

# **Project Overview and Outcomes of an Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant for**

**Ontario Society of Senior Citizens' Organizations/  
Organisations d'aînés de l'Ontario**

***Enhancing Economic Opportunities for People  
50 to 70 Years of Age Project***

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National Organization on Aging and Longevity  
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The views expressed in this report are those of the respondents who participated in the project and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ontario Trillium Foundation or those of the Ontario Senior Citizens' Organizations.

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 Project Overview and Outcomes of an Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant for Enhancing Economic Opportunities for People 50 to 70 Years of Age – February 2022

## **Ontario Society of Senior Citizens' Organizations (OSSCO©)**

- is a registered charity.
- encourage seniors (65 years of age and over) to participate fully in society.
- raises awareness and understanding of implications of an aging population.
- administers numerous programs, projects and initiatives to assist older Ontarians (*including displaced workers 50+*) to develop the skills and wherewithal to succeed in the current job market.
- provide resources to government and business on issues relating to an aging population.
- work as a partner with government to effect positive public policy outcomes for seniors.
- serve as a resource for media commentary and expert advice on issues and topics relating to seniors and aging population.

## **National Organization on Aging and Longevity (NOAL)**

- is a non-profit
- experts on population aging, demographic risk and fiscal policy
- help improve socialization needs of seniors in elder care facilities
- deals with various aging issues including employability of older people

## **Funder:**

- Ontario Trillium Foundation - Grow Grant
- Takes a successful project (SEED) to a new level
- Provides a higher level of funding over 2-3 years to help proven community projects increase their impact

## 1. Shifting Demographics:

Ontario's fastest growing age demographic are people 50 years of age and over.

More Canadians are over the age of 65 than under the age of 15 according to Stats Canada with Ontario having 38.5 per cent of its residents over the age of 65.

Population aging will lead to a shortage in labour supply requiring the need for older workers to remain or return to the workforce.

## 2. Current Challenges: Unmet Needs

For 2 years prior to applying for an Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) SEED grant, OSSCO© facilitated employment networking workshops for the Human Resources Professional Association (HRPA) and reached 1,600+ older job seekers. During this time, through its structured activities with a purposeful focus, OSSCO© identified an unmet need. There was an unmet gap in support for people 50 years of age and over to gain and/or retain employment.

Based on a study undertaken by OSSCO© in 2016, the organization noted that there were no specific federal or provincial program designed to assist those 50 to 70 years of age with job search or career training to either remain active in or re-enter the work force.

Statistics indicate workers over 50 years of age, particularly newcomers to Canada in this age group, face the greatest challenge to finding employment. This group needs to learn different ways to find work, be given more time to find employment assistance and develop opportunities to connect with others during long periods of unemployment

Other studies also demonstrated that older workers (*including older newcomers to Canada*) face the greatest challenges to employment.

With the rapid shift in demographics currently taking place in Ontario, OSSCO© determined that older workers (50 years of age and over) and those individuals who are older and new to Canada, require specific training, education and assistance in finding employment opportunities.

OSSCO© built on the work of an OTF SEED grant and rolled out in 4 Regions the Enhancing Economic Opportunities project to fulfill the unmet gap to support people 50-70 years of age in developing the skills to succeed in the current job market.

### **3. The Purpose: a Backgrounder**

#### Needs of people 50 - 70 years of Age

It was determined that adults between the ages of 50 to 70 require different tools, resources and information/training to help remain independent, engaged in the workforce and deal with new employment related realities.

Unemployed older persons including newcomers and immigrants have a unique set of needs and require different tools, resources, approaches, information and support to help remain independent and deal with economic realities.

#### OSSCO© Toolkit for Self-Sufficiency

Teaching this age demographic how to “network”, to share, connect and discuss coping skills to deal with financial pressures, health and social issues needed as adjustments to new realities are made would enhance employment opportunities as well.

OSSCO© developed and delivered help to this age group in the GTA with a educational toolkit made up of 2 programs that would enhance their economic opportunities and help find the support/resources they may need to do so.

The 1st program in the toolkit, Job Search Strategies, is a job seeking program that provides learners with new knowledge and skills of the job search process relevant and specific for people 50+. Through this program, they also learned how to deal with economic vulnerability with support from their collaborator agencies, COSTI, YMCA, JobStart and Times Change Women. These agencies provided them with information on where to find the help they may need i.e. accommodations, food insecurity, transportation, etc. to remove any potential barrier to finding work.

