in Québec by developing a culture of lifelong learning that values the recognition of acquired competencies, which leads to more effective sociovocational integration. In this context, SARCA really does do justice to its name: reception, referral, counselling and support services.

6.2 Essential Steps in the Process

As the team at the Commission scolaire de Laval so eloquently put it, SARCA is not a place, an office or a group of people. It is a philosophy, an attitude by which all adults, regardless of where they are in their course of action, are entitled to appropriate reception services, useful advice, adequate information and guidance during their learning path. This philosophy is intended to reflect the conditions conducive to the development and implementation of a personal plan, the appropriate attitudes to adopt with adult clients, who are for the most part disadvantaged, methods of helping adults develop a plan and the means of encouraging them to persevere. To this end, SARCA has come up with what the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands calls a new paradigm: that of the plan. The four research projects described in this document reveal four conditions necessary for developing and implementing a personal plan.

6.2.1 A unique context for every project

The first step in any project is to identify a specific context since this will be the springboard to creativity. In other words, every plan is a unique answer to a given problem. The WQSB refers to the plan as a reflection of the context. If we bear this in mind, we can prevent the plan from becoming mechanically repetitive. A unique context can be identified for each adult, each individual plan and each SARCA service point in the case of group plans. The process can be broken down into four steps:

1. **Become familiar with the territory.** The vast territory covered by the WQSB is a unique situation. Measuring 90 000 km², it has a widely dispersed adult population. The Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands also covers a large territory and has very

little public transportation, which, as in the case of the WQSB, has made it necessary to decentralize SARCA services. Agriculture is the principal activity in the rural area served by the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands. The economic situation is fragile, unemployment is rising sharply, and there are few jobs available since all the textile factories in the region have shut down. The situation is entirely different for the Commission scolaire de Laval, which covers the entire territory of Laval and serves more than 300 000 inhabitants residing in the suburbs of Montréal. The Commission scolaire de Laval faces other challenges: high dropout rates, increasing numbers of immigrant clients and a shortage of skilled labour.

2. **Understand the timeline**, including the history of the population, where things seem to be headed and the time needed to implement the project. As the team at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière points out, the timeline for a project is not linear; things don't necessarily go as expected, and usually take more time than anticipated. It is therefore necessary to plan for a more or less distant future, and to project milestones along the way.
3. **Identify the actors involved**. For example, in the case of the WQSB's Val-d'Or project, the goal was to learn more about the Aboriginal population in order to be able to take more effective action. Participating in a workshop on the situation and issues in Anishnabeg communities was one avenue taken to this end. At the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands, the number of adults seeking education and training is relatively limited—150 to 200 a year—and can be broken down into three distinct age groups: 16- to 18-year-olds, 19- to 25-year-olds and 25- to 30-year-olds, all of whom at some point dropped out of school and are now enrolling in Secondary Cycle Two. In addition to these, there are some 20 adults over the age of 30 in literacy programs.
4. **Consider the challenges**. For example, in the WQSB's Val-d'Or project, the group of Aboriginal women met regularly under the supervision of the SARCA team and several other partners—a sign that they were ready to commit to a plan. After observing the effects of violence against women, they decided to build a shelter for battered Aboriginal women. The project at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands was based on a particular characteristic of the Centre Jean-XXIII, the headquarters of SARCA in Ormstown, which for the most part serves young adults living in isolation. Many of these adults, who have not been able to achieve training or education goals earlier in their lives, have abandoned them. It was these dramatically high dropout and absenteeism rates that drew the attention of professionals at the centre and prompted them to develop a more user-friendly service for new clients entering a program.

The Commission scolaire de Laval's project was based on four observations. First, adult clients of all ages who have been out of school for a while have considerable difficulty developing and implementing a personal plan or simply setting an occupational goal. Second, adults admitted to a program are far too likely to quit at the beginning or end of the program. Third, they get tired of answering the same questions from professionals over and over again. Instead of continually repeating their story, they could use a document (a

passport and portfolio) that would foster their personal and social development and encourage them to come up with a preliminary plan. Fourth, the adult clientele is getting younger, a growing number are immigrants, and there has been a spike in the number of at-risk clients, including adults with mental health problems, behaviour disorders and adjustment difficulties. These adults tend to become overusers of the different services, and practitioners have to find a way to help them develop a plan and provide the necessary guidance for its implementation.

6.2.2 Adults and their plans

Adults do not have the same attitude toward a personal plan as toward a group plan. As the team at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands points out, no one is obliged to undertake a plan. The plan belongs to the adult. There is a strong correlation between a plan and its architect. To be able to understand a plan one must seek out its author. Again, as the team at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands points out, adults are alone with their plan or their lack of a plan, and in their solitude they require guidance. By focusing support on the plan, practitioners are making adults the core of SARCA services. Thus, SARCA professionals must determine how committed each adult is to his or her plan, as underlined by the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands.

