

Employment resource for mature workers is making a difference

by Gloria Welton

Re-entering the workforce

Carol Ross of Stratford can't say enough about the tremendous help she is getting from **Passport To Employment**. This program helps mature workers ages 55 to 64 re-enter the workforce.

"I heard about this program through a friend who took it about a year ago," says Carol. "She had great success finding a job she loves."

"I had cared for my mother, who passed away at 95 years of age," says Carol. "The timing seemed right to look into a job I could do a few days a week. I want a job to help keep my mind active, fresh, and sharp and to be with people."

Biggest concerns

"When considering my job choices, I had little confidence in my abilities," says Carol. "I didn't think I had anything to give." Another big concern was a lack of computer skills. "When I worked with the provincial government years ago, there were no computers. I didn't use computers when I co-owned a hair dressing shop or when I was a temporary secretary in a school."

Confidence instilled in short period of time

After just two weeks in the Passport to Employment program, Carol realized there is a place in the workforce for her. "By putting my resumé together, I realize how many skills I have developed over the years."

"I also am learning how to use a computer as I work on my resumé," she says with a big smile. "I feel like a changed person and I am learning quickly because of the program delivery and facilitator styles."

The program Carol is in has eight people working towards similar goals. "At this early stage of re-entering the work force, it's great to be with people of similar age and similar challenges. I feel comfortable with everyone as we share ideas and build new skills. And the facilitator for the job search, **Ed Robillard**, is amazing. He has a way of putting us at ease."

Passport to Employment is evolving

"Not only are we offering more support to ensure employment success but we are getting more inquiries and filling our programs every time we advertise a start date," says **Maitland MacIsaac**, Coordinator. "There are about 7,000 people on PEI who are in this age range and who may want to work. We are starting to hear from them."



Carol Ross has much more confidence in her computer skills after only two weeks of participating in Passport to Employment. "This program is a perfect fit for me. We concentrate on job search skills and we have an extra few weeks to build computer skills here at Academy of Learning."

The program that Carol entered in September familiarized participants with basic office functions and procedures. Each Passport to Employment program is directed towards a different sector of the workforce experiencing labour shortages.

Job search skills

The three to five week program offers job search training in computer skills, creating a resumé and a job portfolio, interview strategies, and self awareness. "The program is working very well," says Maitland. "It has a 65 percent employment success rate."

"We are seeing great success in job seeking and job matching," says **Yvonne Doyle**, Course Coordinator. "Participants usually come into the program without a career goal in mind. During the classroom time, participants realize their strengths and are exposed to new choices. By the end, a decision is usually made as to the type of job they are seeking or they are well into finding a job or actually have a job."

"When we talk with employers, we learn quickly that they value mature workers and are very interested in making a job match," says Yvonne. "Employers see the advantages of hiring mature workers. They see that many come from a wide variety of experiences. Mature workers may also have more flexibility with their time, and may only be looking for part-time work or work for a few more years."

Approaching employers

During the program, staff work with participants to determine a job interest. Then businesses are contacted to ask about possible job opportunities.

"The business may interview one or more participants," says Yvonne. "If they believe they have a job match, Passport staff work with the business to create a set of job readiness skills that are specific to the business."

Along with the job readiness skills, the participant learns about the company's culture and the staff, and becomes familiar with the nature of the work. If the experience is successful for the job seeker and the business, the participant may be hired.

Working with industry

In the past, Passport to Employment has partnered with sectors such as tourism, trucking, and agriculture and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. At present, they are partnered with the Early Childhood Development Association and Academy of Learning.

Maitland says these partnerships are crucial to help make a direct connection to labour market needs. "We work directly with our partners. If we find that there is a job shortage in a sector, we can gear our program directly to the jobs in that area."

Follow-up

"We are in the process of setting up a new aspect to the program," says Maitland. "If a participant does not get a job or the job ends, program staff plan to continue to work with the job seeker. Follow-up can lead to more success."

For more information, call **620-3857** or visit www.peijoblink.ca and click on **Mature Workers**.

Passport to Employment is a cost shared initiative between the Government of Canada and the Government of Prince Edward Island.