The 2nd program in the toolkit, Employment Networking Group (ENG) teaches people 50+ networking skills to rebuild those important business and personal networks. They also learned how to establish and maintain a sustainable volunteer led ENG to improve their job skills, develop career experiences and reduce social isolation to increase their economic stability.

#### Improving Prospects of Employability

The organization implemented these 2 programs to address the idea that participants' financial stability could be enhanced if they changed self-sufficiency through OSSCO©'s toolkit (Job Search Strategies program and ENG meetings) and had access to community services, programs, information and support through collaborator organizations, their prospects for employment would be enhanced.

#### **4. The 3-Year Enhancing Economic Opportunities Project:**

A 2-day Job Search Strategies workshop with modules was implemented by OSSCO© to help job seekers re-assess their skills, approach to job search, and new workplaces such as gig employment, contract work, or weekend/part-time employment and ENG workshop was offered in 4-regions in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Workshop modules were designed to be interactive. We learned that the workshop content and delivery style was modified based on the determined needs of the participants in each workshop including various exercises, activities, out of class assignments and discussions.

Through its previous Trillium SEED grant, OSSCO© had demonstrated that long term unemployed older persons needed programs with a different focus and support including outreach and coaching participants to help them with successful job search strategies such as networking skills, improving social relations, creating online and social media presence, know how to access community services for mental health, homelessness, all associated with unemployment.

This was again reconfirmed throughout the Enhancing Economic Opportunities project.

Participants also gained practical experience in building or re-building their social networks through OSSCO©'s Employment Network Group (ENG) program.

#### **5. Project Description:**

Implementation of the Toolkit with its 2 programs in the GTA dealt with 2 specific groups of older persons:

- The unemployed or laid off older worker, and,
- The unemployed or laid off older worker who maybe a newcomer i.e. without Canadian work experience.

Through this 3-year OTF grant, OSSCO© was able to provide participants with the delivery of programs that were developed and based on community feedback and consultations already received.

Outcomes of the 3-year OTF grant program including this report are to be shared with Provincial and Federal training ministries to raise awareness of the specific needs and requirements of this target audience for future government planning and investments.

This information will also be provided to Ministry of Community and Social Services as well as municipalities where the project takes place as they may not be aware of the social needs of this growing marginalized population affected by job long periods of job loss. This is in addition to information gathered and shared during the Grow Grant period with OSSCO©'s collaborative partners.

## 6. Project Monitoring:

### Evaluation Process:

Evaluation and assessment criteria was developed and collected throughout the project commitment period by each collaborative partner, by OSSCO© as well as the requisite OTF 3rd party surveys which assessed participants before and after completion of each program. This continuous monitoring through evaluations was gathered at partner sites, via telephone and email by OSSCO© as well as collecting pre- and post 3rd party surveys email and ensured that the matrix and project goals would be fulfilled. The 3rd party surveys were gathered onsite or by email, and entered onto their system without any identifying participant information.

Monitoring and follow-up with program participants through multiple surveys was done as part of the benchmarks. This included asking participants' information on the following: - Managing your time - Changing roles : Socialization, self-esteem, loss - Wellness - Emotional and Social well-being, and how the participant felt each program helped them or enhanced their economic opportunities.

### Confirmation of Project Outcomes:

Through workshops and programs, and subsequent educational mentorship workshops of peers, OSSCO© project staff educated participants on how to re-engage in the job search process by connecting with others and taught them how to connect in face-to-face or virtual online environments. This was documented through participant feedback, surveys and observation.

In collecting information to write the report, we learned from past program participants that providing regular space for people of a similar age and dealing with a similar situation (increased social isolation due to job loss) encouraged them to re-organize their lives and introduce consistency. Without life organization, and social connectivity, we also learned from past program participants that unemployed job seekers who are out of work 9+ months became marginalized with increased negative outcomes.

The only requirement to attend workshops and enroll in the Employment Networking Group (ENG) programs was that the individual is: 50+, unemployed, and interested in attending meetings for 4-consecutive weeks (subject to renewal of interest) on topics to assist job seekers and for self-mentoring. ENG was planned to be a self-sufficient and member driven activity to engage workers who have not worked for 9 months or more.

