



# WORKERS ENGLISH SUPPORT KIT

This info flier is designed and prepared for racialized essential workers of Alberta's meat-packing plants. Contents are based on community consultations facilitated by ActionDignity and The Immigrant Education Society. This learners kit may contain information that is not applicable for the public.

Designed and prepared in November 2022 in Alberta, Canada.



## WORKERS ENGLISH SUPPORT KIT



**Are you** an immigrant worker of a meat-packing plant in Alberta? Do you feel that you're not getting what you deserve from work or from your new country? Are you struggling in expressing yourself with your supervisor or co-workers?

Immigrating to Canada has a lot of challenges. Communication is one of the biggest hurdles we work on regularly. Conflict in communications happens in our personal relationships, families, communities, and workplaces. What more if we need to learn a new language?

Now that you are in Canada, learning English is one way to improve your life in your new home. It will lessen the frustrations in expressing what we need in service centers, bus stations, groceries, our workplaces, and in using computers. It will lighten the stress of adjusting to our new lives.

Meat-packing plant workers from the Ethiopian-Eritrean, Mexican, Filipino, and Vietnamese communities were invited recently by Action Dignity and The Immigrant Education Society to share their situations and challenges. The goal is to identify ways to support you. This Workers English Support Kit will give you insights, tips, and recommendations that will help you move forward in Canada. Here are some of the insights shared:

**Everyone said YES.** All the meat-packing plant workers consulted said YES, learning English is important and needed. However, not everyone would like to learn, and below are the reasons. You might connect with some or most of them.

### **7 Beliefs and Reasons that stop you from Learning English**

1.) **NO TIME.** You have no time for English classes. You may be juggling between 2-3 jobs or your work and taking care of your children. Evenings and weekends are for chores, resting, family time. Where is the time to learn English?

2.) **TOO TIRED.** You are too tired after a full day of (stressful) work, or maybe you're working 3 jobs now. There are days when you would rather sleep than eat! Where is the energy to learn English?

3.) **WORK IS STRESSFUL!** 1. Your physical and mental health are very much affected with the workplace conditions at the meat-packing plant. The machines are so fast, your supervisors scream at you, and you can barely keep up, are not able to go to the washroom, and feel like it's a modern-day slavery. The workplace feels like a prison the moment you clock-in until the day is over. You can barely think, how can you even think of learning new skills? Where is the motivation to learn English?

4.) **RELY ON OTHERS.** Since some of your co-workers or family members know how to express themselves in English, they can just translate for you. Your kids are learning faster too, so they help you with transactions and communication outside your home. Where is the need to learn English?

5.) **IT'S FRUSTRATING.** You know that learning something new is not going to happen overnight and sometimes it feels like it will take forever to learn a new language, which will make it useless, you feel that you are too old to learn. It's embarrassing for you to make mistakes with something this basic. Where is the ease and comfort to learn English?

6.) **COMFORT IN MY CULTURE.** You just feel very comfortable and happy spending time with your peers, friends, and family from your own cultural community. Of course, it's way easier to talk to them, share stories with them and just be with them! You are content and happy to relate to your own community, without the need to speak English. Where is the comfort and contentment in learning English?

7.) **I KNOW ENOUGH.** You feel that you already have a good knowledge and practice of the English language. You can communicate just enough to get your message across. Yet, there are times when you feel that you're not completely understood. Where is the need to improve my English?

### **10 BENEFITS to GAIN if you IMPROVE your ENGLISH**

1.) **You gain more confidence** in talking with anyone about your human and labor rights, or about anything. You become an advocate for yourself and for others by speaking out.

2.) **You improve your chances of promotion or getting better jobs.** The most influential people in your organization use English. Learning English will open doors for you.

3.) **You exercise your brain** and become smarter. Research shows that learning a new language is a great exercise for your brain that helps reduce the risk of dementia.

4.) **You have fun learning** English and enjoy more entertainment. English helps you make more friends. Plus, you can enjoy the world's most popular movies and music.