In the case of a group plan, it is necessary to identify the main actors and architects: the partners, the action research teams, the three-member teams responsible for each of the four WQSB projects, the group of six or seven Aboriginal women in the case of the WQSB's Val-d'Or project. But groups are not formed spontaneously. They require a leader or at least someone with enough charisma to motivate members and direct group efforts, as in the case of the WQSB's group of Aboriginal women. The group's facilitator did excellent work and sparked the women's interest by providing support throughout the process.

Mediators are also important: the ambassadors in the WQSB's Low project and, in its Maniwaki project, the ambassadors and the Algonquin Chief of the community of Kitigan Zibi.

Room must also be made for the actors who happen to be there, who, despite themselves and without knowing it, will play a key mediating role in the project. For example, in the Val-d'Or project, the group of Aboriginal women learned of a support centre for Aboriginal women in Ottawa that held an annual assembly, which the women enthusiastically decided to attend. A meeting with one of the directors of the Ottawa centre yielded useful information about how to set up a shelter for battered women.

6.2.2.1 From the adult's personal plan to the professionals' team project

SARCA professionals could hardly encourage adults to develop and implement a plan if they themselves didn't have their own project. That is the lesson that the WQSB quickly learned

when it created a team to coordinate the SARCA projects. The team was made up of three people and had three objectives:

- To ensure that the SARCA projects carried out in the centres were consistent with the philosophy and purpose of the action research project. According to the philosophy of the action research project, adults must have the autonomy to develop and implement their plan.
- To develop a common process to be followed by each of the project teams.
- To facilitate and support the implementation of projects, paying special attention to the way support is provided to adults.

At the WQSB, the teams leading the projects at each centre were also made up of three people, assisted by collaborators as needed.

The Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands also wanted to make sure the adults' plans were consistent with the Centre Jean-XXIII's project. Ideally, the plans developed by adults seeking services at the centre are learning plans aimed at enabling them to find jobs. To this end, the centre launched a project creating a specific service for all new clients entering a program.

Sometimes a project is chosen through a process of elimination, after setting aside everything that has been rejected, refused or excluded and everything that has failed to capture participants' interest. The Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands decided to set aside its old habits of working alone and opted for teamwork. Thus, the role of the guidance counsellor, which until then was too individualistic, was reconsidered. This change brought about a new perception of adults enrolled in programs, who were no longer under the responsibility of an isolated professional, even if that professional was the guidance counsellor, but of the team. The adults' plans became the focus of the team and the guidance counsellor, who was one of the team's resource people.

6.2.2.2 Validation or the plan process as a process of value creation

All individual and group plans need to be validated. In other words, once they have been developed, their social legitimacy must be ensured through recognition by an authority. This is especially true for adults' plans, which must be appropriate. As in the case of the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands, the validation can be informal, and the plan can be monitored by the supervising professionals as it develops.

Although a plan may be defined and validated, it is not necessarily set in stone. Plans can change depending on the situation and as new information comes to light. At the WQSB, the Val-d'Or project team had targeted Aboriginal women with little education, but then learned that

the real problem was women who were not in the work force and were having difficulty finding and keeping a job.

The involvement of the actors throughout the project is a determining factor. Unreliability can be very discouraging, as the group of Aboriginal women learned in the Val-d'Or project. Some participants failed to show up even though their taxis had been reserved and they had confirmed their presence the day before. The solution was to educate the participants about their responsibilities.

Unexpected developments can result in highs and lows. In the case of the WQSB's Val-d'Or project, once the women agreed on their definitive plan, a change occurred in the group. It became a real team, with everyone participating actively because now it had a real goal. The participants knew where they were headed, and this was motivating. The WQSB team mentioned that time management was an issue inasmuch as it had to constantly revise its priorities without neglecting existing obligations. Scheduling conflicts and the distance between participants were also constant problems. The Commission scolaire De La Jonquière was faced with this type of time-management problem when it sought to continue pursuing its established goals after realizing there was no common vision of SARCA or consistency among the different practitioners providing reception services.

Projects like this often require considerable energy, which can result in exhaustion. However, they can also be even more productive than expected. This was the case with the WQSB's Val-d'Or project. The partners were unanimous in saying that the project exceeded their initial expectations. All of their efforts resulted in immediate success and brought incredible energy to the group.