### Launching of ENG Groups in Community:

One of the OTF project goals was that an ENG group would be launched and self-sustaining after the program or project ended. Information was provided during the ENG

program to help develop an individual's networking skills and also acquire knowledge how to establish and operate an ENG in their community. The goal of the ENG group outside of the OSSCO© program is to be one which is an inclusionary, purposeful process involving people 50+ so that they can connect with others. This process is not to be a hand-out but a hand-up for adults who have become marginalized due their economic situations as result of unemployment.

We learned that several ENG groups were launched in the 1st year and 2nd year of the project, but were short lived. Only 1 ENG group continues functioning for more than 1 year. It is in Durham Region.

### ENG Group Launches by Partner

COSTI had 1 ENG group launch after the 2nd ENG program, in year 1. This ENG group was active for an 8-month period, with COSTI providing some meeting space. The group was disbanded when 90% of its members (16) had found employment. There were no further groups launched.

At JobStart, there were 2 participant attempts to launch ENG groups, 1 ENG group in year 1, and 1 ENG group in year 2. The 1st group disbanded within a 3-month period as participant numbers dropped from 11 to 3. The 2nd group launched with 5 members. It was disbanded after 1 month of meetings.

Times Change Women which joined the project in April 2019,, had 1 ENG group launch in August 2019. It initially had 22 members and then dropped down to 8 members. They met bi-weekly in coffee shops. The ENG group was disbanded due to COVID-19.

In April 2020, during COVID-19, an ENG group launched from the ENG program at YMCA Whitby. They had 16 members (founders), with 9 members finding employment shortly thereafter. This ENG group continues to meet virtually, nearly 2 years later, on Wednesday evenings. The group ranges from 6 - 11 participants, and deals with employment and social issues. They renamed themselves The Whitby ENG Club. One (1) out of 4 regions operates an ENG volunteer based group after a program ended.

## **7. Helping Older People Find Work:**

Five host (collaborator) partner locations were chosen to provide geographical diversity. These partners were *COSTI (Brampton)*, *Job Start (Toronto)*, *Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services (Toronto)*, *Times Change Women*, *YMCA Whitby location* and *YMCA Markham location*.

Times Change Women replaced Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services in the 2nd year due to a major employee restructuring at Dixon Hall. They were not able to partner with OSSCO© any further. Times Change Women brought a unique and focused older audience as this organization provided services and programs only to women.



Although only 3 regions were required for this OTF grant, YMCA Markham had requested to participate in this project in year 2 and 3 giving OSSCO© full GTA regional representation in the delivery of its toolkit.

### Partner (collaborator) Organizations' Support for the Toolkit

Each partner organization had identical roles. These organizations were chosen as partners because they provide employment assistance as Employment Ontario sites, and career planning development. They therefore served as a complement to OSSCO©'s role and its 2 programs and their own employment programs.

OSSCO©'s toolkit offered adults 50+ as well as newcomers and immigrants who have been unemployed for long periods of time the best opportunities to find employment. Times Change Women acknowledged that there was no such programs for people 50 - 70 years of age that are available. They averaged attendance of 25 learners in each of the Job Search Workshop (program) and ENG programs although participant access to the program was 30% higher.

The project 's integrated educational program consisting of a 2-day Job Search Workshop, included 2 follow-up connections during the 6-week program. The job search workshop and ENG groups formed a 6-week cycle. This cycle was repeated 3 times during the year. No such program was available at the partner organization sites.

Due to COVID-19, the 2-day (12 hour) Job Search Workshop was revised and modified over a 4-month period. It was tested and feedback gathered from The Whitby ENG Club to become a 6-week virtual program with 2-hour classes. The ENG program was more easily modified for a virtual learning platform during the 4-month period. During COVID-19, the toolkit which was originally a 6-week program was expanded into a 10-week program, with 4 follow-up connections by OSSCO© project staff.

### Participant Access to Enhance Economic Opportunities

All five of the partner organizations had access to additional programs, services, support and services such as connections, employment strategies for individuals with international experience; resources (i.e. language bureau, community services, family and mental health, housing, problem gambling) all of which unemployed older workers (program participants) could need information about or access to.

Prior to COVID-19, we learned that each of OSSCO© partner organization made their specific services known at every workshop or program activity as participants may not be aware of these or how to access the services. This information is important because it enabled participants to gain access to necessary services to enhance their economic opportunities.

