

# **TNLIP Focus Groups**

Research for the 2021-2024 Settlement Strategy



Toronto North  
Local Immigration  
Partnership

November 13, 2020

## **TNLIP Fall 2020 – Focus Group Discussion Summary**

### **Theme: International Students**

Many students leaned on their friends, peers, or family members to seek out advice for their settlement needs (e.g. opening a bank account, child benefits, finding a job, getting medical assistance) because they did not feel settlement agencies are tailored to their unique needs, or they are simply not eligible without PR.

There is a big gap in access for newcomers who have student or work visas and do not meet the eligibility requirements for employment agencies. Many are concerned about finding a job in their field after graduation without access to employment services/recruiters. Recent graduates are relying on their networks to find more temporary jobs and build up their Canadian work experience.

Participants felt that healthcare access varied based on their school benefits programs. Some student's found that their school's insurance program was more affordable and they were satisfied with it, whereas others believed that another school's insurance programs required more expenses with stricter requirements for individuals with pre-existing conditions. Some students felt more vulnerable and concerned about experiencing health issues that needed treatment (particularly during the pandemic) because they could not afford prescription meds, specialized services, etc. These respondents found it difficult to navigate the Canadian healthcare system.

Some participants found that their English Language courses offered by their school could be more expansive/tailored to individual needs, because they felt it was not advanced enough, particularly for academic style writing

Participants discussed the newcomer experience and observed that many newcomers may feel uncomfortable seeking out help (either financial or otherwise) and might miss key supports they are eligible for. They felt it would be better for service providers to increase outreach, to make sure the relevant information is getting to them, on time. They all agreed that newcomers who are less outgoing and confident face additional barriers getting support. They felt that it is important for International Student services to find innovative ways to reach them. There was a general consensus that a welcome package with all the necessary information relevant to International Students (or a 1:1 meeting with a settlement officer) could help ease the transition to Canadian life. It may already exist, in which case it should be better disseminated.

Additionally, students expressed being interested in connecting more with the Toronto community, since most of their friends are international students. More programs that bring students and residents together could help with isolation/mental health. Across the board, students expressed the need for additional financial support as they are often expected to be self-sufficient while in Canada; though their courses and insurance packages are very expensive

A few students experienced discrimination in their courses or with school administrators, based on their language ability or ethnic background. When these instances happen, they talk to their peers about it and feel that they are experiencing similar issues.

Nov 18, 2020

## **TNLIP Fall 2020 – Focus Group Discussion Summary**

### **Theme: Job Seekers**

Participants identified the importance of networking with professionals in their field, either through mentoring, LinkedIn, or professional associations, when seeking employment. There is more financial aid needed for Internationally Trained Professionals who take time off work to work part-time hours or join Employment programming. This includes other stages of their job search, while they gain relevant experience in their field.

It was noted that there are some loan programs for which proof of employment needs to be showed; this poses a challenge for those who are seeking work or cannot work and study simultaneously. Participants observed that there are a lot of newcomers pivoting their career paths to meet the demand of the Canadian labour market, and settling for temporary roles for which they are overqualified.

Participants highlighted the importance of preparing newcomers before they arrive in Canada for challenges they may face securing employment with foreign credentials (ex: information about job market trends, formatting resume, language training, etc.). Participants explained that they would prefer service providers to be honest (or blunt) with them about the career-searching challenges they would face in Toronto, and overall, newcomers are satisfied with the support they've received so far from employment agencies, for example in formatting CVs, job fairs, networking tips, soft skills, and career counselling.

Participants mentioned that there is a need for more mental health programming during COVID-19, but also long-term, to reduce feelings of isolation and help build sense of community. Generally participants provided positive feedback about what they have heard from other newcomers and themselves accessing hospital services or family doctors to care for themselves or family members. Most participants indicated a clear preference for family doctors/hospital services/midwives over walk-in clinics. Participants did not feel it took too long to receive OHIP cards.

Generally, participants are taking initiative to seek their own answers related to healthcare, job-seeking, language, and other services through things like Google searches, asking friends, and family, etc. They have developed settlement strategies of their own.

December 9, 2020

## **TNLIP Fall 2020 – Focus Group Discussion Summary**

### **Theme: LGBTQIA+**

Participants identified that it is challenging for newcomers and refugees to access employment, especially regarding the requirement of Canadian experience. It was identified that often newcomers volunteer, or complete work that is precarious or short term in nature, and with all the additional effort, continue to find it difficult to match their qualifications to employment. Many newcomers find it difficult to network. Many are frustrated with having to acquire additional qualifications for curriculum that seems the same as what they received in their home countries.

It was discussed that in the case of refugees, there are a lot more instances of trauma, which affects one's ability to find employment. In the LGBTQIA+ community, many identified that there is an element of fear of judgement if they open up about their sexual orientation (although they are often encouraged to do so); even though many know about safe spaces, there is still uncertainty, especially as discrimination could have affect the ability for job acquirement. It is tempting to hide one's identity, however this too, is a difficult undertaking. Some identified instances of employers taking advantage of newcomers, making long term employment inaccessible.

Participants identified notable trends of clinics often not accepting the Interim Federal Health Insurance, and find that as refugees, they do not always receive services. It was suggested that more training is required for frontline staff regarding refugees, and especially LGBTQIA+ newcomers. It was identified that it is often difficult to find a family doctor and otherwise there are very long wait times for other health service points (such as clinics).

Participants did not struggle with English as a second language but identified not knowing where to look for free French classes in the same way as ESL is available.

