

# Literacy and Skills Development Community Plan



## Hearst

Submitted by *La Boîte à Lettres de Hearst*

To Decoda Literacy Solutions

June 2016

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1. Task Group	3
2. Community Context	4
a. Our Community's Strengths	6
3. Literacy and Community Development Collaboration	7
a. Partnerships that need to be Developed	9
4. Challenges and Avenues for Action	10
a. Table of Challenges	12
5. Conclusion	17
6. Appendix A	18

## 1. Task Group

*La Boite à Lettres* is an organization that provides basic training services to francophone adults in the Hearst area. It allows francophone adults to upgrade their knowledge of the French language, mathematics and computer use so they can transition toward other educational programs, the workplace or simply improve their functional autonomy. The *Strengthening Rural Canada* project is an initiative based on establishing community partnerships with a view to develop a community plan on literacy and skills development. Within this project, *La Boite à Lettres* was responsible for setting up a task group and organizing community meetings to determine the needs in Hearst.

Members of the task group included the executive director and a trainer from *La Boite à Lettres*, an employee of the *Université de Hearst*, the development officer from RDÉE Ontario (*Réseau de développement économique et d'employabilité*), as well as the involvement of the Far Northeast Training Board (FNETB).



The community forum was organized in collaboration with RDÉE Ontario. Following a meeting with the development officer, where the needs of both organizations were discussed as they related to the community forum, it was decided that the two meetings would be combined into one forum. In addition to people having to attend only one event, the community forum also met both organizations' needs.



The community forum welcomed 27 stakeholders from various sectors, including education, training, employment services, economic development, industry, as well as community and government organizations.

Information gathered from the community forum was used to determine courses of action in developing the community plan. However, several community meetings were also held with various committees and organizations. Results of these discussions were taken into consideration in identifying the overall community issues that are part of this plan. It seemed important to consider all projects that are currently underway in order to capture an accurate picture of the community, its strengths and areas that need improvement.

## 2. Community Context



Hearst is a small community of some 5,000 residents. A dynamic Franco-Ontarian community, it has one of the largest proportions of Francophones in Ontario (88.1% in 2011, Statistics Canada, 2011 Census). Originally, the forest industry dominated the town's economy and provided employment to a large part of the population. The forestry sector is still the major industry, representing 9% of total employment. Hearst stands out because of its francophone heritage and it is also known for its innovative endeavours. This community survived the latest economic recession through various private and public initiatives (*Profil communautaire 2015, Développement économique*).



Located in the heart of Northern Ontario, Hearst is a year-round paradise. Surrounded by lakes and rivers, the vast open spaces that enclose the town provide residents and tourists with opportunities to enjoy an array of outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing and snowmobiling. The community can rely on a fully accredited hospital that provides high-quality medical services. The establishment has a considerable impact on Hearst's economy as it is the second largest employer. In addition, the community has an ultra-modern long-term care facility, a pharmacy, a large supermarket, three financial institutions, many construction companies, a very active arts council, as well as a multitude of community services that meet the key needs of the whole community.

As is the case in many rural areas, Hearst is faced with significant challenges. Among these and central to ongoing discussions are changing demographics (aging population and out-migration) and shortages in qualified workers in many sectors. The need for succession in the workplace is alarming. Statistics demonstrate that in the next few years, there will not be enough people to replace those who retire (*Working Together: A Local Labour Market Plan for the FNETB Region 2013-2016*). This issue, which the community will have to face over the next years, means that we have to find innovative ways to attract people to our area. This implies challenges, since existing training services are mostly provided in French. Indeed, the Francophone presence is an asset for the town of Hearst and makes it stand out when compared to other communities in Ontario. However, in the current context, this situation is also a double-edged sword.

