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# Literacy and Essential Skills Guide

## For Service Providers Assisting Homeless or At-risk Clients

### **Part 2:**

Three Simple Steps to  
Selecting and Using the Tools—  
Scenarios for Service Providers

**Developed by**  
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada



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## About this Guide

This guide was developed to help you learn about the many essential skills tools available through Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). These are tools that you can use to help your clients learn about the skills they will need to enter the work force.

Although the guide was created primarily for service providers who help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, it may also be helpful to anyone who wants to learn more about literacy and essential skills.

The *Literacy and Essential Skills Guide for Service Providers Assisting Homeless or At-risk Clients* consists of three separate documents:

■ **Part 1: Understanding and Using the Tools**

Part 1 of the guide includes information on how to find and select the most appropriate HRSDC literacy and essential skills tools for a particular type of individual or organization. It also includes a definition of the nine essential skills, an overview of the different types of tools available and information on how to access them.

For the best results, it is recommended that you read this document first.

■ **Part 2: Three Simple Steps to Selecting and Using the Tools—Scenarios for Service Providers**

This document includes examples and scenarios to help you use and customize the various tools to meet the needs of different types of clients.

■ **Part 3: Literacy and Essential Skills Tools Catalogue**

This detailed catalogue includes descriptions and explanations of all the HRSDC essential skills tools currently available.

*The Literacy and Essential Skills Guide for Service Providers Assisting Homeless or At-risk Clients* was produced by the Homelessness Partnering Secretariat and the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, which are part of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada.

## Literacy and Essential Skills Tools

For information on how to find and select the most appropriate tools for a particular type of individual or organization, please read *Part 1: Understanding and Using the Tools of the Literacy and Essential Skills Guide for Service Providers Assisting Homeless or At-risk Clients*.

### How to Obtain Copies of the Tools

Copies of the literacy and essential skills tools made available by HRSDC may be ordered online, or by mail or fax.

#### Online

The fastest way to place your order is to use HRSDC's online shopping cart, Publicentre, at [www12.hrsdc.gc.ca](http://www12.hrsdc.gc.ca).

#### By mail or fax

**Note:** When placing an order by mail or fax, be sure to provide your complete name and mailing address and include the catalogue number for each tool you are ordering.

You may fax your request to **819-953-7260**.

You can also submit your request by mail to:

Publications/Distribution Unit  
HRSDC Communications Branch  
140 Promenade du Portage  
Place du Portage, Phase IV, Level 10  
Gatineau, QC K1A 0J9

### What Are Essential Skills?

Essential skills are needed for work, learning and life. They are the foundation for learning all other skills and help people evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.

There are nine essential skills: reading; writing; computer use; thinking; document use; oral communication; numeracy; working with others; and continuous learning. For more information on the nine essential skills, see **Part 1: Understanding and Using the Tools**, or visit [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/definitions/definitions.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/definitions/definitions.shtml).