These partner organizations also promoted their own programs in community in addition to OSSCO©'s and did outreach to employers, businesses & community groups. We can

confirm that their expertise and knowledge helped program participants deal with economic issues such as housing, food security, legal, health and others

### Acknowledging Economic Repercussions of Involuntary Job Loss

The project provided participants aged 50-70 years of age a workshop and programs specific to this age demographic as well as personal connections and learning delivered by peers. The toolkit was provided without cost to the participants. OSSCO© project staff adapted their delivery style based on participant needs and followed-up for support and mentorship to encourage attendance.

When the workshop and program was offered in person, participants were provided with a meal, mid-morning snack as well as bus tokens or travel expenses (i.e. gas) to remove barriers to attend the class. COSTI and JobStart also provided participants with paper, writing materials, access to a photocopier, computers and resource rooms. We learned that by doing so, it eliminated the stigma of food insecurity or lack of transportation from learners at Dixon Hall Neighbourhood Services and Times Change Women as well as at JobStart. Learners received classroom materials and resources that they needed at both COSTI and JobStart.

### Reaching Unemployed Older Workers

Each program or workshop in the toolkit was promoted and marketed by the partner organization to specifically to attract older workers. In gathering this information, we learned the partners used the resources of their marketing departments to create promotional fliers as well as identifying how to reach this target audience through information dissemination. This included broader outreach to attract participants to attend through social media - Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, partner website; mass mailers to other agencies i.e. Peel Think Share including other Employment Ontario and Ontario Works agencies, online publications and local print media as well as to their current and past clients. OSSCO© also posted each workshop and program on their website.

Several examples of negative repercussions of involuntary job loss with successful outcomes after OSSCO© program participation are described below.

Year 1: OSSCO© project staff at COSTI helped 2 participants complete their pre-survey and learned that 1 was homeless and another "couch surfing". Working with COSTI staff, these participants accessed temporary and by applying the learnings from Job Search Strategies found employment, and employment that also provided them with housing.

**Testimonial:** *"I have attended many workshops, and always found work by walking in the door with my resume. This program is very good in summarizing what one needs to take away to find work differently, i.e. Elevator speech, skills inventory...COSTI and OSSCO staff helped me with my life situation and I am now employed"* **Participant, COSTI Brampton, 2019**

Year 2: OSSCO© project staff at YMCA Whitby helped 1 participant who was unemployed for several years, and had "lost everything". They were aggressive in their comments in the classes. They indicated that they had moved in with their elderly family and lost social connects as a result of involuntary job loss. The OSSCO© project staff connected the participant with a YMCA employment counselor. Applying the learnings from Job Search Strategies and refocused by YMCA staff, the participant found work by the end of the ENG class.

**Testimonial:** *I have some good and bad news to start your day. I have found the job I was seeking with one of the companies I was targeting, so unfortunately I cannot continue with the workshop.* **Participant, YMCA Whitby, 2019**

OSSCO© project staff at YMCA Whitby were informed by a participant they had job interviews and would miss a portion of the 2nd day of the workshop. Program participants offered to help the participant prepare for the interview and apply the networking skills. The following week the participant withdrew from the program as they had obtained 2 job offers.

**Testimonial:** *"It was empowering to move forward as a group to problem solve and create clarify on next steps. Was practical and result-driven."* - **Participant from YMCA Whitby, ENG, 2019**

Year 3: OSSCO© project staff at COSTI had 1 group taking JSS program with half of the participants immigrants with professional designations from outside of Canada. The other half of the participants were a mix of people working in para-professional and industrial work settings. Several comments indicated that the program met their needs search needs including using the partner organization for assistance.

**Testimonial:** *"This program was very helpful in giving me the tools necessary to feel better about my job prospects".* - **Participant from COSTI, JSS, 2021**

*"I hope this program is repeated. I would take it again and recommend to many others who I know who are older. It would be a big help to them also".* - **Participant from COSTI, JSS, 2021**

*"As a newcomer to Canada, I learned how to make a resume with the help of the employment centre".* - **Participant from COSTI JSS 2020**

There are many other examples such as those provided. These examples confirm studies that the longer a person is unemployed that there are negative repercussions associated with involuntary job loss such as deterioration of mental health, increased risk of becoming homeless due to lack of employment opportunities, increased use of social safety nets such as Ontario Works/lack of social housing, neglect of self-care, all leading to enhanced risk of marginalization of the older unemployed worker.

