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Final Evaluation Plan: Continuing On In Education

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Executive Summary

Continuing On In Education (C.O.ED.) is a well established program providing adult education opportunities for adults with cognitive impairments and other disabilities, to promote healthy/active living, basic life skills and literacy programming, independence, communication and socialization, in the Quinte region of Ontario. This program has evolved to meet the needs of its clientele, adults over 16 years of age, who are no longer involved in full time schooling or other social service programming (C.O.ED., n.d.). This program came into existence in 1986 and has evolved to meet the needs of its clientele over the years.

This program evaluation is being conducted to ensure C.O.ED. is providing adequate, up to date, valid instruction to promote the healthy/active, independent, and functional lifestyles of adults with disabilities in the local area. As the program is well established, a Monitoring Form of evaluation with a focus on Component Analysis (Owen, 2007), will be utilized to conduct the evaluation with the intent to determine if the Day Program portion of the C.O.ED. programming meets standards necessary to ensure its clientele is receiving adequate and appropriate service, supervision, instructional, and social support. Within the Day Program component of the C.O.ED. programming, there are four subcomponents that require evaluation individually: Literacy and Numeracy; Living Skills; Community Health and Fitness; and Supervised Work Placements (C.O.ED., n.d.), to ensure each meets the intended learning outcomes for the program.

To ensure a valid and unbiased evaluation of each subcomponent within the Component Analysis process, a mix of internal and external evaluators will be utilized, with the external

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evaluators to prescribe to both use-oriented and value-oriented philosophies (Alkin, 2011), to ensure both key stakeholders and clientele (program participant) voices and concerns are addressed during the evaluation process. As the cognitive functioning of the program participants are impaired to varying degrees, where possible caregivers or legal guardians will participate in the evaluation process along side the participants to offer support or provide voice if necessary.

Program Assumptions

1. Programming is learner-centred in its approach and meets specific needs of each individual client relevant to independent living within the scope of cognitive impairments.
2. Day Program subprograms provide adequate preparation for the everyday needs of clientele with only necessary overlap (i.e.: are the skills taught in the Literacy and Numeracy subprogram mirrored in part in the Living Skills program?).
3. Community interaction is supervised and appropriate participant safety initiatives are undertaken to assure the safety, security, and dignity of all clientele.
4. Programming is relevant to modern everyday living and reflects current changes in monetary system (i.e.: the phasing out of the one cent coin) to ensure participants are able to function successfully in society.
5. Program staff and volunteers, are adequately screened for service in the vulnerable sector, and subsequent security checks are undertaken in a timely manner.
6. Learning materials and equipment are modern, up to date, adequately maintained and available for the number of program participants to ensure maximum participation.

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7. Work placements are adequately supervised; take place in a fully accessible environment; give participants the ability to utilize their skills in a manner that fits in with personal goals, interests, and abilities (C.O. Ed., n.d.). The number of available work placements coincides with the number of program participants to ensure maximum participation. **In-**

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The community based program Continuing On In Education, based in Belleville, Ontario, has been operational for approximately 30 years. Its main focus is on delivering key adult education programming for adults with cognitive impairments and other disabilities, aged 16 and over (C.O.ED., n.d.). Programming fills a need for individual clients whom no longer meet the requirements for other Provincially supported education or social service programming, and is funded solely by donations from the community and from other not-for-profit organizations (C.O.ED., n.d.). Quality assurance is the driving factor for this evaluation proposal, focusing on fiscal accountability to the community, to ensure ongoing funding support for the program. As well, the evaluation intends to explore the validity of the programming to ensure it meets the needs of its clientele. For the purposes of this evaluation plan, only the DayProgram portion of the Continuing On In Education program with its four subcomponents have been selected for evaluation.

Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation will focus on accountability (Owen, 2007), and quality assurance (Newton, 2002; Harvey & Newton, 2004), to ensure the learning outcomes are meeting the needs of the clientele in an efficient and effective manner. The spirit of this evaluation is continuous im-

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provement discourse. Evaluators will focus specifically in areas of resource management, curriculum development, program delivery, and client impact. Government policy on educational programming, accessibility, and equality will be reviewed (Harvey & Newton, 2004) to ensure the Day Program meets all requirements and is in compliance with all municipal, provincial, and federal standards.

Ethical consideration will be taken to ensure the voices of the vulnerable clients is solicited in a manner respectful to all involved. Where necessary permissions will be obtained from parents, caregivers, or legal guardians, prior to engaging in any form of evaluative interaction with clientele. External evaluators should comply with any and all regulations for working in the vulnerable sector, including requirements for criminal record checks. Utilizing qualitative research methodology would also ensure a more accurate program evaluation.