For the WQSB's Low team, the action research project was more than merely an opportunity to explore ways of making contact with hard-to-reach adults in precarious situations. The experience was educational for both the team and its partners. The WQSB's Val-d'Or team also said its project was educational, not only for the women's group, but also for the research team. The action research team learned the importance of working in close collaboration with partners in order to reach the target clientele. Once contact was made, the team discovered that the plan had to be developed and implemented *with* and *by* Aboriginal people, a discovery that guided it throughout the project. According to the Val-d'Or team, its project led to the development of an entrepreneurial culture that had a direct impact on the participants and their communities. The group of Aboriginal women learned from each other's experiences, which gave them self-confidence: setting up a tent for the first time, making earrings out of quills, expressing themselves through song, dance and beating drums, etc. These experiences allowed them to forge closer ties with each other and develop more self-esteem. They also learned more about their own culture.

The unexpected results of the projects are also important to consider. The WQSB's Maniwaki project revitalized collaboration among existing partners beyond all expectations. The Val-d'Or

team also mentioned unexpected results, difficulties, opportunities and necessary changes. The professionals at the Commission scolaire de Laval at first used the passport almost exclusively for adults admitted to a program or seeking information at the Guichet conseil, relegating the portfolio to optional status. After the project, many of the participants said they liked the portfolio better than the passport and that they would promote it on Facebook. Several participants wanted to make a single tool out of both, adding the passport as a tab to the portfolio. In the WQSB's Val-d'Or project, a plan to help battered women led to a much broader initiative: opening a shelter. Transfer from one project to the next is not a given. For example, the Aboriginal women's plan in Val-d'Or cannot serve as a model for other plans.

The teamwork at the WQSB in the coordinating team and each of the centres led to new ideas and sharing of experiences and solutions. Participating in a proactive team eliminated the feeling of isolation, improved self-confidence and offered the hope of real change. Participants also created ties and developed a greater sense of belonging by sharing joy in each other's achievements, even though the target clientele remain hard to reach. However, once ties were created and a group of hard-to-reach adults became active, the experience generated an enthusiasm that enabled them to move forward. The ability to collaborate closely and actively to solve a common problem is a valuable asset.

According to the team at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands, their project to set up a service for adults entering a program changed the dynamic at the Centre Jean-XXIII. The professionals are more involved and more likely to collaborate in order to promote change at the centre. The adults, who had often been discouraged, are now mostly enthusiastic. Those who availed themselves of the new services and attended the workshops say they now have a clearer idea of their plan and are more inclined to talk about how they can implement it. Far fewer of them drop out. They now spontaneously ask to see the guidance counsellor; the counsellor is less likely to be the initiator. This success is due to the participation of the centre's staff, which is committed to the reorganized reception services. Constant revision of the content of the workshops is also a contributing factor to the project's success.

The project at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands took on a much broader scope than originally planned. What was initially intended as workshops on different topics for adults entering a program became a collective effort to provide support for adults' plans and review ineffective practices and implement new ones, especially with respect to guidance services.

The project at the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière led to a new perception of reception services. It required teamwork, and as a result, participants learned more about each other, discovered that they wanted to work together and found motivation in sharing a common goal. Also, almost all of the adults who participated in the group meetings appreciated the experience.

6.3 Who Are SARCA's Clients?

The project's focus on adult clients led to what the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands calls a change of paradigm. Attention shifted from the teacher's needs to those of the adults. With this change, instructors ceased to play the key role in the process, as their counterparts in the youth sector still do. They are peripheral to the instructional process, and their role is to regulate the adults' commitment to their program and their relationships with their peers. To describe this less central function, the team at the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands uses the word "counselling." But who are these adults at the heart of SARCA who require counselling?

6.3.1 The clientele

We refer to these adult clients whom we are trying to reach and train by the generic term "the adults," presuming that they are vulnerable because they are unemployed and more or less actively seeking jobs, that some of the younger ones who left school with few qualifications have never been employed and that others are looking for a career change.

It is important to accurately identify the specific characteristics of the adults who seek SARCA services so that we can better meet their needs. Learning to recognize these clienteles and forming groups of adults who are facing situations that make them vulnerable means trying to identify what it is exactly that makes them so vulnerable. Doing this in the context of SARCA services is already a step in the right direction. We must pay special attention to each of the following clienteles seeking one of the four main SARCA services:

- Young adults who left Secondary IV or V without a diploma. These young people aged 16 to 24 often lack the self-confidence to succeed in life (the WQSB's Low project). They are unemployed or working at ill-paying, precarious (seasonal) jobs and lack perseverance and motivation.
- Young Aboriginal males aged 16 to 24 (the WQSB's Maniwaki project).
- Parents with low literacy skills and little education (the WQSB's Pontiac project).
- Aboriginal women in precarious situations (the WQSB's Val-d'Or project).
- Young adults under the age of 20 who have experienced a number of academic difficulties and have no learning plan but are enrolled in a special work-study balance program (the Commission scolaire de Laval's project).
- Allophone immigrant adults of all ages who are unemployed and not engaged in a learning plan but are enrolled in a literacy program to learn how to read and write French (the Commission scolaire de Laval's project).
- Adults under the age of 20 enrolled in a vocational training program (the Commission scolaire de Laval's project).