Other issues associated with involuntary job loss include increased risk of social isolation, loss of identity, feeling powerless, negative impacts on physical health such as weight gain/loss, and alcohol/drug addiction.

Those 50 to 70 years of age who become unemployed have experienced job insecurity or interrupted employment are less likely to have private pensions and retirement savings.

Elderly newcomers to Canada in this age category have additional barriers. Elderly-born older adults may have additional barriers most significantly language.

This project was intended to reduce economic vulnerability as a result of increasing connections with people and reducing the risk of social isolation associated with unemployment by reintroducing new routines, creating a purposeful activity, and helping them to focus on things they can control. The five partner organizations were an integral part of recruiting participants and providing them with support to enhance their economic opportunities.

We also learned in writing this report that being around others of a similar age and facing similar challenges helped energize and motivate participants during their job search. Having a Peer trainer was also noted as beneficial to the program and workshop participants.

## **8. The Job Search Strategies© (JSS) Modules:**

Module 1 - Net Giving, Say Hello to the Networking Alternative Concepts: Branding who you are and using your helpful gene.

Module 2 - Beating the System or One Size Does Not Fit All Concepts: Understanding the various resume application processes from human to A.I.

Module 3 - Finding Your Job Niche Concepts: Building on your strengths and experience, I never thought of that...., Leaving no stone unturned (researching potential industries and sectors), Alternatives to a traditional job search, Taking the pulse on market realities.

Module 4 - Face Your Fears & Stay Out of the Land of Excuses Concepts: Dealing with various barriers such as lack of Canadian experience, language (accents), fear of rejection, over versus under qualified, finding work within your “fence”, dealing with failure, too old (ageism), and more!

Module 5: Considering all your options (including a career or job change after 50). Exploring concepts such as venturing into a new career landscape, identifying fastest growing industries/sectors, finding your personal “hot” job market and ‘never stop learning’.

## **9. Employment Networking Program© (ENG):**

This program is designed to have interactive working sessions and applied learning.

This program offered a combination of businesses (knowledge experts) making presentations and practical learning applications for attendees on networking and using meeting management skills for the attendee's job search process and their personal lives.

The concept of volunteering and its benefits were also introduced, as well as rebuilding new networks starting with their classroom peers.

OSSCO© project staff were responsible to find and confirm knowledge experts to speak in 2 ENG classes. These knowledge experts were also older professionals. By using knowledge experts, the ENG program provided participants with access to different employers and employment processes.

OSSCO©'s project staff, Educational Program Assistants (EPA) facilitated and lead ENG activities. EPAs explored and applied concepts from those knowledge experts and/or leads in discussions for problem-solving on topics such as, "How do you organize your job search for the week?", or "What has worked for you to get connected to a hiring manager?" or "What barriers have everyone encountered that we need to overcome?"

ENG participants learned Canadian meeting management skills by volunteering to give presenter introduction/ thank you, in note taking and distribution of emails/information to other program participants. They practiced networking skills such as sharing "elevator speech", personal or job goals in employment seeking, how the participant can help others and barriers to achieving these goals and to provide much needed social connections (a funding priority).

## **10. OSSCO© Project Staff EPA:**

Year 1, there was 1.5 FTE - 1 full time person & part time working 3 days a week. Due to Dixon Hall dropping out, and JobStart having a large gap in their training schedule the .5 person was laid off.

Year 2, there were 2 full time people. COVID-19 arrived at the start of year 2.

Year 3, 2 FTE redesigned and moved 2 programs onto an online platform. This required a complete rewriting of a 12-hour workshop with its modules into a 6-week program, with new activities, exercises and protocols for plenary and "break out room" discussions.

The two programs were offered once from September to December 2020 at YMCA Whitby, Times Change Women and JobStart. OTF asked OSSCO© to suspend activities from Jan - end of April 2021. The 2 TFE staff were laid off. 1 staff returned; the other took lay-off notice & pay. The project ended with 1.4 FTE project staff delivering 5 programs - 3 Job Search Strategies and 2 ENG programs.

## 11. Key Metrics:

At the end of the grant, each community was to have a volunteer led ENG to share employment opportunities, and network with peers to increase participation in collaborators' programs as part of the job seeking process.

