



# IN MOTION & MOMENTUM+: THE RADICAL ADVENTURE OF NORMALIZING CAREER DEVELOPMENT




Fondation canadienne  
pour le développement  
de carrière

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At last week's *In Motion & Momentum+* (IM&M+) facilitator check-in, I heard some remarkable things not often heard in career and employment services: clients wanting to volunteer to fundraise for the agency to support improved career services for others in their community, clients who are justice-involved organizing a community service fair in their institution so that their peers could find out about opportunities to get transition supports, organization managers wondering why there was so much laughter in the training room, and a facilitator saying that the program's approach has inspired her to advocate for a similar approach in her children's school to support students at-risk.

Pretty remarkable and, some might say, unbelievable. I would have agreed if I hadn't been on the *IM&M+* journey from creation to scaling nationwide for the past seven years. How can a career development intervention encourage such transformation and engagement? What is its secret sauce? From what I have observed, it's a combination of a person-centred, hope-filled, strengths-based, evidence-informed, inventive, and, some may argue, given the state of public career services nationwide, revolutionary curriculum AND the tireless and humane efforts of the program's facilitators.



## The *IM&M+* Approach

*IM&M+*, if you had to put a hard label on it, is for people with pre-employment needs. It might be better described as a program for anyone who gets stuck; as we know, anyone, even us, can get stuck. When we do, the last thing we need is someone telling us what to do. But this is the most common approach across the Canadian career and employment ecosystem. In Canada (and elsewhere), there has been a growing challenge in the publicly-funded career service system. Despite the significant, increasing, and complex barriers to full labour market participation faced by discriminated and underrepresented groups, too much of the career and employment ecosystem continues to operate with the same unproven approach: treat all system clients the same, get them employed quickly in any job, and hope it sticks. The pressure to get all clients to work quickly before many are ready has caused a spin cycle where clients with pre-employment needs predictably fail, returning to services feeling less hopeful and further from sustainable labour market attachment. This cycle has resulted in high socio-economic costs to individuals, communities, employers, industry sectors, and the country.

*IM&M+* is a three-module, 10–13-week group program that can be delivered face-to-face, remotely, or in a hybrid format. Its “radical” approach to ending the spin cycle is meeting people where they are and respecting their choices. Instead of focusing only on outcomes of getting people in further training and employment at the end of an intervention, *IM&M+* encourages participants to reflect on their strengths and needs and to define their own goals for walking towards their personally defined preferred future. Supporting one’s self-determination is at its core. It’s not revolutionary; it’s just what good career development looks like. This approach is what *IM&M+* facilitators tell us they thought they were signing up for when they decided to work in the career and employment sector.

### Being a Guide on the Side

Facilitating *IM&M+* means recognizing that every participant is unique. A deep respect for and responsiveness to what is needed at any moment is integrated into the program design. Still, it’s up to the facilitator to bring it to life by adapting and tailoring the program to the group members’ realities, needs, and cultures. Facilitators participate in a 5-day training and onboarding process that encourages them to be a “guide on the side” rather than a “sage on the stage.” This means that facilitators are encouraged to do each activity in the program along with the group, engage in appropriate disclosure, and acknowledge deeply that the

group is “king” and those decisions like the room/space set up, the inclusion of new group members, and how to process through challenges are made by the group.

Facilitating *IM&M+* is “big,” challenging and rewarding work. CCDF has been fortunate to work with the most amazing and dedicated facilitating superheroes through the process of scaling the program across Canada. When asked what they draw upon to facilitate *IM&M+*, they offered the following:

- Be prepared to be vulnerable and share your own experience.
- Be strategic in the placement of humour and swearing. (i.e., “A bit of profanity can humanize the facilitator to the group.”)
- Make sure you do the little touches to make participants feel special and unique – send encouraging emails, do one-on-one check-ins, bring preferred snacks (e.g., Timbits), and “have your ears pricked up for what they tell you in their stories that you can reference later (i.e., “Oh, Martha you said you’d like to go to Greece one day. I found this great travel article that I thought you’d like.”)
- Provide opportunities for people to get to know themselves and take every chance to celebrate who they are.
- “Make sure that everyone gets what they need and understand that need is different for everyone.”
- “Build trust by ensuring that the participants have a space where they can talk about what’s in their hearts.”
- “Lean hard on the norms developed by the group.”
- “Recognize that the group and the people in it have experienced repeated rejections and that the program is a place to bring them back to themselves.”
- “Emphasize that you can’t fix them because they don’t need fixing.”
- “Always connect participants to additional supports and be the bridge between them and their community.”

