

## Author's Note

Welcome to the *Gathering to Learn* Field Guide!

If you're holding this resource, you're probably curious about how to FIND, ATTRACT, ENGAGE, and RETAIN Adult Foundational Learners, and I'm so glad you are!

When this Field Guide was first created in 2020 as a professional development project for the CALP system, none of us could have imagined how much our work and our world would change in just a few short years.

Five years post-pandemic, what matters now as we find, attract, engage, and retain Adult Foundational Learners? To me, it feels like the world continues to move at warp speed, bringing to light new social, mental health, and economic challenges and concerns for the learners we serve.

In my own CALP context, which is an urban setting, the cost of living is skyrocketing! Rent, groceries, childcare, and household bills have all become more expensive. Sadly, this experience isn't unique. Communities across the province have been and continue to be deeply affected, adding to the multiple layers of barriers Adult Foundational Learners face.

As you read through the guide and come to the sections on FINDING and ATTRACTING learners, I encourage you to bring a lens of curiosity and compassion. I believe it is more important than ever to understand each learner's unique context, paying special attention to the challenges and barriers they may be facing. A kind, compassionate approach connects us to learners in a deeper way and allows us to meet them where they are.

Understanding these challenges may also inspire us to make changes or improvements to our programs. This may require us to shift, adapt, and respond in ways that better support learners' needs.

In the ENGAGE and RETAIN sections of this guide, you will see themes of connection, trust, belonging, and confidence, and how community, environment, and a safe, welcoming space are all important factors in the learner's experience. Over these past five years, many of us have adapted to new ways of delivering programs, such as online, hybrid, or by using tools like AI to inform and even help write curriculum. While these are all wonderful tools to support and meet the needs of today's learners, I want to emphasize that building authentic, human-to-human connections and relationships with learners still matters deeply. Being seen and understood can be pivotal to their learning experience.

I sincerely hope you enjoy the *Gathering to Learn* Field Guide and find it to be a useful, relevant tool for your unique CALP context. Please know I am cheering you on as you FIND, ATTRACT, ENGAGE, and RETAIN Adult Foundational Learners in your corner of Alberta!

Warmly,

Shauna Pivarnyik