### ***a. Our Community's Strengths***

Hearst has several advantages. During the forum, following aspects were identified as community strengths:

- Several services and activities for the elderly
- Comprehensive educational system (all services available in French, from kindergarten to post-secondary)
- Diversified employment services
- Effective networking and information-sharing among various community services
- Quality of life
  - o Less stressful daily life (no traffic jams, etc.)
  - o Proximity of activities (cultural and sporting) and affordable prices to participate
  - o Good collaboration, spirit of mutual support
  - o Welcoming and warm population
  - o Volunteering
- Self-sufficient: Being located in a remote area means that we have to meet our own needs and encourage local businesses
  - o Several successful businesses
  - o Many local specialists (e.g. welders, electricians, mechanics, etc.)
  - o Highly developed sense of entrepreneurship
- *FRANCOPHONIE*

### 3. Literacy and Community Development Collaboration

Context: In Hearst, the education and training sector functions at a high level and provides a greater concentration of jobs than in the overall area. Hearst educational services are well considered when compared to other communities in the Cochrane District.

The *Université de Hearst* is the first French-language university in Ontario and the only francophone academic institution that offers block courses. The *Collège Boréal* campus in Hearst is located on the university's premises, which allows students to use its infrastructures such as the library, the gymnasium and the cafeteria. For such a small community, Hearst is quite lucky to have these institutions.

#### ***Centre d'éducation des adultes***

The *Centre d'éducation des adultes* brings together all adult training services under one roof. The Centre includes three partners. *La Boite à Lettres* offers adult basic training services. The *École secondaire catholique de Hearst* offers correspondence courses to adults who want to earn their high-school diploma. The *Collège Boréal*, through its AFB/ACE program provides college preparation courses. This partnership ensures that whatever the educational needs an adult may have, he or she will be served in one location. It also greatly simplifies referring clients to the appropriate service and providing quality services that are more effective and adapted to each person's needs.



By grouping all training services in one building, from literacy to university studies, Hearst stands out for its partnerships and efficient collaboration between training services provided to the community.

### **Integrated Model**

For three years, *La Boite à Lettres* has been participating in the Boomerang program created by the employment centre. This mentoring program aims to provide participants with comprehensive workplace services and training in order for them to attain a better level of employability. The *Centre d'éducation des adultes* developed customized evaluations to provide participants with training that is adapted to their needs, so they can enhance the basic skills and knowledge they will require to secure stable and sustainable employment. This partnership enables people faced with employment barriers to develop their skills and good work habits, therefore increasing their chances of finding and keeping a job.

### **Learner Gains Research Project**

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) is leading a research project that aims to test a tool that will collect data on skills learners will have gained over a period of a few months. *La Boite à Lettres* was selected to participate in this project. With the collected data, the MTCU will be able to make informed decisions about the future directions of the Performance Management Framework and the LBS program.

### **Family Literacy Day**

In January, as part of Family Literacy Day, *La Boite à Lettres* organized an activity with students from elementary schools in Hearst and Mattice. The event's goal was to increase public awareness about the importance of enjoying learning as a family. The Family Bingo was a success.

### **Local Employment Planning Councils Pilot Projects**

The Far Northeast Training Board is participating in Local Employment Planning Councils (LEPC) Pilot Projects that were set up in eight communities across Ontario. These selected communities offer a representative sample of unique labour market conditions across Ontario.

LEPC pilot projects aim to support local approaches to the planning and delivery of employment and training programs and services, while providing related resources. They will also improve local labour market conditions through enhanced collection and distribution of local labour market information and reinforcing collective mobilization.

A strategic plan will be developed. It will outline activities and expected results for the “activity phase” (April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017).

LEPC pilot projects will operate over 18 month, ending in May 2017. They will provide valuable information, which will help in orienting our current employment and training system. They will also allow us to test the LEPC model in communities, to assess and perfect our approach and to identify the next steps.

The project fosters coordination and collaboration to facilitate access to the whole range of training resources and support available.