In the most recent (about to be published) impact assessment of *IM&M+*, participants said that facilitators’ high levels of engagement and support were crucial to their ability to fully engage in and get the most out of the program. *IM&M+*’s approach has shown impact (see below), but it only works in as far as it is implemented by facilitators who engage with the program’s values and guiding principles. CCDF has been lucky to work with a group of facilitators who embody these values to their core.

## IM&M+'s Impact

IM&M+ has been building its evidence base for over seven years. It has been evaluated by the Government of New Brunswick annually since its launch, by Blueprint ADE in an Ontario Centre for Workforce Innovation (OCWI) pilot conducted at sites in Eastern Ontario and by the Future Skills Centre (FSC) in two research projects: an impact study with 27 sites across six provinces and, currently, through a randomized controlled trial in 14 locations in 5 provinces.

Research to date has shown that IM&M+ has been transformative for participants, their families, and their communities. Research highlights include:

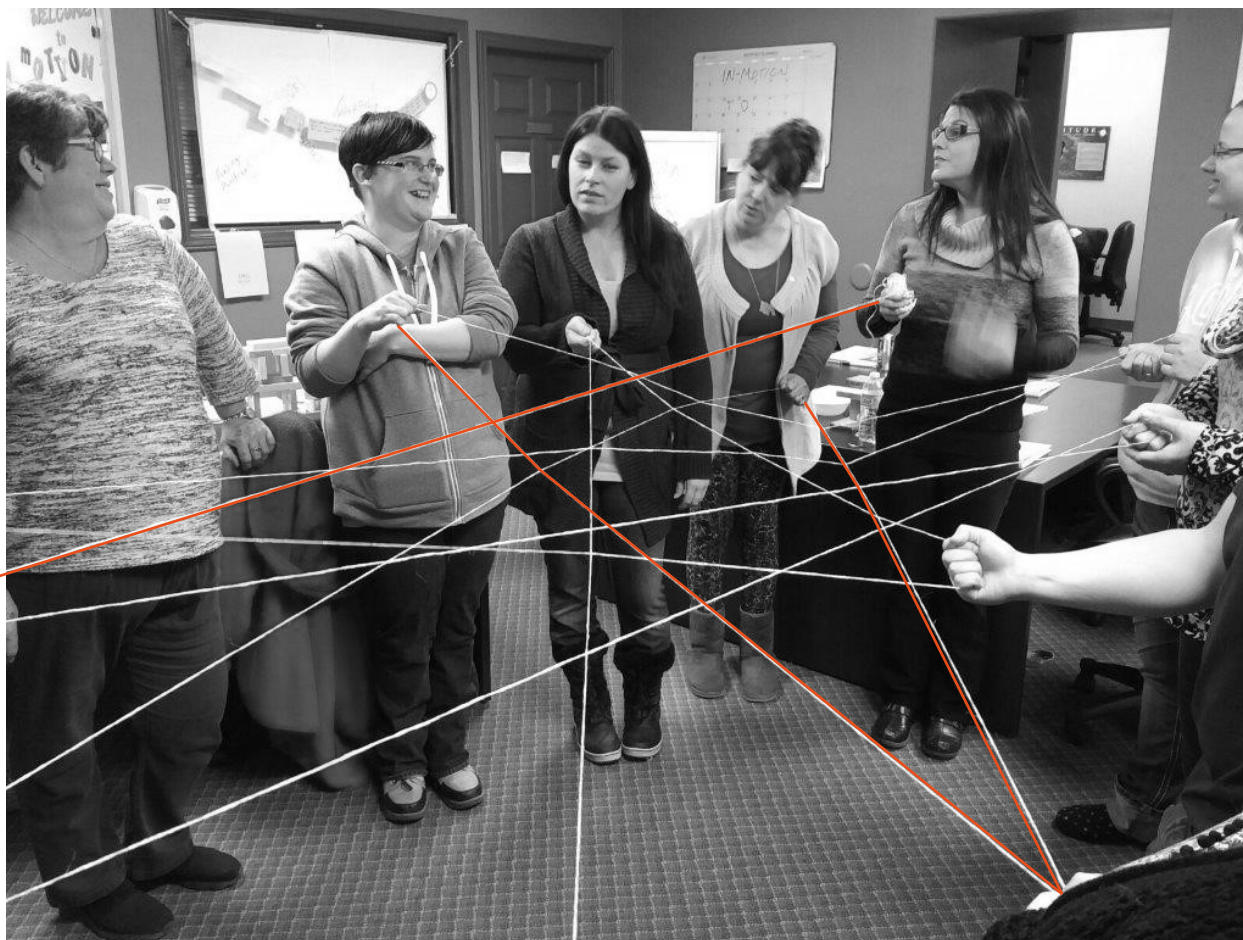
- IM&M+ contributes to breaking costly cycles of dependence on social assistance (GNB, 2020). Since its introduction in New Brunswick in 2016, the province has moved from the highest social assistance caseload to the lowest. Approximately 2200 fewer people required social assistance, a 10% reduction in caseload resulting in at least \$20 million in savings for the province (GNB, 2020).
- Statistically significant improvements in self-esteem, happiness, interpersonal functioning and daily habits, social support, and career goal clarity – all of which are key psycho-social markers of employability (OCWI & Blueprint ADE, 2018).
- Notably, in the impact study (Future Skill Centre & Blueprint ADE, 2023), all participants saw gains across all career readiness factors (self-esteem, self-efficacy, locus of control, motivation, resilience, positive relationship building, accessing resources, networks, and allies, belonging, and mattering) and career management skills (self-awareness, identifying skills and strengths, goal setting and achieving, having a vision for the future).
