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EMPOWERED (VIBE)

## High School Career Program uses the Strong Interest Inventory®

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“What do you want to be when you grow up?” For high-school students on the cusp of graduation and adulthood, pondering that most open-ended of questions can be a source of intense stress. But in the town of Vermilion, Alberta, an assessment program is helping students improve their outlook on that question by giving them insight into themselves.

Entitled “Empowering Our Youth for Tomorrow,” the program is part of a larger project called Vermilion Is Being Empowered, or VIBE—one of 38 mental health capacity-building projects tailored to specific communities, but with the same goal of reducing anxiety among youth aged five to 18.

“High-school students are the most anxious about what they would do after graduating,” says Pat Calyniuk, VIBE program co-ordinator. “They said they needed something to help them make life decisions coming up to grad.”

To meet that need in a way that would go beyond the VIBE program’s focus on study skills and self-esteem for earlier grades, the program was built around the Strong Interest Inventory® assessment.

Calyniuk says the Strong instrument’s reliability and proven track record were reasons for the choice, along with its suitability for the students. “Our approaches have to be based in best practices,” she notes. “We chose the Strong assessment to be the main program for grades 11 and 12 because we thought they would benefit most.”

Part of that benefit, Calyniuk says, is that the Strong tool fulfils a valuable but vanishing function in communities like Vermilion. “Sometimes if you live in a small community, you don’t consider careers. And in lots of little schools, there aren’t many guidance counsellors left. If kids have the opportunity to do the Strong assessment, it opens up doors to careers they didn’t dream of.”

Crystal Jackson, a VIBE coach who works with K–12 students at St. Jerome’s Catholic School, says all Grade 11 students complete the Strong questionnaire online in the fall as a doorway to exploring post-secondary options or other interests.

“Some students have no idea what they want to do, but at least they get a sense of their learning style and basic interests,” she says. “No matter the student, they’re getting something.”

Laryssa Speck, VIBE coach at the J.R. Robson public high school, says students in grades 11 and 12 are approached by the school counsellor, who encourages them to see her to take the Strong assessment. “Last year we had 30 kids, and 65 total at both schools,” she says.

# CASE STUDY

## BUILDING BETTER ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH PEOPLE



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"We've also had requests from parents and teachers, as well as students from other schools and communities," says Calyniuk.

Now in its final year, the three-year program has had a positive effect on both students and coaches.

Speck says she enjoys watching kids go through the transformation from being cautious about the assessment to being excited as it validates their interests. "It's had good word of mouth from kids. They ask, 'How did it know who I am and what I like?'"

Jackson says using the Strong tool has allowed her to build relationships in the school. "I used to work in post-secondary recruitment. It's a conversation starter; it's just nice to be able to stop and talk to a student in the hallway."

"We don't do a lot of programming with these grades," adds Calyniuk. "The Strong is one of our only opportunities to make that connection."

Calyniuk also cites surveys showing that the program is achieving its main goal, with students almost unanimously reporting that it has worked to reduce their anxiety about what they want to grow up to be.

Although the program's funding future is to be determined soon, Calyniuk says 11 people have been certified to administer the Strong tool in every Vermillion school, so the program would outlive its creators.

However long the program continues, it seems to be having a lasting impact on students' lives. "I have a daughter who took the Strong when she was in high school," says Calyniuk. "She's now 20, but she still looks at her results."

**Patricia Calyniuk, BA, B.Ed., BSW, MSW, RSW** is co-ordinator of the VIBE program in Vermillion, Alberta. **Crystal Jackson, BA**, is a VIBE coach. **Laryssa Speck, B.Ed.**, is a VIBE Coach at J.R. Robson High School. All three are certified in the Strong Interest Inventory.

The strong Interest Inventory® is available from Psychometrics Canada at [www.psychometrics.com](http://www.psychometrics.com)



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