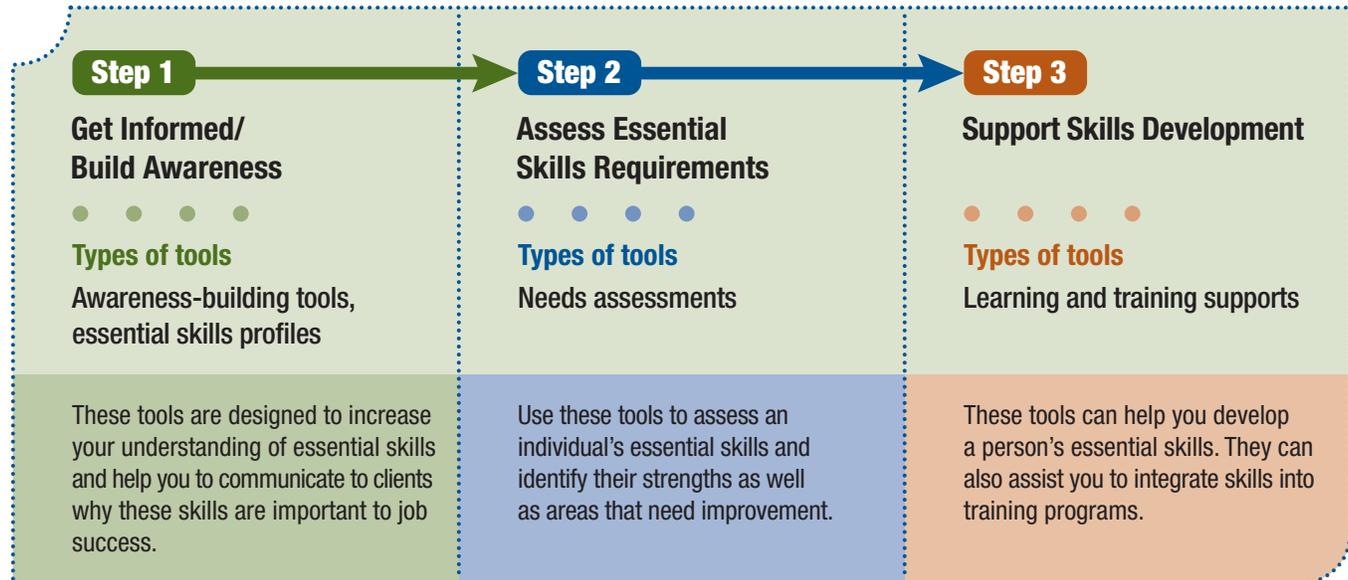
## How to Select the Tools You Need

HRSDC's literacy and essential skills tools have been developed so you can help your clients learn about and develop the skills they will need to enter and succeed in the workforce.

By following the three-step process outlined below, you will be able to select the right tools to help you:

- **learn** and communicate how essential skills contribute to job success;
- **understand** your clients' essential skills strengths and areas for improvement;
- **develop** and improve your clients' essential skills; and
- **integrate** essential skills into existing training and development programs.

### Three Simple Steps to Selecting and Using the Tools



The following pages include examples and scenarios that will help you use and customize the various tools to meet the needs of different types of clients (e.g. job seekers or apprentices).

The tools listed below are meant to serve as examples to assist you in offering better guidance and creating more effective interventions (e.g. training programs). We encourage you to adapt the tools to meet your clients' needs.

Additional information about the types of tools and the purpose of each can be found in *Part 3: Literacy and Essential Skills Tools Catalogue*.

## Which Essential Skills Are Needed for a Particular Job?

**Essential skills profiles** describe how workers in various occupations use each essential skill. Each profile includes examples of tasks that require a particular essential skill, and each task is assigned a level of complexity on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being basic and 5 being advanced).

Before you begin working with your client, you may want to have a look at your own job profile, the Essential Skills Profile for **Community and Social Service Workers**, and see examples of tasks involved in your own work.

## Scenario 1: Preparing for a Job Interview

**You are...** a support worker at a transitional housing facility.

**Your client is...** an immigrant woman named Katya who wants help finding a job.

### Background

Katya has not had a job since she arrived in Canada. She has a difficult time speaking English. Before coming to Canada, she worked as a server in a restaurant. She has noticed some help-wanted signs in local restaurants and says she is interested in doing similar work again. She asks you for your advice on how she can get started.

### Step 1: Get Informed/Build Awareness

You can start by introducing Katya to essential skills and why they are important at work. You can also explore with Katya the essential skills profile for a food and beverage server, and begin discussing the tasks and skills required. This will help Katya better understand what an employer in the industry will be looking for.

### Suggested tools

**Essential Skills Poster**  
(WP-158)

A poster that communicates how essential skills contribute to job success. It lists the nine essential skills and provides the website address for accessing the tools and additional information.

**Food and Beverage Servers**  
(NOC 6453)

An essential skills profile that describes how food and beverage servers use each of the essential skills. (Available online at [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/tools\\_resources/NOC/servers.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/tools_resources/NOC/servers.shtml).)

### Step 2: Assess the Client's Essential Skills Needs

As Katya prepares to talk to restaurant managers who are hiring, you can help her recognize the skills she has to offer and develop a plan for her to work on the areas that she would like to improve.

Since Katya has a difficult time speaking English, you may want to start with a self-assessment in oral communication, followed by assessments in other skill areas.

### Suggested tools

**Oral communication and other self-assessments**

These informal assessments contain a series of statements to help individuals identify their essential skills strengths and areas for improvement. The information can help you support your clients in making career planning and training decisions. (Available online at [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/tools\\_resources/assessment.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/tools_resources/assessment.shtml).)