Measurable Indicators

Improved quality of life for the clientele will be the primary measurable indicator; however it will be difficult to discern on its own. Auditing client improvement using measurable standards in the areas of literacy, numeracy, and life skills would give an indicator of overall improvement, showing a positive indicator of program success. As the clients have impairments in cognitive functioning, it is not simply enough to apply standardized testing to the evaluation process, therefore other indicators will have to be considered qualitatively (i.e.: client satisfaction/happiness, or caregiver input on noticeable improvements in program skills).

Successful community interaction is another indicator of program success, and is measurable qualitatively through evaluator interaction with the local community during or after sched-

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uled events in (specifically in the Community Health and Fitness subcomponent of the programming). Another indicator that is qualitatively measured to show program success is in the Supported Work Placement subcomponent, where employer satisfaction can be measured as well as employee (client) satisfaction. Factors to inquire about would be interest in job function; job skill performance assessment; and job satisfaction including a measure of whether or not the client feels like a productive member of society.

Other measurable indicators would include evaluation of facilities and equipment for modernity and accessibility, where success would be measured in terms of have/have not or pass/fail. A successful program should 'have' all equipment necessary; it should all be in useable condition and updated to reflect modern realities; and facilities should 'pass' all accessibility standards, ensuring all clientele are able to utilize the facilities equally and fully.

Tentative Evaluation Questions

The following evaluation questions have been formulated based on the program logic model. This is by no means an exhaustive list, as during the course of the evaluation, other factors affecting program quality, effectiveness, and efficiency may surface, requiring more in-depth inquiry:

1. Are there Ministry specific curriculum requirements? If so, are the four subcomponents of the Day Program in compliance with Ministry standards?
2. Are the curricula up to date, reflecting modern needs of program participants? Does the portion of the programming relating to money management, making purchases and counting

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change reflective of current practices (i.e.: are clients learning to round up or round down change to compensate for the removal of the one cent coin from Canadian currency)?

3. What are the qualifications of staff providing educational experiences? Does this meet Provincial standards; or are there any standards for program provider credentialing?
4. Are there adequate supervised work placement positions for the number of participants in the program? Do these positions meet the criteria stipulated in program documentation for type or duration of work for clientele?
5. Are there adequate resources available to support the Day Program in its entirety?
6. Is there evidence that this program is being run effectively and efficiently within its current operating budget? Is there room for improvement? How can the program be improved to improve efficiency and effectiveness?
7. Are community fitness facilities accessible to program participants? Are fitness instructors certified and experienced in working with individuals with disabilities and cognitive impairments? Are there adequate safety provisions and supervision for fitness programming?
8. Does the program utilize current computer technology including web 2.0 internet capabilities? Are there internet security safeguards in place to protect client identity? Is internet security and safe online practices included in the curriculum?
9. Do all program staff comply with vulnerable sector policies and are criminal record checks performed in compliance with Provincial regulations?

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10. What initiatives are being employed to recruit new companies into work placement programs? Are there programs in place to draw new clientele?

Evaluation Form and Approach

Continuing On In Education is a program that has been operational and serving its community for approximately thirty years (C.O.ED., n.d.), as such a Monitoring Form of evaluation (Owen, 2007) was selected for the specific purposes of gauging the quality of the program and its services provided to its clientele, and assuring the program was held in accountability (Owen, 2007), to its financial donors, clientele, and to the local community it operates in. Continuous improvement in programming and services is paramount to the success of the program, and as such the Evaluation Form is the most feasible to answer the quality assurance (Harvey & Newton, 2004) aspect of this evaluation.

Component Analysis was chosen for the evaluation approach, as Continuing On In Education has multiple program options available to its clientele, and the Component Analysis will allow for a detailed evaluation of the specific program identified within C.O.ED.'s programming as a possible area in need of improvement. The Day Program portion was selected, as it has the potential to have the greatest impact on the program's identified outcomes.

Within the Day Program, there are four subcomponents that require analysis as part of the evaluation process. As funding for all C.O.ED. programming is based solely on community donations and the donations from other not-for-profit agencies (C.O.ED., n.d.), it is rationalized

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that the programming requiring the greatest allocation of resources be evaluated for efficiency and effectiveness, and the results of the evaluation be utilized to procure future funding (Owen, 2007).

