



John Howard Society of Ottawa Interview, August 07 Jan Goatcher

We caught up with Jan Goatcher, Pre-Employment & Training Coordinator, John Howard Society of Ottawa at her office in the Lowertown area. The literacy program faces real challenges working in a low-income downtown neighbourhood, and with clients who often haven't held a steady job for years, sometimes never at all. We asked Jan some questions about the introduction of *ESPORT*[™] to the program and the impact it has had.

What motivated the John Howard Society to try out *ESPORT*?

Because we were looking for something to do pre-employment services with. Our program has grown into that area. Our funders want us to do more in that area. We had clients who wanted to get a job but they weren't ready right away. They might be there with six months of employment preparation.

Many of our clients have barriers to employment and we weren't sure how to address the barriers. We work with volunteers so we don't have teachers as such. I was doing research on what we could do with this pre-employment phase when Patrick Cummins approached us to see if we would be interested in doing this. I was interested immediately because we had nothing in place and because it offered pre-employment with computer skills, something we want all of our students to be working on. Patrick came into the training for us and the youth office. We discovered that it takes time to help clients through *ESPORT*.

We were also interested in help writing resumes. *ESPORT* has filled a space here.

What has been the response by the clients so far?

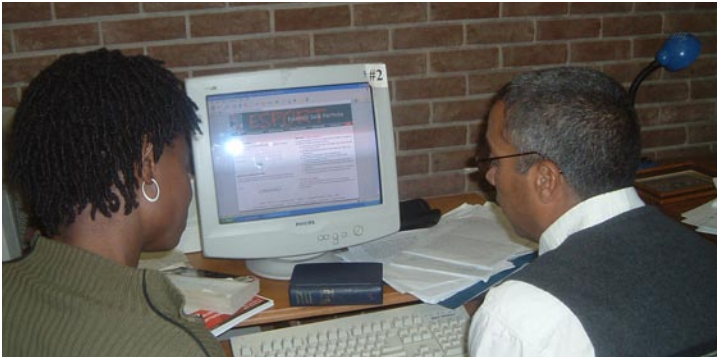
Fantastic. I think now every client is actually doing *ESPORT*. I find it is a really good assessment tool. A lot of my clients, the ones who have been in the program for a while, were losing a bit of direction. *ESPORT* allows clients to think about employment without being anxious about it. When we had Ontario Works [a transition to work program for social assistance recipients] here. We suggested this was a great program for people who might have been chronically unemployed. Someone who has been unemployed for ten years say, is too scared to send off a resume, or even to write a resume. To even approach an employer, there is too much of a gap. Whereas *ESPORT* makes it easy to get together a resume and fire off five or so, and not feel threatened by that.



What happens is that people who never thought about employment are doing it, and people are getting jobs. They are working. They may not be in that job forever but they are getting experience and getting their foot in the door.

For example, we had a client who had a job for a few weeks. It was very physically hard and it didn't work out but he came back and said, now we can add it to the resume and he looked for something more appropriate. Another client got a part time job that she did for a while.

ESPORT is working really well for our program but Wendy, the facilitator, has made all the difference. She is a champion of the program. She has the skills to work with it.



The soft skills of employment which I wanted to build in. Wendy knows those really well and is able to work with clients on those skills. But if I am working with tutors without that kind of employment experience then that piece is not done. We do need that stuff around how to talk to your boss, how to work with your boss. And the facilitator needs to bring that piece. What you need is *ESPORT* with a Wendy.

But as we have grown we have needed to do more group work around employment to stretch our facilitator resources. There are 35 learners in the program right now. They are not all working in groups. Sometimes the facilitator is working back and forth among 3 or 4 of them. Especially if they are lower level, we arrange appointments between a tutor and a learner to guide them through *ESPORT* and *PLATO*.

What has been the biggest surprise of implementing *ESPORT*?

I think the popularity of it. When I first got introduced to it, I thought it was a little dry and I wasn't sure about it. But we have a great group of clients who are open to things. With Wendy working with them, it has worked much better than I thought.

The *PLATO* piece is very important. The learning online is fantastic. People feel good when they are on the computer learning. It doesn't feel like you are a low level even though that's what you

are working on. People here have really picked up their computer use skills using *PLATO*. Before *ESPORT* came, I found it hard sometimes to get people on the computer. They were a little nervous. Now I can't get some of them off. I don't know one client that isn't on the computer.

Wendy trained other facilitators too. But it hasn't been a question of just training them and then launching them. It takes a few months of questions back and forth for them to really get it.

Is there anything I haven't asked about that you'd like to talk about?

I have said this to Patrick Cummins and Grant Bishop (and Pat Fahy, when he did the evaluation). I really do believe in this. This should be developed more and should be used in a lot more places than John Howard. We have a lot of clients with barriers to employment and I think this gives them a way into employment, even if it's volunteer work or just thinking about things.

This opens peoples' eyes to start thinking about employment. They are preparing and changing their views. Now we are giving direction and confidence that they can do something. When they go through the Interest Inventory and strengths they need, it makes them think maybe I can do this, or I can do that.

With *ESPORT* we have been able to offer something concrete. This is a very practical literacy program. Each person works on something related to what they want to do. Once they know their way around the program they can often work independently. The popularity is huge with many clients. Some of them are here for four or five hours working away on it. They may go away and do something else for a while but they are back to doing *ESPORT*, to doing *PLATO*. Variety is important.