### Step 3: Support Skills Development

Katya lacks confidence communicating verbally. To help increase her comfort level and improve her oral communication skills, she could use the vocabulary building workbook. You could also encourage her to watch the video series on oral communication, which will help her to learn tips and tricks on what to do and what to avoid when she meets with a restaurant manager during an interview.

#### Suggested tools

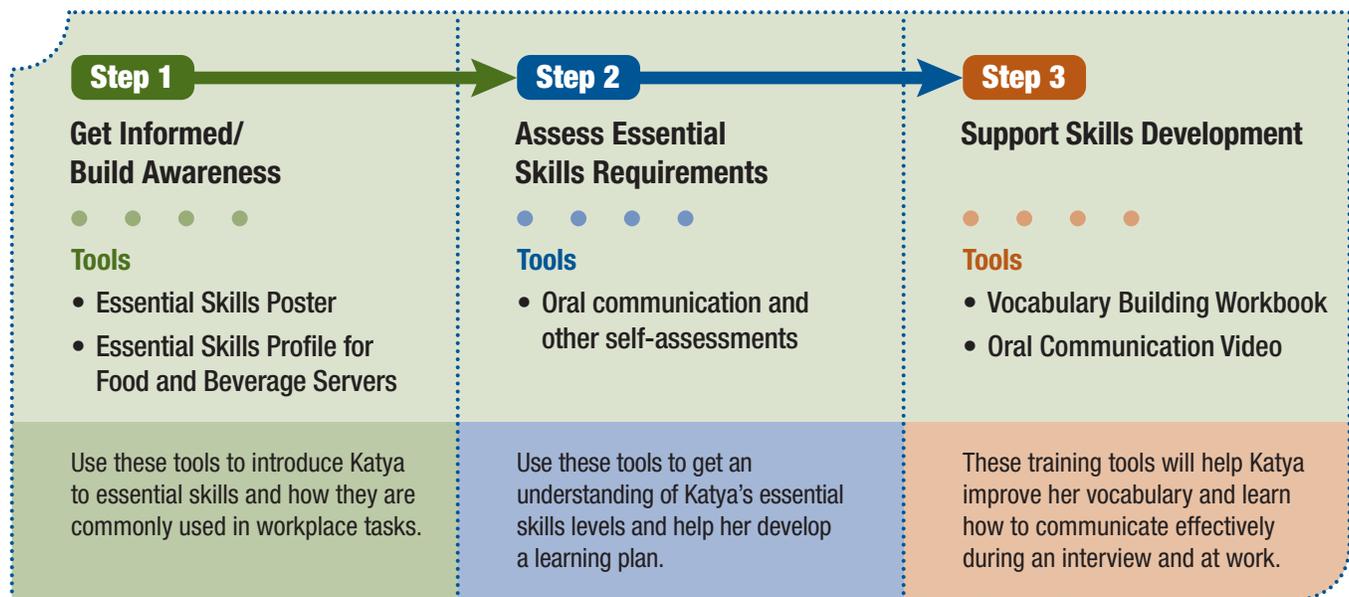
**Vocabulary Building Workbook**  
(WP-102)

A workbook with exercises to help learners improve their vocabulary and learn words commonly used in the Canadian workplace.

**Oral Communication:  
Job Interview Success**  
(WP-122)

A video that explores typical Canadian work situations and what makes oral communication effective in each setting. Newcomers to Canada may find the information and tips offered in this video particularly useful. Available on the Literacy and Essential Skills Tools DVD and online at [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/videos/videos.shtml#tabs2\\_3](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/videos/videos.shtml#tabs2_3).

#### Summary



## Scenario 2: Planning for Training

**You are...** a worker at a youth drop-in centre.

**Your client is...** a young man named Dave looking for advice on how to become an auto mechanic.

### Background

Dave says he is trying to get his high-school equivalency certificate and has no experience in the automotive industry. He is interested in learning what skills are required for this work and what areas he may need to improve.

### Step 1: Get Informed/Build Awareness

Early discussions with Dave could focus on essential skills and how they contribute to getting and keeping a job. Given his interest in a career as an auto mechanic, you might want to go through the essential skills profile for that occupation with him and review the typical tasks he would be expected to perform. Reviewing a fact sheet on how automotive service technicians use essential skills might also be useful.