- Adults under the age of 20 enrolled in a general education program at an adult education centre (the Commission scolaire de Laval's project).
- Unemployed adults over the age of 30 enrolled in a learning plan that will qualify them for employment (the Commission scolaire de Laval's project).
- Immigrant adults of all ages enrolled in a learning plan (the Commission scolaire de Laval's project).
- Adults without a plan (the Commission scolaire de Laval's project).
- Adults aged 16 to 18 who are dropouts (project of the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands).
- Adults aged 19 to 25 enrolled in a work skills program (project of the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands).
- Adults aged 25 to 30 (project of the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands).
- Adults over the age of 30 enrolled in literacy training (project of the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands).
- Men and women aged 16 to 60 from every socioeconomic status in the territory (disadvantaged, middle class, upper class) seeking various services (project of the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière).

6.3.2 Adult professionals¹⁵

The professionals who provide adults with supervision and guidance, especially in SARCA, are themselves adults, although they are employed. It might be worthwhile to consider the relationship between these adults and the adults they serve. The professionals have their own vulnerabilities, as do all postmodern adults, due to our culture of immediacy and urgency, excessively rapid work paces and constant change—change both in the directives issued by their institutions and in the organizational frameworks in which they work. If they are vulnerable in these ways, what makes them different from the adults they serve? What makes them different is their expertise, which allows them to provide reception, counselling, learning and guidance services. Each of these professionals has specific expertise and competencies based on experience.

With this expertise that distinguishes them from the adult clients, professionals enter into a sort of big brother or big sister relationship with clients. Since both professionals and clients are adults, they are similar in all but one respect: the professionals' area of expertise, which gives

¹⁵ The term "professional" is used in this chapter to refer to anyone who is paid for his or her expertise in interacting with adults who are receiving, or may receive SARCA services, which implies all types of personnel: secretaries, receptionists, housekeeping staff, support staff, teaching professionals, specialists, practitioners, etc.

them an authority that incites clients to ask for guidance or advice. In this sense, they are big brothers or big sisters. How do we create such a relationship?

6.4 What Recommendations Emerge From This Exploration?

The four research projects and their outcomes suggest several avenues for helping SARCA better achieve the objectives it has had since its foundation. The challenge is to provide reception and guidance services for all the marginalized adults living in a postmodern environment, seeking direction or redirection and wanting to acquire qualification through the appropriate education or training in order to achieve sociovocational integration or reintegration. The recommendations are as follows.

- 1) *In order to ensure that SARCA services are no longer poorly identified, abstract, and subject to different interpretations depending on the school board and circumstances, as was the case at the four participating school boards before the action research project:*

SARCA professionals, the school board, users and partners must constantly refer to the four key principles of the SARCA philosophy illustrated by the four trials:

- a. Make an effort to reach vulnerable and isolated adults.
- b. Provide reception services for adults requiring guidance, redirection and training or education.
- c. Develop appropriate tools to facilitate counselling and guidance services.
- d. Implement a permanent system based on a project-based approach involving interdependent partnerships.

This entails ensuring that institutions and professionals adhere to these principles. If necessary, try to reach a consensus on certain of these points, or failing that, reformulate some of them.

- 2) *In order to avoid having people assume that SARCA services consist of a single professional known as the “Mr. or Mrs. SARCA” of the school board:*

Foster teamwork among professionals, enabling them to form ties by participating in projects that generate a sense of belonging. These ties will help staff members develop the cohesion needed to implement successful SARCA services. These teams will be the new face of SARCA.

- 3) *To meet the complex challenge of today’s postmodern society, in which many young people have little education, don’t know where they are headed, don’t have proper jobs and find themselves in more or less precarious situations:*

Encourage the formation of dynamic partnerships based on a common problem. SARCA services cannot be successful without the close collaboration of the people responsible for adult education at the school board and external partners. Adopt the following guidelines:

- Familiarity with the community is essential. That it is why it is important to work with partners.
- Working with adults who are more or less marginalized requires the collaboration of professionals and institutions.

4) *To change the paternalistic attitudes of certain professionals who want to develop and implement adults' plans for them, thus undermining their autonomy:*

Encourage adults to develop and implement their own plans, and help them take responsibility for them. Each SARCA service should adopt the practice of ensuring that plans are developed and implemented *with* and *by* people in the community. Even if some plans are not entirely led by adults but are developed and implemented in conjunction with professionals, the adults must be at least directly involved in the process.

