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## Fleming College helps Baby Boomers find careers

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A career program at Ontario's Fleming College is helping people in the communities of Peterborough and Haliburton gain new insights into their career interests and values—but the participants aren't your average college crowd.

"Our main audience is older workers aged 50 to 64," explains Tammy Jinkerson, operations and training co-ordinator with the college's department of Community Resources for Employers and Workers. "These are highly skilled people, many with higher education. We've had teachers, six-figure earners, people with master's degrees."

The program, part of a joint federal/provincial project called Targeted Initiative for Older Workers, helps unemployed and underemployed community members find information, services and opportunities to make job searching, career planning and retraining simpler and more effective.

"Our clients are baby boomers; they expect high quality from the program and the facilitators," says program facilitator Sarah Haase. "They're a diverse group, they will challenge ideas, and they have a lot of wisdom."

To capitalize on that wisdom and help participants benefit from each other's experience, the eight-week program includes both one-on-one and group elements.

Knowing the high expectations of their clientele, Jinkerson and her colleagues did some careful research, including satisfaction surveys of older workers and consultations with Psychometrics Canada, to look at what participants wanted and to find the best available assessment tools for their clients. "We wanted to know about older workers' opinions of existing programs," says Jinkerson. "Many of them talked about previous experiences with assessments. They're looking for tangible, objective results."

For the program staff, that meant finding reliable, valid and standardized tools that would fit within the program's time frame and could be used in group settings. The right tools turned out to be the Career Interest Profiler and Career Values Scale.

"We use both tools in every session," says Haase. "They give people a comprehensive picture of their interests, strengths and values, with tangible results. And they ask powerful, valuable questions."

Donna Arnold, program facilitator at the Haliburton campus, adds that the written take-away report from the Career Values Scale "allows people to read, assimilate and apply their results at their own speed."

Jinkerson notes that the tools help people “develop a portfolio—a show-and-tell piece they can use to point to strengths with future employers.”

Working with more than 60 people since the program began in July 2010, the facilitators have developed their own portfolio: testimonials from happy clients. Jinkerson mentions one client who was new to the community, but landed a job after networking with a new Canadian through the program—a connection who tipped him off to a hidden job market he would otherwise never have investigated. “He told us, ‘If it weren’t for that one day, in that one conversation, I wouldn’t have found my dream job,’” she says. Arnold quotes an insightful statement from one of her participants: “It made me realize I should not take just any job. That’s not good for me or for the employer.”

Along with individual success stories, the program has yielded some pleasant surprises: more demand than originally anticipated, an unusually high retention rate—only one or two participants in each community did not complete the program—and a 100% satisfaction rate in participant surveys.

“It’s a balancing act to get the personal touch,” says Jinkerson. “One thing we didn’t expect was how to wrap up participation. People didn’t want to leave the group! Our challenge was providing a continuing link.”

To help all participants stay in touch, the program includes a followup session called “In the Loop.” The half-day session includes a workshop or guest speaker, and gives people time to share experiences and talk about their progress—time that few participants have had in their previous careers to address self-knowledge and self-discovery.

For Jinkerson and her colleagues, the satisfaction comes from seeing participants explore and express their career interests and values in new ways, such as finding hobbies, volunteering or starting a small business. As Haase points out, the program’s greatest gift to its graduates may be opening them up to the possibilities their career interests offer: “They’re thinking of new ways to find work or create work.”

The Career Values Scale and Career Interest Profiler are available from Psychometrics Canada at [www.psychometrics.com](http://www.psychometrics.com)