1. OSSCO© promoted and recruited participants to support the five partner organizations. Over a 2-year period, every 4 months OSSCO delivered a 2-day workshop, and 4 half day Employment Networking (ENG) activities with participant follow-up.
2. Established ENG meetings (in person and virtual) and taught participants network meeting management and volunteering skills through presenters and activities.
3. Collaborators provided access to various programs such as how to make connections, employment strategies for individuals with international experience; resources such as getting involved; community services eg. family and mental health, housing, problem gambling, seniors' care.
4. Stakeholders are aware that unemployed older persons 50-70 including newcomers and immigrants have unique set of needs for tools, resources and connections for employability.
5. What participants did differently after workshop to find employment. Could they identify barriers to employability and find solutions to barriers.
6. Did participants increase knowledge of new job search strategies. Increased awareness of changes in workplace that occurred during their unemployment such as shift work, "gig" jobs, etc. Did their employment expectations change with respect to wages?
7. Do participants know how to access community services that enhance economic stability? Could participants manage and maintain volunteer based ENG meetings in their community?
8. Did attending ENG help with their confidence, improve social relations, provide valuable job skills, new work experiences, application of networking skills?

## 12. The Results - Participant Questions and Answers

### 1. Have you actively been seeking employment for 12 months or more?

*100% of the respondents indicated they have been seeking employment for at least the last 12-month period.*

*This response confirms that none of OSSCO's program participants fit the criteria for direct and ongoing employment assistance through an Employment Ontario site. By partnering with OSSCO, the partner organizations were better able to provide long-term unemployed people in their communities with access to assistance in finding work.*

*This response also confirms there are no programs or services to directly help or support individuals who are unemployed for 12+ months and over the age of 50.*

### 2. Prior to OSSCO programs, were you being formally helped with your job search?

*40% had sought out assistance with their job search. Of this group, 60% had sought the advice of family, friends and former co-workers. 20% updated their resume. 15% used social media such as LinkedIn. 5% used online employment services such as Indeed and staffing agencies.*

*30% of respondents took voluntary positions (many of these were cancelled due to Covid)*

*This response confirms that there are no formal programs to help older workers, resulting in individuals using various options such as personal connections, social media, volunteering to find work to find their next job.*

### 3. What OSSCO program did you attend? ENG, JSS or both

*50% of respondents attended ENG*

*30% JSS*

*20% both*

*This response indicates that while job search strategies programs are an important component of the job search process, the majority of respondents felt that acquiring skills to rebuild or develop networks to find the "hidden job market" was of greater value. It also confirms that older unemployed workers wanted the support of peers in their job search, which reduces social isolation and loneliness.*

### **3.a. What did you expect to learn from the OSSCO© ENG program you took?**

*100% of respondents to this question all wanted to either learn or improve their networking skills.*

*This indicates that the ENG program achieved the expectations from all participants.*

### **3.b What did you expect to learn from the OSSCO© JSS program you took?**

*Responses to this question were fairly evenly split (50%) between how to use their network contacts, and (50%) how to write a resume and improving their interviewing skills.*

*This indicates the JSS program met the requirements of participants, although 50% wanted more specific information to get a job offer, which was out scope of the project.*

## **4. After taking an OSSCO© program did it change how you were seeking employment?**

*100% of respondents indicated that after taking the OSSCO© program they changed how they were seeking employment.*

*80% noted they began to tailor their resume to the specific position they were applying for.*

*60% noted they felt more confident in their approach to job seeking. (Some even said they were making cold calls to potential employers. Others, they learned to research their potential employer in advance of their interview so they would know more about the company and position they were applying for. )*

*70% the respondents felt it was necessary to take courses to learn a new skill or improve on an existing one to make them more marketable to a potential employer.*

*This indicates that the two OSSCO© programs resulted in positive change to the participants and knowledge to help them find work.*



**5. Prior to taking an OSSCO© program, what activities were you doing while actively seeking working: taking education courses, upgrading specific to your previous employment, special interest, exploring career change. keeping skills current i.e. webinars, online courses, Volunteering, Gig (short term) work, managing own website, Blogging, Investigating Financial Options, use employment centre resources, Other**

*The response of the respondents to this question indicated a rather scattered approach to the kinds of activities undertaken. 60% respondents noted they were searching online by going to company websites. 25% of respondents noted they took online courses to enhance their skill sets. A large group (85%) felt more targeted in their approach in seeking employment especially when dealing with employment centres at the five partner locations.*