5) *To make up for the generalized lack of recognition for adults in our postmodern society, especially those who feel that they have failed:*

Understand that the more responsible adults feel for their plan, the more motivated they are to persevere. They need help and guidance throughout the process to take stock of their life, their learning, the value of the process and their successes and failures. SARCA services must help adults realize that they should take nothing for granted and that taking chances and making mistakes are necessary in order to learn. Mistakes, like failure, are a lever of change as long as they are interspersed with correct answers and successes. During the guidance process, it is vital to give adults the appropriate tools to help them develop their plan and the proper behaviours, but the tool should never be divorced from its purpose (the adult's autonomy) and cannot necessarily be used in the same way in every situation. In short, it is a question of helping adults determine the most appropriate uses for the tools available.

6) *To better deal with current issues faced by SARCA—that is, adults with few qualifications in an overeducated society, adults in precarious situations in a society of abundance and adults confined to inactivity in a society that values performance:*

Make continuing education mandatory for SARCA professionals. Provide supervisors with the information and training they need to convey the fundamental principles of the SARCA philosophy to the various practitioners, train them in project methodologies and

the use of counselling and guidance tools and educate them about the condition of adults in postmodern society. Such training, in combination with experience in SARCA, will ensure both personal and professional development. In other words, the project makes the professional, just as the plan makes the adult.

- 7) *To counter the problematic semantic shifts observed more than once in this action research project (from adult to student, instructor to teacher) and to avoid giving adults the impression that SARCA services are too much like school and therefore present the same risk of failure:*

Make a clear distinction between school, students and teachers on the one hand, and adult education and SARCA on the other. If adults believe that adult education is the same as education in the youth sector (passive and boring), they will automatically lose any motivation they have. In any case, the project-based approach to guidance is not compatible with the system in the youth sector. SARCA services are offered outside of the school system or at least at its fringe. They are undoubtedly an effective source of learning, although that was not the original intention. As a meeting place of formal, informal and non-formal learning, they must be viewed as one of several complementary learning options available to adults in each school board.

- 8) *To facilitate the participation of SARCA staff in innovative group projects:*

Convince directors at the centres and school board that they need to provide guidance and facilitate the creation of an environment conducive to trusting relationships, cooperation and participation. Otherwise, nothing can change in terms of the professionals or adults. Historically, projects are a democratic process, a means of fostering cooperation and facilitation among the different hierarchical levels of an organization.

Outlook

The action research projects described in this document raise three very important questions: which adults, what projects, and how? The answers to each of these questions will reveal aspects of the attitude professionals must adopt: Should they ignore these questions, or with the help of a team of resources, should they take up the challenge and attempt to help adults assume responsibility for their plans, as difficult and lengthy a process as that might be?

How transferable are these four action research projects in these times of limited resources? They are not transferable at all. These are four specific research projects based on unique situations and people, which cannot be repeated. What is transferable is the specific method used by each of the teams to successfully carry out their project. We have attempted to identify these methods in the recommendations listed above.

For example, one transferable structural component is the dynamic partnership created in many of the action research projects. Partnerships are key to achieving success in an action research project involving guidance services for adults.

Another transferable aspect: the need to identify the differences between initial education and training in the youth sector and the adult sector's continuing education and training, and the need to ensure that the two types of learning are kept separate within the school board because any attempt to merge the two will lead to a loss of motivation on the part of adults.

Lastly, another example of transferability: If SARCA professionals are to participate in the project, their superiors in the school board must themselves be involved. Close cooperation between professionals and their superiors will help adults assert their independence. In one way or another, they will discover opportunities in this atmosphere of collaboration. They will also realize that the SARCA team can help them build or rebuild their lives.



GENERAL APPENDIXES

Appendixes Developed During the Action Research Project

APPENDIX 1

What Does It Mean To Be an Adult Today?

2008

SARCA

*Reception, referral, counselling and support services***Action Research Project to Test Approaches to Adult Learners' Personal Plans**

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ADULT TODAY?

Over the course of the past 50 or 60 years, four dominant models of adulthood have emerged in Western industrial and post-industrial societies. These societies have been marked by:

- The implementation of education and training specifically for adults, referred to as continuing or ongoing education.
- The gradual move away from a male-dominated society and the affirmation of the status of women in various laws. Adults no longer identify with the male figure in its generic and specific sense. Adult men and women each have their particular characteristics and their shared traits.

The four models below emerged successively, starting in the 1950s.

1. The Ideal Adult

Arising out of the ancestral traditions of rural society, this model is based on the idea that a person must acquire maturity and that there are ideals to identify with or to aim for. Once his or her psychological development is complete, the adolescent arrives at adulthood, a state of stability. He or she steps into line with a set of intangible points of reference based on family, occupation, social life and ideological and spiritual frameworks. The attraction of this model is in reproduction, provided there are role models in one's surroundings worthy of imitation. However, some are repulsed by this model and reject it. This is still a male-dominated model, with a marked separation between the genders and generations. Children do not mix with adults, or older adults, with younger adults. From a psychological point of view, this model, which tends to mask any deviations from the standard, is often based on hypocrisy: *Hide it, don't let anyone see, don't talk about it* become obsessions. Associated with this hypocritical behaviour is a form of resignation and the tedium of imitation.

