



## HANDOUT: LEARNER PERSISTENCE

### Four Supports to Learner Persistence

#### **Awareness and Management of Positive and Negative Forces**

Adult learners have complicated lives. They have networks of friends and family, and responsibilities of work and family that exert positive and negative pressure on their ability to learn. Positive forces might include supportive friends and family, a desire for better job, or wanting to be a good role model for children. Negative forces might include work schedules, issues around childcare, unreliable transportation, or other life circumstances. When tutors can help learners to recognize these forces, understand how to use the positive ones, and make plans to deal with negative forces; learners are more likely to stay in the literacy program.

#### **Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is the ability to understand what is required to accomplish a task and then to organize resources and execute a course of action to accomplish it. It is not self-confidence. Self-confidence is a global attitude. Self-efficacy is context specific. For an ESL learner, self-efficacy might be saying, “I can go to a restaurant and successfully order a pizza with specific toppings from the server.” For a literacy learner, self-efficacy might be saying, “I can read my bank statement.” Tutors who create opportunities for learners to successfully use new skills help them build self-efficacy. When learners have high self-efficacy, they see that they can be successful at learning and are more likely to continue their learning.

#### **Goals**

When a learner enrolls in an adult education program, there is usually a specific life experience that caused that person to decide to enroll. This event, then, provides the context for setting long-term and short-term goals—the educational and life goals that will be the focus of instruction.

#### **Progress**

Goals only support persistence when learners can see they are making progress toward those goals. Tutors must provide learners with opportunities to measure and evaluate their progress. These opportunities will need to go beyond simple tests and other easy measures of accountability. Learners must have evidence that they believe shows they are making progress.

## Drivers of Persistence

### **Sense of Belonging and Community**

When learners feel welcomed and respected and develop a sense of belonging, they are more likely to keep coming to class. Cultivating a sense of belonging from the start is crucial. Tutors need to create activities that build camaraderie in the classroom.

### **Clarity of Purpose**

This is connected to learner goals and progress. When learners are clear about their own purposes for learning, the tutor's expectations, and the progress they are making, they can make informed decisions about their learning.

### **Agency**

Agency means that learners want to exert control over their learning—they want to make decisions for themselves. Tutors need to provide opportunities for learners to make decisions about their learning.

### **Competence**

Adults want to feel competent in important areas of their lives. When learners see that they can successfully accomplish specific tasks, they feel competent in their learning. When they feel competent, they are more likely to want to learn new things and continue their learning.

### **Relevance**

The degree to which new knowledge relates to an adult's goals, interests, and life experience strongly affects that adult's motivation to continue learning. Adults have compelling and competing responsibilities. If learning is not relevant, it will take a back seat to other priorities.

### **Stability**

Learning is difficult in a chaotic environment. An adult is more likely to persist in learning when the learning environment is stable, structured, predictable, and safe.