**a. Partnerships that need to be developed:**

- Need to develop a partnership between the *Université de Hearst* and *La Boite à Lettres* to provide basic training to some French-speaking African students who need support to improve their knowledge in French and computer use.
- The *Collège Boréal* and *La Boite à Lettres* are looking to create basic training in French communication for community members who do not have basic skills in the French language (oral and written), and who would like to improve these skills to function more effectively within the community.
- *La Boite à Lettres* also wants to forge partnerships with area employers to meet the training needs of their current employees.

#### **4. Challenges and Avenues for Action**

Although the Francophone dimension is an asset and a source of pride for the community, it also generates challenges when new residents move to the area. Despite there being numerous literacy and skills development services, they are mostly, if not almost exclusively, provided in French. As explained in the local labour market plan of the Far Northeast Training Board, if all of the remaining boomers retire by age 65, that means almost one third (28.5%) of the employed labour force could potentially exit the labour market by 2031 (*Working together 2013-2016, Update, October 2014*). Even more preoccupying is data from the 2011 Census revealing that, compared to the rest of Ontario, a much higher percentage of our region's population does not have a certificate, diploma or degree. This situation will pose a significant challenge when trying to fill jobs available in the next few years, for which skill requirements will become increasingly demanding.

## **Challenges facing the Hearst community**

Challenges were identified during the community forum. Following is a list of points that emerged from group discussions: (Please note that these challenges are not prioritized.)

- Limited transportation services and remote area
  - No airport
  - Limited train, taxi and bus services
  - Long distances to travel for medical appointments, sports events, etc.
- Difficult to secure funding for some projects
- Difficult for a newcomer to integrate, particularly if the person does not speak French (for employment as well as training services)
- Lack of communication/coordination between organizations when planning activities
- Lack of volunteers (always the same people who get involved)
- High cost of living (groceries, fuel)
- Aging population
- Lack of housing/houses
- Very slow Internet service

### a. Table of Challenges

Some challenges were identified as priorities and avenues for action were suggested. Following is a table of these results:

Challenges	Strategies	Actions	Outcomes	Partners
<i>Attract people to our community in order to fill positions when residents retire.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Becoming a more welcoming and inclusive community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Form a welcoming committee for newcomers.</li> <li>Host a community symposium to identify ways to stand out from other communities and to encourage people to come and live here.</li> <li>Invite organizations and businesses to participate in identifying strategies to attract and maintain newcomers through the development of partnerships with various community organizations and groups who could provide useful services to newcomers (e.g. language courses, support in finding housing, employment, access to health or social</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>People who settle in Hearst will feel welcomed and will want to stay for a long time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic Development Corporation, employment centre, training organizations (<i>Université de Hearst, Collège Boréal, La Boîte à Lettres</i>, school boards, etc.)</li> </ul>

Challenges	Strategies	Actions	Outcomes	Partners
		services, etc.) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a welcome package.</li> <li>• Write spots in the newspaper to introduce newcomers to community members, describing their interests, in order to facilitate their integration into like-minded groups.</li> </ul>		
<i>Lack of basic training in first language and second language.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the population with training to overcome language barriers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Put in place French-language basic training for unilingual Anglophone residents (or those who speak another language) who want to learn a second language.</li> <li>• Offer basic training in English for Francophones.</li> <li>• Raise employers' awareness about the importance of investing in training for their employees by having businesses give presentations on success stories.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy and language skills development services will be available in both official languages.</li> <li>• Basic training services in French as a second language will be offered in the community.</li> <li>• Francophone members of the community will have access to basic training to help them develop their skills in the English language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Collège Boréal and La Boite à Lettres</i></li> </ul>