*We learned that although the responses were not cohesive, participants consistently noted that after taking a program they were more targeted in their job search and dealt more effectively with the employment centres and there was a change in their job search. This indicates that participants were better prepared and knew how to focus their job search efforts to find work, including using the resources of the Employment Ontario partner organizations.*

**6. As a result of taking an OSSCO© program, what activities were you doing while actively seeking working: taking education courses, upgrading specific skills, special interest courses, exploring career change, keeping skills current i.e. webinars, online courses, volunteering, gig (short term) work, managing own website, blogging, investigating financial options, use employment centre resources, other?**

*The results indicated that the majority of respondents greatly benefitted from what they learned in the OSSCO© program. 90% said they learned how to update, improve and write a better resume. 70% began to take online courses to either improve existing skills or learn new ones. 65% began to use employment centres. 95% of those who took part in the program felt more confident about their ability to seek new employment.*

*The responses confirmed that attending one of the programs provided benefit to the participant in terms of job search capability and understanding what their potential employer requires in terms of skills, knowledge and expertise.*

## **7. What were the barriers and/or challenges that you encountered before taking an OSSCO© program?**

*75% indicated they lacked adequate networking skills. 70% were not familiar enough with how to strategically use the internet and social media to search for specific employment opportunities. 80% lacked knowledge on how to prepare a resume tailored to the job/ position they were applying for or what was required for online job applications. 80% indicated they have encountered ageism in looking for work. Participants learned some sectors would not hire people 50+.*

*These responses indicates that older job seekers are aware of what they are lacking in terms of support or skills for their job search and that there is a bias amongst employers/sectors not to hire people 50+, regardless if they are capable of performing the work.*

*This feedback is important for government, stakeholders, and others to be aware of for future employment program support of this age demographic , and to help businesses better understand the value that an older worker brings and contributions to a businesses' bottom line.*

## **8. After taking an OSSCO© program, what barriers and/or challenges did you encounter?**

*75% indicated that ageism is a problem regardless of what new knowledge they received from an OSSCO© program.. A large portion of respondents commented that many potential employers would rather hire younger workers.*

*This indicates that more employer education is required as to the contributions and value that an older worker can bring to an employer so that they see the older worker as beneficial to the company's bottom line.*

### **9. a. What did you learn from the OSSCO© ENG program you took?**

*80% of respondents indicated that networking skills were the most valuable lessons learned.*

*These responses confirmed that the longer an individual is unemployed, the greater the negative repercussions are for the individual such as loss of connections, both employment and personal. The ENG program helped participants acquire, rebuild or improve their networking skills to find work and social connections.*

## 9.b What did you learn from the OSSCO© JSS program you took?

*80% of respondents identified that how to seek out job leads were the most popular responses. We learned in writing this report that learning how to find job leads was included in both the JSS and ENG programs.*

## 9.c Did you repeat ENG, JSS, or did not repeat the program?

*70% repeated each of the programs once.*

*This indicates that the programs need to be offered over a longer period of time, with additional Peer facilitator support, in helping this age demographic find work.*

## 10. How long after completing an OSSCO© program, did you find any employment i.e. Gig/casual, part time, full time, term contract, seasonal? 3mos, 6-mos, 9-most, 12+ mos, still looking for work

*75% felt more confident about their ability to find employment, identifying that they received interviews. However, 20% of the respondents actually found full time employment within 6-months of completing a program. 25% gained part time employment or term contract work within 6-9 months of completing a program.*

## 13. Objectives versus Results

### Objectives Year 1:

40% of Workshop participants (110) in the 3 regions indicate they applied information from workshop in job seeking process

40% of ENG participants (280) in the 3 regions indicate they applied information from networking in job seeking process

5% of participants (336) in the 3 regions indicate they found employment.

50% of participants (336) in 3 regions indicated they have access to community services that enhance  
Financial stability

## Objectives Year 2:

50% of participants (160) in 4 regions indicate they applied information from workshop in job seeking process

50% of participants (456) in 4 regions indicated they applied information from networking in job seeking process and given opportunity to participate in ENG meeting management

5% of participants (540) in 4 regions indicate they found employment

50% of participants (540) in 4 regions indicated they applied information from networking in job seeking process.