Reference:

Paul Osterrieth, *Faire des adultes* (Brussels: Dessart, 1973).

2. The Adult as a Work in Progress

The 1960s was a time of education reform, rampant urbanization, the triumph of post-industrial society during the postwar boom and the birth of a consumer society with hedonistic tendencies. Almost abruptly, a new model of adulthood springs into being to challenge its predecessor. Authority and obedience were no longer the order of the day. The gap between the generations was no longer a respectful distance, but a chasm between two generations at each others' throats. Adults no longer built a stable career, but were now in perpetual construction with the help of continuing education and training. Women were no longer relegated to the background, dependent on their husbands and their jobs. They were now educated and ready to join the work force to achieve self-fulfillment and autonomy. Everything was "free:" free sex, a liberated lifestyle, freedom from the authority of the establishment, ideological and spiritual freedom, etc. Adults were no longer to be "raised"; the focus was now on self-fulfillment and lifelong development through career. Adults were constantly growing and maturing, with the help of continuing education and training. From a psychological point of view, this model is based on optimism, the "right to exist" and a fair amount of naiveté.

References:

Jean-Pierre Boutinet, *Anthropologie du projet* (Paris: PUF, 1990).

Georges Lapassade, *L'entrée dans la vie: essai sur l'inachèvement de l'homme* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1963).

Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (London: Constable, 1961).

3. The "Problem" Adult

Between 1975 and 1980, with the economic crisis, the oil crisis, changes in the workplace and rampant unemployment, adults were suddenly aware of their fragility in the face of adversity, of their immaturity. Life was unstable, and they discovered their own vulnerability to unexpected failure at home and work. Progress yielded to a new social order/disorder. Sociovocational integration, the idea of having a *place* in life, shifted from a given to a concern. It now depended on multiple sources of financial assistance and education and training programs, which were not always successful. Tensions between the generations disappeared, and adults slipped out of childhood to return when faced with unemployment and the need to return to school. Adult education took on a new meaning. It was no longer a social elevator within a career; it was the answer to intergenerational precariousness. From a psychological point of view, two major syndromes came to light: the cynicism of the dominant few who managed to play their cards right and the depression of the stressed-out, exhausted masses.

References:

Patrick Boulte, *Individus en friche: Essai sur l'exclusion* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1995).

Jean-Pierre Boutinet, *L'immaturité de la vie adulte* (Paris: PUF, 1998).

Alain Ehrenberg, *L'individu incertain* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995).

Alain Ehrenberg, *La fatigue d'être soi: Dépression et société* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1998).

4. The Multifaceted Adult

Between 1995 and 2000, this model, a mix of the first three, gradually began to take root. It is based on deficits to be overcome and bypassed and on a partial and provisional maturity (competencies) acquired through the validation of learning. Adults now know that they are vulnerable in an increasingly complex and uncertain postmodern society and must identify their strengths in order to cope with adversity. This is the reason for the development of mechanisms such as the record of learning and the recognition of acquired competencies. In these mechanisms, adults are multifaceted beings. The aim is no longer to work on one dominant competency, but on a plurality of personal and vocational competencies. It is no longer a matter of qualifying one's experience but of identifying the learning acquired through it. Slowly, a new dominant model of adulthood comes to the fore: the multifaceted adult, now entirely consistent with the new communication-centred environment. With the spectacular developments in information and communications technologies, adults must now learn how to manage a wealth of information, a variety of communications and messages from a multitude of networks. The multifaceted adult lives in shorter and shorter timeframes, in different communication spaces, in a world of urgency and immediacy. From a psychological point of view, the hypomania of the immediate gratification of a large number of overactive adults clashes with the prostration of others. The multifaceted adult lives in the immediacy of the communication-centred environment, with the fear of not being able to deal with it, and is therefore obsessed with the possibility of fragmentation, a tearing apart, a sort of schizoid psychopathy.

References:

Jean-Pierre Boutinet, *Vers une société des agendas, une mutation de temporalités* (Paris: PUF, 2004).
 Bernard Lahire, *L'homme pluriel, les ressorts de l'action* (Paris: Nathan, 1998).
 Charles Melman, *L'homme sans gravité, jouir à tout prix* (Paris: Denoël, 2002).

The Five Parameters of Adulthood

What is an adult? What is adulthood? Each of the following five parameters explains some of the issues associated with adulthood.