Challenges	Strategies	Actions	Outcomes	Partners
<i>The “unknown” factor related to different cultures.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve the community’s understanding of various cultures (particularly Aboriginal and African).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer a workshop on intercultural skills to identify potential challenges and improve understanding of the African culture in order to avoid misunderstandings and create an inclusive environment.</li> <li>Develop strategies to help, welcome adequately and support people from different cultures as soon as they arrive in our community, by creating a welcome committee.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International students will feel welcomed and understood when they arrive in Hearst and throughout their post-secondary studies.</li> <li>People from different cultures will feel better understood by community members.</li> <li>Community members will be more receptive toward different cultures and toward the Aboriginal culture.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Université de Hearst</i>, welcome committee for refugees</li> </ul>
<i>Lack of volunteers.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage youth community members to engage in volunteerism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organize a volunteer fair (combine the event with an activity that is already planned to increase visibility), in order to suggest precise avenues for youth and provide detailed profiles that are required.</li> <li>Recruit volunteers during the fair.</li> <li>Develop a databank on volunteerism: categorize</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in number of volunteers.</li> <li>Improved understanding among youth and general population of the importance of volunteerism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High school, <i>Club Action</i>, <i>Foyer des Pionniers</i> (various organizations to provide an intergenerational experience)</li> </ul>

Challenges	Strategies	Actions	Outcomes	Partners
		<p>volunteering opportunities under various areas of interest and add descriptions of available volunteering opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide short trainings or testimonies from active volunteers.</li> </ul>		
<p><i>Lack of support for local businesses regarding digital technology.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarize businesses with the importance of the Web.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training and support to businesses in designing their websites, but mostly to teach them how to efficiently manage technological tools to stay up to date (Facebook, Twitter, etc.).</li> <li>• Provide various training on the use of digital technology.</li> <li>• Offer workshops about online sales.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Businesses will be more likely to use the Web and social media to advertise themselves and promote their products and services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CRIDDEC, <i>La Boite à Lettres</i></li> </ul>

Challenges	Strategies	Actions	Outcomes	Partners
<i>Avoid duplication of services in the community.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Centralize the information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create a community calendar to centralize information and simplify ways to find it.</li> <li>Create a databank of current services.</li> <li>Meet in person with employers to explain services that may be useful to them.</li> <li>Organize luncheons to encourage information-sharing among employers, organizations, entrepreneurs and service providers where they can describe their respective mandates and new programs to each other.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Duplication of services will be eliminated.</li> <li>Employers will be better informed about existing services in the community.</li> <li>Information will be more readily accessible and in a central location.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic Development Corporation, <i>Centre Partenaires pour l'emploi</i></li> </ul>

## 5. Conclusion

The planning process initiated over the past months has generated positive changes within the community. Already, several committees have been created and partnerships among various organizations were established to meet community needs. The coming year will prove that a community that builds on its assets and strengthens its weaknesses is a healthy community. Effective partnerships will be forged in order to improve literacy and skills development. Newly formed committees will contribute in making the community even more welcoming and inclusive for its residents and newcomers who choose it as a home. Hearst will have the opportunity to consult with the community of Kapuskasing in developing activities that are part of the plan, as it will also have participated in the *Strengthening Rural Canada* project. Further, both communities face the same challenges. Finally, positive outcomes emerging from actions undertaken will become apparent as employment and training services and programs continue to adapt to the particular challenges and needs of the community.

## **APPENDIX A**

List of various organizations that participated in the community forum, held in Hearst on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016.

### **Training and Education:**

RESDAC

*La Boite à Lettres*

Decoda Literacy Solutions

*Collège Boréal* (2 representatives)

*Université de Hearst* (3 representatives)

*École secondaire de Hearst* (2 representatives)

### **Economic Development:**

RDÉE Ontario

Economic Development Corporation

Ministry of Northern Development and Mines

*Nord-Aski*

Town of Hearst

Far Northeast Training Board

### **Employment Service:**

*Centre Partenaires pour l'emploi* (2 representatives)

### **Non-profit Organizations:**

*La Maison Verte*

*Club Action*

*Réseau du mieux-être francophone du Nord*

*Vieillir Chez-soi*

CRIDDEC

### **Businesses:**

Villeneuve Construction

CIBC

*Caisse populaire*