5.) **You get more prepared for the digital world.** Most of the contents of the internet is in English. Our daily lives have become virtual and digital. English is now essential.

6.) **You no longer need an interpreter:** you become one. Most of you need an interpreter. If you seriously learn English, you can become one yourself.

7.) **You become a better listener** and communicator in English and in your own language. Learning a new language improves your overall listening, thinking, and speaking skills.

8.) **You open doors to further education.** Thousands of free courses are available for you here in Canada. Improve your English to access them all.

9.) **Your everyday life becomes easier.** Wherever you go, your routine becomes easier with your English skills. At work, you become more valuable to employers and customers.

10.) **You demonstrate your drive and commitment** to lifelong learning. English will help boost your self-image, relationships and over-all wellbeing.

### **15 things you can do to improve your English**

1.) Take small steps. Start with 10 minutes a day to learn English. First, try to integrate it with your everyday chores so you will not think you're wasting time. Watch TV with subtitles, learn the English words of the ingredients you're using while cooking, use the English translated version while you're surfing your social media, say 'hi', 'thank you' or 'good morning' to your co-worker or friend in English. All these scenarios are convertible to learning opportunities.

2.) Make a commitment. You owe it to yourself. Commit what you can. Commit to learn English for 10 minutes a day or 1 word a day. You can also commit to have a short dialogue in English with one close friend or child per day or per week.

3.) Access the many FREE SERVICES. Canada has free services and resources for you, online and in person. You can learn English even while sleeping. YouTube has tons of them. Here's one:  
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZBr9c1zfaBAyMx0065oLsQ/featured>

4.) Have your English level tested. Call 403 262 2656 and make an appointment with Calgary Language Assessment & Referral Centre (CLARC). Knowing your English level helps you aim to move to the next higher level. This centre will assess your English language skills in four areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing and refer you to appropriate language schools. Their services are FREE. You can check them here: <https://www.immigrantservicescalgary.ca/start-here/#english-testing>.

5.) Join FREE CLASSES. Call 403 291 0002 for FREE English classes that will help you advance your knowledge and use of the English language. The Immigrant Education Society (TIES) will provide you with various options, virtual or in-person classes, to improve your listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Being part of a class will help you practice, interact, and gain new friends. You can also click on the TIES website: <https://immigrant-education.ca/programs/language/>

6.) Practice with close peers or family. Practice with other people at home or at work who speak English well.

7.) Games are very useful. You can even use games and friendly competitions to learn this with your partner and children. Something as simple as the first to guess the English translation of a word from your language or using homemade flash cards of frequently used words. Here is a link for beginners to increasing level of English learning <http://iteslj.org/cw/>.

8.) Join group programs for FREE. Make new friends with native English speakers or with learners like yourself. Check your local library for free English conversations. Here is the link for a list of virtual groups <https://calgarylibrary.ca/events-and-programs/programs/english-conversation-group-intermediate-virtual/> but there are also meet-ups if you prefer to meet new friends and learn along the way in person, try this link <https://www.meetup.com/> 1.and write "learning English" in search box and your area of choice (Calgary, High River, etc.).

9.) Find a learning partner. A family member, friend, or co-worker who is also looking to improve their English is the perfect partner for you to learn and coach with. Use very opportunity at work or at home, such a meal breaks, travel time, relaxation to learn English while talking about any topic. Find joy in learning and each other's company.

10.) Relax and welcome some entertainment. Watch English movies or the local news, listen to the radio or a podcast and imitate how the actors or newscasters speak. Repeat what you hear and keep practicing. Imitation, repetition, and practice are very important in language learning. You can do this while your commuting, doing chores or on when you find the free time.

11.) Aim for progress, not for perfection. Ignore mistakes. It's ok to make mistakes in the process. Mistakes will happen and that's where we learn to move on and improve.