### Suggested tools

**What are Essential Skills?**  
(WP-077)

This fact sheet explains the nine essential skills that people need for work, learning and life. It includes examples of how essential skills are used in the community and the workplace.

**Using Essential Skills:  
On the Job with an Automotive  
Service Technician**  
(WP-146)

This fact sheet describes a typical workday for a tradesperson and provides practical activities that use essential skills.

**Essential Skills for Success as  
an Automotive Service Technician**  
(WP-125)

This fact sheet provides sample tasks that demonstrate how each of the nine essential skills is used in specific trades.

## Step 2: Assess the Client's Essential Skills Needs

Having looked at the essential skills profile with Dave, you noted that reading, thinking and document use are the skills that automotive mechanics rely on the most. Assessing these skills may be a good starting place for Dave. You decide to begin with self-assessments for thinking and numeracy skills.

### Suggested tools

**Essential Skills Workbook for the Trades**  
(WP-167)

A workbook with practical exercises to help learners practice their reading, writing, numeracy and document use skills. A full answer guide is included to help learners understand the steps needed to reach the right answer.

**Thinking Self-Assessment**  
(WP-169)

These informal assessments include a series of statements to help learners identify their strengths and areas for improvement. The information can help you support your clients in making career planning and training decisions.

**Numeracy Self-Assessment**  
(WP-088)

## Step 3: Support Skills Development

The assessments showed that Dave's thinking and numeracy skills are areas he might want to strengthen. You could recommend some learning tools to help with these skills, as well as some tools that are more focused on the trades.

### Suggested tools

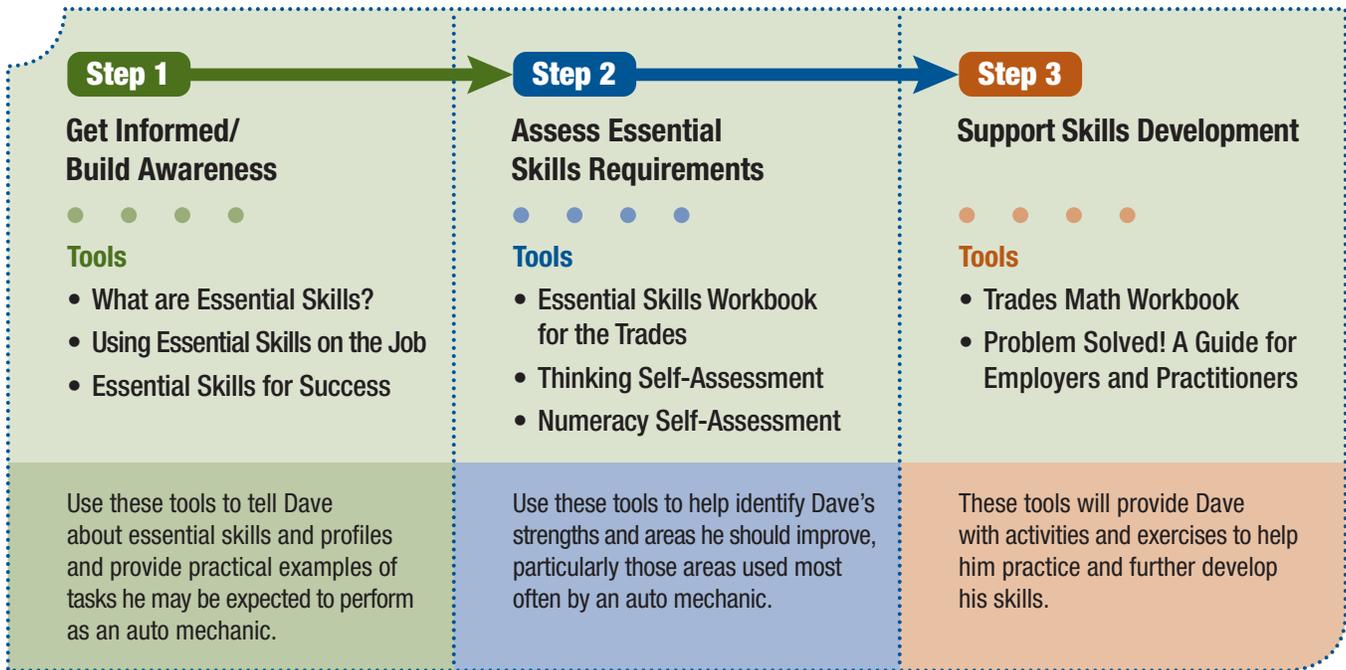
**Trades Math Workbook**  
(WP-145)

A workbook with practical exercises to help learners practice their numeracy skills and increase their success in an apprenticeship program.