- Almost 40% of participants are employed or in training 2-3 months after the program (Ontario study). Thirty-one percent were employed, and of those, 80% of those had found decent permanent positions (OCWI and Blueprint-ADE, 2018). Additionally, almost all participants (88%) were accessing at least one support program, and many (69%) were accessing career services (OCWI & Blueprint ADE, 2018).
- Participants demonstrate significant changes in perceived ability to overcome barriers to career goals (OCWI and Blueprint-ADE, 2018).
- There is reliably high program satisfaction among participants, as 97% say they would recommend or have already recommended the program to others (Future Skill Centre & Blueprint ADE, 2023).
- All participants improved their employability skills (Future Skill Centre & Blueprint ADE, 2023).
- Participants demonstrate clinically significant increases in employment hope between the start and end of the program (Future Skill Centre & Blueprint ADE, 2023).

So, what about the facilitators? Does IM&M+ have any impact on them? At that same Friday check-in referenced at the start of this article, they said:

- "IM&M+ made me love my job again. It's not that I didn't like my job before; it's just that now I have the tools to make a real difference where I felt before that I was in a rut."
- "My confidence has gone up! Program facilitation has always been a weak spot, and now I love it. Since starting the program, I've noticed such a big change in myself."
- "My mother died around the time I was invited to facilitate the program; this was a lifesaver for me. This propelled me! I've made a lot of sound decision making, and I feel saved!"
- "I've let go of my 'hard-ass' personality; I have a different approach. I've learned so much about myself and am happier."

Radical? Maybe. But IM&M+ shouldn't be. It should be the norm. This is what good career development looks like, and we have more than enough evidence to show that it works. Our challenge is to advocate for this kind of programming and approach with funders and policymakers so that we all get to do what we know works and needs to be done. And who knows, we may get the average person saying that their trip to get career services was not only impactful but fun and something they'd fundraise for to ensure that others had access to it.

Here's to continuing this adventure together!



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