1. Age

Postponed entry into adulthood; a life characterized by transitions, break-ups, crises, new beginnings in young adults, middle-aged adults, successful adults, retired adults, adults in the final stages of life.

2. Gender

Male and female roles and how they have evolved and changed; similarity and differences; construction and reconstruction of gender identity.

3. Experience

Its verbalization, its recognition through the understanding of its meanings, the identification of prior learning, its deficits, stereotypes, repetitions.

4. Roles

Activities reflecting social commitment and usefulness; the roles of production and transmission.

5. Reflection on identity

Consideration of one's identity, adults' self-image, the image they project onto others, the image they believe they receive from others, an image made up of invariants and changes:

- ability to reflect on one's identity (I see myself), taking a step back to make sense of it all.

Am I an Adult?

When adults are asked what they think adulthood is, most mention the connection between adulthood and responsibility. Responsibility, a modern concept, is insidious, as if adults wanted and had to be responsible for everything: themselves and their plans, others and their precarious situations in a society of risk. The other concepts associated with adulthood are principally related to family, work and independence.

But at the same time, adults don't think of themselves as entirely adult. They are partially adult: sometimes, somewhat, intermittently. The fear of recognizing oneself as fully adult is perhaps related to the old ideal of the adult who has achieved full maturity or perhaps to the multifaceted model, which imposes a plurality of requirements that exceed human abilities.

APPENDIX 2

Adults and Their Plans

2008
SARCA

Reception, Referral, Counselling and Support Services

Action Research Project to Test Approaches to Adult Learners' Personal Plans

ADULTS AND THEIR PLANS

1. A Variety of Situations

- adults *with a plan* and a time horizon broken down into steps
- adults *without a plan*: on hold
- adults *with no possibility of a plan*, with a turbulent present to contend with

2. The Plan From Beginning to End

- begins with an examination of the situation and continues with the development of a timeline establishing priorities and goals
- begins with an experience and an attempt to put it into words and give it meaning in order to determine what it holds for the future

3. Five Points of Reference for Identifying a Plan

- the author/actor
- an uncertain and complex situation
- a dual approach combining development and implementation
- a unique solution
- opportunities to seize:
 - the right times
 - the right places

4. Acceptable and Unacceptable Formulations

- a plan developed and implemented *by* the adult: an authentic personal plan
- a plan developed and implemented *with* the adult: a guided plan
- a plan developed and implemented *for* the adult: a paternalistic plan
- a plan *about* the adult: a cynical plan
- a plan *against* the adult: a conflicting plan

5. Methodology: Characteristics and Main Steps

- *Development phase*
 - examining the specific situation with its strengths and weaknesses
 - listing possible scenarios by comparing the diagnosis with the author's inspiration (emulation)
 - selecting and developing a scenario
 - doing a formal and informal validation of the scenario chosen
- *Implementation phase*
 - identifying the constraints, obstacles, dysfunctions and opportunities associated with the situation
 - planning the steps involved
 - managing the differences between the projected scenario and the final result
 - doing a multifaceted evaluation of the completed plan in order to determine its successes and failures

6. A Few Technical Principles

- Plans are developed and implemented in the short and medium terms, never urgently.
- One person's plan may be a program for another, and vice versa.
- Plans, always destabilizing in their uncertainties, cannot help a person who is already too destabilized.
- All plans require an articulated guidance and support plan.
- Plans are not a solitary undertaking. They require the help of others as well as room for negotiation.
- Not all situations are conducive to plans. Some plans may be wrong for adults in certain situations. Sometimes adults need time to reflect before proceeding.
- Every course of action involves three levels of uniqueness:
 - of the situation in space and time
 - of the adult's background
 - of the plan developed
- Putting one's plan into words makes it easier to understand and to take a step back and look at it from another perspective.
- Plans always involve:
 - organizing aspects that are different from those encountered in the past
 - identifying aspects that are the same as those encountered in the past

Adults with no possibility of a plan: Start by dealing with the current crisis (room for rest: anticipating = resting).

A Few Points of Reference

The five key elements of a personal or group plan are:

1. The Actor: Who is this person?

- The adult's plan belongs to the adult, and the professional cannot manipulate it through projection.
- This is not the counsellor's plan. It belongs to the adult.

We can develop the plan **with** the adult. Now it is an intermediary plan, a momentary plan aimed at comforting the adult in his or her autonomy until he or she is ready to develop the plan alone.

A plan for: unethical and paternalistic, this plan places the adult in a situation of dependence.

A plan about: a cynical plan.

A plan against: a conflicting plan. The purpose of the plan is not to manage conflicts. It is a matter of discussing and sharing. This type of plan always reflects the professional's subjectivity.

Comments

- ✓ The plan: Make sure not to destabilize the adult.
- ✓ With the plan: Work in the medium term, not urgently.
- ✓ The guidance and support plan.
- ✓ Guidance with the plan:
 - Prioritize listening and asking questions.
 - Allow time for reflection.
 - There is a difference between counselling and guidance.