**Problem Solved! A Guide for Employers and Practitioners**  
(WP-063)

A guide that includes various techniques, activities and worksheets to help learners practice and improve their thinking skills.

## Summary



## Scenario 3: Supporting a Job Search

**You are...** a counsellor at a homeless shelter.

**Your client is...** an Aboriginal man named Rudy.

### Background

Rudy tells you that he did not complete high school, that he has little experience applying for work and is not very confident in his skill set. He would like to write a résumé, start to improve his skills and increase his chances of a successful job search.

### Step 1: Get Informed/Build Awareness

As Rudy does not have a specific occupation in mind, sharing stories of other people's success may be a good starting point. These stories could be followed by questions that guide him and get him thinking about why he should improve his essential skills and how to do so.

### Suggested tools

**Living and Learning: Essential Skills Success Stories**  
(HIP-031)

A collection of real stories about Canadians who have experienced success in work and life after improving their essential skills. Told from the learner's point of view, these stories can help inspire others to deal with their own essential skills challenges.

### Step 2: Assess the Client's Essential Skills Needs

Once Rudy has thought about why and how he might want to improve his essential skills, you can ask if he would like to take an informal assessment. To do this, you could use the Essential Skills Needs Assessment tool. Organizations working with Aboriginal people that have used the tool say it can be a helpful way to begin a conversation with clients about how to build on their strengths.

### Suggested tools

**Essential Skills Needs Assessment (ESNA)**

The ESNA is an informal means of assessing reading, writing and numeracy skills. It comes with separate client and assessor booklets corresponding with each of the three essential skills being assessed. (For more information and to obtain this tool, send an email to [es-ce2@hrsdcc.gc.ca](mailto:es-ce2@hrsdcc.gc.ca).)

### Step 3: Support Skills Development

After spending a few sessions going through the ESNA together with you, Rudy decides to work on his writing skills. This will help improve his résumé-writing abilities and get him closer to achieving his employment goals. Rudy has also expressed an interest in improving his computer skills, so you could work on his résumé together using a computer. This will help him feel more comfortable, both with computers and with his writing abilities.

#### Suggested tools

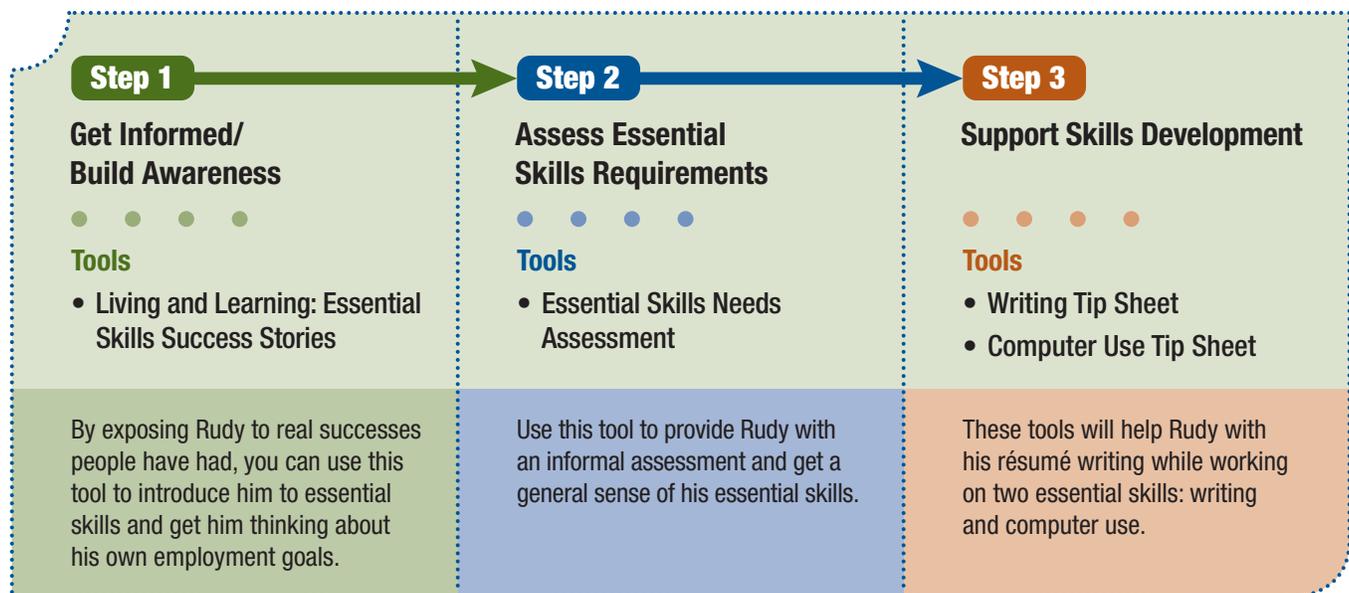
**Writing Tip Sheet**  
(WP-109)