12.) Borrow a book in the nearest library that interests you. Read it for a few minutes before going to sleep. Reading helps you think in English. It also helps you improve your writing skills, just as listening helps you improve your speaking skills. For more information about our free library services, click on <https://calgarylibrary.ca/>

13.) Stay focused. Ignore comments as "it's too late for you to learn" or "it's not necessary anymore with your current situation". Learning English will only make your brain grow healthier not just because you learn how to communicate but life becomes less stressful as well. A few months from now, when you hear yourself speak better English, you will congratulate and thank yourself for never giving up.

14.) Ask for an interpreter. If you can't express yourself accurately to others, ask for an interpreter. Alberta health has this service for free for 24 hours when you access their services. If you're at your workplace, ask support from your union, human resources, supervisor, or co-worker. Unfortunately, there is not a lot of free interpretation services in Alberta, but most immigrant serving agencies has this service. Some of your community associations may also be able to support you. Please check ActionDignity's [Workers' Resource Kit](#) for a list of resources, including Language Support.

15.) Use technology. There are a lot of interpretation services online now that you can access by downloading apps. [Google translate](#) is one of them, it can translate from English to another language and vice versa. It covers over 100 languages including Filipino, Vietnamese, Tigrinya, Amharic, and Spanish.

## 9 Benefits of Learning English in your Workplace.

If you think that learning English is hard work, then it will be hard work for you. If you think it is easy, then it will be easy.

- 1.) from working hard at your factory to *getting a better job or a promotion*
- 2.) from being bullied or harassed to *speaking out for your rights & self-advocacy*
- 3.) from being unaware of your opportunities to *maximizing all that Canada is offering you*
- 4.) from feeling isolated in a small group to making *new friends with newer ideas*
- 5.) from being stuck in your life to *knowing you have many choices to do new things*
- 6.) from being afraid to make mistakes to *welcoming them and mastering English*
- 7.) from being too proud of oneself to *becoming more human and more fulfilled*
- 8.) from having a fixed mindset to *developing a growth mindset with the right attitude, determination, values and motivation*
- 9.) from thinking that no help is available for you to *knowing that we are here to listen and give you what you need for your own development and for those you care for*

Your first language is not a problem, it is never second to any language. It is great that you are very fluent with your native language, it ties you to your culture and your identity. It gives you comfort and that sense of belonging in a new, unpredictable place you are now living in. Learning English is just a key step that will help your life in Canada become adaptable, your challenges will become more manageable. When you learn English, you are not just able to communicate but you also protect yourself and your loved ones.

## How to use this info kit:

- Essential workers are invited to read through or be part of discussions using this info kit to encourage them to learn English, to make them aware that they are not alone in their challenges, and to ensure that communities and organizations are ready to support them.
- ActionDignity community brokers are invited to use this in group discussions as a resource in creating more awareness in essential workers' rights and the steps they can take to equip themselves in advocating for their rights.
- Service providers, immigrant serving agencies, ethnocultural community leaders, mentors, and community partners are invited to use this leaflet to increase awareness on the challenges that our racialized meat-packing plant workers are facing, provide direct service, and bridge gaps to support them in their needs.
- This document can be used to support the work in influencing policy and systems around immigrant workers rights. Immediate and accessible language support is needed to ensure their rights are protected. Workplace conditions are dreadful and should be addressed immediately.

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IF you experienced **verbal abuse, threats, discrimination, harassment** or any kind of **aggressive behaviour**, please call (Alberta Human Rights) Confidential Inquiry Line **780-427-7661** on **workdays** between **8:15am to 4:30pm**. If prompted, be sure to leave a message with your name and a phone number where you can be reached.  
Website: [www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca](http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca)

IF you experienced any form of **sexual violence** and need support OR if you need help finding **sexual assault support services** in Alberta:  
Please text or call: Toll Free **1-866-403-8000**  
(**9am to 9pm** daily, with interpreters for 170+ languages)  
Website: <https://aasas.ca/>

IF you are **unsure** who to call or what service you need, please call **211** (Alberta).  
Open **24/7**, with interpreters for 170+ languages.  
IF you're in **immediate danger**, please call 911.



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