2. Dual Approach

pro → ject

pro ← ject

pro (development phase)

ject (implementation phase)

Development phase

- a) Examination
- b) Possible scenarios

- c) Selection by comparing the diagnosis with the possible scenarios
- d) Validation: informal (social recognition; plans require a minimum of support; if there is no support, they are merely dreams) and formal (admission, first step in the plan, etc.)

Implementation phase

The plan must be explained orally or in writing.

- a) Inventory of constraints, obstacles and means
- b) Planning of steps
- c) Management of differences
- d) Multifaceted evaluation (not merely a single dimension; to identify successes and failures)

3. Back-and-Forth Between Development and Implementation

Never “good” plans. Complexity and uncertainty: working with these aspects in the examination.

- a) Complexity: Always examine several aspects.
- b) Uncertainty: Negotiate points of reference: “You rely on” Humanize uncertainty by identifying points of reference.

4. The Right Plan

The right plan is the adult’s plan in its uniqueness. Identify where the adult gets his or her inspiration (emulation, not imitation).

Three unique elements:

- a) Situation: Why does the person want to see me?
- b) What is his or her background and situation? What has been his or her journey?
- c) The plan

5. All Plans Include Opportunities. There is Always Some Failure in a Completed Plan.

If there is no opportunity, it is best to postpone the plan.

- a) The right place place: Everything associated with the environment in which I live.
- b) The right situation, time and place.

Adults often require redirection (starting over, “rebounding,” especially adults 40 and up).

Publishing the report gives the adult a sense of value.

APPENDIX 3

Strengths of the Action Research Projects Under Way in the Four School Boards

Reception, referral, counselling and support services

Action Research Project to Test Approaches to Adult Learners' Personal Plans

Report on the Seminar of February 17 and 18, 2009

STRENGTHS OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS UNDER WAY IN THE FOUR SCHOOL BOARDS¹

1. When we look at today's society, two concerns come to mind:²
 - **making contact** with hard-to-reach adults who are not in school but who are in precarious and vulnerable situations
 - helping them develop and implement a **plan**
2. With the appropriate **guidance and support**, we must help adults in a **mobile society** develop and implement their plans. How can we help them acquire the consistency and the essential **points of reference** in their plans to allow them to assert themselves?
3. We must pay careful attention to SARCA **reception services** for adults. How can we **listen** and answer their questions in order to understand their **expectations** and **needs**?
4. **Partnership** is key in reception services: partnerships with resource people and communities and partnerships with adult clients. How can we create internal and external partnership **networks**?
5. Adults take action when the conditions are right. Adults learn when their brain is available to learn. How can we help adults in the SARCA system identify the **opportunities** that will enable them to **persevere** in order to prevent them from dropping out?
6. The goal is to allow adults enrolled in **training or education**, who are not students subject to a program, to be the architects of their own plans. Also, it is important to remember that their learning plan will also need to include a plan to exit their studies. At the right moment, they will need help developing such an exit plan.
7. We must identify the **variables** that facilitate or hinder adults' return to school:

¹ SARCA services of the Commission scolaire De La Jonquière, the Commission scolaire de Laval, the Commission scolaire de la Vallée-des-Tisserands and the Western Québec School Board.

² These two concerns are the principles underlying the implementation of SARCA services.

- **Age:** Young adults aged 16 to 18 (who are in fact really *almost* adults) vs. young adults aged 20 to 24 who left school and have more experience
 - **Gender**
 - Immigrants or sedentary individuals
 - In adult education or vocational training
 - Working in a closed group over a long period of time or in a constantly changing open group with a view to ensuring individualized learning
 - Used to working on:
 - a. paper
 - b. a computer
 - c. both
8. For adults enrolled in a program, especially for those aged 16 to 18 who are not in the work force, it is important to create a **motivational dynamic** through **involvement** in a plan. But at the same time, we must guard against an initial wave of enthusiasm that ends in a slump. From this point of view, if adults enrolled in a program are our primary partners, how can we develop their **empowerment** in terms of their ability to act? How can we foster their **participation** in the development of the appropriate tools, so that they become the architects of their own plans?
9. There can be no personal plans without a project developed and implemented by **teams** of SARCA professionals, who must at least be attuned to what is going on. How can we create a shared dynamic between the SARCA team's project and the adults' plans? How can we develop a project in constant **evolution** while being flexible about the process and the time it takes, but at the same time ensuring transparency, which is key to progress on the project?
10. What **counselling** skills for collaborating at the individual and group levels will give SARCA professionals the expertise they need to guide and support adults in their plans? The adult's plan must be a function of its environment and the opportunities available in the community.



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