This booklet provides learners with practical tips and activities to improve their writing skills.

**Computer Use Tip Sheet**  
(WP-070)

This booklet provides learners with practical tips and activities to improve their ability to use computers.

#### Summary



## Scenario 4: Career Planning

**You are...** an employment counsellor at a homeless shelter.

**Your client is...** a man named Joe who is looking for advice on the skills he would need for construction work.

### Background

Joe has not had much relevant experience and fears that his skills—especially his reading skills—will make it difficult to get the type of work he wants.

### Step 1: Get Informed/Build Awareness

A good place to start would be to discuss the importance of essential skills and how they are used in apprenticeships and construction-related trades. Go through the essential skills profile for construction trades. Begin a conversation about the tasks Joe would need to perform on the job and the skills he would need to have.

#### Suggested tools

**What are Essential Skills for the Trades?**  
(WP-123)

This fact sheet outlines how essential skills are used in the trades. It includes definitions, common tasks and examples of how each skill is used in various trades.

**Essential Skills Profile on Construction Trades Helpers and Labourers**

This profile describes how workers in construction trades use each essential skill. (Available online at [www10.hrsdc.gc.ca/English/ShowProfile.aspx?v=115](http://www10.hrsdc.gc.ca/English/ShowProfile.aspx?v=115).)

### Step 2: Assess the Client's Essential Skills Needs

Now that Joe has a better understanding of the essential skills needed to work in construction, you can help him to identify his particular needs. He already has an idea that reading might be a problem area, but you could offer other self-assessment tools to help him recognize other potential strengths and weaknesses.

#### Suggested tools

**Essential Skills Indicator: Reading Pre-test**

This informal assessment asks learners to solve questions to get an indication of their reading ability. It is available online at [www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/tools\\_resources/tools\\_audience/general/online\\_indicator.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/LES/tools_resources/tools_audience/general/online_indicator.shtml).

**Essential Skills Self-Assessment for the Trades**  
(WP-135)

This checklist can help individuals identify their essential skills strengths and areas for improvement. It includes statements that describe common trades-related tasks for the nine essential skills.

### Step 3: Support Skills Development

The assessments showed that Joe is confident in most of the essential skills, but his reading skills could be improved. You also noticed that he is nervous about working with unfamiliar people, and you know that construction work often requires teamwork. You could recommend the relevant tip sheets to improve Joe’s skills, and support him to set goals and track his skills development. You can also help him identify people, community resources and websites to further prepare him for his job training.

#### Suggested tools

**Reading Tip Sheet**

(WP-101)

These booklets provide learners with practical tips and activities to improve their essential skills.

**Working with Others Tip Sheet**

(WP-093)

**Passport**

(WP-037)

This tracking tool lets learners record their strengths and identify areas that need improvement. It is intended to be updated and reviewed regularly.

**Before Training: Resources to Improve Your Essential Skills**

(WP-138)

This booklet includes tips and activities that help learners identify ways to improve their essential skills and be better prepared for training.

### Summary