Participants felt that settlement services gave them a sense of belonging, in that they provided opportunities to find friends with similar sexual orientation, volunteer and socialize, as well as connect with other services, such as social assistance, food banks, lawyers, and others. Some felt that these services often had long wait times.

Participants identified that there is still a need to support settlement after a couple years in Canada as settlement is a long term process – some of the needs remain the same over time (job access, getting education, and others, especially for refugees receiving appeals. Some examples of this are the required IDs, credit score, first and last payment when searching for housing, which is difficult for refugees to provide. Housing is very expensive in Toronto and participants found it too difficult to leave Toronto as employment is limited in rural areas.

## **TNLIP Fall 2020 - Focus Group Discussion Summary**

### **Theme: Mental Health**

The main challenges in finding a job in Canada mentioned by all participants were language and work culture. They find it difficult to learn a new language as adults. Work culture is also different in Canada from their home countries - many newcomers face issues at work for things considered normal in their home countries but culturally not appropriate in Canada.

Participants find difficulty seeking employment in their own profession, socializing at work, finding mental health and stress support at work, and face higher expectations of employers despite lower pay. Some newcomers go for survival jobs to support themselves or seek employment in businesses of their own communities to avoid these challenges.

Being away from families and loved ones and living in isolation adds to the challenges.

Participants found navigating services in hospitals and the long waiting times challenging. Especially for people with disabilities or seniors, they were unsure where to find help, and interpretation was not optional. Participants also felt discrimination towards immigrants in hospitals. One participant felt none of the mentioned challenges.

Participants appreciated the language and education services and supports available for immigrants in Canada. Learning a new language and completing the settlement process at the same time is a challenge. They felt that some teachers need cultural training to equally support some students with different learning expectations (i.e. dominant vs. shy students).

Participants appreciated settlement services, and felt that available training and orientation was of high quality and helped them settle well. However, they said, "people need people as well, not only services". They recommended increasing mental health & peer support services to tackle isolation, increasing social groups and volunteer opportunities for immigrants.

They also recommended preparation services for newcomers going to hospital appointments. Settlement workers could prepare them on expectations, how they should present their problem, how to request help and assistance, etc.

Participants also recommended tackling isolation in cold weather as some immigrants come from warmer countries and struggle with their mental health during this time. They mentioned that there are plenty of health promotion and preventive services for physical health but there are no preventive and promotion services for mental health issues, especially in the cold.

When they first arrived to Canada, they were welcomed home, received services and settled well. Now, they are looking for new life and new needs arises. There are settlement services for them, but they want to know their future by knowing more details about the government, education opportunities, services and benefits.

## **TNLIP Fall 2020 – Focus Group Discussion Summary**

### **Theme: Seniors**

Participants noted that they believe that seniors in their community face multiple issues affecting newcomer senior settlement and integration, including: senior isolation, access to settlement information, and housing. These were identified as the highest needs.

For the issue of isolation, seniors believed that there are not enough ‘one stop hubs’ that could provide necessary services that are more all encompassing, rather than having to search everywhere for these differing services. It was believed that this kind of intervention could also address the issue of senior isolation. Participants generally believed that there are not enough socialization or recreation programs available to them, or they are unsure where to look. Seniors would appreciate more volunteering opportunities, and other changes for seniors to make contributions to the community in which they reside.

Participants noted that they felt that senior newcomers face certain common challenges in accessing settlement information. These include having less awareness of settlement information, such as how to register for classes, as well as language barriers when trying to discover programming.

Senior newcomers noted challenges in housing, which include struggling with fluctuating rental costs, as they struggle with the changes in the market rent – they feel this is an area they do not have enough control over. Senior newcomers also noted that it is difficult to access senior housing because the lines are long when applying to housing.

Access to labor market was a major focus for newcomer seniors with Toronto North area. Many reported having experienced challenges in finding work that matched their skills, education and prior work experience. A number of common challenges in accessing employment included lacking Canadian work experience, lacking networking opportunities, facing an information gap about job search assistance in landing jobs that match their skills and experience, and a lack of co-op opportunities for Internationally Trained Professionals. These are issues faced by all newcomers, but senior respondents believed that it is especially difficult for seniors who are still interested in working. Of these, job search assistance and networking support as well as co-op opportunities were identified as of the greatest need.

Seniors noted that the three-month waiting period for OHIP coverage was too long, and that the waiting list for seeing specialists is of great concern for newcomer seniors who need access to these services and information in a timelier manner.

November 14, 2020

## **TNLIP Fall 2020 – Focus Group Discussion Summary**

### **Theme: Newcomer Youth**

The major issues affecting newcomer youth settlement and integration in Toronto North LIP area were highlighted, among which learning language, ESL classes, access to the labour market, cultural adaptation and adjustment to a new country were highlighted as the most challenging.

For many youth, the language barrier remains the biggest issue affecting their settlement and integration. Participants identified that they believe newcomer youth sometimes find it difficult to make friends, and have an increased sense of feeling left out and find it difficult to access the supports they need (such as job seeking, etc.)

Many newcomer youth face additional challenges in ESL classes that are difficult to understand, especially as there is typically no translation nor interpretation available. As a result, there is often the added emotional pressure of feeling left out.

Participants also identified that for many newcomer youth, there are additional challenges in accessing the labour market, such as language barriers, conflicting schedules with the school, and lack of sufficient working experience except volunteer experience to be considered.

Participants found it difficult adjusting to the cultural adaption and acculturation between the Canadian culture and their home culture. This is also something that they believe is an important issue that many newcomer youth are concerned about.

It was also identified that newcomer youth feel additional stress and pressure from the expectations of their parents, which can be frustrating and cause strain on their Mental Health.