## Objectives Year 3:

60% of participants (180) in regions indicated they applied information from workshop in job seeking Process

60% of participants (532) indicated they know how to manage and maintain volunteer based ENG meetings in their communities

5 % of participants (630) in 4 regions indicated they found employment

60% of participants (630) in 4 regions indicated they have access to community services that enhance financial stability

## Results (Sum of Years 1, 2 and 3)

Delta: +35%

85% of respondents indicated they applied the information they learned in the workshops to their job seeking.

Delta: +35%

85% of respondents indicated their networking skills were improved as a result of their participation in this program.

Delta: +2%

7% of respondents found employment after taking the program.

Delta: +17%

70% of the participants indicated they had improved access to support systems to enhance their financial stability.

## 14. Conclusion

The results clearly indicate that this toolkit program has been a success and fulfilled the OTF application criteria. An observation was that participants needed a longer length of time in the both JSS program which was 2-day workshop/6-week program, and the 4-week ENG program. Based on the comments received in this evaluation, the ENG program appeared to meet all of the participant's expectations, except that it needed to be a longer program. Should OSSCO© receive funding in the future and proceed with the delivery of these two programs, an integrated 10-week program, incorporating ENG program concepts throughout the 10-weeks would fully meet the needs of the older unemployed worker.

OSSCO© identified a clear need in the community to create a toolkit with 2-programs for those aged 50 to 70 years to address the challenges they face in securing employment. Given the fact that Ontario's population is aging and the number of newcomers, especially older ones, are increasing, the OSSCO© model would be well received if implemented as government policy to support employment of this demographic, across the province of Ontario.

Although Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on in person meetings, virtual training was substituted in order to fulfill the requirements of the grant requirements. This resulted in OSSCO© program staff adapting a 2-day workshop into a 6-week online program from May until July 2020. Discussions, in class activities and out of class room exercises (homework) had to be re-created to fit the new virtual model using Zoom, where there was a plenary group, several themed discussion rooms, reporting back to the plenary group and incorporating homework assignments into the class curriculum.

The pandemic also resulted in all program delivery being suspended from March 11, 2020 until mid-September 2020 as partner organizations were responding to the

provincial lockdowns and reorganization of their own agency's work. They also assigned different staff to support OSSCO© virtual programs as the agencies transitioned to online learning. Our conclusion was that everyone was learning and applying that learning in real time so that the older workers receive the knowledge that they needed to continue to find employment.

The challenge for the program participants during the pandemic became for access to technology - hardware, software and stable internet connections - in order to attend the classes as well as understanding the new virtual delivery model as students had not experienced virtual training.

In addition to changing program delivery and support for OSSCO©'s programs, partner organizations had to adjust their participant access and intake procedures. They changed their screening of program participants to ensure participants had a higher level of English language skills and technology literacy in order to attend the programs.

One organization (JobStart) offered several technology preparedness workshops in advance of the programs. Another, Times Change Women, purchased tablets which were loaned to program participants i.e. signing out a book from the library. They provided technology preparedness workshops as well.

It should be noted that these adaptations were done within the budget of the OTF grant. There were not additional monies provided or received. Due to COVID-19, the project was extended beyond March 31, 2021, ending in December 2021. It was concluded during the evaluation that OSSCO© and its program partners were able to adapt to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, with no negative impact or outcomes, for the program participants.

In concluding the evaluation, OSSCO© achieved its goal for access even while having to adapt to the changing landscape and new delivery models as a result of COVID-19 pandemic.

## 15. Recommendation and Next Steps:

It is recommended, based on the empirical results, that OSSCO© continue the toolkit program with its Job Search Strategies© (JSS) and Employment Networking© (ENG) programs.

It is recommended that OSSCO© work with provincial government in developing policy and new programs to improve access to employment programs and support for unemployed older workers 50+ or those in transition.

It is recommended that OSSCO© work with federal and provincial governments in developing policy and new programs to support older newcomers and immigrants 50+ to access employment programs and support to enhance their economic opportunities and contribute to the Canadian fabric.

It is recommended that OSSCO© partner with government and financial institutions to offer its toolkit to older unemployed workers or those in transition to help them find work.

It is recommended that OSSCO© modify and upgrade its current learning programs, based on participant feedback and these evaluations, to integrate and 2-programs into a 10-week online program, and, to develop the following 2-new programs in order to respond to the the job search process for people 50+:

- Employment Preparedness Skills: resume writing in an electronic age, interview preparation, imagining programs, applying/interviewing online
- Self Employment: how to start your own business specific to the older adult (50 to 70 years age) with support up to and including business registration and soft launch