Methodological Strategy

A mixed methodology (Alkin, 2011), is required for obtaining the necessary evaluation data for analysis. One group of key stakeholders is a marginalized group (the clientele), where cognitive impairments are likely to impact their ability to participate in the evaluation process. Ignoring this group is not an option, therefore utilizing quantitative data collection techniques will not be beneficial to soliciting accurate information from this group. Qualitative data collection techniques will be required, including interviews and questionnaires to obtain data. Improvisation and patience will also be required, and where possible the use of questionnaires should be limited in wording, as functional literacy may pose an issue in data collection. Interviewing would be the most appropriate methodology, and where possible the use of internal evaluators to conduct this research is paramount to ensure clientele comfort and security. A note should be made about seeking inclusion of parents, caregivers, or legal guardians in the data collection process.

For all other aspects of program evaluation, a mixed use of qualitative and quantitative data collection can be utilized, as quantitative data involving program finances would have a greater impact on evaluation outcomes usage for financial purposes; though qualitative data would best suite program planners and community leaders.

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Documentation and Survey Group Information

For the purposes of this evaluation, all program curriculum design and lesson plan documentation should be obtained for each subcomponent in the Day Program, as well as all documentation related to the Day Program curriculum not included in the documentation from the subcomponents. Any Ministry or other agency policy documentation is also required for analysis, to define the standards to which the Day Program should operate within. Other documentation from financial sponsors, not-for-profit groups, or other community groups involved in service provision should also be obtained. Financial statements and other relevant banking information or financial information should also be provided for evaluation purposes. Any contracts with employers that are participating in the Supervised Work Placement program, or additional documentation from employers or in relation to Work Placement programming should also be available to evaluators.

Survey Groups

For the purposes of this evaluation key groups should be surveyed, including program providers and program staff (i.e.: educators, volunteers, administrators, employers), to ascertain if these people are providing the services or functions specific to their position details as outlined in the above documentation. Community leaders and community members should be approached for participation in the evaluation process both in general and in relation to Community Health and Fitness subcomponent evaluation. Community safety officials (including Community Policing) should also be included in the survey group to evaluate program safety standards. Clientele (program participants) are another survey group that should be involved; however in-

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involvement may be limited and should be approached from a one-on-one perspective (with internal evaluators and legal guardians present), instead of utilizing a focus group format. Key financial supporters should also be included in the process, as the outcomes will directly affect future financial donations and program budgets.

Evaluation Findings

Analysis of the data collected during the evaluation process should be completed in a timely manner, and a professional report should be prepared for presentation, to include evidence of program successes or program deficits (Owen, 2007). Recommendations for program change or development should be included (Owen, 2007), and should include short term (1-3 year implementation), long term (4-6 year implementation), and impact (7+ year) outcomes. A report of initial findings (primarily program deficits or areas in need of immediate action) will be provided within 14 days of the completion of the evaluation, with a full report ready for presentation to the key stakeholders and program directors within 30 days. A working group should be convened at the time of the initial report, to allow the primary stakeholders and the evaluators to work together to prepare recommendations based on the evaluation findings (Owen, 2007). Once the work group begins to work on recommendations, it may be necessary to alter the timeline for the final report presentation, and every effort should be made to accommodate the workgroup while still focusing on finalizing the evaluation outcomes for presentation at the earliest possible date.

Conclusion

After thirty years in operation, Continuing On In Education requires evaluation to ensure its programming meets the needs of its clientele and the local community, and to ensure the

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highest quality of programming is being provided to its clientele in the most efficient and effective manner. As funding is reliant on the local community and other not-for-profit agencies for donations, the evaluation is also being conducted to assure resources are being managed responsibly, in order to secure future funding for the program.

In order to meet the needs of a growing community, the Day Program component of C.O.ED.'s programming is being evaluated, as it has the greatest usage and has the most impact by positively affecting its participants quality of life. To ensure the program is meeting the needs of its clientele in an efficient and effective manner, a Monitoring Form of evaluation is being proposed, utilizing the Component Analysis approach. Mixed methodology for data collection will be utilized in order to gain all pertinent data from all sources, including from client testimonial. As the clientele are adults with disabilities and cognitive impairments, mixed methodology for qualitative data collection will prove beneficial, as improvisation in the data collection methodology will probably be necessary.

All findings will be documented and presented in a timely manner, with the intention of utilizing a working group comprised of primary stakeholders and program planners to formulate recommendations for program change based on evaluation findings. It is the intent to have a final report prepared for presentation within 30 days of the evaluation.

References

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